The Photographically-mediated Identity: Jiang Qing (1914—1991)

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is a study of Jiang Qing’s 江青 (1914-1991) published photographic works in Chinese national magazines from early 1950s to 1976. Dividing her works into three categories in chronological order, I will investigate how she continuously fashioned her own identity through the manipulation of photography in her pursuit of recognition, fame, and power before and during the Cultural Revolution, a socio-political campaign launched by her husband Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893—1976) to regain power and consolidate authority through the revolutionary campaign in ideological spheres, such as class struggle and eradication of old culture and custom. By regarding her works and her association with photography as text, based on which the historical context can be reconstructed, I purport to examine her role in the Cultural Revolution, concluding that her primary perceived identity as Mao’s wife facilitated her rapid rise to power but also curbed her self-fulfillment and resulted in her final downfall soon after Mao died.

Approved: _____________________________________________________________

Marion Lee

Assistant Professor of Art History
To my father, Liu Shuyong
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My study will explore the interpretative strategy of how Jiang Qing 江青 (1914-1991), who took interest in photography in the important period in modern China from early 1950s to 1976, incorporated photography in the self-fashioning of her identity. By investigating the interrelation between Jiang Qing and photography, I will trace the way in which her identity was photographically mediated and self-fashioned in different periods, trying to scrutinize some neglected aspects of her existence as a woman, a wife, a photographer, and a politician.

More commonly known as Madame Mao, Jiang Qing was the first lady of the People’s Republic of China (hereafter as PRC), the fourth and last wife of Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893—1976), who was a Chinese communist revolutionist, military strategist, political leader, and the founding father of the PRC.¹ The Cultural Revolution 文化大革命 (hereafter as CR) (1966—1976), short for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution 无产阶级文化大革命, was a national socio-political proletarian campaign started by Mao, who attempted to build China into a socialist nation that embodied genuine communist values. Nonetheless, his primary aim was to purge his political enemies within the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter as CCP) and to reinstate his unchallengeable authority after his leadership was criticized and weakened due to the disastrous Great Leap Forward 大跃进 (1958—1959) he initiated.

¹ Throughout Jiang Qing’s whole life, Jiang used several names. In this thesis, only “Jiang Qing” is used in referring to her, because that is the name most commonly known to the public. A summary of her other used names is included in Chapter 2.
The CR was a crucial historical period that intersected with Jiang Qing’s life. It was also the central context of her photographic works. The ten-year CR can be roughly divided into three stages.

The first stage officially began with the *May 16 Notification* 五·六通知 issued by the CCP Politburo 中共中央政治局 in 1966, covering the first three years from 1966 to 1969. During this period, the Red Guards, usually high school students and college students, became the enthusiastic young rebels. They were directed to smash the “four olds” 四旧—old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits, fighting against the party leadership and intellectuals under Mao’s guidance. These fanatical young people stopped attending schools, “seeking out and destroying anything representative of the feudal past and the bourgeois present”.² They broke into the home of their teachers and scholars and trashed their books, paintings, and other valuable collections. Ancient temples, museums, and libraries were severely ravaged. This was an era characterized by chaos and turbulence.

The CR caused a large-scale migration of young students. On one hand, students from cities were sent to the countryside to live with peasants in rural areas to undergo reeducation. On the other hand, students traveled collectively and assembled in Beijing to see Mao Zedong. On August 18, 1966, a million Red Guards from all over the country gathered in Tian’anmen Square to see their Supreme Commander. Mao Zedong reviewed his radical faithful fighters from atop the rostrum.³ It indicated the fever of Mao Zedong’s

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² Ibid.
personality cult was nationwide rife. It also signaled a national mass movement to dig out the “capital-roaders” in the Party and wipe out the “reactionary line” led by the Chairman of the PRC Liu Shaoqi and his followers.

Liu Shaoqi increasingly gained considerable support in the Party after the failure of the Great Leap Forward. This threatened Mao’s authority within the CCP. On August 5, 1966, Mao wrote his own big-character poster 大字報 entitled “Bombard the Headquarters” 炮打司令部. That poster was Mao’s public attack against Liu Shaoqi. Since then, Liu became known as “the head of the reactionary line” and “the head of capital-roaders”.

A new power structure gradually formed. First, Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao 张春桥 (1917—2005), and Yao Wenyuan 姚文元 (1931—2005) were respectively the first deputy, deputy head, and member of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group 中央文革小组 (hereafter as CCRSG), a governmental organ especially established in 1966 to direct the CR. Second, the military force was exceedingly important for the maintenance of stability and the restoration of order. Hence, the military achieved rising power in the Party. In the Ninth National Congress of the CCP in 1969 中国中央第九届人民代表大会, 45 percent members of the new party central committee were from the military.5

The second stage featured Lin Biao’s rise to power and downfall from 1969 to 1973, the interval between the Ninth and Tenth National Congress of the Party. In the complicated struggle within the CCP, the leading figures were consequently fragmented

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into four fractions. During the CR, Jiang Qing became a top-ranked political leader of the Central Committee of the CCP 中共中央. In 1973, an ultraleftist faction headed by Jiang was formed, composed of four prominent members of the CCP Politburo, later known as the Gang of Four 四人帮. They were Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, and Wang Hongwen 王洪文 (1935—1992). The mission of Gang of Four was to carry out Mao’s commands and facilitate Mao’s bid for power. Mao and the Gang of Four were the ultraleftists; Zhou Enlai was the centrist; Lin Biao represented the ultraleftist military; and Deng Xiaoping 邓小平 (1904—1997) stood for the pragmatists. These four clans coexisted in conflict. Gang of Four and Lin Biao were both Mao’s proponents, but they also competed in importance and tried to strengthen their own power.

Like Jiang Qing, Li Biao skyrocketed to fame and power because of the CR. In the 1950s, although he was a major political leader and general, he did not hold any pivotal position in the Party. In 1959, after Peng Dehuai’s dismissal due to his criticism towards Mao, Lin replaced Peng as the Defense Minister. He did his utmost to trumpet Mao Zedong Thought in the army and wrote the preface for the second edition of Mao’s Selected Works of Mao Zedong. In the political sphere, he later substituted for Liu Shaoqi as Mao’s successor and kept beating the drum for Mao’s fanatical cult of personality nationwide. In the 1st Plenum of the 9th Party Congress 中共九届一中全会 in 1969, he was appointed as a member of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee, Deputy General Secretary of the Communist Party, and Deputy Chairman of the Central Military

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6 Schoppa, Revolution and Its Past, 357.

Deng Xiaoping was the most important leader in the second-generation leaders of China from 1978 to 1992 after Mao’s death. During the CR, he was dismissed and reappointed three times by Mao. In the post-Mao era, he initiated the opening up policy, bringing market economy to China.
Commission. His role as Mao’s legal successor was written into the Party Constitution. Since then, Lin turned to be the supreme CCP leader only next to Mao, widely referred to as “Chairman Mao’s Comrade-in-arm”.  

The reason of the original tense between Lin Biao and Mao Zedong is unclear even today. However, it is evident that a divergence between Mao and Lin gradually emerged in 1970. In the 2nd Plenum of the 9th Party Congress, Lin Biao’s henchman Chen Boda 陈伯达 (1904—1989) proposed to restore the state presidency and give the title of Chairman of the PRC to Mao Zedong. However, after the former Chairman of the PRC Liu Shaoqi was denounced as “capital roaders” and then removed from his position, Mao eliminated the post and expressed his unwillingness to restore it. Mao believed that Lin actually wanted the post himself and Chen Boda’s proposal apparently showed Lin’s persistence and ambition.

Mao immediately responded to Chen a sharp critical opinion. Nevertheless, in his speech entitled “Some Views of Mine” 我的一点意见 that heavily bombarded Chen, he stated that his criticism was on behalf of himself and Lin Biao, instead of attacking Lin directly, probably for fear of Lin’s military power. In early 1971, Lin started planning a coup d'état, called Plot 571 五一工程纪要, attempting to assassinate Mao by exploding his train. The plot failed and Mao escaped. On September 14th, Lin and his

7 Ibid.
8 Chen Boda was a secretary of Mao Zedong and especially assisted him in the theoretical matter. During the CR, he was the head of the CCRSG. Later he isolated from Jiang Qing and the CCRSG and allied with Lin Biao.
9 Some people today believe the real plotter of this assassination was actually Lin’s son Lin Liguo 林立果 (1945—1971).
family tried to flee to the Soviet Union, but their plane crashed in Mongolia. All the people on board were killed.

The third stage of the CR lasted from the Tenth National Congress in 1973 to the final downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976 that signaled the end of the ten-year CR. In this period, the major issue was the power struggle between the Gang of Four and the second-generation leaders like Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng 华国锋 (1921—2008). After Lin Biao died, the Anti-Lin, Anti-Confucius Movement 批林批孔运动 prevailed in early 1974, actually aiming at attacking Zhou Enlai. Lin Biao was dead. Zhou Enlai was hospitalized for severe cancer. Gang of Four regarded this as a perfect opportunity to further expand their influence and consolidate their power. However, Mao chose Deng Xiaoping to manage the country.

1976 was especially a traumatic year when political atmosphere of China changed fundamentally. Zhou Enlai died in January. Hua Guofeng replaced Zhou Enlai by Mao’s direction. In July, Zhu De 朱德 (1886—1976), the founding father of the Red Army and one of Mao’s closest comrades died. On July 28, Tangshan Earthquake killed more than 250,000 people. On September 9, Mao died. In October 1976, one month after Mao’s death, Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng had the Gang of Four arrested, which led to Jiang’s final downfall.

11 Hua Guofeng was a local official in Hunan Province between 1949 to 1971, rising to power in the latter stage of the CR.
12 Ibid.
Generally speaking, the CR led to a national ultraleftist movement, causing political persecution, mistreatment of intellectuals, extreme class antagonism, repression of free artistic expression, and other harmful aftereffects. As a key figure working at high levels in the CCP during the CR, Jiang Qing was severely condemned due to the enormous damages the CR brought to China, and she became a highly controversial figure with a negative public image. Additionally, Jiang’s early background as a film star in Shanghai and her knowledge of Beijing Opera and drama enabled her to intensively engage in cultural affairs. She initiated the creation of the “eight model revolutionary operas” that served as a key component of CCP’s propaganda apparatus.

Nevertheless, few people know that Jiang Qing was a very enthusiastic photographer, and her photographic works were widely published in national pictorials and professional photography magazines before and during the CR. From posters, prints, and magazines to daily supplies such as portable calendar cards, replicas of her works deeply penetrated into Chinese people’s daily life, aided by mass media. However, few scholars have paid close attention to the correlation between Jiang’s own photographic work and her role in the CR. Also, the topic of how her works were linked to the transition of her identity from a first lady who did not hold any official position in the CCP to one of the most powerful politicians of the era has not been probed.

The methodology I apply to my study is derived from Bal and Bryson’s “Semiotics and Art History,” an essay concentrating on the basic tenets of semiotics in
the post-structuralist arena.14 According to the authors, the relation between the sociohistorical context and works of art (text) is not a one-way cause-and-effect. Context does not naturally exist as the determining factors shaping the way artworks are. Social history is not prior to artifact. Context and text coexist interdependently. In fact, the distinction between context and text oversimplifies rather than enriches the study of art history. Just like text, context consists of signs that need to be interpreted.15 Context is produced and can be inferred from text. Text can be deemed as the constraint of context in the interpretation of a text.16 In addition, Bal and Bryson demonstrate that authorship does not naturally exist: “An ‘author’ is in the works, in a body of artifacts and in the complex operations performed on them. Like ‘context’, ‘authorship’ is an elaborate work of framing, something we elaborately produce rather than something we simply find.”17

Hence, in this thesis, I analyze Jiang’s photographic works and her association with photography as text that is intertwined with the sociohistorical context and correlate her identity with authorship that is produced by the interpretation of her work in order to examine her self-fashioning identity and reconstruct her role in the history of the CR. I believe her work should be regarded as “the work as effect and affect, not only as a neatly product of an age long gone.”18 Additionally, her works have remarkable significance because of the complexity and multiplicity of her identity. She was woman, a former actress, a wife, an enthusiastic amateur photographer, the first lady, and one of the most

15 Bal and Bryson, “Semiotics,” 175.
18 Bal and Bryson, “Semiotics,” 175.
crucial political leaders in the CCP. As a photographer, she was inevitably subject to the influence of the mainstream in the artistic circle and also to the overall sociohistorical milieu of her days. However, as a chief leader of the country who was especially in charge of cultural affairs, she consciously employed her works to interfere with political struggles, and her own works reflect her vision of art that she endeavored to advocate on a national scale. As a wife, she assisted Mao to realize his political ambition by her works. As a politician, she was eager to make a name for herself and gained recognition in photographic circles and even broader spheres. This intention, however, challenged Mao’s authority. In all these roles, photography was a key means she used to fashion her own identity.

The main body of the thesis is Chapter 3, Chapter 4, and Chapter 5. The subject matter of Jiang Qing’s work has a wide range from still life, landscape, and portrait to military exercise, agricultural activities, and industrial production. Here, I select three categories that can be taken as her representative works in three phases of her life: first, the photographs of flowers published in early stages before the CR, including “Gentle and Pure” 温馨玉洁 (Fig.1) published in 1961 and “Chlorophytum Malayense” 大叶吊兰 (Fig.2) published in 1963; and second, the photographs that closely associated with her role in the CR from 1964 to 1969, including a landscape photograph entitled “Fairy Cave on Mountain Lu” 庐山仙人洞 (Fig.3) published in 1964 and a stage still of The Red Detachment of Women 红色娘子军 (Fig.4) published in 1965. The third category is the photograph she took at the height of her power as a member of CCP’s Politburo, the portrait photograph of Lin Biao 林彪 (1907—1971), the chief leader of the CCP, second
only to Mao Zedong during the CR. This photograph was published in 1971 in both *China Pictorial* and *People’s Liberation Army Pictorial*, entitled “Chairman Mao’s Comrade-in-arm Deputy Chairman Lin Biao” 毛主席的亲密战友林彪副主席 (Fig. 5).19

The formal analysis of the selected works, linked by detailed sociohistorical background, is integrated with the progressive expansion of her political career and the transition of her identity.

To sum up, based on the affinity between social history, the works of art, and the artist, I interpret Jiang Qing’s photographic works and study her association with photography in hope to reexamine the particular historical period Jiang lived in and reevaluate her as a controversial historical figure and her role in the CR. In the last chapter, I arrive at the conclusion that even though Jiang used photography as an efficient means to step into politics and realize her ambition, the most recognized identity she bore—Mao Zedong’s wife—is the reason she became Mao’s right hand during the CR and the scapegoat after the CR for Mao’s erroneous directives.

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CHAPTER 2: EARLY LIFE OF JIANG QING FROM 1914 TO 1949

Writing a fully truthful biography of Jiang Qing is a challenging job due to two major difficulties. First, Jiang Qing is already mythologized in the story of her life, which has been told, interpreted, adapted, and even distorted in circulation for years. For instance, as a part of the Anti-Jiang Qing campaign after the downfall of the Gang of Four in 1976, the government-owned publishing house People’s Publishing House published a number of books that harshly denounced Jiang.20 These books testify to the vilification of Jiang engineered by official institutions. Even today, the negative appraisal of Jiang approved by the CCP still lingers in Mainland China. Gao mentioned that Zhu Zhongli, a Chinese author of two popular biographies of Jiang Qing, admitted in an interview, “…no account of Jiang Qing could be published unless she was demonized in it”.21 Like her husband Mao Zedong, Jiang Qing is like a legend, an enigma – someone who is “larger than life”.22 The boundaries between formal biography and biographical novel are arbitrary in Jiang’s case. Most of her biographies are hybrids of historical facts, anecdotes, and fantasies. They are fictional and sometimes full of imagined romance and erotic factors. For example, Jiang Qing has been depicted as a woman driven by lust for sex and power in Bodard’s Le Chien de Mao (“Mao’s Dog”).23 In the biography written

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22 Adrian Hsia, “Lucien Bodard’s Literarization of Jiang Qing or The (Legend of the) Cultural Revolution Revisited,” Eastwards: Western Views on East Asian Culture, ed. Frank Kraushaar (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 103.
by Terrill, the author creates numerous monologues and conversations, causing the biography to be historically unreliable. Even *Comrade Chiang Ch’ing*, whose author interviewed Jiang Qing in person in 1972, cannot be totally taken as a credible source of information, since it is possible that Jiang deliberately disclosed certain information to the author to build up her positive public image. Moreover, most original historical documents about Jiang Qing remain highly confidential in the hands of the Chinese government. Because of their political sensitivity, some of those valuable archives circulate only scarcely, in a limited sphere under institutional supervision, and some are completely inaccessible. This strict censorship is also why some memoirs are conditioned to be vague, mixed with fictional narrative and lack of hard evidence.

Based on these underlying obstacles, I have used official publications such as newspapers and magazines as the most valid historical documents in the study of Jiang Qing and her works. A few personal memoirs and biographies that are clearly dated or supported by first-hand materials can also be relied on to some extent. Rumors whose origin cannot be clearly identified, no matter how widespread, will be only mentioned when necessary, and are given less weight.

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Names as a Measure of Jiang Qing’s Self-Fashioning Identity

Jiang Qing adapted multiple names in her lifetime. Nearly all of them indicate a particular identity and stage of her life. More importantly, her names can be used as a measure of her self-fashioning identity. Hence, it is necessary to give a brief introduction of her names.

Jiang Qing’s family name is Li 李. Her name in childhood was probably “Li Jinhai 李进孩”. After she started going to school, she got a formal name, “Li Yunhe 李云鹤”. Later on, after she turned into a popular film star in Shanghai, she ceased to use her family name and became known as “Lan Ping 蓝苹—her stage name since 1934. In 1937, Jiang Qing went to Yan’an, the CCP’s headquarters, and became Mao Zedong’s wife one year later. After she moved to Yan’an, she changed her name to Jiang Qing 江青 and continued to use it till the day she died.

However, in order to conceal her identity as Mao’s wife, Jiang used various pen names when she published photographic works. The first time she published her photographic work in 1961, her previous formal name, “Li Yunhe,” was used as pen name. In 1963, she started to use “Li Jin 李进, “Jun Ling 峻岭, and other names as pen names. The publishing of Jiang’s work shows the privilege she enjoyed being the first lady—the fact that she gained more opportunities to publish her works than common

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25 Some biographies state that Jiang Qing also had used “Li Shumeng 李淑蒙 as her name before she changed to Lan Ping, but when she used that name and the purpose of using it are in dispute.
photographers. Meanwhile, the necessity of using pen names shows the disadvantage of that identity—the downside of that privilege. It proves a negotiation of the contradiction between her two identities: an enthusiastic photographer and a submissive wife of Mao who was not supposed to yearn for attention.

Early Life

*Early Unknown Years (1914—1933)*

Jiang Qing was born in a poor family in 1914. After the Revolution of 1911 led by Sun Yat-sen (1866—1925) who later founded Kuomintang (also known as the Nationalist Party, hereafter as KMT) in 1912, the last imperial dynasty, the Qing dynasty, was overturned, and the Republic of China was established. In 1919, the May Fourth Movement—an anti-feudal, cultural, and political revolutionary protest—broke out. Pioneered by intellectuals and students, this movement widely spread Marxism in China, leading to the establishment of the CCP in 1921. Thereafter, China witnessed nearly three decades of severe turbulence and dramatic change due to the coexistence and rivalry of different political parties and military forces. The territory of China was fragmented into regions governed by the KMT government of the Republic of China, warlords, and the CCP.\(^{28}\)

Jiang Qing’s hometown was Zhucheng in Shandong province, a coastal province of China. Jiang’s father owned a carpentry shop; her mother was her father’s concubine who later left the family and worked as a domestic servant to support her. At the age of

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\(^{28}\) The KMT government had control over much of China since 1928 until the CCP defeated KMT and founded the New China (PRC) in 1949. The KMT then relocated to Taiwan and remains as one of the major political parties till today.
13, Jiang Qing moved with her mother to Tianjin, a major city close to Beijing and north of Shandong. Two years later, they went to Jinan, the capital of Shandong province, where Jiang Qing enrolled in Shandong Experimental Art Theatre School and started to receive formal acting training for Beijing Opera and drama in 1929. At the end of 1930, Jiang married Fei Minglun, an admirer and fan of Jiang Qing’s and a wealthy young man from Jinan. However, this marriage only lasted a few months. Jiang went to Qingdao and began to work as a librarian at Qingdao University in 1931 through her connection with Zhao Taimou (1889—1968), who previously was the administrator of Shandong Experimental Art Theatre School and later appointed as the principal of Qingdao University. In the same year, the Japanese army destroyed the railway in Shenyang, Dongbei province (also known as Mukden, the former name of Shenyang), foreshadowing the upcoming Second Sino-Japanese War (1937—1945). This event was known as the Mukden Incident (known as the "September 18 Incident" in China).

While working at Qingdao University, Jiang attended class as an auditor to study literature, poetry, and theatre, learning from top intellectuals such as Wen Yiduo (1899—1946) and Shen Congwen (1902—1988). This was a period of

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29 Beijing Opera, also known as Peking Opera, is a form of Chinese traditional performing arts that arose in the late 18th century and then developed to be one of the most remarkable Chinese opera forms.
30 Qingdao is also known in another spelling Tsingtao. It is a large city lying in eastern Shandong province.
31 Wen Yiduo was an influential poet and scholar in Chinese literature. He had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1922 to 1925. In 1944, he joined the China Democratic League and was politically active, assassinated by Kuomintang’s secret agents in 1946. Shen
enlightenment for Jiang Qing. Basking in the academic environment, Jiang was intensively exposed to liberal thought and knowledge about culture, art, and politics for the first time in her life. Zhao Taimou’s wife Yu Shan (1908—1968) was famous for starring as the heroine of Oscar Wilde’s play *Salome* in 1927, and she was also a crucial member of the most influential modern theatre association, the Southern China Society 南国社. Influenced by Yu Shan, Jiang Qing joined the League of Left-Wing Dramatists 中国左翼戏剧家联盟 and the League of Left-Wing Writers 中国左翼作家联盟. At the same time, she fell in love with Yu Shan’s younger brother Yu Qiwei (1912—1958), a student at Qingdao University, a communist, and an activist in the student movement. Under his influence, Jiang participated in student movements to protest the KMT’S nonresistance to the Japanese invasion and joined the Communist Party in 1933. However, Yu Qiwei was soon arrested by the KMT, and Jiang then fled to Shanghai to seek shelter.

*Gaining Fame in Shanghai (1933—1937)*

In 1934, Jiang Qing was prisoned by the KMT for her political activities. After being released, she once went to Beijing to meet Yu Qiwei, but they soon separated. One year later, she was invited to play the leading role of Nora in a play adapted from Henrik Congwen was a novelist since early 1920s. After 1950s, instead of writing fiction, he embarked on the study of Chinese ancient history, costume, and dress, publishing a series of in-depth articles.

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Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House.* This was a turning point in Jiang’s acting career. She eventually won the chance to pursue her career on the stage as a professional actress. Meanwhile, she also started gaining fame under her stage name Lan Ping, which means “blue apple”. Compared with her original, formal name, Li Yunhe, which literally means “crane in the clouds,” her new name was catchy and novel. The stage name also perfectly matched her new identity—a modern fashionable lady living in a metropolis like Shanghai (Fig.6). Jiang’s performance received positive public recognition. She joined Diantong Film Company (hereafter as Diantong) in 1936 and expanded her acting career to the film industry. Diantong had a close connection to a “leftist drama group Shanghai Artistic Drama Association”, from which Diantong recruited many dramatists.

In the 1930s, the film industry in Shanghai was unprecedentedly booming. In response to the complex social problems at that time, such as the threat of an impending Japanese invasion and the social-cultural transformation to modernity, films featured patriotic enthusiasm, progressive ideology, commercial success, and urban sensation. That was a period characterized by the imminence and the anticipation of war, and a yearning for nationalist empowerment was constructed along with a romantic pursuit of

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34 Crane symbolizes longevity and purity in Chinese culture. Embedded with auspicious connotation, it can be found in many tradition Chinese paintings, poems, or essays. 
individualist liberation reminiscent of the May Fourth Movement.”36 Naturally, the character Nora, who Jiang Qing played, became a model in the woman’s emancipation movement, as Nora made a “conscious decision to become an individual human being rather than a man’s doll.”37 However, this representation of women consisted of gendered identity and social reforms was initially constructed to legitimize anti-imperialism and anti-traditionalism and to advocate the building of a new social order. As Li states, “Women’s emancipation in China is the direct product of social revolution and national salvation, not the result of a feminist movement.”38 To put it more precisely, women’s emancipation is the byproduct of social revolution in China, because it is not the primary reason for its initiation. Instead, it functioned as a legitimate pretext for it. Women’s liberation during that time did not result from women’s own self-conscious awakening; it was an incarnation of national salvation imposed by male intellectuals.

Therefore, the “new woman” image Nora stood for was both ambiguous and problematic. In fact, like Nora, Jiang Qing was on delicate ground in the pursuit of self-reliance. As an actress, she was financially independent and free from male dominance. However, to maintain her job and to advance her career, she still had to rely on men, since there was no female director or playwright in the filmmaking circle at that time.39 This is a dilemma many women who fought for freedom during this time had to face.

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Jiang Qing later appeared in the play *The Storm* written by Aleksandr Ostrovsky. Cooperating with the famous actor Zhao Dan 赵丹 (1915—1980), who she had previously worked with in *A Doll’s House*, she played the heroine Katerina and gained warm applause for her acting. She also performed in a few films such as *Old Mr. Wang* 王老五 and *Blood on Wolf Mountain* 狼山喋血记. In those films, she seldom played leading roles and usually played “characters representing the tarnished side of metropolitan Shanghai”, such as a peasant’s daughter.40

Besides her film career, Jiang Qing’s personal life gained more and more public attention. In 1936, she married Tang Na 唐纳 (1914—1988), a reputed left-wing film critic, actor, and dramatist, but two months after their wedding, she broke up with Tang for her old lover Yu Qiwei and later was reported to have had an affair with a married director, Zhang Min 章泯 (1906—1975). Tang Na was so shocked that he attempted suicide twice before their final divorce. These scandals considerably affected Jiang’s public image. Right before Japan seized hold of Shanghai in July 1937, she set out for the headquarters of the CCP in Yan’an, leaving behind her disreputable history and the celebrity identity of Lan Ping.

**Supporting Mao Zedong as His Wife and Secretary in Yan’an (1937—1949)**

On July 7th 1937, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (known as Lugouqiao Incident 卢沟桥事变 in China) took place, marking the full-scale Second Sino-Japanese War. Jiang Qing arrived in Yan’an in August. Unlike some rumors imply, the name “Jiang

Qing” was not bestowed by Mao Zedong. Chinese Biographer Ye Yonglie states that Jiang Qing already referred to herself as “Jiang Qing” in the autobiography she wrote in 1937 in Yan’an before she met Mao Zedong. In an interview with Witke, Jiang Qing quoted a well-known Chinese saying to explain the significance of her new name: “azure comes from the blue but excels blue.” This saying is a metaphor usually used to describe the students (azure) who surpass their teachers (blue). Here, given the fact that “Jiang Qing” literally means “river azure” and her old stage name “Lan Ping” means “blue apple”, we see Jiang’s wish to better herself with her new name and identity.

After her arrival in Yan’an, Jiang Qing enrolled in the Anti-Japanese Military and Political University and started teaching and acting at Lu Xun Academy of Art. In 1938, 24-year-old Jiang Qing married 45-year-old Mao Zedong, the political and military chief leader of CCP. From then until 1949, she worked as Mao’s personal secretary and dutiful wife, taking care of Mao’s daily life and assisting him in his work (Fig. 7). As Mao’s wife, the primary identity Jiang took over for the rest of her life, she continued her days in Yan’an beside one of the most powerful men in China.

Today’s remaining defamation of Jiang Qing is generally framed in two ways. On one hand, official publications criticize her political misconducts and her ambition to restore feudalism to become an empress. The Gang of Four headed by Jiang was regarded as the chief culprit for the catastrophic damages the CR caused, minimizing the

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41 Some people believe that the name “Jiang Qing” was inspired by a tradition Chinese poem “Musical Soul of the Xiang River” which Mao Zedong highly appreciated. 
42 Ye wrote that the original manuscript of Jiang’s autobiography is stored in the State Archive Administration of PRC now. See Yonglie Ye, A Pictorial Biography of Jiang Qing, (Hong Kong: Time International Publishing Co.Ltd, 2005), 82. 
43 Witke, Comrade Chiang Ching, 155.
incrimination towards Mao Zedong. In the government-sanctioned books, Jiang was compared to the most (in)famous female rulers in China. One is Empress Lü (241 BC—180 BC), who married the first emperor of the Han Dynasty Emperor Gaozu (ca.256BC—195BC). After Emperor Gaozu died, her son became the successor, and she cruelly tortured Concubine Qi (¿—194BC) (the late Emperor Gaozu’s consort) and came into power for fifteen years. The other empress Jiang was repeatedly compared to is Wu Zetian (624—705), who established the Zhou dynasty in 690 and was on the throne for fifteen years as empress regnant.

On the other hand, unofficial rumors and gossip stemmed from deep-rooted prejudice against actresses and female politicians are disseminated and linger even today. These discursive rumors mostly target Jiang’s “corrupted personal life”, such as her luxurious lifestyle as a first lady, bad temper and unpredictable mood, and her early scandals with multiple men. Attacked in both formal and informal ways, Jiang Qing is depicted as a crafty and dissolute woman who manipulated other people for her own benefit.

As aforementioned, Jiang was a very complex person, and no one can give an absolute answer to the "truth" of her life. However, what I seek is a reasonable interpretation of her, based on relatively reliable historical materials and logical speculation, in order to unveil some factors that have caused an oversimplified and misleading understanding of her, since there are so many dubious rumors and unjust

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accusations loaded on the identity of “Jiang Qing”.45 When we look back to her life, it seems that she always left one place and man to start a new life in a new place. Every new name signals a departure from an old identity, a full stop marking the end of the previous history, and a new hope for what awaited next. The stress given to her education background at Qingdao University is to point out that Jiang Qing was a cultured, educated, and capable woman, intellectually compatible with Mao, not just a third-class, depraved actress from Shanghai. Coming from a humble background, she struggled to be in control of her life and aimed to make a name for herself by using every means. That is why I believe her identity is self-fashioned.

“Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” 延安文艺工作座谈会上的讲话

In 1942, Mao Zedong gave a public speech later known as “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art” (hereafter as “the Talk”), addressing the principal standards of proletarian literature and art.46 The influence of the Talk was profound and decisive. Essential issues concerning the function of proletarian art and literature and how to make them operate effectively were discussed in depth. From the present strict government censorship of literary and artistic works in China to the highly politicized and propagandized art style during the CR, almost all the problems that seriously hampered the full development of Chinese literature and art can find theoretical roots in the Talk. Through the Talk, Mao systemized his thoughts on literature and art, and he set it forth as

45 See Gao, The Battle for China’s Past, 148-150.

46 This speech was first officially published on People’s Liberation Army Daily 解放军日报 on Oct. 19th 1943, including the Introduction lectured on May 3rd and the Conclusion lectured on May 23rd. The Talk served as a guideline for launching the Yan’an Rectification Movement 延安整风运动 (1842—1944), the first ideological mass movement started by Mao Zedong in the CCP.
the fundamental regulation on literary and artistic practices, later solidified by relevant national policies, political campaigns, and the establishment of numerous art organizations nationwide. As Mao’s steadfast follower, Jiang Qing also adopted Mao’s vision of art in her own artistic practice during the CR.

In the Talk, Mao formulated a class-oriented, utilitarian, and political policy of literature and art. First and foremost, Mao demonstrated the purpose of the forum, which illuminated the function of art and literature as far as CCP was concerned:

“The purpose of our meeting today is precisely to ensure that literature and art fit well into the whole revolutionary machine as a component part, that they operate as powerful weapons for uniting and educating the people and for attacking and destroying the enemy, and that they help the people fight the enemy with one heart and one mind.”

According to Mao, literature and art were supposed to contribute first to the course of the proletarian revolution, since the class struggle against the bourgeoisie was a primary task of the CCP during this time. Because of the class antagonism, Mao’s art policy was highly militant. To him, art should take effect as a “cultural army,” “the front of pen” in the actual proletarian class struggle. Literature and art should serve the proletarian “masses of people,” which specifically refers to “the workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie.” (The urban petty bourgeoisie, a group between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, was taken as a force that the CCP should win over.)

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47 Mao, “Talks”, 70.

48 Mao, “Talks,” 76-77. Mao was deeply influenced by Marxist-Leninist literature and art theory, which can be proved by his quotation from Lenin in the Talk. The quote by Lenin is “literature and art should serve…the millions and tens of millions of working people”, extracted from
Second, Mao Zedong’s theory of literature and art was utilitarian. He advocated a popularized style to appeal to the masses, since the proletarian masses were mostly illiterate or uneducated:49

“Popular works are simpler and plainer, and therefore more readily accepted by the broad masses of the people today. Works of a higher quality, being more polished, are more difficult to produce and in general do not circulate so easily and quickly among the masses at present.”50

The masses needed to be enlightened and also united with “one heart and one mind” to fight together.51 Mao considered the question of how to make the proletarian ideology conveyed by the literary and art works more accessible to the masses an urgent task. One of the many typical examples of applying this policy is that quotes from Selected Works of Mao Zedong 毛泽东选集 were painted on the wall as catchphrases during the CR. Written in the most comprehensible way, those catchphrases were usually short, plain, and powerful, so their meaning could be quickly absorbed by the masses.

Third, Mao Zedong pointed out the dominant role politics should take in relation to literature and art, stating that “literature and art are subordinate to politics… class politics, the politics of the masses.” Hereby the political standing authors or artists take is always a serious issue, as well as a crucial factor when it comes to the evaluation of their works. Due to the considerable emphasis on holding the correct political position,


49 Mao, “Talks,” 82.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
Chinese artists have to carefully choose their subject matter and examine the political message their work carries. Furthermore, Mao admonished that works by some petty-bourgeois writers “only expose the dark (side) and are known as the ‘literature of exposure’.”\footnote{Mao, “Talks,” 91.} He continued,

“For revolutionary writers and artists the targets for exposure can never be the masses, but only the aggressors, exploiters and oppressors and the evil influence they have on the people. The masses too have shortcomings, which should be overcome by criticism and self-criticism within the people’s own ranks, and such criticism and self-criticism is also one of the most important tasks of literature and art.”

Nonetheless, interpretation of artworks can be highly subjective and flexible. Where is the borderline between the revolutionary artworks that facilitate people’s criticism and self-criticism and the counterrevolutionary artworks that expose the darkness of the people? Mao did not give a clear answer in the Talk. This undefined problem later became the key premise enabling Mao to successfully initiate a series of political persecutions on certain intellectuals and his enemies in the Party by criticizing their opinions on certain artworks. With absolute control of the official media, Mao became the final judge of the political inclination literary work or artwork expressed. Afraid of being accused of besmirching the proletarian masses and the image of New China, most authors and artists had to follow the quintessential art stereotype enforced by the CCP, at the price of an unvaried art style and limited freedom of creation. More tragically, some of them gradually exercised “self-censorship” upon their own works to
avoid troubles. Needless to say, in this process, the “dark side”, as an essential part of the social reality, was covered, and the bright side was exaggerated and glorified.

From Chapter 3 to Chapter 5, I investigate the published photographic works by Jiang Qing, who was both the maker and a follower of the CCP’s art policies established after the Talk. During the CR, she was the only high-ranked political leader that intensively engaged in artistic practices.
CHAPTER 3: PHOTOGRAPHY: MORE THAN A HOBBY

A Privileged Amateur Photographer

In 1945, the Second Sino-Japanese War ended with the surrender of Japan. Four years later, the New China (PRC) was founded by the CCP while KMT withdrew to Taiwan. As Chairman Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing naturally became the first lady of China. However, due to gynecological disease, she became bedridden and was sent to Moscow in Russia for medical care for several times from 1949 to early 1960s. In fact, Jiang Qing’s later capricious, perverse character was partly ascribed to her ill health and climacteric.

Du Xiuxian 杜修贤 (1926—present), an experienced photojournalist in Xinhua News Agency 新华通讯社 (hereafter as Xinhua) and the full-time photographer of Premier Zhou Enlai 周恩来 (1898—1976) and Mao Zedong, gave a detailed, first-hand narrative of Jiang Qing’s engagement with photography in his memoir written by Gu Baozi.53 According to Du, Jiang Qing grew interested in photography since 1959, when she went to Mountain Lu and was fascinated by the stunning scenery there. In 1962, after her disease was cured, Jiang Qing was already very enthusiastic about learning to take photographs. To encourage her, Mao Zedong asked renowned photographer Shi Shaohua

53 Baozi Gu, Red Lens: State Affairs in the Eyes of a Zhongnanhai Photographer, (Shenyang: Liaoning People's Publishing House, 1998), 392. The revised edition of this book was published in 2006 by Chinese Communist Party History Publishing House 中共党史出版社. Under the direct control of Party History Research Center of the CCP Central Committee 中共中央党史研究室, it specializes in publishing authoritative articles, biographies, and memoirs about CCP. Zhongnanhai 中南海 is an enclosed area in Beijing where the headquarter of the CCP is located since 1949. In the early days of PRC, chief political leaders like Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai all lived in this compound with their families. Daily administrative activities such as meeting with foreign leaders are also taken place there.
With a strong background in documentary photography, Shi advised Jiang find inspiration in the real lives of the masses. However, he forgot that Jiang was not a common person. She was carefully guarded wherever she went and was not supposed to appear in public places. Therefore, Shi suggested she photograph still life or landscape instead, in order to advance her photography skills, such as rendering depth, mastering accurate exposure, and constructing pleasing composition. Jiang showed assiduous attitude in the process of practice and was very productive. As Jiang’s secretary Yang Yinlu stated, she would spend hours or days to wait for a “decisive moment” to shoot the sunrise.

In 1961, Jiang Qing published a black-and-white photograph of a flower titled “Gentle and Pure” on China Photography (Fig.1). Issued nationwide since 1957, China Photography is a government-owned magazine on photography, targeting both professional photographers and photo amateurs. It is one of the most authoritative and professional magazines on photography in China. The magazine’s content varies from photographic techniques to academic criticism. It is an official magazine supervised by China Photographers Association—the earliest national photographer association since 1956. In short, publishing photos in China Photography is one of the highest honors a photographer could expect.

The appearance of “Gentle and Pure” in China Photography marks the first time that Jiang’s photographic work was published. The technical parameters of the shooting process that she provided can be translated as follows: “This photo was taken by single-

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54 Shi Shaohua was appointed as the Director of Photography Department of Xinhua in 1952. As China’s biggest official press agency, Xinhua is subordinate to the State Council.
lens reflex camera outdoors at 7pm on August 8th, 1961. Speed: ISO 100/21°. Aperture: f/16. Shutter speed: 1/15 s. Green filter and tripod were used.” (Fig.8)

This note reveals several facts to us. First, she owned essential photography equipment. As a matter of fact, according to her secretary Yang’s memoir, she owned an expensive Hasselblad camera, different types of camera lenses, and other equipment such as a portable tripod and flash.55 Second, she had adequate knowledge of professional terms. Third, she was able to properly operate a camera manually.

After her first publication, Jiang started frequently publishing works in the most influential official magazines such as China Photography, China Pictorial, and People’s Liberation Army Pictorial (hereafter as PLA Pictorial). However, why could her photos of some pretty delicate flowers be published in these national publications? Was it simply because she was the first lady? What is the significance of the subject matter in her works? To answer this question, I have to make a long detour to elucidate the mainstream of Chinese photography in the 1960s.

The Significance of the Popularity of Landscape/Still Life Photography

After the PRC was established in 1949, Chinese professional photographers consisted of four groups of people: first, the official photojournalists of the CCP; second, official photojournalists from the area previously controlled by the KMT; third, studio photographers; and fourth, scholars that took photos in an artistic way or out of personal interests.56 In the era when cameras were extremely rare and expensive, these

55 Yinlu Yang, I Was Jiang Qing’s Secretary, 196.
photographers were a small number of people who had access to cameras and had acquired the skills of taking photos. They were from different social classes and photographed for diverse purposes. How to make them work compatibly to serve the new regime in a unified political tone was a foremost task for the CCP.

In the light of the above, photography magazines directed by the CPA, such as *China Photography*, became a pivotal platform where fine arts photography was defined and where the standards of authorized photography genres were formed. The photography of landscape and still life, like the flowers Jiang Qing photographed, embedded with the pictorial aesthetics inherited from Chinese traditional ink paintings, was the officially approved genre and regarded as artistic.

Photography was introduced to China around 1840s. “Essentially as a Western mode of image making”, it gradually turned into “a recognized form of art” in China as early as the 1920s by mimicking “paintings both in subjects and in styles.”57 The reason for this imitation is obvious. With a long-lasting history, traditional Chinese ink paintings were a paramount component of Chinese people’s visual experience in two-dimensional visual representation. Consequently, photography, this foreign and new form of art, was deemed as a substitution of ink painting at the cost of losing its inherent characteristics as a distinct art medium. It was mostly employed on a technological level, while the composition, subject matter, and even the idyllic spirituality in “art photographs” showed a profound influence from the tradition of ink painting. These photos were referred to as “salon photography” 沙龙摄影 or “picturesque photography” 画意摄影, endowed with

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an obvious implication of painting. Photographer Lang Jinshan (1892—1995), best known for his “composite photography” 集锦摄影, was a pioneer and master in this field.

Composite photography is a method of creating photographs based on the artist’s deliberate selection, rearrangement, and integration of certain visual segments to formulate the final work. It is accomplished by printing a number of negatives on one printing paper in the darkroom. The visual elements in one photo can stem from photos taken in different places in different periods. For example, published in 1951, Lang Jingshan’s “Boating on Misty River” 烟波摇艇 (Fig.9) combines the scenery of Mountain Huang in mainland China, a scene of boating in Hong Kong, and reeds from Taiwan. As Lang himself stated, “now with the method of composite photography, I can convey natural landscape in my own way as in the scope of painting. By imitating the traditional composition in my landscape photos, I can produce my ideal artistic imagery.”

In short, the features of composite photography can be summarized as follows: first, heavy dependence on darkroom techniques; second, divorce from visual reality, allowing plenty of freedom for the artist to reconstruct visual fragments at his or her own will to render a fictional and idealized representation; third, mimicry of traditional Chinese ink paintings in the respect of subject matter, composition, and a sense of spirituality shared by Chinese intellectuals or literati artists. Like landscape painters in China, the early art photographers were interested in visualizing their inner spiritual

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world rather than honestly capturing the visual aspect of the physical world by photography.

Comparing another photo taken by Jiang Qing called “Chlorophytum Malayense” 大叶吊兰 (Fig.2) with a conventional ink painting done by a female artist, Yuexiang 月香 (c.1800), entitled “Ink Orchids” 墨兰 (Fig.10), one can effortlessly find similarities in subject matter and composition. Chlorophytum Malayense is the scientific name of a Chinese flower that is very similar to orchid. A very common motif in Chinese ink paintings, the orchid symbolizes beauty, fragrance, nobility and refinement. Furthermore, in both Jiang’s photo and Yue Xiang’s painting, twisted leaves overlapped in a balanced manner are crowded intensely in the lower left, leaving the rest of the picture plane blank. Finally, concerning the unnatural pointy tip of the leaves on Jiang’s work, it is reasonable to speculate that Jiang deliberately trimmed leaves to make them seem more idealized. This modification corresponds with Lang Jiangshan’s philosophy of composite photography, aiming to render pictorial perfection rather than honest visual representation.

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to call these seemingly beautiful, poetic photos “apolitical,” because the promotion and popularity of landscape/still life photography as the only type of art photography was strongly politically relevant. Chinese photo critic Liu Shuyong argued that “the photographic image of landscape is never just an issue on photography but ties to the relation between human and reality. How can we obtain a
state of spiritual harmony between ongoing contradiction in real life that we feel anxious about and the enchanting fantasized world beyond reality?"59

In the days of political tempest, Chinese photographers were confronted with only two alternatives. They could either perform services for the CCP’s propaganda apparatus or stay as far away from politics as possible. Landscape and still life, disconnected with social problems, became a tempting option and a safe choice of subject matter to photographers. At the same time, numerous art competitions of landscape/still life photography held by the governmental organizations lured photographers with promises of fame and power. Without taking clear political standings, and thus immune from any consequence of political struggles, the art photographers managed to escape from reality and hide in an imaginary nostalgic world through their works.

To return to the case of Jiang Qing, the publishing of her photographic works of flowers testified to two facts. First, landscape/still life photography was an accepted and approved genre of art photography. Second, the privilege Jiang enjoyed as Mao’s wife enabled her to publish as many works as she wanted, demonstrating that the political leaders of the CCP directly wielded power over the press and mass media, since they could manipulate the affairs of government-owned institutions for personal reasons. For example, Xinhua, a state-owned institution, was responsible for developing most of Jiang Qing’s photos. The cost was paid by Jiang Qing and Mao’s salary, as well as the remuneration they earned from their published works.

In addition, Jiang Qing’s works were nominated under her pen name in the National Photography Art Exhibition (hereafter as National Exhibition) for three years in a row from 1961 to 1963. Hosted by the CPA, the National Exhibition was the top-ranked, biggest, and most influential photography exhibition in China. In the Fifth National Exhibition in 1961, four of her works were nominated. In the Sixth National Exhibition in 1962, she had five works nominated. In the Seventh National Exhibition in 1963, she got six works nominated. For the three years, nobody could compete with her in the number of nominated works.60

To Jiang Qing, photography was no longer just a hobby and a personal pastime but a new stage on which prove her capability and talent. From an amateur photographer to a photographer whose “artistic creation” was repeatedly published in magazines, she gained increasing self-fulfillment and confidence. Soon, her strength in photography became a springboard for her next, even bigger stage—her political career.

CHAPTER 4: FROM MAO’S WIFE TO MAO’S POLITICAL PARTNER

The Cultural Revolution (CR) (1966—1976) was a radical ultraleftist movement initiated by Mao Zedong to further the proletarian class struggle against the feudal ruling class and what he considered to be the bourgeoisie within the ruling leaders in the CCP. However, in fact, the ultimate aim of the initiation of the CR was to purge Mao’s enemies in the Party and restore his unchallengeable authority after his dominance was severely weakened since the Eighth Party Congress of the CCP in 1956.

The CR was cultural because it featured extensive reforms in ideological spheres. According to Mao, all the literature or artworks that embodied old customs, old cultures, old habits, and old ideas should be despised. Even intellectuals and teachers were regarded as the promoters of the old cultural legacies and values, ending up as the target of political persecution. Mao proclaimed that people living in the New China should be provided with new literature and art that coincided with the socialist system based on Marxism-Leninism. Needless to say, acknowledged as the most authoritative protagonist of Marxism-Leninism in China, Mao actually attempted to preach his own thoughts as the orthodox guiding doctrine of the CCP; this explains why the personality cult and deification of Mao prevailed during the CR.

The CR was the most significant phase of Jiang Qing’s life. She completed the change of identity from Mao’s wife to Mao’s most loyal and competent political partner, shining and waning in the world of politics. In general, she had two outstanding accomplishments. First, she successfully assisted in Mao’s preparation for the CR. Second, in the launching stage of the CR, she initiated the innovative creation of model
opera, “something new by combining three elements into one organic performance art: revolutionary content (women’s liberation and participation in society as in *The White Haired Girl* 白毛女 and *The Red Regiment of the Woman’s Army* 红色娘子军), traditional Chinese art (Peking Opera), and Western techniques (ballet and wind and string music instruments)”. 61 Using model opera as the proof of her contribution to the reform of Beijing Opera, she later began governing all the national affairs related to literary and artistic practices during the CR.

In this chapter, I correlate her two greatest achievements in the preparation of the CR with two of her crucial published works in order to analyze what exact role she played in the CR through her photography.

The Launching Stage of the Cultural Revolution

The root of the CR was the catastrophic failure of the Great Leap Forward 大跃进 (1958—1960), a reform started by Mao to transform China’s agriculture-based economy to an industry-based economy in the shortest possible time. Nevertheless, due to his lack of knowledge of the law of economic growth and avidity for quick results, Mao gave unpractical orders such as calling on the people to “surpass Britain within fifteen years or in less time in output of iron, steel and other major industrial products” on the Second Plenum of the CCP’s Eighth National Congress 中共八大二次会议 in 1958. 62 Fired with enthusiasm and confidence in the development of China’s economy, as well as with tremendous faith in Mao’s directives, people became crazed for producing steel and disregarded agriculture.

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The Great Leap Forward ended as a huge failure both economically and socially. Without proper instruction, peasants put essential farm tools and daily supplies into homemade backyard furnaces to melt down for steel, most of which was of poor quality and unfit for use in industrial production. At the same time, to conceal declining agricultural production, local officials reported false statistics of production to the central government, complicating the situation with widespread negative influences. Instead of accelerating China’s modernization, the Great Leap Forward negatively affected China’s economic growth and the progress of industrialization.

Mao’s unwise leadership shook his absolute dominant control in the CCP. In 1959, Marshal Peng Dehuai 彭德懷 (1898—1974) wrote a private letter to Mao Zedong concerning the problems of the Great Leap Forward. Under the command of Mao, this letter was printed out and disseminated in the 8th Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP 中共八屆八中全會 (also known as Lushan Conference 南山會議). Peng was instantly removed from his official posts in the CCP, because Mao accused him of being the “leader of an anti-Party clique” and a “right-opportunist”. Lin Biao 林彪 (1907—1971), another army general, was chosen for his loyalty to Mao to replace Peng Dehuai.

Additionally, Mao’s longtime close aide Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1898—1969) evidently changed his attitude toward Mao’s leadership after he replaced Mao as Chairman of the PRC 国家主席 in the same year.63 It was Liu who first put forward the

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notion of “Mao Zedong Thought” 毛泽东思想 and proposed to put it in the Party Constitution. However, he did not give any credit to Mao’s Thoughts in his speech “The Victory of Marxism-Leninism in China” 马克思列宁主义在中国的胜利 that was published on People’s Daily 人民日报 in October 1959. Moreover, Liu’s economic policy was more liberal while Mao’s was ultraleftist. The economic reform Liu led after the Great Leap Forward was very effectual, which won him great prestige in the CCP.

Peng’s criticism and Liu’s changing attitude caused Mao unrest. Although Mao still held the title of General Secretary of the Communist Party 中共中央主席 and Chairman of the Central Military Commission 中共中央军委主席 at that time, he knew his authority was facing challenges. Under such circumstances, he desired to strengthen his power and eliminate those who questioned or disapproved with him, and his wife Jiang Qing became the only person he deemed trustworthy.

Concerning her photography’s intricate historical background, the publishing of Jiang Qing’s work “Fairy Cave on Mountain Lu” (hereafter as “Fairy Cave”) (Fig.3) in March 1964, two years before the beginning of the CR, implied layers of information. As I introduced in last chapter, landscape was a popular subject matter in art photography since the 1950s. Like in many other landscape photos, the profound influence of Chinese paintings on this photograph is very obvious. Many common visual elements of traditional landscape paintings can be found in this photo, such as mountain peaks, pavilions, pine trees, and fog. In composition, the overhanging pine tree in the upper-right corner can also be easily seen in other Chinese paintings (Fig.11).

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64 Hsü, Readings in Modern Chinese History, 647.
What distinguished “Fairy Cave” from other normal landscape photographs is the attachment of two texts. The first text is Mao Zedong’s poem “Qijue· Inscription on Fairy Cave on Mountain Lu, the Photograph Taken by Comrade Li Jin” 七绝·为李进同志题所 摄庐山仙人洞照 written on September 9th, 1961.65 The second text is the comment written in prose style by Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892—1978), a famed writer, poet, and government official. Mao’s poem can be translated as follows:

Amid the growing shades of dusk stand sturdy pines, 暮色苍茫看劲松,

Riotous clouds sweep past, swift and tranquil. 乱云飞渡仍从容。

Nature has excelled herself in the Fairy Cave, 天生一个仙人洞,

On perilous peaks dwells beauty in infinite variety. 无限风光在险峰。

This poem seems discursive and confusing at first sight. Nevertheless, Guo Moruo’s comment gave an explicit interpretation. Moreover, as we know from the Talk that Mao agreed with Lenin on the Party’s all-inclusive supervision of publications, it must suffice to say that Guo’s interpretation was approved by Mao. The role Guo’s writing took in the understanding of the poem also reaffirmed the utilitarianism of Mao’s thoughts on literature and art. Written in traditional literary form, Mao’s poem is abstract, condensed, and metaphorical, therefore many uneducated peasants and workers may not be able to fully comprehend the poem or grasp the underlying connotation Mao tended to express. Guo’s writing paraphrased Mao’s poem into vernacular Chinese, enabling the masses to better understand the poem.

65 Mao’s poem is written in qijue 七绝, a traditional Chinese poetry form consisting of four phrases each seven Chinese characters in length.
According to Guo, Mao’s poem is actually not to praise the beauty of the Fairy Cave but the sturdy pines near the Fairy Cave. Conventionally, sturdy pines are emblematic of the spirit of self-reliance, perseverance, and toughness in Chinese literature and paintings. “Amid the growing shades of dusk”, the pines stood still, unafraid of the sweeping clouds on the top of the mountain, and became a part of the stunning scenery in this photo. The sweeping clouds on the top of the mountain represent the complicated political atmosphere. In other words, it suggested the national crisis brought by the bitter result of the Great Leap Forward. Guo provoked readers to ponder the undertone of Mao’s poem, citing that Mao writing the poem was actually to boost the civilian morale in the current bleak situation. Appealing to the masses to regard the sturdy pines as role models, Gao asked them to learn from the pine tree’s fortitude and remain loyal followers of Mao. According to him, to be a brave progressive member in the course of communism, everyone should dare to fight against all kinds of obstacles to climb up the top of the mountain, where the beautiful scenery that stands for China’s prosperity and the success of communism can be seen.

Likewise, Jiang Qing’s photo was utilized as an illustration to enrich and visualize Mao’s poem. Since this photograph became famous for Mao’s inscription and Guo’s essay, the photograph was inevitably embedded with the political undertones even when it was published alone without the presence of text. In other words, Mao attached underlying political meaning to this simple landscape photograph Jiang took. Consequently, Jiang’s photograph, Mao’s poem, and Guo’s writing constituted a triad.
Mao’s inscription proved his reliance on Jiang Qing’s photograph. To Jiang, this was the best praise from Mao on her photographic practices.

One year later, Yao Wenyuan’s “On the New Historical Drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*” was published on *Shanghai Wenhui Daily*. This critical review was actually commissioned by Mao after months of preparation. Jiang Qing worked as an organizer of the writing crew. The drama *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* is about a righteous loyal civil servant called Hai Rui (1515—1587) being dismissed by the corrupted emperor. The review under Yao’s name claimed that the author of *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office* Wu Han (1909—1969) compared Peng Dehuai to Hai Rui and discredited Mao as the fatuous emperor. The criticism bombarding Wu Han gave a warning to those who intend to disagree with Mao.

In March 1966, supported by Lin Biao, Jiang gave a lecture on a forum about the cultural field. The summary of her speech was revised by Mao and later published on the official documents of the Central Committee of the CCP, entitled “The Summary of the Forum about the Literature and Art Work in the Military Comrade Jiang Qing Convened by Comrade Lin Biao’s Commission.” Mao and Lin Biao’s support allowed Jiang to smoothly become a key political leader presiding over cultural affairs.

The CR was formally launched in May 1966. Hence, Jiang’s photo of “Fairy Cave” can be regarded as the link between the end of the Great Leap Forward and the

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66 See Ding Wang, *A Brief Biography of Jiang Qing*, (Hong Kong: Contemporary China Research Institute, 1967), 42-51.
advent of the CR, a visualized statement showing Mao’s determination to reinstate his power in the CCP. Jiang also obtained an official post as a reward for her support in Mao’s preparation for the CR: first deputy head of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (CCRSG). CCRSG was not a “small group” at all. During the CR, the official documents of the CCP (also known as “Red Header Document” 红头文件) were signed by the Central Committee of the CCP, State Council, the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the CPC, and CCRSG, evidencing the superior rank of the CCRSG in the state structure. Jiang Qing eventually reached the stage of politics and became a prominent politician.

The Formation of Model Operas

Before the CR, Jiang Qing had already been the mouthpiece of Mao in art circles. The reform in the art world during the CR actually originated from Mao’s literature and art theory established in the Talk, but Mao’s theory was implemented in an extreme way on a more practical level this time. Jiang directed the creation of model operas样板戏, the eight nation-sanctioned revolutionary operas as well as the only politically correct operas allowed on stage in that era. In 1964, Jiang Qing gave a speech at the forum of the National Modern Beijing Opera 全国立剧院现代戏观摩演出大会, officially initiating harsh criticism on the old Beijing Operas. In 1967, entitled as “On the Reform of Beijing Opera” 谈京剧改革, this speech was published in the “two newspapers and one

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67 This photograph was also published on China Daily, 1971, Vol. 7&8 and PLA Daily, 1971, Vol. 7&8.
68 “Red Header Document” usually refers to the most definitive, precise, and authentic directives of the Central Committee of the CCP, most of which are highly confidential and only circulated within the high ranked CCP leaders.
magazine”两报一刊, the principal, most official newspapers and periodicals in China during the CR: *People’s Daily, PLA Daily, and Red Flag*．

From 1964 to 1966, the eight model operas were generated and later adapted from films. As the chief director of the eight operas, Jiang Qing not only closely supervised the writing of arias, stage design, characters’ image design, rehearsal, and shooting process, but also took photographs of the operas and published her works. From a former actress who only received the gaze from the audience, she became the chief director of the creation of model opera and could exercise personal authority over all participants. This was surely dramatic progress.

**The Theorization of Model Opera’s Art Style**

In that period, several sets of artistic rules were created for the standardized image for glorification of proletarian heroes to exalt the proletarian revolution and class struggles. These rules were later summarized and referred to as the “Three Prominences” 三突出, “tall, mighty, and wholesome” 高大全, and “red, bright, and shining” 红光亮．“Tall, mighty, and wholesome” were the necessary characteristics of all good figures. “Red, bright, and shining” was the idealized visual impression presented by heroic figures. “Three Prominences” means that the good figures must be prominent among all the characters, the heroes must be prominent among all good figures, and the leading hero must be prominent among all heroes. By using these strategies, the perfect image and impression of the proletarian revolutionist was engendered.

It was Yu Huiyong 于会泳 (1925－1977) who first proposed the notion of the “Three Prominences,” whose essay entitled “Make the Performance Stage Become the
Mao Zedong Thought’s Front Forever” 让文艺舞台永远成为毛泽东思想的阵地 was first published on the *Shanghai Wenhui Daily* on May 23rd, 1968. Yu was a minister of cultural affairs during the CR and participated in the formative stage of the eight model plays. The “Three Prominences” theorized Jiang Qing’s directives on successfully representing the images of revolutionary heroes. In essence, it “was a series of symbolic relationships: artistically between (revolutionary) realism and (revolutionary) romanticism; ideologically between the party and the state; culturally between Mao as leader, the nation, and the Chinese people.” 69 This romanticism and idealization is in accord with Mao Zedong’s the Talk, in which he stated that “the life represented by art and literature works can be and should be more elevated, intense, concentrative, typical, and idealized than the actual daily life, hence to be more representative”. 70

Based on the usage of sharp contrast between heroes and villains, the “Three Prominences” were further crystallized into specific photography shooting techniques to highlight the lofty character of heroic figures, such as “big versus small,” “dynamic versus static,” “virtual versus real,” “bright versus dark,” “upward versus downward,” etc. 71 For example, the heroic leading role always stood in the foreground while the villains stood in the background on the stage. When the distance between them is not

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70 Mao, "Talks", 82.
obvious enough, the photographer would deliberately stand closely to the heroic figure to make the hero look bigger and taller than the enemy. In terms of lighting, bright and warm lighting (usually with a red hue) was used on proletarian figures while dim and cold lighting (usually with a blue hue) was used on the “bad guy.” The large aperture was applied to give focus to the heroic figures, so they could appear clear on the still. For example, in a still of Shajia Creek 沙家浜 (Fig.12), the image of a female communist is in the foreground, bright and clear, while the KMT officers are in the background and look blurry and dark. Also, when taking photographs of heroes, photographers would “usually lower the cameras and make the lens facing upward to magnify the heroic image.” On the contrary, they made camera lenses face downward when shooting enemies, emphasizing the enemy’s stupidity, decadence, and impotence. The primary goal of all these techniques was to accentuate the bravery, shrewdness, and dignity of the communist proletarian heroes.

*Gendered Identity and Class Struggle*

As mentioned above, Jiang also took photographs of the model operas she directed. Here I select a still from the ballet model opera *The Red Detachment of Women* photographed by Jiang to explore her understanding and representation of women (Fig.4). This opera is the marriage of ballet and Beijing Opera. It was also seen as an ingenious artistic innovation guided by Mao’s literature and art theory, a remarkable achievement in the Chinese art world. When U.S. President Richard Nixon visited China to normalize the

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relation between the PRC and America in 1972, he watched this ballet accompanied by Jiang Qing (Fig.13).

_The Red Detachment of Women_ narrated a story about a poor peasant girl named Wu Qinghua 吴清华, who lived in a state of constant torture by her master, an atrocious local landlord. Rescued by the commissar of the Red Detachment of Women Hong Changqing 洪常青, she regained freedom and became exposed to proletarian revolutionary thoughts. After Hong was martyred in the fight, Wu succeeded Hong and led the Red Detachment of Women to destroy the local armed forces headed by her old master.

In the photograph I have selected, the woman soldier is the commander of the Red Detachment of Women. Her image meets the requirement of “red, bright, shining.” The strip attached on her broadsword, her badge, armband, and sash are all red. The spot light on her makes her image bright and outstanding in contrast with the dark plain background. In her grey military uniform, she holds a broadsword in her right hand and holds her left hand in a tight fist, showing her determination to topple the old social system in the revolution. Meanwhile, her arabesque standing position indicates the technique of ballet, which was a foreign form of performing art not introduced to China until the 1950s. Nevertheless, the overall garment looks unharmonious with the soft silky ballet slippers she wears, since the image of her is strong, revolutionary, and unstoppable. To put it another way, her soldier identity considerably overshadowed her woman identity.
Concerning the representation of women’s sexuality, Chinese feminist scholar Dai Jinhua pointed out that there is a particular rhetorical manner in the storytelling about women in the CCP’s officially-sanctioned art works. She argues that a bond exists between women’s sexual identity and class struggle. Only the exploiting class, such as the feudal class or bourgeois, acknowledges and emphasizes the sexuality and the gendered identity of the female. “Only in front of them (the exploiting class), do women need to play their roles as women, displaying the identity and sexuality of women.” On the contrary, the proletarian ideology believes that the distinction between men and women implies a proof of prejudice against women, a ribald gaze on women’s bodies, and the ravaging of women’s rights. One widely published poem written by Mao can be the best evidence. In his “Inscription on Photograph of Militia Women,” Mao wrote, “Daughters of China with a marvelous will. You prefer hardy uniforms to colorful silk.”

However, is it true that the young did not like colorful silk and preferred hardy uniforms? Or is it because women were not supposed to like colorful silk and were not expected to play their roles as women in the era of fierce class struggles and revolutionary battles? They were molded to be women soldiers rather than women. Dai omitted a crucial point in her comment: women’s identity is not purely determined by the social class they identify with; women’s identity is also influenced by the ruling class,

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74 Ibid.
75 This poem was written in 1961, first published on Chairman Mao’s Poems in 1963.
76 The translation is from The Poems of Mao Zedong, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 97.
political party, or regime’s expectation of women’s social role in a specific historical period for the benefit of the class, party, or regime. This has been well shown in the artworks especially made for political propaganda. For example, in the model operas *Ode to the Yimeng Mountains* 沂蒙颂, the heroine Hongsao红嫂 used her breast milk to bring a thirsty wounded communist soldier back to life. In other model operas such as *The Red Lantern* 红灯记, the image of an old woman repeatedly appeared. In those works, women’s identity as mother was enhanced, while their mission remained unchanged—to facilitate the revolution led by CCP.

In the model operas and the photograph of women soldiers Jiang took, we again see the identity of New China women resonate with the problematic cinematic representation of women in the 1930s. There is always a void in women’s identity to be filled with any other interests exposed by external forces. In the 1930s, it was the nationalism directed by the male intellectuals. In the period of the CR, it became the revolutionary struggles promoted by Mao and CCP. However, in both cases, women’s sexual identity was appropriated, politicized, and complicated. The uprising of women’s social status is manipulated to show that a regime is more socially advanced than its predecessor. The oppression of women is represented to legitimize the revolutions against the former rulers, in order to reinforce the necessity and urgency to initiate revolutions. Moreover, it is worthwhile to note that in most CCP-promoted artistic works, the mentor who inspires women’s self-awakening or the savior who brings freedom to the victimized women is usually male, just like Hong Changqing in *The Red Detachment of Women*. 
In the 1970s, as Jiang rose to power in the CCP, her interest in photography never waned. Du Xiuxian stated that Jiang Qing attempted to hold her own photography show in Beijing three times from 1966 to 1975, because Jiang always asked him to magnify photographs for the show. However, Mao Zedong was upset with Jiang’s immoderate self-expression. He stopped her from holding the show every time and sharply criticized her for showing off.

This detail unveils very important information about two relationships: the relation between Jiang and photography and the relation between Jiang and Mao. First, photography seems to be her continuous interest and the stage on which she sought fame and recognition. Also, since she used to publish works under her pen name, she probably wanted to show the public that she was the famous photographer whose works were frequently complimented by Chairman Mao. Second, Mao elevated Jiang to the highest rank of the CCP as his ally to allow her to better facilitate him and carry out his orders, but Mao did not fully trust Jiang and would suppress her power and influence when necessary. Mao needed Jiang Qing’s talent to accomplish the reform on art and literature, but Jiang had to strictly follow his guidance and could not search for power for herself. To Mao, Jiang publishing her works under a pen name was acceptable, but holding a photography show would attract too much attention from the public.

In the late stage of Mao and Jiang’s marriage, they did not live together anymore. Both of them had their own personal secretaries and bodyguards. Mao and Jiang were basically colleagues rather than husband and wife. In Mao’s last days, Jiang needed to

77 Gu, Red Len, 518.
make appointments with Mao’s secretary to have a face-to-face talk with him. It is fair to say that Jiang was more like Mao’s subordinate rather than his wife.
CHAPTER 5: AT THE APEX OF POWER AND THE DOWNFALL

A Member of the CCP Central Committee Politburo

In April 1969, the Ninth National Congress of the CCP was held in Beijing. Jiang Qing was appointed as a member of the CCP Central Committee Politburo, next only to the five members of the Politburo Standing Committee. In other words, she was the sixth most powerful person in China.

Even in the very center of authority, Jiang was still enthusiastic about taking photographs. A well-known photograph she took in this period is the photograph portrait of Lin Biao. The photograph is called “Chairman Mao’s Close Comrade-in-arms Deputy Chairman Lin Biao.”

Here, I include two photocopies of this photograph. They are both from the magazine in which Jiang’s work was published. One shows the original photograph Jiang took (Fig.5); the other shows that the photograph of Lin Biao on the magazine was defaced, probably done by a reader after Lin’s fall from power (Fig.14). By including the disfigured version, I want to underscore the changing physical condition of published photographs. “In the age of mechanical reproduction,” photographs should not be regarded as timeless images. Every copy or replica has a unique afterlife and a particular concrete material form that is exposed to modification. The physical condition is refashioned as time passes by. Photograph (text) may bear more complicated meaning.

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78 This photograph was found in National Library of China, Beijing, China in 2010.
and can reveal more information about the context. Hence, there is no final interpretation of text or context, because they can be reactivated by ever-changing external factors.\(^{79}\)

The details about the publishing of Lin Biao’s photograph taken by Jiang Qing testify to Lin Biao high position. The photograph was printed in full-page scale in color on the third page of the pictorial, next to Mao Zedong’s full-page color portrait photograph. Furthermore, on July 31st 1971, *People’s Daily* expressly reported the publishing of Lin’s portrait, stating, “Both pictorials (*China Pictorial* and *PLA Pictorial*) published the photograph of Chairman Mao’s close comrade-in-arms Deputy Chairman Lin Biao studying Chairman Mao’s works. This photograph vividly shows us Deputy Chairman Lin’s immense loyalty to Chairman Mao and their deep proletarian comradeship, bringing us great inspiration and encouragement.”

The plain background and Lin Biao’s staged pose reading a book suggest that this photograph is a set-up. According to the memoir of Jiang Qing’s secretary Yang Yinlu, it was taken in Jiang Qing’s personal photography studio in Building No.17 at Diaoyutai State Hotel on June 9th 1971.\(^{80}\) Jiang was busy taking photographs of many political leaders of the CCP in that period. This photograph distinguished itself from all the other photographs of Lin, because this was the only published bareheaded photograph of Lin. As a major military leader, Lin Biao always wore an army cap and uniform in public. The absence of the army cap proves Jiang Qing’s power and prominent position at that time.

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\(^{80}\) Yang, *I Was Jiang Qing’s Secretary*, 199.
A common photographer would not dare to give instructions to Lin and make him take off the army cap.

Jiang’s advice of removing Lin’s cap was perhaps due to her aesthetic preferences in lighting. Her secretary Yang Yinlu explained that she did not like using front light, because she thought it made photographs look “flat, without depth, unappealing, and not beautiful”. Jiang’s favorite lightings are side lighting and back lighting. If Lin Biao wore a cap, the brim would have completely blocked the light from the back and shadowed over his face. Based on the reflected light on the top of Lin’s head, we can speculate that the main light source was at a 45-degree angle to the side from the back. This angle is one of the most flattering portrait lightings. The side lighting excellently conveyed Lin’s skin texture. The change of light and shade gave depth to the photograph. The back lighting caused a glow that illuminated Lin.

In the photograph, the red book Lin Biao holds as a prop is the Selected Work of Mao Zedong. Directed by Jiang Qing, the book was temporarily borrowed from her secretary before the shooting, because Lin’s most outstanding achievement in his post was publicizing Mao Zedong Thought and promoting the Selected Work of Mao Zedong. Lin posed to read the book intently. The peaceful content smile on his face shows his reverence for and faithfulness to Mao. In order to look younger and more energetic, he was also asked by Jiang to shave his beard.

In terms of color, the sharp color contrast between the background and the figure clearly contours the figure. Moreover, the sharp contrast between green and red gives a vibrant look and causes both parts to stand out, especially when used at full saturation.

81 Yang, I Was Jiang Qing’s Secretary, 97.
This color scheme engenders a sense of unsettlement and vitality, perfect for the subject of revolution or rebellion. Additionally, the golden red badge on Lin’s chest adorns the dark green military uniform.

In the whole photograph, a halo-type effect is rendered around the head because of the special setup of the lighting, adding a sense of religious rite and holiness. A halo symbolizes purity, power, and glory inspired by God in religious paintings. Here, the halo light on Lin’s head demonstrates him being inspired by Mao Zedong Thoughts, written in the red book. This reflects the radical cult of Maoism supported by Lin, suggesting Lin is Mao’s most devoted disciple. The photograph extols Mao and Maoism in essence – compared with Jiang’s early work of flowers, landscape, and the model opera, the portrait photograph of prominent national leader like Lin Biao is extremely political and propagandistic.

In September 1971, one month after the portrait photograph of Lin Biao was published in *China Pictorial* and *PLA Pictorial*, Lin Biao and his family attempted to flee to the Soviet Union, but their airplane ran out of fuel and crashed in Mongolia. According to the official explanation of this incident given by the Chinese government, Lin Biao tried to use his armed forces to destroy Mao Zedong’s train, and hence to kill Mao. After his assassination failed, he ran for his life.

Lin Biao’s death meant Mao needed to find a new successor. Wang Hongwen (who later became one of the members of the Gang of Four), Deng Xiaoping, and Hua Guofeng were all candidates. Hua Guofeng was a regional official in Hunan between 1949 and in 1971, he became the head of the party leadership in the province during the
latter stages of the CR. Jiang Qing was not regarded as Mao’s successor. However, she still longed to raise her profile and glorify her image among the national populace. In September 1975, while attending the National Conference of Emulating Da Zhai on Agriculture 全国农业学大寨会议 in Shanxi, photography again became her effective tool to self-fashion her identity. Da Zhai is located in Xiyang County in Shanxi Province 山西, and despite the eroded land there, the peasants in Da Zhai increased grain production by arduous labor and terracing, overcoming the innate natural disadvantages without state aid. In 1964, Mao Zedong called on Chinese agriculture to learn from Da Zhai. Da Zhai therefore became well-known and a role model for other agricultural units.

According to Du Xiuxian, who was assigned to take photographs of Jiang Qing, Jiang directed the shooting and also posed like an actress in Da Zhai (Fig.15). With a white towel on her head—a common headdress Shanxi peasants wear—she dressed up as a peasant and took part in labor for a photograph shoot. She also gave orders about the shooting angle. Sometimes she wanted Du to use backlight; sometimes she stopped him from taking photographs, because the background was too “messy”. 82 Needless to say, her costume and the performance of participating in labor were to identify with the peasant and to demonstrate that she was a leader of the people. In this whole process, even though she was not the photographer, she maintained direct control by exercising power to manipulate the photographer.

Furthermore, Du stated that Jiang held her photography show in the conference hall of the National Conference of Emulating Da Zhai on Agriculture. At the request of

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Jiang, Du magnified over 150 photographs for her. Large photographs were hung all over the wall.\textsuperscript{83} A piece of Mao Zedong’s calligraphy was also on display, to show Jiang’s unshakable fidelity to Mao.

The Enemy of the Nation

In October 1976, four weeks after the death of Mao Zedong, Jiang Qing came to the end of her political career. According to the directive of Mao’s designated successor Hua Guofeng, she was soon arrested for implementing ultraleftist misconducts and political persecution during the CR. On January 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 1981, a special meeting of the Supreme People’s Court of the PRC sentenced Jiang Qing to death with a two-year reprieve. In 1983, her death sentence was changed to life imprisonment. Despite her consistent self-defense during the trial, Judge Jiang Hua said, “Jiang Qing represented none other than a handful of schemers, careerists, counter-revolutionaries, criminals, hoodlums and other dregs of society.”\textsuperscript{84} Without Mao’s shelter and support, Jiang again became nobody. In 1983, her sentence was changed to life imprisonment. On May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1991, at the age of 77, Jiang Qing committed suicide at a hospital in Beijing.

Jiang Qing’s only child Li Na buried her in Futian Cemetery in Beijing (Fig.16).\textsuperscript{85} On the gravestone, it says, “In Memory of Mother Li Yunhe (1914—1991). Daughter, Son-in-law, and Grandson.” (As mentioned earlier, Li Yunhe was Jiang’s original name.) Afraid of people vandalizing her mother’s grave, Li Na chose to refer to Jiang Qing as Li

\textsuperscript{83} Gu, Red Len, 569.
\textsuperscript{85} “The Last Stage of Jiang Qing’s Life and Her Grave,” accessed April 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2012. http://hi.baidu.com/laman2008/blog/item/b8769819241b870d35fa41ea.html
Yunhe, Jiang Qing’s original formal name before she turned into the famous Lan Ping and the notorious Jiang Qing.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Jiang Qing is not a woman or politician who can be easily defined or evaluated. Throughout her whole life, she ceaselessly hunted for opportunities to prove herself and yearned to take fate into her own hands. In the pursuit of self-reliance and self-fulfillment, photography played a crucial part in both her personal life and her seizure of power in politics. Being a film actress, submissive wife, and radical revolutionary is the negotiated result between her ambition and the objective condition she was situated in.

Throughout this thesis, I link the transition of her self-fashioned identity with her association with photography to examine her association with the CR. As her political power rose to prominence, her photographic works carried political connotations in more and more obvious ways. From manipulating flowers and leaves in her own photographs, she later gave orders in the shooting process to her models, the prominent political leaders like Lin Biao. At last, she also personally directed other photographers to take photographs of her, requesting certain shooting angles, timing, or composition. Jiang Qing was definitely very aware of the advantage of photography in the sphere of propaganda and was proficient in using it as a means for her own benefit.

Mao Zedong, her husband and the paramount leader of China, was a significant figure in her life and her engagement with photography. Since the early 1960s, he chose to trust Jiang Qing and cultivated her to be his ally in the CCP. Mao used both Jiang Qing’s photographs and her talent and knowledge of performing arts to advance the influence of Mao Zedong Thought and intensify the revolution. However, the relationship between Jiang and Mao changed subtly as time passed by. They turned from a couple into
colleagues, from companions in life to companions in their political careers. Based on Mao’s discouraging attitude towards Jiang holding photography shows, we can tell that Mao did not approve of Jiang’s burning desire to make a name for herself. Especially in the latter stage of the CR, after the power of the Gang of Four was enhanced, Mao regarded Jiang as his semi-enemy and criticized Jiang in public to tamper with her authority in the CR. Mao’s mistrust of Jiang Qing was evidenced by Jiang Qing’s final downfall soon after Mao’s death.

During the CR, the Gang of Four functioned as the executives of Mao’s commands. This was an unarguable fact. Jiang usually served as the “front of pen” in Mao’s struggle against his opponents, while Mao masterminded his political purge in secret. Nevertheless, in the Chinese government’s official narrative on the problems of the CR, Mao was put on the opposite side of Jiang Qing and the Gang of Four.86 If the Gang of Four and Jiang Qing were Mao’s enemies, how could Mao promote them and put them in important positions? The masses’ intense hatred of the Gang of Four was a release of the longtime repressed negative emotions towards the calamitous nightmares the CR brought to people’s lives. Jiang Qing naturally became the scapegoat for Mao and the CR.

Jiang Qing’s marriage/alliance with Mao is the key to her smooth and successful political career, but also the critical cause of her downfall in the CR. After her marriage to Mao, she was more perceived as “Mao’s wife” rather than “Jiang Qing.” This is why

few people dared to express their resentment against her during the CR when she was under Mao’s wing, and why the political damnation targeting her was greatly severe after Mao’s death.

Photography was originally a means Jiang mastered to realize her artistic pursuit and also a way to gain recognition for herself in the shadow of Mao, but Mao took advantage of her and her photography and manipulated them to his own ends. Although Jiang received considerable political power in return, her supporter was always Mao Zedong alone. She and her photography never experienced real self-reliance, but were essentially dependent on Mao. Like Nora, who stands for national salvation, like the women soldiers that represented proletarian revolution, Jiang Qing and her photography never managed to earn their agency as an independent entity.
REFERENCES


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Yang, Yinlu. *I Was Jiang Qing's Secretary*. Hong Kong: Republic (HK) Press Ltd., 2003.


FIGURES

Figure 6: Jiang Qing’s Photograph, Photographer unknown, n.d. Published on *Diantong Magazine*, cover, Vol.4, 1935. Courtesy of jfjshzz.blog.163.com, Accessed August 4th, 2011.
Figure 7: Jiang Qing, Mao Zedong, and Their Daughter Li Na at CCP Secretariat Zao Yuan, Yan’an, Photographer unknown, 1944. Courtesy of 360doc.com, Accessed April 19th, 2012.
Figure 10: YUE Xiang, Ink Orchids, n.d. Ink on paper. Fan, 16.8 x 51cm. Courtesy of Chengxun tang Collection.
Figure 12: ZHANG Yaxin, Stage Still from *Shajia Creek*, ca.1971. Published on *Stills of Model Opera*. (Beijing: People’s Art Publishing House, 2009), 27. Photocopied March 23rd, 2012.
Figure 14: Jiang Qing’s Gravestone at Futian Cemetry, Beijing, Photographer unknown, n.d. Courtesy of bbs.news.163.com, Accessed January 23rd, 2012.
APPENDIX A: NOTES

Throughout Jiang Qing’s whole life, Jiang had used several names. In this thesis, only “Jiang Qing” is used in referring to her, because that is her most commonly known name to the public. A summary of her other names is included in the Chapter 1.

In this thesis, pinyin system is applied to show the Mandarin pronunciation of Chinese names. However, some Chinese names are more well-known as written in Wade-Giles form in the Western world due to early transcriptions, such as Sun Yat-sen, Tsinghua University, and Kuomingtang. They remain in Wade-Giles form as established terms. According to Chinese convention, all Chinese names are written with the family name first and the given name next, followed by the italicized Chinese characters and the year of birth and death in parenthesis mark. In the main text, the original Chinese names in italicized form are added after the English translations of important Chinese terms, titles, publications, institutions, and historical events.

Frequently used terms will appear in acronyms after the full name is given. For example, CCP stands for Chinese Communist Party. A list of the acronyms can be found in the APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.
### APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>Chinese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCRSG</td>
<td>Central Cultural Revolution Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPA</td>
<td>China Photographers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR</td>
<td>Cultural Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diantong</td>
<td>Diantong Film Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Fairy Cave”</td>
<td>“Fairy Cave on Mountain Lu”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lushan Conference</td>
<td>The 8th Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee of the CCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Exhibition</td>
<td>National Photography Art Exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA Pictorial</td>
<td>People’s Liberation Army Pictorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRC</td>
<td>People’s Republic of China, New China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Talk”</td>
<td>“Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xinhua</td>
<td>Xinhua News Agency</td>
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