

Sociopolitical Factors Shaping De-Stalinization and De-Maoization

Honors Thesis

University of Colorado Boulder  
Department of International Affairs

By

Emily Kate Long

Thesis Advisors

Timothy Weston, PhD., Department of History  
Amy Liu, PhD., Department of Political Science  
Vicki Hunter, PhD., Department of International Affairs

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## **Sociopolitical factors shaping De-Stalinization and De-Maoization**

*Abstract:* This paper uses the case studies of the Soviet Union and China to analyze succession in single-party states by examining the sociopolitical factors that shaped the divergent approaches to de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. A comparison of Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong's histories illustrates the extensive similarities in the legacies bequeathed to Nikita Khrushchev and Deng Xiaoping. However, in 1956 Khrushchev launched a powerful attack on Stalin, castigating the cult of the individual and his years of terror. Whereas two decades later, Deng departed greatly from the path blazed by his Soviet Union counterpart, Nikita Khrushchev. Instead of explicitly criticizing Mao and diminishing his significance in Chinese history, Deng used nuanced rhetoric to covertly depart from Maoism and Maoist ideology. This thesis will argue that sociopolitical factors played the most important role in the distinctive trajectories of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. The three sociopolitical factors that will be examined are: Khrushchev and Deng's roles in their predecessor's regimes, party composition, and public opinion.

The process of succession is a problem that plagues many authoritarian regimes, particularly states whose succession is not decided by hereditary. This problem is further magnified when an extolled leader passes away. The revision of history so as to construct a national narrative reflecting the party's desired image, too, is a common feature in many authoritarian regimes and frequently this process is undertaken in order to consolidate power. Therefore, the death of a larger-than-life leader in a single-party state bequeaths a massive responsibility to the rest of party-elites; consequentially, these leaders are tasked with retaining party legitimacy and, often times, reshaping the narrative surrounding their predecessor in a way that strengthens the successor's right to rule. Frequently, the successor consolidates his or her rule only after an inner-party power struggle, thus I will look at three of the most important sociopolitical factors that shape the manner in which a new leader handles their predecessor's legacy: first, the successor's position in the previous regime; second, the party composition and the successor's relationship with said party; and third, the dynamic of the successor and public vis-a-vis public opinion.

In this thesis I aim to investigate the sociopolitical factors that influence how a new leader redefines their predecessor's legacy in communist states. This analysis will use case studies in order to examine this phenomenon, comparing the divergent trajectories of dismantling of Stalin and Mao's cults of personality. Through this comparison I seek to demystify the underlying causes responsible for the divergent paths taken by the Soviet Union and China in the management of two rather similar leaders' legacies. Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong were both responsible for millions of deaths, years of chaos and terror that brought their respective countries to the brink of destruction, and elaborate cults of personality; however, Nikita Khrushchev and Deng Xiaoping approached the predicament in extremely different ways,

suggesting that internal sociopolitical factors were at play.

The Soviet Union and China are perhaps the two most prominent cases of communist states faced with the question of succession. Surprisingly, however, studies have primarily only addressed de-Stalinization and de-Maoization as individual phenomena, overlooking the insight that such a comparison might provide to the larger puzzle of succession in a communist state. I will begin by providing a historical background that demonstrates why this is a relevant comparison, following this with a brief assessment of existing literature on the subject, and finally will examine the variables that I find to be relevant in shaping Khrushchev and Deng's divergent trajectories.

## **Part I: Background**

### **Problems in existing literature**

Comparisons of the Soviet and Chinese political systems are abundant due to their historical prominence as major communist nations; Stalin and Mao, too, have frequently been compared; however, scholarship lacks a comprehensive comparative study of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. Khrushchev's Secret Speech, which will be addressed later in this paper, has been extensively analyzed as has the PRC's path and their subsequent resolutions addressing Mao's legacy. Yet, the two phenomena have been treated as rather isolated occurrences, or at the very least, little effort has been made to reveal the insights the comparison of the two strategies might offer.

### **De-Stalinization analyses**

Most scholars would agree that Stalin's death bequeathed unto his successors a complicated legacy to traverse. The departure from Stalinist policies, which had terrorized the nation for decades, demanded careful consideration due to the very real possibility that a wrong

move might destabilize the nation.<sup>1</sup> Yet scholastic opinions begin to diverge in the attempt to explain Khrushchev's motives for such a bold denigration of a larger-than-life leader. Miriam Dobson, for instance, suggests that the state's response to amnesty issues raised by the extensive rehabilitation of those purged under Stalin "was highly significant in shaping the policies of the Khrushchev era."<sup>2</sup> Polly Jones agrees that the reversals of Stalinist policies were influential factors in shaping de-Stalinization, but she emphasizes the importance of public opinion, rather than amnesty, in shaping the trajectory of de-Stalinization.<sup>3</sup> (However, Jones and Dobson are both contributors in a compilation book addressing the dilemmas of de-Stalinization, so their different views may be intended as pieces that together, along with the other articles in the book, seek to explain Khrushchev's motives).

Chamberlin offers another perspective, asserting that Khrushchev's motivations are not clear, but that three factors likely influenced his policies: First, the continuation of Stalin's denigration after the reactions to the Secret Speech may be seen as a response to an already strained relationship between Moscow and Beijing, the latter having rejected Stalin's diminishment in party history, thus Khrushchev's renewed condemnation of Stalin during the Twenty-Second Party Congress was motivated by this tense relationship. Second, Khrushchev may have seen this technique to be politically expedient as a means to marginalize his opposition within the party by stigmatizing this 'anti-Party' group as 'Stalinists.' And third, Stalin's condemnation may have been a play to generate popular support by distancing himself from the

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<sup>1</sup> Polly Jones, introduction to *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, edited by Polly Jones, New York: Routledge, 2006. p. 1; William Henry, Chamberlin, "Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost." *Russian Review*, 21.1 (January 1962), p. 3-10

<sup>2</sup> Miriam Dobson, "'Show the bandit-enemies no mercy!': amnesty, criminality, and public responses in 1953," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. Polly Jones, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Polly Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. Polly Jones, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 42

terrors of Stalin's legacy.<sup>4</sup> Bociurkiw, too, addresses the strategic nature of Khrushchev implicating his rivals as Stalin's collaborators.<sup>5</sup> Parry, on the other hand, presents a number of unique possibilities; for example, one theory is "The 'Sheer Accident' Theory" which claims that Khrushchev did not intentionally begin a campaign against Stalin, but "something or other, or somebody or other, quite fortuitously made him burst out when he least intended to do any such thing." This theory, as well as a number of others, departs from some of the more traditional explanations offered by the scholars discussed above.<sup>6</sup>

### **The role of Soviet citizens**

The majority of literature on the topic also acknowledges the divisions in the party and populace following Khrushchev's revelations. Jones interestingly discusses Soviet citizens in terms of "*subjects* of de-Stalinization," emphasizing the resistance to new policy directives.<sup>7</sup> Like Jones, Hooper recognizes the opposition to Khrushchev's revelations; however, she acknowledges that while there was certainly a constituency that resisted the disclosures of the Secret Speech, there was also a portion of society that felt these criticisms had not been taken far enough.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, Lowenstein addresses how the public's extreme reactions to Khrushchev's speech greatly shaped the party's path of de-Stalinization.<sup>9</sup> The volume, alone, of the literature discussing ambiguous public attitudes towards de-Stalinization makes it clear that addressing Stalin's complicated political legacy would prove to be a divisive task for the party.

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<sup>4</sup> Chamberlin, "Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost." *Russian Review*, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Bohdan R. Bociurkiw, "The Problem of Succession in the Soviet Political System: The case of Khrushchev," *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science/ Revue canadienne d'Economique et de Science politique*, 26.4 (November 1960), p. 582

<sup>6</sup> Albert Parry, "The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's 'Second Funeral,'" *American Slavic and East European Review*, 15.4 (December 1956), p. 463

<sup>7</sup> Jones, Polly, Introduction, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 6

<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Hooper, "What Can and Cannot Be Said: Between the Stalinist Past and New Soviet Future." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 86.2 (April 2008), p. 314

<sup>9</sup> Karl E. Lowenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58.8, 1956 and Its Legacy (December 2006), p. 1329

## Evaluations of the Secret Speech

Interestingly, scholars evaluate the success and influence of the Secret Speech in immensely different terms. Some, such as Jones and Bociurkiw, see it as “at best a partial success,”<sup>10</sup> due to the ambiguous outpouring of objections and disagreement following the speech as well as the party’s increasingly unstable claim to legitimacy.<sup>11</sup> While others go so far as to say that it “changed the course of Soviet history” holding the “audience in rapt attention.”<sup>12</sup> For example, Parry’s assessment suggests it was extremely influential, describing it as an event that demarcated the inception of a new era.<sup>13</sup> The Secret Speech and its consequences are but a fraction of de-Stalinization, therefore, the division surrounding this singular, albeit major, event suggests that there is more insight to be gained from further study.

## De-Maoization analyses

Compared to its Soviet Union counterpart, the analyses of de-Maoization have not been nearly as extensive. This is perhaps due to the lack of information available in such a closed society or due to the subtleties of de-Maoization that were not present in de-Stalinization. Following Mao’s death in September 1976, many foreign analysts predicted that his successors’ actions would mirror the example set by the Soviet Union decades prior.<sup>14</sup> Yet this was far from the case; China adamantly fought claims that they were embarking down the path in any way similar to Khrushchev’s. Therefore, these two cases make for an interesting comparison that has not been adequately addressed thus far.

While, generally speaking, there are few discontinuities in scholars’ assessments of

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<sup>10</sup> Jones, “From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin,” *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 42

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 42; Bociurkiw, “The Problem of Succession” in the Soviet Political System” *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, p. 583

<sup>12</sup> Lowenstein, “Re-emergence of Public Opinion,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, p. 1334

<sup>13</sup> Parry, “The Twentieth Congress,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, p. 463

<sup>14</sup> Jean C. Robinson, “Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy,” *Asian Survey*, 28.3 (March 1988), p. 353



Khrushchev's actions, evaluations of de-Maoization differ much more drastically. For example, Robinson and Chen offer different explanations for how Deng legitimized his rule; Robinson, as several other scholars, suggests, "the Dengist leadership had to assert its interpretation of Mao Zedong [Thought] over those of opposing factions" in order to create "an impeccably legitimate base of authority."<sup>15</sup> Whereas Chen alleges that ideological and revolutionary-based legitimizing strategies failed following the Cultural Revolution and consequently the party was forced to turn to eudaemonic legitimacy (in this case, economic well-being).<sup>16</sup> While Chen's assertion does not explicitly contradict Robinson's, Robinson's implies that without Mao Zedong, whose legitimacy was firmly rooted in ideology, it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Deng to have consolidated his power over others striving for the position; thus, using Mao as a claim to legitimacy suggests that ideological legitimization strategies had not failed as Chen asserts. Sandschneider, too, discusses the critical need for leaders to utilize Mao and/or Mao Zedong Thought as the principal source of legitimacy.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, I would assert that while Deng certainly turned to the growth of the economy as a source of legitimacy, Deng's hesitancy to abandon Mao as a source of legitimization suggests two key things: first, that his figure was indispensable in establishing legitimacy, after all, and, second, it also demonstrates that there were inner-party forces that prevented his departure from Mao in a way that was not present in the Soviet Union following Stalin's death.

### **Problematic rhetoric**

The subtleties inherent in the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) de-Maoization policies also cause scholarship to be inconclusive and incomplete. Due to reasons to be discussed later in

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<sup>15</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death," *Asian Survey*, p. 356

<sup>16</sup> Feng Chen, "The Dilemma of Eudaemonic Legitimacy in Post-Mao China," *Polity*, 29.3 (Spring 1997), p. 421

<sup>17</sup> Eberhard Sandschneider, "Political Succession in the People's Republic of China: Rule by Purge," *Asian Survey*, 25.6 (June 1985), p. 644; Robinson, "Mao after Death," *Asia Survey*, p. 356

this paper, Deng was tasked with a precarious balancing act, never comfortable with the denigration of Mao in unyielding terms, as Khrushchev did with Stalin. While Mao's policies during the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution were certainly repudiated,<sup>18</sup> authors like Sullivan draw attention to an important caveat: that these criticisms are generally mitigated and ultimately deemed of secondary importance.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, it is this nuanced rhetoric, which simultaneously censured decades of Mao's rule while maintaining his status as a lauded visionary, which causes such different scholastic interpretations and is also why de-Maoization persists as an abstruse phenomenon.

### **Conclusion from existing literature**

Indeed, Khrushchev and Deng were both bequeathed the difficult task of dismantling their larger-than-life predecessors' personality cults and political legacies. While each successor's tactics have been examined individually and comparisons of the Soviet and Chinese political systems been made, there has yet to be an adequate analysis of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization in relation to one another. Thus, this thesis seeks to unravel the sociopolitical factors that shaped the trajectories taken by Khrushchev and Deng in the hopes that this comparison might shed light on this phenomenon elsewhere.

### **The legacies themselves**

Before addressing *how* Stalin and Mao's successors managed their legacies and *why* de-Maoization departed so significantly from the trajectory of de-Stalinization, we must first demonstrate how Stalin and Mao's political paths make for a meaningful comparison. As was introduced at the beginning of this paper, Stalin and Mao are famous, or rather infamous, for

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<sup>18</sup> Henry Yuhui, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China/ 中华人民共和国政治文化用语大典*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001, p. 94; David S. G. Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?" *The China Quarterly*, 87(September 1981), p. 521

<sup>19</sup> Michael Sullivan, "...Two Steps Back." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*. 7(January 1982), p. 182

many of the same reasons. Both are responsible for agricultural policies that resulted in severe famines costing millions of lives, both suffered from a paranoia that led to extensive political purges, and, perhaps most significant to their legacies, both had elaborate cults of personality. Therefore, the first part of this paper will provide a background history addressing the Stalin and Mao eras, which demonstrate why this is a meaningful comparison.

## **General histories**

### **The Soviet Union**

Unlike Mao's role in the communists' victory in China, Stalin was not a key participant in the October Revolution, which was led by Vladimir Lenin. After the Bolsheviks overthrew the czar in 1917, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was formally constituted in 1923 following several years of civil war.<sup>20</sup> Despite his marginal role in the Bolshevik victory, Josef Stalin rose through the ranks and became the Communist Party's general secretary in 1922. Following Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin effectively became the nation's dictator after besting his political rivals.<sup>21</sup> Since 1917 the monopoly of power had been a paramount principle of Leninism. Therefore, Stalin's consolidation of power was derived from a monolithic set of institutions operating under 'democratic centralization.'<sup>22</sup>

### **Agriculture and the Soviet Famine**

Following the trend set by his predecessor, Stalin treated agriculture as one of the primary processes in the construction of socialism. Agriculture was seen as a means to rapidly industrialize and was undertaken at the expense of millions of lives. In a matter of six years, from 1929 to 1935, an estimated 85 percent of the Russian peasantry had undergone some form

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Smele, "War and Revolution in Russia 1914-1921," BBC: History, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/eastern\\_front\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/eastern_front_01.shtml) (accessed 11 November 2013)

<sup>21</sup> "Joseph Stalin (1879-1953)," BBC: History, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/stalin\\_joseph.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/stalin_joseph.shtml) (accessed 11 November 2013)

<sup>22</sup> Z. "To the Stalin Mausoleum," *Daedalus*, 119.1 (Winter 1990), p. 309

of collectivization. These new collective farms, or *kolkhozes*, were state-owned with a strict quota system that forced peasants to hand over a certain quantity of their harvest regardless of the size of their crop yield. In 1932 a famine struck and an estimated 6 million to 11 million people perished in only a couple years due to these collectivization policies.<sup>23</sup> However, there is considerable disagreement as to whether this was an intentional policy designed to starve the peasants into submission or simply a consequence of poor policies that were ruthlessly implemented.

Stalin and the Party optimistically believed peasants would welcome collectivization and the only opposition would come from the *kulaks*, or the rich peasants. However, these policies were not implemented with as much ease as expected and, in turn, “Stalin’s policy towards the peasants was ruthless and brutal.”<sup>24</sup> It was also initially believed that this collectivized system would be far superior to small family farms. However, during the disastrous failure of collectivization, the peasantry’s living standards dipped far below that of 1913. According to the anonymous author ‘Z,’ “the cost of this operation in human lives, in slaughtered livestock, and in material loss has been exorbitant beyond calculation.”<sup>25</sup>

Forced grain seizures were the primary cause of the mass starvations between 1931 and 1933. Just as would occur in China nearly thirty years later, local cadres inflated harvest figures, instigating the state to requisite additional grain quotas. The Soviet Union’s most productive agricultural regions were those hit hardest by the famine, particularly the Ukraine. Acknowledging the dire situation across the nation, Stalin implemented grain relief policies to alleviate areas experiencing the beginnings of the famine. However, despite being hit the hardest, Ukraine received no such reprieve. Soviet writer Vasily Grossman chronicled: “When the snow

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 310

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 626

<sup>25</sup> Z. “To the Stalin Mausoleum,” *Daedalus*, 119.1 (Winter 1990), p. 310

melted true starvation began. People had swollen faces and legs and stomachs... They caught mice, rats, sparrows, ants, earthworms... they used everything there was.”<sup>26</sup> The situation was so desperate that by the spring of 1933, corpses littered the ground and people in the Ukrainian countryside “were killing and eating their own children.”<sup>27</sup>

Even at this time, Stalin maintained that current production levels had surpassed the harvest of 1931. By the spring of 1933, bread rations across the country had been cut so drastically that workers were allotted, at best, a near-starvation portion. By the summer of 1933 the urban areas of the Russian Republic, too, had death rate indicators twice as high as normal and in the Ukraine these figures were even higher. Despite the policies intended to alleviate the starving nation, Stalin refused to admit fault. Instead, the *kulaks* were held responsible for the grain shortage. Furthermore, while he did readjust harvest quotas, the extensive loss of life was seen “as a necessary cost of the progressive policies of industrialization.”<sup>28</sup>

### **The Great Terror**

In response to the social tensions created by these failed attempts at constructing a socialist society, and after the crisis of 1932-1933 had passed, Stalin launched a series of systematic administrative purges. In a preemptive strike against potential opposition, any party member not seen as being fully dedicated to the General Line was endangered as Stalin sought to renew his support base. The vast number of subsequent purges occurring between 1936-1938 came to be called the Great Terror.<sup>29</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of people fell victim to The Great Terror, which reached its height between 1937 and 1938. In these two years alone, the victims “accounted for about 91 percent of

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<sup>26</sup> Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*. New York: Holt Paperbacks, 1996. p. 41-43

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 43

<sup>28</sup> R.W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft, “Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-1933: A Reply to Ellman,” *Asia Studies*, 58.4(June 2006), p. 627-633

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 313

all the death sentences for political crimes between 1921 and 1940.”<sup>30</sup> Following a mass execution of top officials in the summer of 1937, two other major segments of society were targeted: the *kulaks* and non-Russian ethnic groups.<sup>31</sup> The purges affected all levels of society, from political elite to street cleaners.<sup>32</sup> The fear that swept society was so pervasive that nobody felt immune to the purges. Initially, those imprisoned believed they were the only innocent ones, that their arrest was a mistake; however, it quickly became clear to the public that none of those imprisoned were guilty of the crimes they were accused of.<sup>33</sup>

Through the reorganization of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (the NKVD), Stalin purged the party of every conceivable political rival “at every level of the Party and state administration.”<sup>34</sup> The Kremlin warned citizens of “ubiquitous upper-level espionage” and urged them to report any suspicious individual; this exhortation led to endless denunciations reported to the NKVD, which further wrought police violence.<sup>35</sup> Of the 139 of those elected to the Party’s Central Committee in 1934 at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, 98 were arrested and shot, or in other words, 70% of one of the party’s main organs were killed. Of the 1,966 delegates at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, over half (1,108) were charged with ‘counter-revolutionary crimes.’<sup>36</sup>

Even after these years of terror, political purges remained a regularized occurrence until Stalin’s death in 1953. The fear of being classified as an ‘enemy of the people’ was so pervasive that society dwelled in a persistent state of apprehension for two decades.<sup>37</sup> Anonymous author ‘Z’ estimates that “another 10 million victims were added to Stalin’s score, to yield a grand total

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<sup>30</sup> Hiroaki Kuromiya, “Accounting for the Great Terror,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, 53.1 (2005), p. 86-88

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 92

<sup>32</sup> Thurston, “Fear and Belief in the USSR’s ‘Great Terror’: Response to Arrest, 1935-1939,” *Slavic Review*, 45.2 (Summer 1986), p. 213

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 223

<sup>34</sup> Davies and Wheatcroft, “Stalin and the Soviet Famine of 1932-1933” *Asia Studies*, p. 314

<sup>35</sup> Hooper, “What Can and Cannot Be Said,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 321

<sup>36</sup> Chamberlin, “The Stalin Era and Stalin’s Heirs.” *Russian Review*, p. 239

<sup>37</sup> Z. “To the Stalin Mausoleum,” *Daedalus*, 119.1 (Winter 1990), p. 314

of 20 million, the conservative estimate.”<sup>38</sup> Stalin’s political paranoia resulted in a mass purge between 1936-1938, devastating the party officials and innocent citizens. Stalin’s “gigantic coup d’état” in the 1930s parallels many of the measures Mao would take 40 years later in his Cultural Revolution.<sup>39</sup>

### **Stalin’s Cult of Personality**

The last component of Stalin’s legacy, which presented some of the largest questions for the party to resolve, was Stalin’s cult of personality. Stalin’s personality cult emerged in late December 1929 as a response to the anticipation of his fiftieth birthday. Gill asserts that from December 1929 until Stalin’s death in 1953, the cult of personality was a significant component of Soviet society that dominated every facet of life. Following Lenin’s death, Stalin initially aligned himself closely with his predecessor. He emphasized his dedication to the Leninist line and intentionally portrayed himself as having been entrusted with fulfilling the banner of communism that Lenin had passed on to him. Quickly he rose from portraying himself as Lenin’s disciple to rendering himself as his equal. The CPSU was no longer the ‘Leninist Party,’ but rather ‘the party of Lenin-Stalin.’<sup>40</sup>

As time passed, Stalin relied less and less on his association with Lenin and thus revised party history to show how he alone was responsible for the successes of the Soviet Union, thereby intentionally creating a national narrative that served to legitimate his leadership position. His purported role in party history grew so exponentially that his figure overshadowed Lenin’s. Stalin’s genius replaced Lenin’s supposed absence in the preparations and insurrection during the civil war and the establishment of the Soviet Union came to be attributed to Stalin.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 314

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 314

<sup>40</sup> Graeme Gill, “The Soviet Leader Cult: Reflections on the Structure of Leadership in the Soviet Union,” *British Journal of Political Science*, 10.2 (April 1980), p. 167-168

Stalin's glorified image became "the golden sun" of the people and "was the source and inspiration of all their endeavors," and eventually, he was portrayed as "the savior of world civilization."<sup>41</sup>

The party used Stalin's writings to indoctrinate the nation. Representations of his genius could be seen everywhere in the Soviet Union during these years.<sup>42</sup> One of the critical components of the Stalinist cult was his established infallibility. One way in which this was accomplished was the conflation of Marxist-Leninist ideology with his own words. Secondly, and more importantly, this infallibility was supposedly established as his words and theories were continually proven correct. Stalin's words became synonymous with the regime's accomplishments, thereby demonstrating the "eternal correctness" of his genius. Due to the elevation of his character, Soviet citizens were strongly encouraged to study Stalin's infallible words and to emulate his teachings in their daily lives. His principles were intended to guide the populace to the bright future of the Soviet Union and his speeches were communicated as if "from the demi-god to the populace who would have been lost without his guidance."<sup>43</sup>

Stalin became the father of the people, one whose every action was a result of his devotion to them. Rather than the typical *rukovoditel* title held by everyday leaders, Stalin was the *vozhd*, denoting his supreme power over the people. Stalin was not just their leader, but their "teacher, father, and friend." People's attitudes toward their dear leader went as far as "veneration, awe, and worship."<sup>44</sup> Clearly, his figure was regarded as more than just the nation's leader; the Stalin cult treated him as a god-like deity, who could do no wrong. Indeed, Stalin's elevated status as the supreme Soviet leader left a vacuum in society at the time of his death. His

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 169-170

<sup>42</sup> Larson, Thomas B. "Dismantling the Cults of Stalin and Khrushchev." *The Western Political Quarterly*, 21.3 (September 1968), p. 385-386

<sup>43</sup> Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult," *British Journal of Political Science*, p. 170-171

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 171



successors certainly had a complicated and contradictory legacy to manage and rescript according to their needs.

## **China**

Mao was among those who founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921 after years of studying Marxist literature. In 1927 when the ruling party, the Kuomintang (KMT), began purging communists, and eventually cornered them in southeast China in 1934, the CCP embarked on a 6,000-mile journey towards northwestern China, now known as the 'Long March'. Mao's leadership during the 6,000-mile military retreat led to his gradual ascent to power. The Long March became a symbolic and significant event in the Communist Party's history, thereby reaffirming Mao's prestige. After a brief alliance with the KMT against the Japanese, a civil war broke out. Finally, on 1 October 1949, Mao pronounced the Communists' victory and established the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>45</sup> Mao's revolutionary history was one of the key sources from which he, and consequentially the Party, derived its legitimacy.

## **The Great Leap Forward**

Agricultural reform began in China before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had even defeated the Kuomintang. The communist strongholds during the civil war were the first to experience the beginnings of agricultural socialization. Party officials began by categorizing the peasantry as landlords, rich peasants, or middle peasants. The landlords and rich peasants were labeled the exploiting class and, as with Stalin's liquidation of the *kulaks*, were brutally targeted. Before the establishment of the PRC in 1949, an estimated 2 to 5 million landlords had already been killed. The agricultural policies adopted by the CCP, both before and after the founding of the PRC, were strongly based of the example set by the Soviet Union. Becker states, "The

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<sup>45</sup> "Mao Zedong," BBC: History, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/mao\\_zedong.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/mao_zedong.shtml) (accessed 11 November 2013)

origins of Mao's great famine lie as much in Russian as in Chinese history."<sup>46</sup>

Despite the horrific failure of Stalin's agricultural policies, China pursued collectivization with an even more intense fervor. The state declared a monopoly on grain purchase and distribution and cadres were sent to the villages to forcefully extract grain quotas from the peasants. Those who failed to meet the quotas procured by the state were savagely beaten in struggle sessions.<sup>47</sup> Between 1949 and 1958, average grain harvests were even below that of 1929 and 1933, a period in which northern China experienced a great famine. Mao was so confident that the experimental agricultural policies, such as high-density planting and deep ploughing, would produce unparalleled crop harvests that he feared it might trigger a labor shortage. Therefore, he encouraged the Chinese countryside to have as many children as possible. Consequently, within a single generation, the Chinese population doubled.<sup>48</sup>

The Great Leap Forward was introduced in January 1958 at a meeting in Nanning. Economic plans formed several years before were deemed too cautious, and so by April of that same year, Chayashan, Henan province, became the first 'people's commune,' consisting of 40,000 members. Cadres across the country began falsely reporting record-breaking harvests, consequentially encouraging Mao to repay foreign loans ahead of schedule to demonstrate how successful his policies were. This supposed abundant harvest also caused Mao to encourage peasants to consume as much grain as they pleased. These foolish policies quickly depleted the communal kitchens' supply of food. By Chinese New Year 1959 (early February 1959), peasants began experiencing the consequences of this negligence. Soon the elderly and weak began to die of starvation. When rumors of famine reached Mao, he accused the peasants of stealing grain,

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<sup>46</sup> Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, p. 37

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 49-51

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 82

just as Stalin had accused the *kulaks* of sabotaging his policies.<sup>49</sup> In order to reach the unrealistic targets set, “local cadres launched a brutal ‘anti-hiding campaign’ that resulted in tens of thousands being arrested, many of which were beaten or starved to death.”<sup>50</sup>

While harvests dropped by over 30 million tons between fall 1958 and fall 1959, local officials continued to claim record-breaking figures. In order to satisfy these fabricated assertions, cadres began to seize whatever grain they could find, often times taking the entire harvest, leaving none for the peasants to eat.<sup>51</sup> The consequences of these policies almost perfectly mirror what had occurred in the Ukraine three decades before. Families became so desperate that they “killed and ate their children in many parts of China.”<sup>52</sup> The 1964 census, the first following the Great Leap Forward, was never published. However, death tolls estimates of the Great Leap Forward range from 20 million to 60 million.<sup>53</sup>

### **The Cultural Revolution**

The Cultural Revolution, too, has many similarities to Stalin’s purges. Mao launched the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in mid-May 1966 as an attack on party members he saw as pursuing ‘the capitalist road.’ The failure of the Great Leap Forward was one of the major catalysts in the launch of the Cultural Revolution as Mao scrambled to maintain legitimacy. As a response to the strong undercurrent of dissent present during the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mao sought to extricate his rivals from power. He did so by “mobilizing China’s vast population of urban youth and harnessing their idealism, fervor, and political naiveté to remove his political opponents” and to “circumvent the CCP’s administrative structure.”<sup>54</sup> One of the first groups he

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 85-86

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 113

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 93

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 270-272

<sup>54</sup> Bruce A. Elleman and S.C.M. Paine, “The Cultural Revolution,” In *Modern China: Continuity and Change 1644 to the Present*, (New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2010), p. 396

turned on were those who had ended and criticized the Great Leap Forward. He also mobilized the urban youth to weed out from society the ‘Four Bad Elements’ (*si lei fenzi*): wealthy peasants, descendants of landlords, counterrevolutionaries, and other ‘rotten elements’ and to attack the ‘Four Olds’: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits.<sup>55</sup> Contrary to what the movement’s name suggests, the Cultural Revolution did more to destroy old culture than create a new one.<sup>56</sup> The Red Guards destroyed thousands of years of Chinese history during the 1960s years due to Mao’s imploring speeches urging the youth to action.

In accordance with his idea of ‘continuous revolution,’ Mao encouraged violent class struggle during these years. Mao purged vast numbers of senior party members, sending them away to perform physical labor or be reeducated.<sup>57</sup> Mao used the Cultural Revolution as a tool to undermine his political opponents. By 1969, the former political elite “had been scattered throughout the countryside to perform manual labor or serve out prison terms.”<sup>58</sup> Most of Stalin’s purge victims were shot, whereas Mao “subjected his to coercive reeducation.”<sup>59</sup> By 1969 at the Ninth Party Congress, only 40 percent of the previous Politburo remained, 30 percent of the Central Committee, and 20 to 30 percent of the regional and provincial leaders. In addition to this mass political purge, Mao also forced 17 million urban youth to the countryside to allay urban unemployment and to stimulate rural development. Many in this group, also known as the Sent Down Generation, were separated from their homes and families for over a decade. Indeed, Mao’s great purge, while not as deadly as Stalin’s, unleashed great terror across the nation and resulted in mass government turnovers and the displacement tens of millions of people.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 396-397

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 249

<sup>57</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011. p. 43

<sup>58</sup> Elleman and Paine, “The Cultural Revolution,” In *Modern China*, p. 398

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 398

## The Mao Cult

A nascent personality cult surrounding Mao Zedong developed during the late 1930s before the People's Republic of China was even established and matured in the early 1940s with the Rectification Campaign; however, the far-reaching cult that eventually came to take over Chinese culture did not firmly take root until 1956 after Khrushchev's secret speech.<sup>60</sup> The failure of the Hundred Flowers Campaign and the Great Leap Forward left Mao with crumbling legitimacy; his once omniscient image became tarnished and he was left with a credibility problem.<sup>61</sup> Thus it became necessary to "unite the Party under the banner of Mao Zedong Thought."<sup>62</sup> From March 1958 onwards, the media increasingly referenced Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought, which eventually became a highly important symbol to emotionalize and mobilize support for the Party.<sup>63</sup>

The extensive cult of Mao actually began in opposition to Party ideology; after Khrushchev's secret speech, the Party strongly denounced personality cults, and, in fact, took measures to preclude the rise of personality worship.<sup>64</sup> Yet the promotion of the cult proved indispensable for retaining legitimacy, thus the Party and Mao differentiated between two types of cults: one of blind obedience and one which worshipped individuals who personified the truth.<sup>65</sup> If the cult worship was focused on an individual representing the truth, then this was acceptable; in the words of Mao Zedong, "If it represents the truth, then it should be worshipped."<sup>66</sup> This delineation was critical in differentiating Mao's cult of personality from its

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<sup>60</sup> Daniel Leese, "The Mao Cult as Communicative Space," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8 no. 3-4(December 2007): p. 624

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 625

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 628

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 629

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 623

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Leese, *Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 68

<sup>66</sup> Leese, "The Mao Cult," *Totalitarian Movements*, p. 625

Soviet counterpart. In other words, the Party sought to minimize any contradictions with their earlier denigration of personality cults; therefore, according to the Party line, Mao's cult of personality was not in contention with communist ideals unlike that of Stalin's. With this integral differentiation in place, the Party used the cult as a political tool to generate public support and foster enthusiasm for policy directives.<sup>67</sup>

While roots of the cult of Mao can be said to predate the establishment of the PRC and trace back to Mao's time in Yan'an, the development of the cult and indoctrination of the PLA laid the foundation for the extensive cult with quasi-religious dimensions that was to exist at the height of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>68</sup> Lin Biao is perhaps the most influential figure in the creation of the Cult of Mao; beginning in 1959 Lin began indoctrinating the PLA with short quotations of Chairman Mao's.<sup>69</sup> In early 1960 under the auspices of Lin Biao, the PLA studied and memorized important quotes and phrases from Chairman Mao, which had a significant effect on the Cultural Revolution Cult of Mao.<sup>70</sup> Thus, this ideological instruction was to enhance physical training in order to provide the soldiers with quotations applicable to any situation in which they might find themselves.<sup>71</sup>

By spring 1964 a multitude of Mao quotes had been compiled, and on May 16 the first edition of *Quotations from Chairman Mao* was printed.<sup>72</sup> Initially *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, or what became known as the Little Red Book, was intended for use within the PLA. Yet with the reprinting of *Quotations* in December 1966, the Little Red Book spread across China with stunning speed.<sup>73</sup> According to Lin Biao, "Everything that Mao Zedong says is the truth;

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<sup>67</sup> Leese, *Mao Cult*, p. 70

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 87

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 87

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 94

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 95

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 112

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 114

every statement he utters is worth 10,000 sentences.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, under Lin Biao’s auspices, the army popularized the campaign to study *Quotations from Chairman Mao*.<sup>75</sup>

Demand for the Little Red Book quickly surpassed the supply with the introduction of the campaign to emulate the PLA.<sup>76</sup> In fact, between 1966 and 1969 over a billion copies were printed worldwide, making it the second in volume only to the Holy Bible.<sup>77</sup> An estimated 10.8 billion copies were published during the decade of the Cultural Revolution alone and an additional 110 million copies were published abroad with the Little Red Book translated into 36 languages.<sup>78</sup> It was with these foundations that the cult truly emerged. Intended as a tool to mobilize support and loyalty, the cult became conflated with the success of the revolution, leaving the Party’s future in the hands of China’s supreme leader.<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, citizens’ days evolved to take shape around quasi-religious rituals centered on Mao Zedong. For instance, “asking for instructions in the morning, thanking Mao for his kindness at noon, and reporting back at night” became an important ritual that structured people’s days.<sup>80</sup> This ritual consisted of “bowing three times, the singing of the national anthem, reading passages from the Little Red Book in front of Mao’s picture or bust, and would end with wishing him ‘Ten thousand years.’”<sup>81</sup> Mornings began by announcing to Chairman Mao’s portrait how one would contribute to the revolution on that day, evenings consisted of reporting the outcome of these intentions, and finally would end with the following day’s resolutions.<sup>82</sup> This ritual emphasizes the influence Mao’s glorified image had in individuals’ day-to-day lives.

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<sup>74</sup> “Quotations of Chairman Mao,” *Chinese posters.net*

<sup>75</sup> “Cult of Mao,” *Chinese posters.net*

<sup>76</sup> Leese, *Mao Cult*, p. 117

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 108

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 108

<sup>79</sup> Leese, “The Mao Cult,” *Totalitarian Movements*, p. 623

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* 155

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 155

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 155

The Cultural Revolution produced a personality cult, which quickly reached every corner of China. The cult was originally devised as a loyalty-creating device, however it flourished in ways never intended or expected. Lin Biao and the PLA played an integral role in the creation and dissemination of the cult. *Quotations from Chairman Mao*, which originally was intended for intra-army use, became the “Mao-Bible,” the cult’s most recognizable icon.<sup>83</sup> The cult was visible in just about every facet of life, from the display of loyalty, in the form of Mao badges and the Little Red Book, to Mao statues and portraits in every home and every public space. The masses began to apotheosize Mao, looking to him for guidance and protection; this ritualized worship overturned thousands of years of customs, replacing traditional deities with Mao’s glorified figure. Mao ceased to be a mere mortal and instead began to resemble an omniscient deity.

### **Significance of the Stalin/Mao comparison**

These two case studies make for a significant comparison due to the extensive similarities of Stalin and Mao’s legacies. Despite a wide array of scholarship on each individual case, there has been no meaningful comparison study addressing the underlying causes for the different trajectories of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. The dissimilar approaches to the management of their legacies suggest there was an underlying force(s) directing Khrushchev and Deng’s respective processes. Furthermore, the counterintuitive progression of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization, from the perspective of Khrushchev and Deng’s personal ties to the process, points to internal sociopolitical forces.

The intricacy of the succession process in these two case studies makes it nearly impossible to account for every possible variable that may have influenced the management of each leader’s legacy, yet I contend the three primary forces that I focus on are stronger than

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<sup>83</sup> Leese, “The Mao Cult,” *Totalitarian Movements*, p. 623



alternative explanations. These possible alternatives might include personal vendettas, external forces, and/or economics. Furthermore, the three sociopolitical factors I have chosen are consistent in and influential to each case study, making it possible to identify dissimilarities which might account for the divergent progressions of the process. In this paper I will continuously stress how the factors I have chosen outweigh any personal motivations Khrushchev and Deng might have had; Khrushchev's role as a beneficiary in Stalin's regime and Deng's as a victim of the Mao regime should prompt a moderate management of Stalin's legacy and provoke a harsher treatment of Mao's legacy. Yet, as we will see, the reverse is true.

Another force that may have guided the different progressions of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization is economics. Unfortunately, length constraints will not allow a thorough examination of this factor. However, I believe China's economy at the time of Mao's death serves as a concise, strong example for the insufficiency of an economic explanation. China's economy was in disarray by the early 1970s, and one of Deng's primary policy objectives appeared to be the departure from Mao's economic policies. Therefore, in addition to Deng's personal victimization, it would seem this would be an additional incentive to rebuke Mao for bringing the country to the brink of collapse. Once again, the tempered criticisms we see from Deng invalidate this possible explanation.

Stalin and Mao's revolutionary roles had critical impacts on their successors' legitimation strategies and the management of their respective legacies. Therefore, it is important to recognize that while Stalin aligned himself as closely as possible with Lenin and manipulated history to make himself an equal of Lenin,<sup>84</sup> he was not, in fact, a founding father of which the USSR. Therefore, his role was more easily revised in posthumous writings of his legacy. Whereas Mao, the founding father of the People's Republic of China, could not as easily be diminished in the

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<sup>84</sup> Gill, "The Soviet Leader Cult," *British Journal of Political Science*, p. 168

Chinese nation's history, because he served, and continues to serve, as the very foundation of the state, much the same as Lenin did the USSR.

Mao's place is more firmly rooted in the Chinese Communist Party's history than Stalin's in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, making it much more difficult to eliminate him from the national narrative; however, the following figures suggest that his atrocities far outreach Stalin's, which is one reason that Deng's comparably mild treatment of Mao's legacy is so puzzling. If Mao's policies are considered "a deliberate act of inhumanity, then his record can also be measured against that of Hitler and Stalin."<sup>85</sup> It is believed that approximately 20 million died in Stalin's gulags and another 10 to 20 million from other various aspect of his rule. Becker includes an investigation made by Daniel Southerland in the *Washington Post*, which suggests Mao greatly surpassed even Stalin's shocking death tolls. In his report, Sutherland states that "evidence shows that [Mao] was in some way responsible for at least 40 million deaths and perhaps 80 million or more. This includes deaths he was directly responsible for and deaths resulting from disastrous policies that he refused to change. One government document... says that 80 million died unnatural deaths—most of them in the famine following the Great Leap Forward."<sup>86</sup> These ghastly figures put into perspective why the harsh treatment of Stalin's legacy and the comparatively mild management of Mao's are so perplexing. If these figures are to be believed, then Mao's atrocities far outreached Stalin's, yet he receives significantly less blame.

### **Overview of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization**

The sudden death of Stalin and the subsequent psychological vacuum left by the absence of his charismatic rule, mandated that his successors address his legacy and decide which pieces should be used to extend their own power and which aspects necessitated abandonment. It was

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<sup>85</sup> Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, p. 274

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 274

the perfect opportunity to justify a departure from Stalinist policies that had left the state in a complete socioeconomic and cultural crisis. Yet the Khrushchev period is characterized by extreme fluctuations in policy as the new administration recognized the dangers excessive reform presented. Therefore, Khrushchev's policies oscillated between an iconoclastic abandonment of Stalinism and retreat from those policies that threatened the stability of the Soviet system.<sup>87</sup> This paper will use Jones' definition of de-Stalinization: "the process of historical revisionism which deconstructed the Stalin cult... the debunking of Stalin's authority was a prerequisite for rethinking a whole range of Stalinist priorities and practices in other domains" and will also apply the same guidelines to delineate de-Maoization.<sup>88</sup>

Mao Zedong's death came only a few months after the deaths of three other top party members. On September 9, 1976, he suffered a fatal heart attack and died, eliciting a state-led period of mourning. While Mao's death also presented an excellent opportunity to end the chaos he had unleashed in the latter years of his life, politics were briefly placed aside as the party unified to pay homage to Mao's memory. At the time of Mao's death, Deng had not been reinstated into the party and consequentially was excluded from the party's commemoration of him. Mao's death certainly precipitated a complicated management of his legacy, however, as will be discussed in this paper, the trajectory the Chinese leadership followed, differed greatly from the Soviet's example.

## **PART II: Sociopolitical Variables**

This next section will now address the sociopolitical variables that shaped Khrushchev and Deng's responses following their predecessors' deaths. First, I will look at how Khrushchev and Deng's roles in the previous regime influenced the way they manipulated the legacies they

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<sup>87</sup> Jones, Polly, Introduction, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p.1

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 2

were dealt. Second, I will examine the power struggle within the parties following Stalin and Mao's deaths and analyze how the party's composition affected the way their legacies were treated. Finally, I will discuss the construction of a national narrative and the politics of memory, vis a vis the party's manipulation of public opinion as well as the public's influence on the party's narrative.

### **Khrushchev's role in the Stalin Regime**

Both Khrushchev and Deng were complicit in their predecessors' detrimental policies at some time or another, however Khrushchev survived Stalin's many purges by unhesitatingly following orders, whereas Deng, following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, began to subtly resist Mao's extremism, ultimately resulting in his purge from the party twice. Thus, it was not with clean hands that Khrushchev succeeded Stalin; he, like every political elite who survived Stalin's purges, only survived "by obsequious sycophancy and by zealously carrying out any purging assignments."<sup>89</sup>

Khrushchev, who had rapidly risen through the party ranks from the early 1920s to mid-1930s, was placed in charge of the 'purity' of the party members below him in 1932. The purges of local party organizations were so extreme that by 1934, over 70% of the members who had served on the Moscow Committee two years prior still remained in the Moscow body.<sup>90</sup> While second-level officials like Khrushchev likely had little agency in the manner the purges were carried out during these years, Khrushchev was described as "a true disciple of the great Stalin" during these years, suggesting his unwavering dedication to the policies he carried out.<sup>91</sup> In 1937 Stalin designated Khrushchev a member of a 'purge troika' and ordered the annihilation of Ukraine's 'enemies of the people.' The Ukrainian Cabinet, Supreme Soviet, and the Central

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<sup>89</sup> Chamberlin, "Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost." *Russian Review*, p. 5

<sup>90</sup> William K. Medlin, "Khrushchev: A Political Profile: II," *Russian Review*, 18.1 (January 1959), p. 29

<sup>91</sup> William K. Medlin, "Khrushchev: A Political Profile: III," *Russian Review*, 18.2 (April 1959), p. 135

Committee were purged almost in their entirety and its members precipitously executed.

Chamberlin conservatively suggests that over sixty percent of the Ukrainian officials were eliminated.<sup>92</sup>

While it might seem counterintuitive that Khrushchev would go on to harshly denounce Stalin given his own role in the ghastly policies, there are several plausible reasons that this move actually served to strengthen his political power. Schattenberg suggests that the startling revelations and the criticisms launched at Stalin was both a defensive and offensive strategy. Likely, these issues would have been revealed even without Khrushchev's preemptive strike against Stalin and these repudiations also served to strengthen his public support by allegedly pursuing a new political style.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, Khrushchev used Stalin's disparaged reputation to stress the new leaders' legitimacy as well as to establish grounds for each set of political and economic reform.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, Khrushchev sought to predicate his legitimacy on his commitment to 'the good of the people,' thereby implicitly characterizing "the Stalin era as neglectful of the individual."<sup>95</sup> This was only possible by distancing himself from his role in the Stalinist regime. By denigrating Stalin, Khrushchev was able to depart from Stalinist policies by characterizing Stalin as a malicious leader while making himself out to be the Soviet peoples' liberator. Therefore, this is yet another example of how his role in Stalin's regime informed his management of Stalin's legacy. Khrushchev's need to exonerate his own crimes for the sake of his legitimacy dictated an attack on Stalin.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>93</sup> Susanne Schattenberg, "'Democracy' or 'despotism'? How the Secret Speech was translated into everyday life," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. Polly Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 66

<sup>94</sup> Jones, Polly, Introduction, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 8

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 8

While undoubtedly Khrushchev's actions in Stalin's regime must have had some level of impact on his management of Stalin legacy, Parry offers an even more critical example of how his role in Stalin's reign had a direct impact on Khrushchev's efforts to de-Stalinize. He asserts that there is a widely held belief that "Khrushchev was pushed into his historic oration by Anastas Mikoyan." According to this theory, Mikoyan's early condemnation of the cult of personality at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress implied that Khrushchev was complicit in many of Stalin's abuses of power and rehabilitated the memory of a Stanislav V. Kossov whom Stalin had notoriously purged and whose job Khrushchev inherited. Parry thus asserts that it was due to Khrushchev's fear of what implications such an allegation might hold that led to his denigration of the personality cult, thereby salving concerns that he might follow a similar course of action.<sup>96</sup>

### **Power struggle in the CPSU**

Less than a day after Stalin's death, the party elites had almost entirely restructured the central apparatuses of the party and government with the commencement of a proclaimed dedication to 'collective leadership.' These extensive decrees reflect the fluidity of the Soviet system at the time of Stalin's death.<sup>97</sup> The absence of a clear successor at the time of Stalin's death precipitated a three-year power struggle within the CPSU.<sup>98</sup> While there are some indications that Stalin sought to prepare for his demise by strengthening Georgy Malenkov's position in the party as a possible successor, his sudden death on March 5, 1953 left the party without an undisputed leader to take charge. Despite the party's aim to maintain some semblance of a united front, within a week of Stalin's death, Malenkov appeared to be attempting to amalgamate his status as *primus inter pares*. *Pravda*, the political newspaper closely aligned

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<sup>96</sup> Parry, "The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's 'Second Funeral,'" *American Slavic and East European Review*, p. 464

<sup>97</sup> Bociurkiw, "The Problem of Succession in the Soviet Political System" *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, p. 575

<sup>98</sup> Lowenstein, "Re-emergence of Public Opinion," *Europe-Asia Studies*, p. 1333

with the CPSU, conspicuously offered Malenkov prominence as the heir apparent. Yet this support soon ceased as the power struggle ensued.<sup>99</sup>

For the first several months after Stalin's demise, Khrushchev stayed out of the spotlight of the power struggle; however, by fall of 1953 his prominence began to rise. Initially following Stalin's death, Khrushchev had been relegated no official post, only retaining his role as Secretary of the Central Committee. However, Khrushchev became the senior party Secretary after Malenkov was compelled to step down from his party secretaryship after a Central Committee meeting in March 1953. This ultimately became Malenkov's undoing. Soon the purge of party secretaries became commonplace and Khrushchev slowly installed a support base in the party's key positions.<sup>100</sup> By early 1954 the professed collective leadership of the Soviet Union seemed to have been done away with as the press began to depict Khrushchev as the sole leader. By February 1955, Malenkov offered a letter of resignation, abandoning his post of the Council of Ministers chairman, signally the end of his power struggle with Khrushchev.<sup>101</sup>

### **Composition of the CPSU**

This is, of course, an extremely brief overview of the inner-party struggle for power following Stalin's death. However, the restructuring of the party apparatus had important implications for Khrushchev's control of the party once he had consolidated his position as Stalin's successor. One of the many reconstructions of the party reduced the size of the Central Committee Secretariat from ten to five Secretaries; this move "may well [have] strengthen[ed] Khrushchev's control of this important fortress of power."<sup>102</sup> In addition to the massive restructuring of the party, the party's composition experienced important changes with

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<sup>99</sup> Merle Fainsod, "The Communist Party Since Stalin," *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 303, *Russia Since Stalin: Old Trends and New Problems* (January 1956), p. 24-25

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 25-28

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 27-29

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 31

implications carrying over into Khrushchev's decision to explicitly denigrate Stalin in his 1956 Secret Speech.

The vacillation between a more mild treatment and more extreme condemnations of Stalin's era following the Secret Speech suggests there may be reason to believe that the Soviet leadership was unable to reach a consensus on the most appropriate course of action. Therefore, the inconsistent policies may reflect infighting between two or more party factions. The leaders present at the Twentieth Party Congress, where the Secret Speech was given, were in an equally problematic position as Khrushchev had found himself in. Many of the leaders had extolled Stalin's virtues for decades, therefore the sudden departure from glorifying the dead leader placed the officials in conflicting and embarrassing position.<sup>103</sup> Khrushchev's revelations forced all of the party leadership to confront questions such as, "what were you, leaders of the Communist Party, members of the Politburo, doing while this savage reign of terror was going on?"<sup>104</sup> Party responses tended to be vague and defensive suggesting things such as "the perilous international situation, 'demanding iron discipline, ever growing vigilance and a most strict centralization of leadership'; Stalin's popularity with the masses, due to the association of his name with 'the success of socialist construction' and the fact that many of Stalin's misdeeds only came to light after his death and 'the exposure of the Beria gang.'"<sup>105</sup> The evasion of responsibility reveals some hesitation within the party to push ahead with de-Stalinization at such a breakneck pace. Given the different roles officials served under Stalin, logically Stalin's denigration would not be equally advantageous for everyone. Compared to other party elites such as Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov, Khrushchev's influence in "the inner workings of Stalin's

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<sup>103</sup> William Henry Chamberlin, "The Stalin Era and Stalin's Heirs," *Russian Review*, 15.4 (October 1956), p. 238-240

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 239

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* 239



apparatus of controls” was insignificant.<sup>106</sup>

On the other hand, as Khrushchev sought to solidify his victory over Malenkov in the fight for succession, he carefully inserted men who were loyal to him above all else. Wolfe gives this formula to describe Khrushchev’s purges: “key officials 100 percent faithful to the ‘collective leadership’ have been replaced by others more than 100 percent faithful—that is, by Khrushchev’s men.”<sup>107</sup> By June 1957, Khrushchev had replaced nearly half of the Central Committee members.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, the Committee was firmly dominated by Khrushchev’s supporters,<sup>109</sup> giving him much more leverage to pursue anti-Stalin policies than Deng was able given the composition of the CCP. I assert this reorganization of party leadership gave Khrushchev freedom to strongly denigrate Stalin without too much opposition within the party; whereas, as we will see later, the Chinese leadership was more deeply divided, forcing Deng to address the strong pro-Mao faction within the party with more moderate criticisms.

While the Secret Speech undoubtedly sparked outrage and confusion both in the party and the public, Hooper suggests that many party members were suspicious of Khrushchev’s motives for de-Stalinization and that he used the shock of these revelations “to rally popular support and deflect attention away from his egregious economic policy failures.”<sup>110</sup> She also asserts that others called attention to the pattern of political rivals’ purges following new ‘revelations’ of the terror of Stalin’s reign.<sup>111</sup> The timing of these purges supports the emphasis I have placed on party composition as a significant factor in determining the progression of de-Stalinization, because it provides another example of how de-Stalinization was politically

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<sup>106</sup> William K. Medlin, “Khrushchev: A Political Profile: I,” *Russian Review*, 17.4 (October 1958), p. 279

<sup>107</sup> Bertram D. Wolfe, “Stalin’s Ghost at the Party Congress,” *Foreign Affairs* 34.4 (July 1956), p. 558

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.* 558

<sup>109</sup> Bociurkiw, “The Problem of Succession in the Soviet Political System” *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, p. 584

<sup>110</sup> Hooper, “What Can and Cannot Be Said,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 320

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 320

expedient for Khrushchev.

### **Political Culture and Public Opinion in the Soviet Union**

The Soviet public greatly affected the management of Stalin's legacy. Despite the inherent risk in deploring a leader whose personality cult still inculcated many Soviet citizens, his denigration also offered the possibility of uniting those who had been terrorized; Khrushchev could rally those individuals whose family members were mercilessly slaughtered and those who had been forcefully relocated, millions of which were exiled to slave labor camps.<sup>112</sup> Therefore when Khrushchev stepped in and vilified a leader who had been lauded for decades, the beliefs the populace had held were shattered. At the time the Secret Speech was disclosed, Khrushchev and other party elites seemed to anticipate the citizens' general approval; however, instead the divulgements elicited a myriad of emotional outcries. Even practiced members of the CPSU hierarchy expressed indignation and confusion towards the revelations of the speech.<sup>113</sup> Stalin, who had once been the hero of the Soviet Union, was exposed as a corrupt dictator who had usurped power from the collective leadership of the party and terrorized the party and population into submission. The revelations provoked "genuine shock and disgust."<sup>114</sup>

Initially, the party was relatively accepting of public opinion and the iconoclastic discourse, which followed the Secret Speech. These expressions were, at first, "seen as excusable excesses of emotion."<sup>115</sup> Quickly, however, closed party meetings digressed from criticisms of Stalin to criticisms of the Soviet Union, an extremely dangerous development.<sup>116</sup> De-Stalinization became more than a purely verbal phenomenon and resulted in widespread physical

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<sup>112</sup> Chamberlin, "Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost," *Russian Review*, p. 3

<sup>113</sup> Polly Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. Polly Jones, New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 42

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 43

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.* 44

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.* 44

protests against Stalinist symbols. Stalin statues were beheaded, torn down, and vandalized. His pictures were defaced and destroyed.<sup>117</sup> As the first phase of de-Stalinization progressed, the risk of destabilization increased significantly. However, as we will see, when de-Stalinization was revived in 1961 after several years' hiatus, these violent acts did not recur.

The reactions elicited by the Secret Speech had a significant impact on party politics. The surge in public outcries forced the party to acknowledge the power that the populace held to potentially upset the Soviet system. The threat of public opinion, however, could not be challenged directly. Publically addressing the problem intrinsically reinforced the hazard, because it acknowledged that the public held this power in the first place.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, rather than directly challenging the public debate, the party was forced to covertly address their fears. Many of the criticisms leveled at Stalin in 1956 during the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress were largely recanted in the following years. Therefore, while Stalin's image became a poorly defined, indistinct part of Soviet history, the matter of public opinion was in no way treated with such ambiguity.

Thus, when de-Stalinization reemerged in 1961 at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress, the campaign was “not to destabilize further the old imagery of Stalin, but rather to stabilize popular opinion about the erstwhile leader, and about his successors' policies of de-Stalinization.”<sup>119</sup> Hence, the course of subsequent episodes of de-Stalinization can be viewed as a response to the Soviet system's instability following the dissemination of the Secret Speech. This experience served as “a blueprint for the management of public opinion.”<sup>120</sup> Likely as a direct response to the violent

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid. 48-49

<sup>118</sup> Karl E. Lowenstein, “Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union: Khrushchev and Responses to the Secret Speech,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58.8, 1956 and Its Legacy (December 2006), p. 1340-1343

<sup>119</sup> Jones, “From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, p. 59

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 42

reactions the Secret Speech provoked, as de-Stalinization progressed, private acts of outrage were tolerated “perhaps because they were thought to constitute reasonable responses.”<sup>121</sup> Yet public displays of dissent were treated as dangerous and subversive threats to Soviet society and thereby addressed as criminal acts.<sup>122</sup> This differentiation between what was and was not an acceptable part of de-Stalinization demonstrates how big a role public opinion played in shaping the progression of de-Stalinization. This is significant because it demonstrates how the party delineated the limits to tolerable responses to de-Stalinization.

### **Russian Political Culture**

Political culture was also a critical determinant of the variant progressions of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. This element will be clarified further when juxtaposed with China, however, the most critical difference in Russian and Chinese political culture is the peoples’ willingness to speak out against their superiors and their inclination to address past horrors. As Khrushchev pursued de-Stalinization, Soviet citizens, especially victims of the Great Terror, began raising unthinkable questions. One of the biggest problems the party was faced with was how to control the outflow of these questions and testimonies. Just as their regulation of public opinion following the Secret Speech, the party was also forced to address the flood of victim testimonies. How might the party shape these memories of the Terror and other horrors of de-Stalinization to construct a national narrative other one of despair?<sup>123</sup>

Many of the Terror victims privately and publically exposed their horrific testimonies, a cultural trend markedly different than Mao’s victims. While some Chinese citizens certainly publicized their experiences, Chinese culture is strongly inclined to respect their superiors and

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>123</sup> Polly Jones, “Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories? Terror, Trauma and Survival in Soviet Culture of the Thaw.” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 86.2 The Relaunch of the Soviet Project, 1945-64 (April 2008), p. 348

tend not to speak about the hardships of the past. In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, this was not so much the case. Jones includes a sentiment expressed by a farm director that announced, “communists of the older generation cannot forget the repression against honest people.”<sup>124</sup> This strongly juxtaposes a phenomenon some have described as ‘collective amnesia’ in the Chinese population of the horrors of previous generations.

### **Father of the Revolution**

Earlier in this paper, I stressed the different roles Stalin and Mao played in the establishment of a new nation. Diminishing Mao’s importance in the revolution would be akin to reducing Lenin’s role in the Russian Revolution. Mao Zedong led the Long March and led the CCP to victory; the party’s very legitimacy was predicated on his historical significance. Therefore, to downgrade Mao’s importance risked jeopardizing the foundation the party had built under his name. To denounce the father of a nation has significantly more political risks than to denigrate a leader who had a rather insignificant role in his nation’s founding. Deng Xiaoping, ever the pragmatist, recognized the importance in keeping Mao’s name clear of too much blame, otherwise risking the party’s crumbling legitimacy.

### **Deng’s role in Mao regime**

Unlike Khrushchev, Deng was not a beneficiary of the Mao regime. During the Great Leap Forward, Deng, like many other party members, recognized the danger in openly expressing dissent against these agricultural policies, and therefore initially refrained from criticizing the disastrous plans. However, Deng and these other party members also had faith that if Mao’s decisions during the civil war and unification of the PRC had been proved correct, so should his economic policies. Therefore, Deng ignored his skepticism and helped implement the

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<sup>124</sup> Jones, “From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, p. 44

disastrous policies of the Great Leap Forward.<sup>125</sup>

His commitment to Mao's policies lasted until 1959. The calamitous results of the Great Leap Forward proved to be too much. Deng was tasked with the containment of the turmoil caused by the Great Leap Forward and directing local officials in recovery efforts.<sup>126</sup> The reversal of the Great Leap Forward was one of, if not the biggest, motivations for Mao to launch the Cultural Revolution. He saw the dissent against the failure of his agricultural program as an affront against his legitimacy, and thereby sought to purge the party of his political opponents. Therefore, Deng was one of the first victims of the Cultural Revolution. Deng and his entire family were targets of frequent criticism. While he was not purged on the scale that many other political elites were, he was retired of his positions and sent to Nanchang "to engage in physical labor and be reeducated in Mao Zedong Thought" with his wife and stepmother in October 1969.<sup>127</sup>

Following a brief reprieve, Deng was brought back to Beijing in February 1973 but was once again purged from the party only three years later. Deng had so vehemently been attacked in 1966, that his reintegration back into the party was a slow process.<sup>128</sup> Yet again in 1976, Deng received harsh criticisms from Mao and following three self-criticisms that were deemed insufficient; Deng offered Mao a letter of resignation in January 1976. However, Mao once again limited his attacks on Deng in his public campaign to criticize him, never labeling him a 'counterrevolutionary.' In April 1976 Deng was stripped of all his posts and forbidden to engage in party discussions and meetings.<sup>129</sup> It was not until after Mao's death in September of 1976 that Hua Guofeng, Mao's initial successor, was pressured to reverse verdicts on Deng Xiaoping.

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<sup>125</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. p. 41

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 42

<sup>127</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. 67

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. 171

Deng's approach, then too, is counterintuitive. If he was marginalized and purged by the Mao regime, why would he not wish to strongly denounce his predecessor? I have demonstrated how Khrushchev denigrated Stalin in order to separate himself from the horrors of Stalinist policies and used his departure from Stalinism as a legitimizing strategy, however, why did Deng not follow a similar path if he was both a victim of the Mao era and also sought to depart from Maoist policies? This is where several key differences come into play. First, Mao's revolutionary role as the founder of the CCP and the nation prevented Deng from diminishing Mao's role in the national narrative without greatly jeopardizing party legitimacy. Second, the composition of the CCP differed from that of the CPSU. The CCP still had a strong pro-Mao faction that resisted de-Maoization and, in order to mitigate the criticism thrown at him for following the 'capitalist road,' Deng was forced to appease this faction and ease concerns that he was abandoning the Maoist legacy.

### **Power Struggle in the CCP**

At the time of Mao's death, there was a complex power struggle already in its beginning stages. The Gang of Four consisted of Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, and three of her closest associates: Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan. Jiang Qing was one of the chief perpetrators of the Cultural Revolution's many excesses. During the Cultural Revolution, she greatly expanded her power base and vindictively targeted her political opponents. However, while Jiang vied for power, Mao appeared to recognize that her extremism posed some form of threat to the party and designated Hua Guofeng as his successor. Hua had been a staunch proponent of Mao's political campaigns and proved his loyalty by supporting Mao's most controversial endeavors. Even more importantly, Hua Guofeng profited greatly from the Cultural

Revolution, and as a result, Mao felt he could trust that he would not censure it.<sup>130</sup>

Unlike Deng, who had a strong support base, Hua solely relied on his status as Mao's designated successor as a source of legitimacy. Therefore, Hua had no choice but to uphold Mao's reputation or would otherwise risk his own power by denigrating Mao's.<sup>131</sup> One of his very first moves as Mao's heir was the arrest of the Gang of Four, one of the main contenders that jeopardized his power. This move safely eliminated the very real threat they posed and precluded the extremism that would likely result from their rule. Hua's legacy, as dictated by official history, highlights the extent to which he clung to Mao's reputation. However, Vogel suggests that these "understate Hua's willingness to depart from the ways of Mao."<sup>132</sup>

In addition to the arrest of the Gang of Four, Hua abandoned the radicalism, which had defined the previous decade, by diminishing the integral role of political campaigns and ideology. However, because his support base consisted of those still loyal to Mao, Hua was under immense pressure to pacify those who claimed he was departing from Mao's legacy.<sup>133</sup> In order to mollify the party radicals, in February 1977 he issued a statement entitled "Study the Documents Well and Grasp the Key Links" ("*Xue hao wenjian zhuazhu gang*"), which came to be known as the 'two whatevers.' This proclamation was intended to show Hua's commitment to Mao and stated, "We will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao gave."<sup>134</sup>

Despite Hua's hesitancy to cease the criticism of Deng that Mao had begun before his death, eventually he was forced to reinstate Deng to the party. Deng had a support base much stronger than Hua's, even before his restoration. Therefore, upon his return, another power struggle ensued. Deng took a very different approach than Hua. He resolutely opposed Hua's

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid. 161-163

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 163

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 185

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 188

<sup>134</sup> Yuhui, Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People's Republic of China, p. 240



‘two whatevers,’ and instead stressed a ‘correct’ and ‘comprehensive’ understanding of Mao Zedong Thought. Vogel keenly observes, “By using this clever formulation, Deng accepted authority of Mao, while asserting, in effect, that Hua Guofeng was not the only one who had the authority to interpret Mao’s views.”<sup>135</sup>

Deng countered Hua’s ‘two whatevers’ with his own article entitled ‘Practice is the Sole Criterion for Judging Truth.’ In this Deng proposes that “The only way to evaluate truth was by the broad social experience of the people... if experience reveals errors, changes should be made.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, without abandoning Mao Zedong Thought, Deng proposed that it could be interpreted and manipulated to fit the current situation. He asserted, based on this principle, that the results of class struggle and continuous revolution had been calamitous and, therefore, “it followed that they should be abandoned.”<sup>137</sup> Deng’s ‘Practice is the Sole Criterion for Judging Truth’ was a covert attack on Maoist orthodoxy and this silent attack attracted the support of others who had been targets of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>138</sup>

At the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1977, Deng was restored to all of his former positions. Soon thereafter, Hua stepped down from power, which was, at this point, really only titular in nature, and performed a self-criticism for following Maoist lines.<sup>139</sup> However, even after triumphing over Hua in the battle for power, Deng explicitly reassured his colleagues, and the world, “that he would not become China’s Khrushchev.”<sup>140</sup> Deng made it clear that while he certainly had his differences with Mao, Mao’s contributions were indispensable, and therefore, the CCP would “not launch an attack on Mao like Khrushchev’s on Stalin.”<sup>141</sup> Therefore, while

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<sup>135</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 195

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. 212

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. 258

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. 237

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. 241

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. 241

he clearly intended to depart from Maoism to some extent, he continued to frame his endeavors in terms of a more flexible interpretation of Maoist ideology. This is one of the primary differences between Khrushchev and Deng's approaches and will be discussed later in this paper.

### **CCP Composition**

The party composition, too, strongly influenced the trajectory of de-Maoization. Unlike in the Soviet Union, the majority of the leaders survived Mao's purges.<sup>142</sup> They were sent off to perform physical labor or be reeducated, but they were not typically killed for their supposed offence against the regime. Therefore, the leadership of the CCP was comprised by a variety of individuals who had either profited during the Maoist era or received similar or worse treatment than Deng. One of the key features of Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping's struggle for power following Mao's death is seen in Hua's "Two Whatevers" and Deng's "Practice is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth." These two articles "became two magnetic poles" within the party; Hua's supporters "feared the consequences of loosening the traditional orthodoxy" and Deng's followers who supported the push away "from what they saw as stultifying dogma."<sup>143</sup>

A large portion of the CCP officials had advanced through the party ranks during the Cultural Revolution and, therefore, owed their positions to this controversial period in the party's history. These individuals, then, were understandably wary of what implications de-Maoization might have on their position in the party.<sup>144</sup> For if Mao were condemned for the Cultural Revolution, their advancements would likely be one of the excesses attacked during de-Maoization. This faction, as well as a substantial pro-Mao faction that still saw Mao as infallible, strongly resisted the direction Deng appeared to be taking China. The departure from the

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<sup>142</sup> Constance Squires Meaney, "Is the Soviet Present China's Future?" *World Politics*, 39.2 (January 1987), p. 225

<sup>143</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. p. 213

<sup>144</sup> Tony Saich, "Party and State Reforms in the People's Republic of China," *Third World Quarterly*. 5.3 (July 1983), p. 637

ideology that had ruled the nation for decades was a serious affair. Deng's main sources of opposition generally were older cadres, skill-less Cultural Revolution college graduates, personnel and security cadres, propaganda cadres, and party members/cadres responsible for political campaigns.<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, Deng lacked several critical support bases that his Soviet counterpart had enjoyed. Consequentially, Deng was forced to balance the sentiments of those who had survived the purges with the desires of those, like himself, who had a greater incentive to repudiate Mao. Deng also could not rely on a younger generation of party members, whose counterparts in the Soviet Union had risen through the ranks and offered alternatives to those who had been complicit in Stalin's crimes and replaced those who had been purged under Stalin. Instead, this younger generation of party members and cadres had "been tainted and/or made useless by the Cultural Revolution."<sup>146</sup> There was also a substantial faction within the party who supported the use of political campaigns and opposed Deng's abandonment of Maoist era policies and political movements. Therefore, unlike in the Soviet Union, which had seen a large turnover in party composition and advanced a new generation through party ranks, many of Deng's fellow party members had incentives to resist reform, whether it be because they were beneficiaries or believed in Maoist orthodoxy. Therefore, these factions within the party forced Deng to "perform a complex balancing act" that prevented any extreme departures from the Maoist era.<sup>147</sup> Therefore, while Deng also had his supporters within the party, there was a strong counterforce that moderated the extent to which Deng criticized Mao. In this way the CCP's composition did not parallel that of the CPSU, which demonstrates how influential party composition was in pushing for or mitigating a departure from a leader's legacy.

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<sup>145</sup> Meaney, "Is the Soviet Present China's Future?" *World Politics*, p. 224

<sup>146</sup> Ibid. 228

<sup>147</sup> Ibid. 228

## Chinese Political Culture

Confucianism dominated China's philosophical landscape centuries. Society and government were strongly rooted in Confucianism ideology and stressed the importance of hierarchical social relationships. These five relationships: 'sovereign-subject; husband-wife; parent-child; elder brother-younger brother; friend-friend' clearly delineated the relationship between superiors and their subordinates and defined the duties of each hierarchical level. Filial piety was the foundational element of Confucius thought. Confucianism greatly influenced Chinese governance, and its hierarchical model strongly promoted a monarchical institution. This is but a brief overview of a complex philosophy that governed Chinese culture for centuries; however, Confucianism's utmost impact is likely the hierarchical relationships that it advocated for and reinforced within Chinese society. Confucianism undoubtedly shaped Chinese political culture, and its imbedded hierarchical concerns determined social and political relationships for centuries to come.<sup>148</sup>

As Confucianism's influence began to wane during China's late imperial period, people continued to pay homage, and, at temples and museums, Confucianism was still celebrated. However, Confucianism's integral role in people's daily lives had ceased. Scholar Joseph Levenson uses this description to parallel a similar phenomenon that occurred after Mao's death. Even posthumously Mao was celebrated, his mausoleum attracting vast crowds visiting to pay their respects. Yet with the arrest of the Gang of Four and the end of radical Maoism, his presence was no longer intertwined with people's daily lives as it was during the period of mass campaigns and class warfare.<sup>149</sup> This comparison offers important insight into China's political culture; it underscores a trend in Chinese culture that partially defined the public's perception of

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<sup>148</sup> "Introduction to Confucian Thought," Columbia: Asia for Educators, 2009. Accessed 10 December 2013, <[http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china\\_1000bce\\_confucius\\_intro.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/special/china_1000bce_confucius_intro.htm)>

<sup>149</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*. p. 182

de-Maoization.

Vogel states, “In Chinese Communist circles, it is taboo to criticize a leader openly and directly.”<sup>150</sup> If this assertion is taken to be true, this helps explain why de-Maoization was extremely nuanced in its rhetoric and why his reputation was primarily left in tact. Pye challenges this notion slightly by suggesting “The Chinese rule is: ‘Speak no ill of elders—until after they die.’”<sup>151</sup> He proposes Mao’s posthumous disparagement exemplifies this ‘rule,’ because, before death, Mao was beyond reproach, whereas after death, his character was subjected to a range of criticisms. I would suggest that Chinese political culture falls somewhere in between these two notions due to the relatively mild rebukes leveled at Mao posthumously.

Additionally, Pye suggests that, traditionally, great Chinese leaders were modest and reserved; they lacked oratorical prowess and pomposity. Therefore, after over two decades of atypical leadership according to these values, Deng conformed to traditional Chinese political culture by operating behind the scenes.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, his ascension to power was made possible by the horror of the Cultural Revolution decade, which “taught Chinese the dangers of anarchy were very real and thus it worked to intensify their deeply-held cultural fears of disorder.”<sup>153</sup> It would seem this culturally ingrained fear of ‘luan’ and fear of volatility, especially after a decade of just that, would moderate any criticisms and the management of Mao’s legacy; or else risk immersing the nation into even deeper chaos, which would result from too strong of disparagement of Mao. Moreover, the population’s intense anxiety to establish even a modicum of stability after the Cultural Revolution led them to be more tolerant of authoritarian

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid. 213

<sup>151</sup> Lucian W. Pye, “An Introductory Profile: Deng Xiaoping and China’s Political Culture.” *The Chinese Quarterly*, No. 135 Special Issue: Deng Xiaoping: An Assessment (September 1993), p. 419

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. 415

<sup>153</sup> Ibid. 420

repression and more open to traditional hierarchical arrangements.<sup>154</sup>

### **Reactions to De-Maoization**

Due to the aforementioned political climate, the Chinese public's response to de-Maoization is notably different than the Soviet citizens'. Nearly everyone welcomed the end of radical Maoism and mass campaigns, yet many also looked back on the years before the Cultural Revolution with great fondness. Goodman suggests, "For many Chinese the years of the mid-1950s...are remembered (rightly or wrongly)...as the periods when they had 'never had it so good.'"<sup>155</sup> Additionally, younger generations frequently had only faint memories of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and thus were often unimpressed with Deng's reforms and felt "skepticism [towards] politics and resentment of authority."<sup>156</sup> Their disillusionment towards their current leadership, therefore, often led to nostalgia for the Maoist era.<sup>157</sup> Furthermore, Pye asserts that Deng's ascension to power occurred during a period when many citizens wanted nothing more than to free themselves from their horrible memories of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>158</sup> I will examine the party's management of the Cultural Revolution legacy more in depth later in this paper, but I expect this aversion to remembrance to have influenced both the party's treatment of the period and the creation of a collective memory.

### **Part III: The Progression of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization**

#### **The Secret Speech and its consequences**

As I established earlier in this paper, the primary catalyst for de-Stalinization was Nikita Khrushchev's Secret Speech, delivered on the night of 25 February 1956 during a closed session

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid. 420-422

<sup>155</sup> Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?" *The China Quarterly*, 87(September 1981), p. 526

<sup>156</sup> Peter R. Moody, Jr., "The Political Culture of Chinese Students and Intellectuals: A Historical Examination," *Asian Survey*, 28.11 (November 1988), p. 1156

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. 1157

<sup>158</sup> Pye, "An Introductory Profile: Deng Xiaoping and China's Political Culture." *The Chinese Quarterly*, p. 420

of the CPSU's Twentieth Party Congress. Khrushchev shocked the audience, and eventually the public, with his revelations of Stalin's excesses.<sup>159</sup> Khrushchev's denigration of Stalin was carefully navigated, detailing specific failures of Stalin's rule, while limiting other criticisms. Khrushchev strongly articulated Stalin's excesses, particularly that of his cult of personality. In addition to this significant criticism, Khrushchev also attacked "Stalinist repressions, arrests, terror and murders...[and] for bungling foreign affairs and mishandling the war."<sup>160</sup> However, during these profound criticisms, he prudently emphasized the party's innocence, and even victimization, instead holding Stalin personally responsible for the years of misrule. Khrushchev was also careful to not implicate any members of the current party leadership in his criticisms of Stalin. Even more notable was his failure to acknowledge how the party could have permitted such abuses to occur. Khrushchev's focus on Stalin as an individual rather than the Soviet system as a whole clearly delineated the boundaries of acceptable criticism and sought to condemn Stalin without jeopardizing the party's legitimacy.<sup>161</sup>

The Twentieth Party Congress served as Khrushchev's platform to terminate Stalin's image of the "all-benevolent, all-wise, all-powerful 'father of the peoples' and 'sun of the universe.'"<sup>162</sup> However, while Khrushchev was incredibly candid with his criticisms, as will be examined in the next paragraph, he was selective in his denunciation of Stalin's crimes. For example, the annihilation of the *kulaks*, the frequent mass deportations, and the avertable famine that killed millions are among some of Stalin's most heinous atrocities, yet not one of these was addressed in the Secret Speech.<sup>163</sup> As I will note in more detail later in this paper, this approach differed significantly from Deng's. Khrushchev explicitly faulted Stalin for the errors of his era,

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<sup>159</sup> Lowenstein, "Re-Emergence of Public Opinion in the Soviet Union," p. 1329

<sup>160</sup> Ibid. 1334

<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 1334

<sup>162</sup> Chamberlin, "Khrushchev's War with Stalin's Ghost." *Russian Review*, p. 3

<sup>163</sup> Ibid. 3

yet did not condemn some of Stalin's most brutal policies, whereas Deng primarily attacked Maoist policies rather than Mao himself for the excesses of his rule.

While Khrushchev certainly limited his criticisms in some respects to protect himself and the party, his attack of Stalin's misrule was approached with unprecedented candor. Stalin was castigated in no uncertain terms for "his intolerance, his brutality, and his abuse of power" and for his "mania for greatness."<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, he was condemned for his betrayal of Marxism-Leninism. In his speech, Khrushchev also deplored Stalin's use of terror and mass purges in the party, but did not explicitly address his more heinous crimes such as the famine.<sup>165</sup> The Stalin era was depicted as a period filled with falsities, from false statistics to false pretenses to glory to false confessions. Therefore, the Soviet Union had certainly not been unsusceptible to bureaucratic deception. Furthermore, Stalin was relegated to the ranks of those, like the police, whom "had striven to betray the party and manipulate the Soviet people."<sup>166</sup> Indeed, Khrushchev's brutal attack on Stalin was certainly unprecedented in its frankness.

Despite the post-facto title of the 'Secret Speech,' the speech was really anything except. In addition to the 1,400 delegates present at its deliverance, the Central Committee itself arranged for the speech to be disseminated.<sup>167</sup> However, Parry suggests that, at least outside of the USSR, Stalin's atrocities were fairly well known; therefore, the significance of the speech lay not in Khrushchev's allegations, which were not necessarily revelations, but rather "the significant thing was that *Khrushchev* was saying all this, that *Communism itself* was admitting bestiality."<sup>168</sup> Certainly, the unprecedented nature of this attack meant that there was no example

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<sup>164</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences," Speech, Moscow, USSR, February 25, 1956. Modern History Sourcebook. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1956khrushchev-secret1.html>

<sup>165</sup> Parry, "The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's 'Second Funeral,'" p. 472

<sup>166</sup> Hooper, "What Can and Cannot Be Said: Between the Stalinist Past and New Soviet Future," p. 307-309

<sup>167</sup> Schattenberg, "'Democracy' or 'despotism'?" in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* p. 65

<sup>168</sup> Parry, "The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's 'Second Funeral,'" p. 471



on which to base expected outcomes. Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin's crimes against the party and the populace, however, triggered a flood of unanticipated consequences. De-Stalinization quickly became a force of its own, delegitimizing the Soviet system and unleashing pent-up grievances. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the party's active push for de-Stalinization ceased in order to stabilize the system that these criticisms threatened to destroy.<sup>169</sup>

### **Return to de-Stalinization**

The Secret Speech marked a critical juncture in de-Stalinization. Despite its arguable success in discrediting the once canonical Stalin narrative promulgated through Stalin's personality cult, the speech engendered a public opinion disaster that the party sought to mitigate. Yet the retreat from de-Stalinization between the Twentieth and Twenty-Second Party Congresses left Stalin's legacy ill defined, neither rehabilitating him nor castigating him further.<sup>170</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> Party Congress is significant primarily because of its conspicuous exclusion "of a meaningful reference to Stalin." This overt omission signals the party's inability to resolve an acceptable depiction of the Stalinist era.<sup>171</sup>

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress markedly differs from the 21<sup>st</sup>, however. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, held in 1961, signaled the recommencement of de-Stalinization. Unlike the divulgences revealed at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress during Khrushchev's Secret Speech, the events of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress were broadcast on public radio. These speeches did not shy away from the controversial and problematic topics that had plagued the party for nearly a decade since Stalin's death. Instead, Khrushchev and the party addressed everything from the Stalin Cult to mass rehabilitations.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Z. "To the Stalin Mausoleum," p. 317

<sup>170</sup> Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin: real and ideal responses to de-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* p. 59

<sup>171</sup> Ritvo, "Twenty-First Party Congress—before and after (Part One)." *American Slavic and East European Review*, 20.2(April 1961), p. 206

<sup>172</sup> Hooper, "What Can and Cannot Be Said" *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 319

Therefore, Khrushchev strongly resumed the forceful push for de-Stalinization and attempted to advance his vision of communism. Indeed, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress embraced what previous efforts of de-Stalinization had lacked: an “overt, easily interpreted, *public* condemnation of Stalin, and the iconoclasm of his cult.”<sup>173</sup>

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress was also effective in defining a more comprehensive and stable image of Stalin than the party had been following the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress. Jones even suggests that, unlike the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress, the party encouraged moral outrage in order to cathartically dissolve any persisting qualms.<sup>174</sup> In his concluding remarks at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress, Khrushchev went far as to incite criticism from the people: “Any leader who forgets this pays a harsh price for such errors...or the people will not forgive him after his death, as happened with the condemnation of Stalin’s cult of personality.”<sup>175</sup> Again contrasting the 1956 episode of denigration, Khrushchev would not rescind this denouncement. Additionally, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress’s unequivocal attacks on Stalin culminated in the removal of his body from the mausoleum on 31 August 1961. This climactic event signaled the party’s thorough effort to eradicate Stalin’s presence from public life.<sup>176</sup>

### **Framing of de-Stalinization**

Unlike Deng, as we will see, Khrushchev unequivocally imputed Stalin for the errors of his era.<sup>177</sup> One of the themes continually emphasized after Stalin’s death was collective leadership. Whether or not that collective leadership was utilized in practice, however, can very disputable. Shortly after Stalin’s death, the party’s primary organ of theory publication ‘*Kommunist*’ released a new issue (9 March 1953). This issue emphasized that the Party’s

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<sup>173</sup> Jones, “From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* p. 51

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 51-52

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. 52

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. 51

<sup>177</sup> Larson, “Dismantling the Cults of Stalin and Khrushchev.” *The Western Political Quarterly*, p. 388

strongest asset was “collective work, collective leadership and monolithic unity.”<sup>178</sup> By April 1953 *Pravda*, too, had used Stalin’s own words to stress the hazard of individually ascertaining questions without collective consultation. Wolfe suggests that even the announcement of Stalin’s death was less a lamentation than it was a plead for “collective leadership, orderly succession, [and] monolithic unity.”<sup>179</sup> Indeed, one of the key ways the party framed the succession was that it was a chance to return to collective leadership, which had been abandoned by Stalin.

Just as the Secret Speech was dubbed its title post-facto, so too was de-Stalinization named. The term de-Stalinization was absent from the rhetoric of the Khrushchev era. Instead the ostensible objective of addressing the Stalinist era was “the overcoming/exposure of the cult of personality.”<sup>180</sup> However, even the cult of personality was never explicitly linked to Stalin prior to the Secret Speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. Yet following this momentous unprecedented attack on Stalin, the cult of the individual became synonymous with Stalin’s devotees. Even now one of the most predominate associations with Stalin is his cult of personality. Therefore, Khrushchev’s rhetoric in his Secret Speech defined not only the most important element of de-Stalinization, but its lasting effects can be felt even today.

One of the most interesting ways the party framed the Stalin years was with medical terminology. Jones asserts, “Party propaganda and the Soviet press used medical, psychological and even spiritual imagery to promote de-Stalinization, suggesting a keen concern with exposing and repairing Stalinism’s damage to the people’s hearts and minds.”<sup>181</sup> The residual remnants of the Stalin era were treated as an infection of the Soviet people, which necessitated “a simple

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<sup>178</sup> Wolfe, “Stalin’s Ghost at the Party Congress,” *Foreign Affairs*, p. 554

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.* 554

<sup>180</sup> Jones, introduction to *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. by Polly Jones, p. 2

<sup>181</sup> Jones, “Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories?” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 349

operation that excised the tumor of Stalinism.”<sup>182</sup> What is most significant about this presentation of de-Stalinization is that the individuals’ ability to overcome this ‘disease’ was treated as evidence that “society could, and must, do the same.”<sup>183</sup>

One of the more significant ways that Khrushchev and the party reframed Soviet history to accommodate their needs was the transference of prestige. During Stalin’s reign, any and all accomplishments were somehow accredited to his excellence in leadership. Therefore, one of the first things Khrushchev had to tackle in dismantling the Stalin cult was the reallocation of praise from Stalin to the party. Hence, one way Khrushchev framed the cult of personality was that it had harmfully diminished the role of the party. For example, the cadres were “not [trained] in a spirit of devotion to the Party, people, and the cause of communism, but in a spirit of blind trust in and devotion to individual persons.”<sup>184</sup> As a result, the party reframed its national narrative to deflate Stalin’s role and to inflate the party’s role.<sup>185</sup>

Furthermore, Khrushchev deftly portrayed much of the Stalinist era as Stalin and the corrupted security forces against the innocent party. For example, the Terror was unequivocally rendered as a period where the party was continually terrorized by the security services and fiercely fought the misconduct in a merciless moral battle. The supposed antagonism between the security forces versus the party was a frame Khrushchev persistently used throughout his time in power, occasionally tweaking the details ever so slightly to insinuate new allegations against the corrupt power structure under Stalin.<sup>186</sup> The framing of the innocent party versus the terror of Stalin and the police forces’ rule supports my earlier proposal that in order to gain favor with the Soviet people, Khrushchev was forced to distance himself, and the party, from the terrors of the

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid. 352

<sup>183</sup> Ibid. 367

<sup>184</sup> Robert C. Tucker, “The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth.” *World Politics*, 7.1(October 1954), p. 45

<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 45

<sup>186</sup> Hooper, “What Can and Cannot Be Said,” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 308

Stalin era despite his role in carrying out some of the atrocities himself. Moreover, Hooper suggests that Khrushchev also used the Great Terror as a political tool by labeling his opposition guilty of committing these brutalities.<sup>187</sup> Indeed, this too supports my assertion that the party composition was influential in the management of the Stalinist legacy, in this case as a politically expedient device. Indeed, Khrushchev used rhetoric to “invariably associate ‘truth’ with socialism and falsity with police repression and fascist domination.”<sup>188</sup> This method served as a means to secure public support by distancing himself and the party from the horrors of the Stalinist era and was also a political tool to eliminate any potential rivals.

### **Construction of a national narrative**

One phenomenon seen across many regimes is the reconstruction of a national narrative to serve the leader’s interests. The manipulation of history in order to assist a leader in establishing or maintaining legitimacy underscores the importance of the politics of memory. In the cases of the Soviet Union and China, the mobilization power of memory “necessitated intensive, intrusive state controls to ensure its ‘health.’”<sup>189</sup>

Indeed, this was certainly a practical tool that Khrushchev used to serve his own political interests and establish his legitimacy at the expense of Stalin’s. The CPSU carefully constructed narratives of the Terror to progress policy objectives. These new narratives indicated that it was now tolerable, if not imperative, that moral indignation be the reaction to the cult of the individual and the atrocities of the Stalin era. Rehabilitated survivors of the purges were “ideal vehicles for de-Stalinization... they represented the ideal discursive nexus from which to condemn the past and anticipate the de-Stalinized future.”<sup>190</sup> Testimonies and detailed accounts

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. 310

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. 314-315

<sup>189</sup> Jones, “Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories?” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 370

<sup>190</sup> Jones, “From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 53

from Terror victims were used as propaganda, particularly towards the Soviet youth. However, despite the discursive emphasis on oral terror testimonies, the official revised historical narrative chiefly glossed over the details of the horrors, instead offering only general references.<sup>191</sup> Indeed, the party ingenuously balanced “victimhood and survival” in order to obviate the requisite for prolonged commemoration and penitence by suggesting that society had not suffered any permanent damage.<sup>192</sup>

One aspect of the Stalinist narrative that Khrushchev rewrote was to whom the Soviet’s victory over the Nazis would be attributed. The canonical description attributing the victory to Stalin’s ‘genius’ was dismantled. Khrushchev’s Secret Speech debunked this persistent narrative, instead vilifying Stalin’s “incompetent leadership” for the early defeats and blaming his anxiety and frenzy for failing to heed warnings of an imminent attack. Khrushchev solicited historians’ help in exposing the falsities of Stalin’s narrative. Henceforth, Khrushchev’s revisionism completely altered Stalin’s once integral role in the Soviet military victory. His involvement was downgraded significantly and military successes were rendered as victories despite Stalin’s incompetency.<sup>193</sup> Stalin’s military genius was one of the critical ways he legitimized his rule and fostered his cult of personality; therefore Khrushchev’s reconstruction of this narrative was a critical step in delegitimizing Stalin.

Khrushchev also radically amended the history of agricultural collectivization. An integral component of the Stalin myth depended on the supposed success of complete collectivization and the *kulak*’s annihilation. Collectivization and the necessitated removal of the *kulaks* as a class were portrayed as two important steps toward attaining the Soviet socialist

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<sup>191</sup> Jones, “Memories of Terror or Terrorizing Memories?” *The Slavonic and East European Review*, p. 353

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 370

<sup>193</sup> Roger D. Markwick, “Thaws and freezes in Soviet historiography, 1953-64,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating cultural and social change in the Khrushchev era*, ed. by Polly Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 181

utopia. Khrushchev challenged this pervasive history that had been a fundamental component of Stalin's *Short Course* history of the party. Research on agriculture in the 1920s reflected the premature push to collectivize, showing that the country had lacked the basic material and technical prerequisites. Indeed, the historians' revisionist evaluation of collectivization reflected the reconstruction of party history that Khrushchev's reformism necessitated.<sup>194</sup>

Perhaps the largest revision, though, was Stalin's demotion from co-founder and father of the nation. The amended image of Stalin was no longer an equal of Lenin. The title of 'genius of mankind' in party history was solely reserved for Lenin. Stalin's history had elevated him to "co-founder of the Party [and] co-architect of the October Revolution."<sup>195</sup> However the new version of party history suggested that no one individual succeeded Lenin, rather "Leadership of the country reverted to 'the Party,' of which Stalin happened to be head."<sup>196</sup> Therefore, Stalin was relegated to a level of importance even under that of a successor pursuing the Leninist cause. The new Soviet narrative accorded Stalin with only a minimal role in the nation's history.<sup>197</sup> A similar treatment of Mao's role in the Chinese Communist Party's history would be impossible. His position as founding father of the nation precluded any notion to similarly accord Mao only a minor role in Chinese history.

Furthermore, the demotion of Stalinist ideology greatly contrasts Deng's treatment of Maoist ideology. Stalin was once seen as a tactical genius, known for his intellectual prowess and "wondrous powers of reasoning, his supreme foresight...[and] his profound and peerless grasp of Marxist fundamentals."<sup>198</sup> Stalin's contributions had once been elevated to parallel

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 184

<sup>195</sup> Tucker, "The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth." *World Politics*, p. 47-48

<sup>196</sup> Ibid. 49

<sup>197</sup> Larson, "Dismantling the Cults of Stalin and Khrushchev," *The Western Political Quarterly*, p. 389

<sup>198</sup> Tucker, "The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth." *World Politics*, p. 50

Marx's and Lenin's, however, Khrushchev's historical revision diminished his role so significantly that he was merely accredited with "specific and limited contributions to Marxist-Leninist doctrine."<sup>199</sup> Certainly, the party reconstructed history by transforming a larger-than-life leader into "a modest lifelong Leninist" in order to serve its own political interests.<sup>200</sup>

Whereas the period following the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress had left an incomplete and ambiguous reinterpretation of party history, the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress served as a platform to present an articulate narrative recounting the Stalin era in terms of terror and depravity. This new narrative that had begun with the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and then subsequently retracted was now unequivocal with its "clear interpretive guidelines for listeners."<sup>201</sup> Careful to avoid their mistakes with the first episodes of de-Stalinization, the party prescribed an explicit script of Stalinist history, in which "Criticisms were more open, but discussion was closed off."<sup>202</sup>

The Stalinist narrative continued to be manipulated at the party's discretion, indicating that further revision rested only in the party's domain.<sup>203</sup> Those who diverged from the 'correct interpretation' of the speech or challenged the party's narrative were threatened.<sup>204</sup> The party's monopoly on historical revisionism and the enforcement of the 'right' interpretation of the Secret Speech reflects the party's attempt to control and manipulate the collective memory of the Stalin era. Despite the seemingly open nature of public testimonies, the party recognized the mobilization power that memories carry and their management of such reflects "the overriding belief that memory could and should be manipulated, both by the state and by the individual."<sup>205</sup>

The supervision of de-Stalinization also reaffirms the party's recognition of the vulnerability of

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid. 50

<sup>200</sup> Ibid. 55

<sup>201</sup> Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the burial of Stalin" in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 57

<sup>202</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. 59

<sup>204</sup> Schattenberg, "'Democracy' or 'despotism'?" in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*"p. 66

<sup>205</sup> Ibid. 369



memory.

## **De-Maoization**

### **The framing of Mao's legacy under Hua**

Due to Hua's more involved role as Mao's temporary successor than his Soviet counterpart, Malenkov, I will start with an examination of the discourse surrounding the first steps to de-Maoization before addressing Deng's approach. Following Mao's death in September 1976, Hua swiftly arrested the Gang of Four. However, even after Deng usurped power from Hua, the party continued to go to great lengths "to separate Mao from the Gang of Four and other 'counter-revolutionaries.'"<sup>206</sup> Hua treated the Gang of Four's actions as crimes punishable by law whereas he portrayed Mao's as 'mistakes,' thereby absolving Mao from the worst excesses that were instead blamed on the Gang of Four. Therefore, the Gang of Four's trial "took shape as a giant national rite in which radical Maoism was blamed not on Mao but on the Gang of Four."<sup>207</sup>

In many ways Hua managed Mao's legacy just as Mao had expected. Because his sole source of legitimacy lay in his association with Mao, he largely upheld Mao's reputation and a thematic continuity with policies of the Maoist period. However, Hua's arrest and criticism of the Gang of Four necessitated exposing the Cultural Revolution to similar criticisms due to the Gang of Four's close ties to it. Therefore, while Hua orally affirmed Mao's theory of continuous revolution, which included the Cultural Revolution, he recognized the need to focus on Mao's earlier remarks, which were substantially more moderate than those made during the Cultural Revolution era. So while Hua supported Mao's later, more radical years in theory, in practice

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<sup>206</sup> Yee, "China: de-Maoization and foreign policy." *The World Today*, p. 94

<sup>207</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 183

they overlooked Mao's more incendiary statements.<sup>208</sup>

### **Deng Reenters the Mix**

Following Mao's death in September 1976, all of the political rival factions invoked his name as a source of legitimacy,<sup>209</sup> immediately revealing the integral role Mao would play in his successor's regime's legitimacy. Therefore, even though Deng's hesitancy to abandon Mao's legacy may seem counterintuitive, in fact, the factions initial adherence to Mao as a source of legitimacy demonstrates how essential his figure was for anyone seeking to consolidate power. Mao's fundamental role in the establishment of the PRC appears to trump any grievances Deng may have had that would motivate him to more strongly condemn his predecessor.

### **The Resolution on Certain Questions...**

Yet the Third Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee in December 1978 signaled Deng and the party's dedication to attempt some level of reassessment of the Cultural Revolution, Mao's place in the party's narrative, and Maoist ideology.<sup>210</sup> However, it was at the Sixth Plenum, held in June and July of 1981, where this set of reevaluations were truly realized with 'The Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the People's Republic of China' (hereafter the Resolution). Unlike Khrushchev's monumental revelations at the CPSU's Twentieth Party Congress, the CCP's criticisms would be much more tempered. As with the attack on Stalin, one of the primary critiques of Mao was his cult of personality. For more than a decade following Mao's death, Deng's regime attempted to remove any remnants of Mao's cult or cults of personality surrounding any other leader. As in the Soviet Union, the Chinese leadership sought to institute a standard of collective leadership that would

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<sup>208</sup> Lowell Dittmer, "Ideology and Organization in Post-Mao China." *Asian Survey*, 24.3 (March 1984), p. 350-351

<sup>209</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy," *Asian Survey*, p. 354

<sup>210</sup> David S. G. Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP: Look Back in Anger?" *The China Quarterly*, 87(September 1981), p. 520

prevent cults of personality from arising in the future.<sup>211</sup>

Yet unlike the course of de-Stalinization, de-Maoization primarily concentrated on his policies rather than Mao himself. The resolution focused on Mao's theory of 'continuing revolution' as source of many of his policy gaffs. However, one of the most interesting ways de-Maoization differed from de-Stalinization was Deng's use of Mao's early ideology to criticize Mao's later policies. This will be discussed further later, however, it is important to note that even with the party's denunciation of 'continuous revolution,' Mao's own ideology was used to show how this theory had deviated from established Mao Zedong Thought. Therefore, it was because "Mao's theory of 'continuing revolution' was inconsistent with the 'stand, viewpoint and method' of Mao Zedong Thought, which is seeking truth from facts, the mass line and maintaining independence" that his later policies were problematic.<sup>212</sup> In other words, the critical distinction made in the Resolution was the differentiation between Mao's actions and Mao Zedong Thought.<sup>213</sup>

Whereas Khrushchev had exonerated himself and the party from Stalin's crimes, Deng held "the Party leadership as a whole partly responsible."<sup>214</sup> Despite the Resolution's denunciation of several policies Mao implemented in later years, including holding him directly responsible for the Cultural Revolution, his mistakes were treated as "those of a 'great proletarian revolutionary.'<sup>215</sup> Despite the massive death tolls during the years of the Great Leap famine, the decade is generally seen as extremely successful (Resolution article 16).

Furthermore, the "successes and errors [of these years] are attributed to the CCP's collective

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<sup>211</sup> A. Doak Barnett, "Ten Years After Mao," *Foreign Affairs*, 65.1 (Fall 1986), p. 43

<sup>212</sup> Michael Sullivan, "...Two Steps Back." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 7(January 1982), p. 182

<sup>213</sup> Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP" *The China Quarterly*, p. 522

<sup>214</sup> Sullivan, "...Two Steps Back." *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, p. 182

<sup>215</sup> Ibid. 182

leadership despite Mao's 'chief responsibility' (article 18)."<sup>216</sup> Therefore, notwithstanding Mao's grievous failures and a death toll a magnitude far greater than that of Stalin's, the party carefully mitigates their rebuke with tempered qualifications.

### **Deng's framing of De-Maoization**

As discussed above, the Deng administration carefully constructed their criticisms to limit direct rebukes of Mao. Indeed, because of Mao's indispensable role in party history, Deng was forced to grapple with "how to show respect for Mao while departing from Mao's policies."<sup>217</sup> One of Deng's primary strategies to depart from the Maoist era whilst maintaining Mao's integral role in the party was the manipulation of Maoist ideology. For instance, Deng stressed the importance of adaptability. Earlier I discussed 'Practice is the Sole Criterion for Judging Truth' in which Deng asserts, "The only way to evaluate truth [is] by the broad social experience of the people... if experience reveals errors, changes should be made."<sup>218</sup> By advocating for the adaptability of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng justified his departures from Maoist policy. Deng used the logic of Mao's revolutionary victory as evidence. Vogel describes Deng's argument: "Marxism-Leninism did not tell the Chinese revolutionaries to surround the cities from the countryside: Mao had succeeded militarily because he adapted Marxism-Leninism to China's particular conditions at the time."<sup>219</sup> Deng's strategy thus moderated the extreme emphasis that had been placed on ideology in the late Maoist years "in favor of a 'more flexible and utilitarian standard' to evaluate a new set of priorities and policies."<sup>220</sup> Therefore, de-Maoization consisted of a strong bureaucratic effort to institutionalize Mao's words and

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<sup>216</sup> Goodman, "The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP" *The China Quarterly*, p. 54

<sup>217</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 242

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 212

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* 228

<sup>220</sup> Kalpana Misra, "Deng's China: From Post-Maoism to Post-Marxism." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 33.42/43 (October 17-30, 1998), p. 2740

charisma in order to bolster their new political agenda.<sup>221</sup>

Indeed, the appropriate framing of de-Maoization was critical in providing Deng with the freedom to depart from the Maoist era while simultaneously attempting to maintain Mao's reputation as a source of legitimacy. Deng stressed that without Mao's exceptional leadership, Communists would not have been victorious; so while Mao was not infallible, as no person is, there was no need to draw hasty conclusions.<sup>222</sup> In fact, the primary allegation leveled at Mao for the radical nature of the Cultural Revolution era was that he was 'divorced from practice and from the masses.' It was his disconnect from the masses that instigated the implementation of policies that "did not fit 'reality' or enhance socialist construction."<sup>223</sup> In other words, his leadership failures were a consequence of his elevation as a leader and his subsequent divorce from the masses.

Deng emphasized that any leader in Mao's place would have made errors, and, in fact, the two largest catastrophes of the Mao era, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, "were caused by a system that allow[ed] one person to dominate without any input from other voices."<sup>224</sup> Therefore, Deng's leadership was careful to divert as much responsibility as possible to other persons such as the CCP and the Gang of Four. While the party acknowledged errors had been made during Mao's late years, his mistakes were secondary to his many contributions.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, Mao Zedong Thought remained the "crystallization of the experience of the Chinese people's revolutionary struggle."<sup>226</sup> His most grievous error was that he "ignored his own infallible teachings."<sup>227</sup> Deng's use of Mao's own philosophy as a means to criticize Maoist

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<sup>221</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy." *Asian Survey*, p. 354

<sup>222</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 243

<sup>223</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy." *Asian Survey*, p. 358

<sup>224</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 243

<sup>225</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy." *Asian Survey*, p. 356

<sup>226</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 263

<sup>227</sup> Robinson, "Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy." *Asian Survey*, p. 358

policies was a brilliant maneuver that upheld the ideologies, which had become the backbone of the nation, whilst justifying his departure from these failed policies. Consequentially, Deng frequently criticized the *implementation* of these failed policies (including the Hundred Flowers Campaign the Anti-Rightist Movement, and the Great Leap Forward) rather than assert that they were “incorrectly conceived.” Therefore, Mao was framed as both the “cause and solution of the ‘crisis of faith.’”<sup>228</sup>

### **Construction of a New National Narrative**

Six months after Mao’s death at the Central Work Party Conference in March 1977, broad discussions of Mao’s legacy began. While there was some general agreement on the direction the leaders wanted to take the party, many thought it was too earlier to begin frankly addressing Mao’s mistakes nor had any consensus been reached on the management of Mao’s legacy at this time.<sup>229</sup> Therefore, it wasn’t until the Central Party Work Conference in November 1978 that the construction of a narrative truly began. Yet unlike Khrushchev’s reconstruction of Soviet history, Mao’s demotion in party history was far less significant. Deng saw the Cultural Revolution as a divisive topic, thus despite his support for overturning verdicts of this era, he felt the party should not dwell on the Cultural Revolution.<sup>230</sup> Deng was careful to reassure the party and the nation that he would not follow Khrushchev’s example, which was seen to have weakened the Soviet government. This was an additional force that led Deng to preserve ‘the banner of Mao Zedong Thought’ and postpone a deeper assessment of problematic periods in People’s Republic’s history.<sup>231</sup>

One of the key steps in the creation of a new national narrative was distinguishing Mao

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<sup>228</sup> Goodman, “The Sixth Plenum of the 11<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP” *The China Quarterly*, p. 521

<sup>229</sup> Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 193

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.* 244

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.* 261

Zedong from Mao Zedong Thought. At the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress Hu Yaobang, the general secretary of the party, made the key differentiation that Mao Zedong Thought was “the body of theoretical principles concerning the revolution and construction in China.”<sup>232</sup> The separation of Mao from Mao Zedong Thought provided Deng with “scriptural basis” for policy initiatives and enabled him to reorient Maoist ideology to serve the party’s purposes and “aimed at creating a heroic model of Mao Zedong that symbolizes his revolutionary spirit but not his personal leadership.”<sup>233</sup> Therefore, the party attempted to harness Mao’s charisma and revolutionary figure for their purposes while abandoning the errors of Mao’s leadership. Afraid of publicizing the party’s lack of a consensus on the topic, “[an] official position in the assessment of Mao’s contributions and mistakes since the founding of the Communist Party in 1921 [was] circulated... among leading cadres.”<sup>234</sup>

The official historical narrative was altered from the pre-Cultural Revolution era narrative requiring schools’ history curriculum to be reevaluated. It appears the party was not the only body unable to reach an acceptable consensus, as Alisa Jones suggests, “curriculum developers, textbook writers, and History teachers [were] in constant re-negotiation of the delicate balance between politics, academic professionalism, and practical pedagogy.”<sup>235</sup> As in many authoritarian nations, history is the chief “conduit for inculcating new ideological precepts...and transmitting the official narrative of ‘legitimate succession.’”<sup>236</sup> Consequentially, the uncertain political climate led those writing the new history curriculum in 1978 to closely toe the party’s most prominent political line.

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<sup>232</sup> Robinson, “Mao after Death: Charisma and Political Legitimacy.” *Asian Survey*, p. 359

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. 363-364

<sup>234</sup> Yee, “China: de-Maoization and foreign policy.” *The World Today*, p. 94

<sup>235</sup> Alisa Jones, “Politics and history curriculum reform in post-Mao China.” *International Journal of Educational Research* 37 (2002), p. 548

<sup>236</sup> Ibid. 549

Yet even the tentative consensus the party and curriculum writers reached differed greatly from the Soviet narrative of the Stalin years. The curriculum's reverence of Mao's contribution continued to exalt Mao as the founding father of the nation and a revolutionary hero. Following party lines, the 1978 curriculum also regarded the years from 1949 to 1957 as successful. Even more interesting, however, was the Cultural Revolution's 'victory' over 'revisionism' and 'rightist deviations.'<sup>237</sup> Under Deng's authority, other sensitive issues, such as the Anti-Rightist Campaign, were glossed over or excluded altogether from the curriculum. Future history curriculums subdued the reverence with which they treated Mao, replacing it with a greater emphasis on the collective leadership.<sup>238</sup> However, even in these subsequent curriculums, Mao was both praised and blamed for the successes and errors of his era, reflecting the official party narrative.

However, Weigelin-Schwiedrzik notes the CCP's failure to impede alternative narratives from entering the national discussion. So while curriculums remain largely based on the consensus reached in the Resolution, she suggests, "The CCP version of the master narrative of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese history no longer exists."<sup>239</sup> The Resolution's interpretive framing of the Mao era has largely been unsuccessful in monopolizing a national narrative for these years. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik instead makes the distinction between official historiography and unofficial historiography. She suggests that the official historiography conforms to the party's resolution; however, the unofficial historiography challenges official narratives by defying the official history's taboos.<sup>240</sup>

Deng's reconstruction of history slightly reduced Mao's historical role, but maintained

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid. 551

<sup>238</sup> Ibid. 552

<sup>239</sup> Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "In Search of a Master Narrative for 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Chinese History," *The China Quarterly*, No. 188 The History of the PRC (1949-1976) (December 2006), p. 1071-1073

<sup>240</sup> Ibid. 1075



the foundation of Mao Zedong Thought. This technique thereby solved two dilemmas at once: the party historiographers “complied with the Party’s need to adapt Party history to the necessity of collective leadership, and they accommodated their readers who were tired of only reading about principles and eager to know more facts.”<sup>241</sup> The gradual augmentation of the knowledge that was made public quickly made clear that the official narratives found in “many books and textbooks published [was] not even half the story.”<sup>242</sup> One reason the new construction of a nationalist narrative failed so miserably compared to the initial master narrative on pre-1949 history was its lack of credibility, which the previous model had predicated on Mao’s irrefutable revolutionary victory. Therefore, as the public was made more cognizant of historical happenings and the party began censuring the Cultural Revolution under the façade of “criticizing the Gang of Four,” the admittance of these errors caused the party to lose its authority on historical events.<sup>243</sup>

The construction of a national narrative, whether successful or not, depended on striking a balance between criticizing Mao, which risked “separate[ing] the CCP from its historical and ideological roots, and praising Mao’s socialist ideals, which drastically contradicted the implementation of new policies.” The result of this balancing act culminated in the ‘70:30 assessment.’ Mao Zedong’s actions were evaluated as 70 percent good and 30 percent bad.<sup>244</sup> Therefore, the historical evaluation of the Cultural Revolution remains purposefully ambiguous, consciously avoiding the identification of those culpable and those victimized. Instead, the Resolution delineates three levels of responsibility for the Cultural Revolution. First, Mao is liable for the radical theories that instigated the Cultural Revolution. Second, the Party is guilty

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid. 1076

<sup>242</sup> Ibid. 1076

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. 1076

<sup>244</sup> Ibid. 1076

of failing to cease the implementation of these policies. And third, the Gang of Four is culpable for “taking advantage of Comrade Mao Zedong’s errors” and “attempt[ing] to seize supreme power.”<sup>245</sup> The CCP’s assignment of blame is therefore incongruous with the Secret Speech’s model. The CCP’s Resolution ascribes “universal complicity,” whereas Khrushchev distinctly portrayed Stalin as the perpetrator and the party as the victim.

Despite Deng and the party’s relatively ambiguous consensus on an appropriate official narrative, their ongoing battle of how to simultaneously respect and abandon the Maoist era still starkly contrasts Khrushchev’s management of Stalin’s legacy. Weigelin-Schwiedrzik challenges the widespread belief that the CCP silenced, and still silences, discourse addressing the Cultural Revolution, yet notes the CCP’s dependence on the citizens’ apathy towards the subject. Certainly, unofficial accounts of the Cultural Revolution era can be found in a variety of sources, such as films and books.<sup>246</sup> However, I will later suggest that the party’s inability to monopolize the historical narrative of this period has indeed led the CCP to “impose silence on society for years to come.”<sup>247</sup>

In the earlier section discussing collective memory in the Khrushchev era, I stressed the importance of the politics of memory. History has been the primary means to inculcate younger generations with state-authorized communal identities and collective memories. These state-authorized memories are integral to the party’s monopoly on historical narratives and serve as a critical device to maintain party legitimacy. Jones asserts, “In the post-Mao era, History is primarily expected to promote acceptance of the political system [and] the current regime and its

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid. 1081

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. 1078

<sup>247</sup> Ibid. 1083

policies.”<sup>248</sup> The efficacy of a state-authorized collective memory is likely limited; however, the party’s attempt to monopolize collective memory and enforce an official historical narrative signals the perceived importance of the manipulation of recent history for current political purposes.

#### **IV: Conclusions**

Stalin’s successors were dealt a complex legacy, whose fragility necessitated a methodical management. Due to the sociopolitical forces discussed earlier, which greatly shaped the course of de-Stalinization, Khrushchev’s most advantageous approach to de-Stalinization appeared to be detaching himself and the party from the terrors perpetrated by his predecessor. Ultimately, Khrushchev sought to exonerate the party of Stalin’s crimes in order to avert Stalin’s rule from spoiling the ideals of communism and socialism.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, the party could either discredit Stalin completely in an iconoclastic abandonment of three decades of party history or the party could radically demote his position in Soviet history to create an official narrative that corresponded with their political needs.<sup>250</sup> Thus it was from these two options that Khrushchev pursued the re-imagination of Stalin’s figure and the course of Soviet history to serve his political endeavors.

Furthermore, Khrushchev’s denigration of the Stalin era was politically expedient in several areas. First, it allowed him to implicate his political rivals as Stalinist collaborators, thereby declaring his own innocence. Second, Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin served as a source of legitimacy. By detaching himself from his predecessor’s political legacy, he cleared himself of blame for many of the policies he had actively implemented and promised a “return to

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<sup>248</sup> Jones, “Politics and history curriculum reform in post-Mao China.” *International Journal of Educational Research*, p. 546-547

<sup>249</sup> Dev Murarka, “Twentieth Party Congress: Celebration, Indifference and Revilement,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 31.14(April 6, 1996), p. 876

<sup>250</sup> Tucker, “The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth.” *World Politics*, p. 57

Leninism.” And finally, Khrushchev sought to exonerate the Soviet system by delegitimizing Stalin and condemning his atrocities.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, Khrushchev’s motives to forcefully pursue de-Stalinization certainly had deep roots in his own role in Stalin’s regime and in the party composition as he sought to consolidate his power.

Tucker suggests that political survival dictated that “the continuity of the dictatorship must be preserved, because only in such continuity...lies the claim of the regime to legitimacy.”<sup>252</sup> This assertion reflects my earlier analysis of the influence public opinion had on the trajectory of de-Stalinization. The citizens’ outrage at the Secret Speech’s shocking revelations threatened to jeopardize the party’s stability. For this reason, Khrushchev suspended his initial push towards de-Stalinization in order to protect his legitimacy. The subsequent episode of de-Stalinization, which resumed at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress, included the implementation of certain provisional measures precluding social unrest, which reflected the party’s acknowledgement of the threat public opinion posed. Therefore, the party’s secondary attempt to delegitimize Stalin was predicated on the lessons of public opinion management they had learned following the Secret Speech.

The trajectory of de-Maoization differed significantly from the example set by Khrushchev. The legacy bequeathed unto Deng in many ways was even more complex than the legacy Khrushchev was dealt. Tens of millions more died during Mao’s rule than during Stalin’s even though the latter’s time in power exceeded the former’s by several years. However, due to Mao’s vital role in party history, in addition to several sociopolitical factors at the time of his death, his legacy was treated with greater restraint than Stalin’s.

Unlike Khrushchev, when Deng bested his political rival and consolidated power, there

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<sup>251</sup> Bociurkiw, “The Problem of Succession in the Soviet Political System” *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science*, p. 582-583

<sup>252</sup> Tucker, “The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth.” *World Politics*, p. 57

was still a significant faction within the party that was strongly loyal to Mao. This internal division moderated any strong attacks Deng may have considered launching against Mao. Khrushchev had no such restraints. Furthermore, China's political culture differed from the Soviet political culture in such a way that also constrained Deng's actions. China's hierarchical traditions likely played at least a small part in the management of Mao's legacy. However, more importantly, the communists were led to victory and the People's Republic of China was founded under Mao. While Stalin had greatly inflated his role in the party's revolutionary history, ultimately, Lenin remained the sole father of the nation. To remove such an integral foundation of country risked greatly destabilizing the nation and jeopardizing the party's legacy. As such, Deng would have been unwise to have completely condemn Mao, because even though the population deplored radical Maoism, an inculcated love of Mao existed in the nation long after his death.

I believe the evidence presented in this paper supports my hypothesis that the three aforementioned sociopolitical factors were largely responsible for the divergent courses of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization. Khrushchev's legitimacy was predicated on his departure from the horrors of the Stalin era, whereas Deng's legitimacy remained rooted in his theoretical dedication to Mao Zedong Thought despite the majority of his policies being in contention with Mao's fundamental beliefs. Each leader had motivation to denigrate their predecessor and each had an incentive to protect their reputation, but, in the end, Khrushchev proposed legitimacy depended on the destruction of his predecessor's legacy while Deng's did not.

While the paper predominately focused on two case studies, I believe many of these findings can be applied to other single-party states, especially communist nations. One might watch Raul Castro's succession of Fidel as a potential progression of this phenomenon. There are

certainly other elements that I did not focus on that played a role in the trajectories of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization; however, I assert that the sociopolitical factors I discussed dominate other potential influences such as leaders' personal motivations, centuries of tradition, and economics. In both Khrushchev and Deng's cases we see that these sociopolitical factors trump what would seemingly be a more logical course of action. Khrushchev was a beneficiary of the Stalin regime, and, as an accomplice, it might seem best for him to uphold Stalin's reputation. Yet internal party dynamics and public opinion dictated a much different response. Deng, on the other hand, would appear to have a greater incentive to castigate Mao after having been a victim himself. However, Mao's historical significance as well as pro-Mao factions in the party and unique political culture forced Deng to moderate and mitigate many of his criticisms of Mao. Indeed, I propose the evidence I have collected supports the significance I have placed on these political determinants. While Khrushchev and Deng's actions appear to be inconsistent with their personal motives, their seemingly counterintuitive treatment of their predecessors' legacies demonstrates the greater weight these sociopolitical factors carried.

## **Implications**

### **Resurgence of Stalin's Popularity**

So, how have Khrushchev and Deng's respective approaches impacted contemporary perceptions of the two leaders? My original hypothesis suggested that the initial management of the deceased leaders' legacies shaped contemporary perspectives of the two leaders. I believe in some respects this is true, especially on an international level; the West's characterization of Stalin depicts him as a monster in modern history, second only to Hitler, whereas Mao's atrocities receive little or no attention in western schools. Their domestic characterizations, however, largely disprove my early hypothesis. While perceptions of Mao remain predominantly

positive, at least in official discourse, Stalin's figure has seen a resurgence of popularity in recent years.

March 5, 2013 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stalin's death. Despite the millions who died during Stalin's reign, in recent years his popularity has expanded. On the anniversary of his death, Stalinist devotees congregated at the Kremlin gravesite to praise his 'great victories.' The logical question that follows is one that troubles many scholars and regular citizens alike: why is Stalin still widely admired despite his brutal repressions? It appears that attitudes began changing under President Vladimir Putin. Putin has certainly received an abundance of attention in his own right in recent years due to the increasingly undemocratic nature of his rule. In terms of Putin's rule and the revival of Stalin's popularity, the *Boston Globe* asserts, "the Kremlin has found Stalin's image useful in its efforts to tighten control."<sup>253</sup>

One could write a book discussing Russian political culture and their gravitational pull towards authoritarian leadership. However, in summation, the fall of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a volatile decade. The political and economic transitions of these years wiped out many people's entire saving accounts and otherwise created a myriad of hardships. Thornburgh and Shuster present a survey from 2000 shortly after Vladimir Putin succeeded Yeltsin that shows, at this time, 81% of Russian citizens desired stability and order, even at the expense of personal liberties and democratic freedoms.<sup>254</sup> It is not as shocking, therefore, that after a decade of extreme instability "nostalgic perceptions of [Stalin] as a strong leader in line with Russian traditions" might reemerge. Furthermore, Murarka points to a prevalence of apathy towards the history of the communist era, stating that contemporary Russia does "not want[] to

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<sup>253</sup> Max Seddon, "Russia marks 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stalin's death," *The Boston Globe*, 6 March 2013, accessed 5 December 2013 < <http://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2013/03/06/russia-marks-anniversary-stalin-death/ljmpBMecZ2xJtnH1J6zqXO/story.html> >

<sup>254</sup> Thornburgh and Shuster, "Russia's New Red Guard."

draw proper lessons from its failures and achievements.”<sup>255</sup>

A poll conducted by the Yuri Levada Centre in 2008 revealed that in a sample of 1,802 Russians between the ages of 16-19 54 percent “believed that Stalin did more good than evil and that he was a wise leader. 40 percent believed his involvement in the Gulags had been exaggerated. In this same year, Stalin was ranked as the third greatest historic Russian. This begs the question “what is so different in Russia that Stalin’s figure is exalted and not reviled as it is in the West?” Hughes states in the Berkeley Political Review that the Stalin era was not merely a time of oppression, it was also the period USSR was hailed as a major superpower. The status and power that resulted from the World War II victory began to dissipate by the early 1950s, or in other words, around the time of Stalin’s death. After a series of successively weaker Soviet leaders, and a volatile transition decade, Hughes asserts that this nation “was left with only nostalgia for an age in which they were a major force in international politics.” This “coupled with the dissatisfaction of Russian youth [] has contributed to the resurgence in Stalin’s popularity.”<sup>256</sup> Therefore, it appears that Putin’s recent exoneration of Stalin paired with nostalgia for the ‘golden age’ in Russian history is the primary cause of this recent resurgence.

### **The Mao Craze**

Mao’s resurgence in popularity is less puzzling than Stalin’s considering the comparatively moderate management of his legacy. However, it would seem that, for the same reasons Mao’s mild rebuke was perplexing, hindsight would provide a clearer lens to evaluate Mao’s rule. In the early 1990s, China saw a huge revival of Mao’s popularity. The emergence of the ‘Mao Craze,’ as this period is often referred to, led to a commercial phenomenon. Books on

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<sup>255</sup> Murarka, “Twentieth Party Congress: Celebration, Indifference and Revilement.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, p. 874

<sup>256</sup> Eoghan Hughes, “The Resurrection of Stalin,” *Berkeley Political Review*, 1 March 2013, accessed 5 December 2013 < <http://bpr.berkeley.edu/2013/03/the-resurrection-of-stalin/>>



his life, Mao badges, copies of *Quotations From Chairman Mao*, as well as a number of other Cultural Revolution-era relics were for sale throughout the country.<sup>257</sup> Mao's name and image became selling tactics in the new capitalist markets; Mao-style restaurants featuring Cultural Revolution paraphernalia and diets based on countryside cuisine became commonplace,<sup>258</sup> Mao's sayings were used to sell unrelated items such as wallpaper,<sup>259</sup> and tourism to his hometown skyrocketed.<sup>260</sup> Mao's figure could once again be seen everywhere; however, this time his presence was that of a commodity rather than a semi-divine leader.

There are several explanations for Mao's huge boost in popularity. First of all, we must note that his character was never reviled in the way Stalin's was. Compounding this, Dal Lago suggests older generations are also still deeply impacted by the Mao years and frequently have strong positive or negative feelings associated with his memory.<sup>261</sup> Therefore as those who were young adults during the Cultural Revolution hear and see these pieces of culture reused years later, they reflect on the exhilaration and excitement of those years.<sup>262</sup> For later generations, who were young at the time of Mao's death, he remains a cultural idol, much in the same role as Western pop stars such as Elvis; in other words, he is an icon that retains little personal significance.<sup>263</sup> These cultural perceptions of Mao were strongly influential in the Mao Craze. His shift in identity from a demi-god to a commodity or pop culture figure also helps explain the acceptance of his reemergence.

### **Cultural Revolution Silence**

At the height of de-Stalinization under Khrushchev, Stalin's body was removed from the

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<sup>257</sup> Dal Lago, "Personal Mao," p. 49; Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, p. 40

<sup>258</sup> Dal Lago, "Personal Mao," p. 49

<sup>259</sup> Barmé, *Shades of Mao*, p. 35

<sup>260</sup> Ibid. 37

<sup>261</sup> Dal Lago, "Personal Mao," 52

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. 51

<sup>263</sup> Ibid. 51

mausoleum and a memorial was erected in remembrance of Stalin's victims. Yet, nearly 40 years after Mao's death in 1976, no such equivalent exists in China. Finally, in 2005 a Cultural Revolution museum was constructed in Shantou's Chenghai district; however, even this commemoration was a private endeavor, lacking official backing. The Cultural Revolution remains a profoundly problematic period in Chinese history that continues to be largely silenced. There does not appear to be any change in this trend, either. School "children are taught little about it... [and] their parents are unlikely to tell them what they went through."<sup>264</sup> Additionally, the party refuses to publish any damning biographies of Mao. Moreover, in 1999, a US-based academic was "charged with stealing state secrets" and contained for over a year after conducting research on the era.<sup>265</sup> These troubling facts suggest the party's persisting need to control these memories.

### **Final Remarks**

This paper aimed to explain the root causes that led to vastly different courses of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization, and in the process, hopefully gain insight into the succession process in a communist dictatorship. I hypothesized that the leader's position in the predecessor's regime, the party composition, and public opinion were the three most influential sociopolitical factors in this determination. The evidence I have collected supports this hypothesis. My findings show that these three factors carry more weight than other factors such as personal concerns and motivations. The application of these findings on future perceptions on the two leaders appears to be less useful, however. In many ways contemporary assessments of Mao fit my preliminary assertion that the course of de-Maoization helped define future

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<sup>264</sup> Clifford Coonan, "China's first Cultural Revolution museum exposes Mao's war on 'bourgeois culture,'" *The Independent*, 21 February 2006. Accessed 9 December 2013.

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/chinas-first-cultural-revolution-museum-exposes-maos-war-on-bourgeois-culture-467265.html>>

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

perceptions; however, modern evaluations of the Stalinist period challenge this hypothesis.

The incredibly divergent progressions of de-Stalinization and de-Maoization indeed suggest the presence of dissimilar sociopolitical pressures, which dictated the management of the leaders' legacies. Stalin and Mao were both responsible for tens of millions of deaths in their respective countries, with Mao's death tolls far exceeding those of Stalin. Their rules were both firmly rooted in charisma and terror, yet the treatment of their eras differed drastically. In this thesis, I have attributed this incongruity to each successor's role in their predecessor's regime, the party composition, and public opinion and political culture. It appears that the very internal factors that pushed Khrushchev towards a harsh denunciation of Stalin moderated Deng's criticisms. Whereas Khrushchev predicated his power on de-legitimizing Stalin due to existing social and political pressures, these very same forces dictated a significantly different approach for Deng's management of Mao's legacy. Therefore, while Khrushchev's personal history, the CPSU's composition, and public opinion called for a candid and extensive denigration of Stalin, Deng's personal history alongside the party's composition and public opinion necessitated a moderate rebuke mitigated by the party's dedication to Mao as the founding father of the PRC.

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