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REFLECTIONS OF DELEUZIAN PHILOSOPHY OF DESIRING-MACHINE IN MO
YAN'S LIFE AND DEATH ARE WEARING ME OUT

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Abstract

Mo Yan's oeuvre foregrounds the plight of the Chinese folk during the turmoil of the whole twentieth century as people have suffered from horrendous oppression and torture. Throughout the century, people witnessed the social and political change from imperial rule to republic administration in the first half of the century while as impulsive reformations in the second half of communist China. One of the significant and brutal events portrayed by Mo Yan in his novel Life and Death Are Wearing Me Out was the socio-political movement called the Cultural Revolution. With Deleuze's concept of desiring-machine, the paper will discuss the significance and purpose of this revolution. He emphasizes the root cause of brutality, as exemplified in the novel. Moreover, this paper will also focus on other factors targeted by Mao Zedong to make this revolution a prolific success.

Keywords: Cultural Revolution, Mo Yan, Anti-production, Desiring-Machine

Mo Yan describes Cultural Revolution in his novel *Life and Death are Wearing Me Out* as "a tale of blood and tears, describing the period as hell of earth, more terrifying than Hitler's concentration camps" (Yan 156). The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of Chairman Mao intended to obliterate the bourgeoisie from Chinese society. This great revolution in China came after the Land Reform of 1947-1952, which overthrew all the landlords; the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1956-57, which resulted in the subversion of intellectual

freedom; and the Anti-Rightist Movement of 1957-59, dealing with all the radicals of the new communist society. As Ximen Nao, the protagonist of the novel was executed for being “a master of exploitation” (Yan 23) during the peak of the Land Reform, while Ximen Bai, his wife, along with other born capitalists, was sent to the labour camp. Not only that, the engineers who had studied abroad and come back to the country were categorized as rightists during the anti-rightist movement and sent for reformation through labour (Yan 83). The question then arises, why, after purging the capitalist via execution and reformation in camps in the early years of communism in China, that Mao Zedong initiated this new revolution in the year 1966.

Chairman Mao was concerned over the fact that even though the radicals of the society were defeated, the capitalist ideology still remained in Chinese society, which was evident through the persisting corruption in the society. This backdoor, which deep-seated in the society, would eventually bring back what Chairman Mao desperately wanted to remove from his new world. Considering that, the Cultural Revolution charged at the way of living of the Chinese people to bring a total change in society. This change was initiated with the Four Clean-ups Campaign, where the four olds of the society i.e. old-customs, old-culture, old-Ideas and old-habits were attacked by the special force of Mao Zedong called the Red Guards. “During the revolutionary period, the people had the power to execute individuals. The Jia Mountain People’s Commune passed the executionary authority down to the village level, and Mawan Village had killed thirty-three people in a single day, the oldest eighty-eight, the youngest thirteen. Some were clubbed to death, and some were sliced in half with hay cutters” (Yan 166). Anyone found associated with the four olds was attacked by the red guards. The revolution ambushed the cultural sphere, the set habits, the old Confucian teaching, which fuelled the Chinese ideology, substituting them with the new communist ways of living. Whereby sealing “the doom of the capitalist-roaders, landlords, rich-peasants, and counter-revolutionaries” (Yan 163-164). The Four Clean-ups Campaign punished the people, went down on the capitalist path, intends to eliminate the substantial visible practices in the lifestyle and target the imperceptible mentality of the people and their desires. To put it in simple words, the Cultural Revolution aimed at the inner desire of the population. The purpose of the revolution was to control and modify the desire since the essence of capitalism or the capitalist roaders was that they had personal desires. The enemy or the evils of Mao’s communist society was private ownership, yearning for the riches; satisfying physical desire with pleasure, be it comfort or sensual; unequal treatment of others through injustice, etc. All these evils are the outcome of the personal desire of an individual.

During the Cultural Revolution, capitalist thinking was replaced with communist ideology, which also implies that the private interest of the people was being replaced with public interests. Wherein, private ownership was substituted with collectives and communes, as the belongings of Ximen Nao and all other landlords were distributed among the community, while his household was transformed into the community office. The agricultural land, the livestock, the tools, other necessities were the property of the community and not the individual. The inherent desires of the people of Ximen village were challenged with the utopian ideals of socialism under totalitarian ideology. Consequently, Mao established a totalizing control over the individual’s body and their desires. Since it was called for the elimination of private desires in order to purge the bourgeoisie ideology, which would later result in the creation of a new communist man, along with that, the Cultural Revolution also swept the bureaucratic state machine as all the party members who secretly followed the path of capitalism were finally punished during this revolution.

The village Four Clean-ups campaign created torment in the lives of every cadre: Huang Tong, the militia company commander and brigade commander, was removed from his position over the misappropriation of money; Hong Taiyue, the village Party secretary, was removed from his position for roasting and eating a black goat that was being raised in the brigade goat

nursery. But they were back at their posts in short order' not so fortunate was the brigade accountant, who stole horse feed from the production brigade. His dismissal was permanent. (*Life and Death* 142-43)

While Hong Taiyue, who escaped the same fate during the Four Clean-ups, was caught during the Cultural Revolution and paraded along with other capitalist-roaders. Another purpose of the revolution was to uproot capitalist ideology from the Communist Party of China's party members. As the party members were the leading figures in their respective areas, and purifying their ideological perspective would help the whole country to recode into the new ways. Hence, making this a revolution that intend to eliminate desire from the social, intellectual, cultural, ideological, and political domain altogether.

The target of the Cultural Revolution was the personal desire of the individual. In their book *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze, along with Guattari, argues that desire is productive in nature, not something that has been considered opposing reason since earlier times. Contrasting Plato's notion of desire as a lack in humans that needs to be controlled, Deleuze argues that desire is something real. He argues that:

If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack the object. It is, rather, the subject that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. Desire and its object are one and the same thing: the machine, as a machine of machine. Desire is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it. (Deleuze and Guattari 26)

To maintain his power over the people, Mao Zedong intended to change China's reality as China was not progressing even after all those reformations done in the initial period. The country was still not strengthening, and all those reformations again brought back the old ways used by the people. So in order to transform China into a whole new society, it was called for work around the area of desiring-machine. In his book, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze mentions the revolutionary nature of desire, which can bring major changes. Deleuze argues that since desire is central to everything, be it principles, laws, or any other social structure, and it also becomes central to the reality and the truth of the society. Therefore, making a reality the product of human desire, according to Deleuze.

Desire begins from connection.... Life strives to preserve and enhance itself and does so by connecting with other desires. These connections and productions eventually form social wholes. When bodies connect with other bodies to enhance their power they eventually form communities or societies. Against the idea that social wholes are formed through ideology, Deleuze argues for social wholes as positive and productive. Social wholes take desires in order to produce interests, coded, regular, collective and organised forms of desire. (Gao 410)

In order to eliminate the current reality of the Chinese people, the desired machine making needed to be put on hold. Only then the new reality designed by Mao could be implemented in the void created as the result of stopping the desiring machine. Deleuze further argues that desire is not powered by human need. It's the other way around; i.e., human needs are the outcome of their desire. This also leads to another deduction, which Deleuze points out is that "social production and desiring production are one and the same thing, they are inseparable" (Gao 408).

So in order to implement the Cultural Revolution, it was required to suppress the desire of the people by using various methods. One of the methods was controlling the flow of food and basic needs, as these are

the primary requirement for the subject to encourage, inspire or give fuel to their desiring machine. This controlling method was implemented in the Ximen village through the coupon system where the work points of every villager were recorded in order to provide them with the ration coupons based on the work they did on the commune agriculture land or commune projects. Jinlong was responsible for recording work points. "Every evening he went to a small office, where he calculated the daily work activities of each commune member in a ledger" (Yan 131). With the help of these coupons earned through working for the commune, the villagers were provided access to ration and basic necessities. The freedom to buy whatever they could with money was now limited to daily ration and necessities. This new system not only put constraints on the people's fetish with food and other materialistic desires, but it also helped the government to monitor and deal with the economic crisis. Therefore coupon system provided every individual the adequate amount of food required for him to survive.

The abjuration of desire during the Cultural Revolution imposed many restrictions on the people of Ximen village in particular and China as a whole. In the initial stage of the revolution, the change was suggested in the lives of the people. From the beginning of the communist revolution in Ximen village, the independent farmer Lan Lian was tormented on a daily basis, ever since the landlords' land was distributed among the peasants. During the Land Reform the communist revolutionaries such as Hong Taiyue and Director Chief Chen tried to persuade Lao Lian and his family to join the commune farming. "Eliminating the last remaining independent farmer was one of the most important tasks confronting the Ximen Village Production Brigade as well as the Milky Way People's Commune" (Yan 117). To make that happen, a team of men and women was organised, to persuade the members of Lan family to join the commune, and they were successful as all the members except Lan Lian and Lan Jiefang joined the commune. Chief Chen, when he met Lan Lian in the market, expressed his discontent with Lan Lian's action of not joining the commune. He knew that "Lan Lian is one tough donkey, and you have to rub him with grain. Don't be impatient with him or he might kick or bite you". He suggested Lan Lian to not "join the co-op right away. See if you can compete with it" by comparing his production on the assigned eight acres of land with the production of the collective (Yan 37). If his individual production per acre is higher than the collectives', then no one would ever force him to join the collective. As in the initial stage, "joining a commune ... [was] voluntary, leaving a commune [was] a matter of individual choice" (Yan 27). Lan Lian reputed any sort of bully that he received from the revolutionaries by saying that he will join the commune only when Mao Zedong orders him to do so.

But when the Cultural Revolution came, Lan Lian's adopted son Jinlong who was the head of the Red Guard faction, forced him to join the collective since he was the only farmer working individually in the whole province. The public announcement system communicated the propagandas of the Cultural revolutions out, naming the radicals which needed to be brought on the right track. This revolution aimed to conquer the last man standing i.e., Lan Lian. Jinlong pledged in front of his men that "no independent farmer is going to slip through the cracks. If he refuses to abandon his independent activities and continues down the path of capitalism, we'll drown him in a bucket of red paint!" (Yan 164). Which he literally did and almost blinded Lan Lian. Enraged by his father's resistance, Jinlong poured red paint on Lan Lian, which went into his eyes when he was trying to fight him. The red faced Lan Lian was then paraded with plough on his shoulder alongside all the other counter-revolutionaries with a cardboard sign saying, "Stinking, Obstinate Independent Farmer" (172). They were repressing the desire of the people by using public parades where they were humiliated in front of all the people and other forceful methods brought chaos in the economic realm of China. As with all these revolutionary activities going around, the production of China during the Cultural Revolution was at its lowest. As Deleuze argues that:

In production, desire is entirely immanent in the process... This is the creative power of desire, a spontaneous relation which emerges by connecting up heterogeneous elements, producing some kind of flow. In antiproduction, however, there is not sufficient energy or desire to create a full, consistent, mutually affective relation between assemblages that encounter one another. Instead, the mode of production of one of the assemblages will remain unchanged; for example, codes, habits, or conventions, may be applied to a new content, but their mode of encoding remains unchanged; similarly becoming may be reterritorialized on an unchanging territorial assemblage. (Goodchild 73)

In order to alter the habits of the people and to change the entire code of the society, anti-production was one of the factors working in favour of the revolution. Consequently, the revolution resulted in hunger and chaos while the economy of China at this point of the century was on the point of its collapse.

The absurdity and chaos during the revolution are visually represented by Mo Yan when he illustrates the scene of Lan Lian and Ximen Ox (the reincarnation of Ximen Nao) being paraded by the revolutionaries in the market. The marketplace was covered in red banners with slogans written in yellow. When one of the red flags got stuck in the horns of Ximen Ox he was terrified and lost his temper. The animal was rampaging around the market area. "If a pair of knives had been attached to them, you [ox] could have decimated the crowd and routed the survivors.... You [ox] ran straight into the crowd, drawing fearful howls and screams.... Take that red banner off his head! Someone yelled.... In running for cover, the people subconsciously formed tight clusters. Old women were crying, children were bawling" (Yan 176-77). Lan Lian, who was had earlier tied the rope of his ox around his waist, was being dragged by the animal in his frenzy. A butcher named Zhu Jiujie struck the ox with his knife to stop the disarray, ending up breaking his horn and removing the red banner out of his face. To take his revenge, the ox buried his "good horn in Zhu Jiujie's plump belly" (Yan 178). This carnivalesque depiction of the revolution brings out the misery and torment of people.

While the portrayal of hunger during the Cultural Revolution is also put forth by Mo Yan in the novel, since there was not enough to feed and clothe the whole population during this revolution, the people rarely ate meat during those tough ten years and were always cold. When Lan Lian was paraded after the red paint incident, the loud slogans from the loudspeaker killed the wild geese flying overhead, which dropped on the crowd below watching the rally. The people, due to the shortage of food, were impoverished at that time, along with all that frenzy of killing and parading going around. But when the dead birds started falling on the people, they went crazy and the whole procession became big chaos where they were fighting one another for the organs of the falling birds. "The bird's wings were torn off, [their] legs wound up in someone else's hand, its head and neck were torn from its body and held high in the air, dripping blood. People in the rear pushed down on the heads and shoulders of those in front to leap like hunting dogs. People were knocked to the ground, squashed where they stood, trampled where they lay" (Yan 158). This skirmish during the Cultural Revolution marked the first massacre in the Ximen village. As in total, seventeen people were trampled to death, while the rest were injured badly.

Conclusion

During the Cultural Revolution, this whole frenzied struggle was not to give form to some object reality, but it wanted to create a society with the lack of such reality. There existed no multiplicities but monotony, as the social reality was replaced with an illusion, which Mao had designed in his socialist illusion. This nationwide revolution engaged in transforming the innermost soul of the people by repressing people's private desires was a success because it established its control over desire. It was no surprise that this

revolution manifested anti-production as one of its important and determining factors, which is also maintained by Deleuze's argument that desire is productive. Moreover, Hobbes comments that the death of desire results in the death of life which was true during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution as depicted by Mo Yan in his novel. Mo Yan's visual illustrations in the novel bring out the ideology behind the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution.

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