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Images for Iconoclasts: Images of Confucius in the Cultural Revolution

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Abstract

Confucius died and was buried in 479 B.C.E., and he was never seen again. Or so one would think. "You may forget me as I once was," Confucius reminds us in the Zhuangzi, "but there is something unforgettable about me that will still live on." Confucius's physical frame was concealed from sight below ground, but his body and face were not forgotten either by his followers or his detractors, each of whom remembered him (or remembered him) in different ways. People created semblances of Confucius that reflected their own visions of the past, and constructions of his body took on many lives of their own over the succeeding centuries.

[*excerpt*]

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Images for Iconoclasts: Images of Confucius in the Cultural Revolution

Deborah Sommer

Confucius died and was buried in 479 BCE, and he was never seen again.¹ Or so one would think. “You may forget me as I once was,” Confucius reminds us in the *Zhuangzi*, “but there is something unforgettable about me that will still live on.”² Confucius’s physical frame was concealed from sight below ground, but his body and face were not forgotten either by his followers or his detractors, each of whom remembered him (or re-membered him) in different ways. People created semblances of Confucius that reflected their own visions of the past, and constructions of his body took on many lives of their own over the succeeding centuries. The modern philosopher Gu Jiegang (1893-1980), for example, observed in the early twenti-

¹ Research for this project was conducted courtesy of a grant from the Institute for International Research at the Johns Hopkins University-Nanjing University Center for Chinese and American Studies at Nanjing University in the fall of 2004. The author would like to thank the Center for its support. For Chinese sources for this article and additional images, see my “Wengezhong de pi Kong yundong.” All Cultural Revolution literature and images described are from the author’s personal collection.

² Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, “Tianzi fang,” p. 709. Translations from the Chinese are my own unless otherwise noted. See also Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, p. 201. Confucius appears in nearly fifty entries in the *Zhuangzi*, often as a bookish pedant but also as an insightful sage.

eth century that Confucius is reimagined anew with each age and exists in multiple forms. Gu writes,

Every age has its own Confucius, and in each age there are several different kinds of Confuciuses. . . . The figure of Confucius continually changes according to whatever the people of each age think or say about him. But most people are not at all aware of this, and they ultimately don't understand what the real face of Confucius is.³

Gu Jiegang could hardly have realized that just decades after he wrote this, Confucius's "real face" that had been buried since 479 BCE would again see the light of day. Confucius's grave was desecrated with much ceremony in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution (which lasted from 1966 to 1976) and his mortal remains—long since turned to dust—were thrown to the winds.

Ironically, the Cultural Revolution iconoclasts who robbed the tomb gave birth to a whole new legion of visual simulacra of the Sage: they produced literally millions of visual depictions of Confucius during the Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucius Campaign (*Pi Lin pi Kong yundong*; I will refer to it below by the shorter "Anti-Confucius Campaign") of the mid 1970s. This essay explores how Confucius's "true face" was visually reimagined in Cultural Revolution propaganda art of the 1970s. Anti-Confucius images were narrative and didactic, and many were extremely violent and showed their subjects being disgraced, beaten, or killed. Many depicted the destruction of *other* images and cultural objects. These "images for iconoclasts," as one might call them, invited their viewers to participate in the work of burning books, smashing spirit tablets, destroying temples, beheading statues, and decapitating human beings. Not all anti-Confucius images were violent, and the few accessible to western viewers at the time were largely idyllic pastoral scenes such as those published in the English-language *Peasant Paintings from Huhsien County*. Two of the four anti-Confucius "peasant paintings" (most likely done by professionals) in this volume depict the movement as a festive agricultural event; another two depict rousing political rallies where participants are armed, but no one is in imminent danger of decapitation.⁴ Anti-

³ From his "Chunqiu shi de Kongzi," pp. 130-131.

⁴ Fine Arts Collection, ed., *Peasant Paintings*, pp. 10-13.

Confucius images were reported in the *New York Times* by western journalists, who understood them as comic satire.⁵

The Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucius Campaign was one of the most violent periods of the Cultural Revolution. Launched in earnest in the early months of 1974, it appeared in the media with greatest intensity through the summer of 1974, but visual propaganda was produced until 1976. One of its prime targets was ostensibly Lin Biao (1907-1971?), a famous military leader under Mao Zedong (1893-1976) who was accused of attempting a coup against Mao and died in a mysterious plane crash over Mongolia in 1971.⁶ Since Lin Biao was actually long dead by the time the movement began, the actual targets of the campaign are unclear. Such ambiguity works all the better for political forces that seek to target “enemies,” as the enemy can then become anyone. All forms of media were subject to political control, and nearly all were organs of the central government itself. This campaign was but one of many that occurred during the Cultural Revolution, and it was part of a larger movement to eradicate old patterns of thinking and living that purportedly prevented China from advancing into a more prosperous age.

What better way to attack old belief systems than to attack their perceived champion, Confucius! And as Gu Jiegang had earlier noted, Confucius’s identity was continually changing; so he, too, could serve as a convenient target when the identities of political enemies changed with shifting political currents. “Bad” people such as Lin Biao (an otherwise capable general) were associated with Confucius over the course of the movement, and so were many others. And what better way to inspire a rural, semi-literate population to join that attack than to saturate their visual world with propaganda art created in every conceivable media? The exact identity of the “Confuciuses” featured in this campaign was extremely ambiguous and subject to many different interpretations. Was Confucius the historical figure from antiquity associated with the *Analects*? Was he

⁵ Lelyveld, “Confucius, China’s Sage.”

⁶ For a chronicle of events as reported in the official Chinese media, see the English-language periodical *Peking Review*. For translations of anti-Confucius literature, see Price, ed., *Anti-Confucius Campaign*, which also contains some images. See also Louie, *Critiques of Confucius and Inheriting Tradition*.

any figure associated with education in general, or simply everything “old,” “feudal,” and unmodern? Was he an allegory of political enemies of Mao Zedong, or was he simply any one (or all) of the many “enemies” constructed by the ever-changing political campaigns of the day? What one knew for sure by looking at images from the campaign was that Confucius was “bad”; he was the enemy, he was weak, and he was easily dispatched by any number of means. Those who righteously struggled against him—even small children—were good, powerful, and inevitably victorious.

Years before the Anti-Confucius movement was officially launched in 1974, direct attacks on the home town of Confucius inaugurated the Cultural Revolution itself, which had begun in the spring of 1966. November of that year saw the opening of Confucius’s tomb and the immolation of his temple in his home town of Qufu in Shandong province. Details of the desecration were reported with great relish in the broadsides of the *War Bulletin on the Investigation against Confucius* (*Tao Kong zhanbao*), a revolutionary newspaper published for several years at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. The *War Bulletin* proudly featured a photograph of the moment of the opening of the grave, and the photo is shot at an angle that invites the viewer to participate vicariously in the event as it actually unfolded. One can watch as workers remove slabs of stone from the grave with shovels and ropes; their mouths are covered with white masks, perhaps to protect them from noxious miasmas that might arise from the tomb. Confucius has long since turned to dust, the image seems to say, and the photograph testifies to his disappearance.

A smiling photo of Mao Zedong appeared on the cover of the November 20 issue of the *War Bulletin* that elatedly announced the successful attack on Qufu, and Mao is accompanied by two other powerful political leaders: Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) and Lin Biao. Lin Biao smiles broadly, unaware of his impending fate. Neither does he realize that in 1974, three years after his death in Mongolia, he will be posthumously vilified as a devout disciple of Confucius—although his smiling photograph on the cover of the *War Bulletin* testifies to his warm support for the attack on Qufu.

The fate of anthropomorphic images often very closely parallels that of the human bodies that are their prototypes. A few days after Confucius's mortal remains were desecrated at Qufu, the statue of Confucius in the main hall of his temple there was also immolated⁷ (Figure 1). Photographs of the eviscerated statue show that it was violated as if it were an actual human body and not merely an inanimate human-shaped form. Its throat was slit, its eyes were gouged out, its face was slashed, and its stomach was disemboweled (images such as this often contained texts and internal "organs" made of precious materials). Then, experiencing a fate similar to that of human beings who were "struggled against," the statue was hung with banners inscribed with obscenities, given a dunce cap, and paraded around Qufu in the back of an open truck. Finally, the statue was thrown into a ditch under a bridge near the Confucius family graveyard and burned. Photographs of the events were featured in the November 30 *War Bulletin*.⁸

Oddly, photographs of the desecration at Qufu did not reappear in the Anti-Lin Biao and Anti-Confucius Campaign launched in the early spring of 1974. But then, one of the goals of that campaign was to vilify Lin Biao as a disciple of the evil Confucius, and the cover photos of the *War Bulletin* demonstrated otherwise. The Anti-Confucius Campaign was at its height in the spring and summer of 1974, but anti-Confucius literature was published through 1976. This was a period that saw the creation of propaganda art (and of course written literature) in all forms of media then available: posters, bulletin boards, lantern slides, children's literature, illustrated books and journals, films, sets of photographs, sculptures, mimeographed broadsheets, and so on. All forms of publication were under central political control and were distributed by such political organs as the New China News Agency (*Xinhuashe*) or the various branches of the People's Publishing Company (*Renmin chubanshe*).

⁷ Undated Cultural Revolution era photograph, most likely 1966. Photos such as this one were usually produced anonymously by photographers from the Xinhuashe (New China News Agency). They were sold individually or in sets intended for exhibition on village bulletin boards. Collection of the author.

⁸ For a description of the events at Qufu, see Wang Liang, "Confucius Temple Tragedy."



Figure 1.

Images were made by professional artists and amateurs alike, and detailed instructional handbooks for creating homemade propaganda art were distributed in rural areas.

Within this deluge of mass-produced images, however, the photographs of the desecration of Qufu are nowhere to be found. Line-

drawings that look suspiciously like those photos, however, did appear in the propaganda art of the mid 1970s in unusual ways: they appeared in the line-drawings of illustrated pocket-sized graphic novels (*lianhuanhua*, literally, “a set of narrative illustrations”; I translate the term hereafter as “pocket-novel”) that depicted attacks on Qufu that took place not in 1966 but sometime in the very distant past. According to one popular revolutionary narrative, oppressed peasants and workers since the time of Confucius himself had invaded Qufu time and again, attacking the temple and destroying its contents.⁹ Hence, *line drawings* of book burnings that purportedly took place in the Confucian temple in premodern times are composed in almost precisely the same way as *photos* of book burnings at Qufu in November 1966. History was reimagined to show that modern-day revolutionary activities were firmly grounded in historical precedents.

Tales of these anti-Confucian revolutionary activities appeared in the form of pocket-novels, an extremely popular form of literature that had been used for decades to illustrate everything from traditional operas to films to stories about Lenin’s childhood. Pocket-novels were loved by children and were also accessible to a semi-literate (and of course literate) adult audience. This is not to say that their content was juvenile: they were often illustrated by famous professional artists, and they were often highly political and extremely violent in nature. Many, for example, depicted graphic tales of child warriors or child martyrs. Each narrative illustration (each pocket-novel consisted of about sixty pages of illustrations) was accompanied by a short text, but the images were so concisely composed that the story was transmitted more by image than by text.

At the height of the Anti-Confucius campaign in the early spring and summer of 1974, nearly everything that appeared in print contained at least some reference to the attack on Lin Biao and Confucius. Writers and artists produced dozens of pocket-novels (and many other kinds of literature) devoted to denouncing Confucius.

⁹ For a summary of these “historical” events, see Wu, *Lin Biao*, chapter 4. Wu accepts the “official” version of events uncritically, and hence this chapter can best be understood as a useful English summary of the party line.

The most widely distributed of these was *The Evil Life of Old Kong Number Two* (*Kong Lao'er zui e de yi sheng*) by Xiao Gan, an illustrated “biography” of Confucius produced in June of 1974 in an astounding large print run of 2.5 million¹⁰ (Figure 2). Confucius is here merely “Old Kong Number Two,” an impolite form of address common in Cultural Revolution materials. “Kong” is Confucius’s surname in Chinese; “Number Two” refers to Confucius’s birth order as the second-born child (folkloric traditions place him second in birth order behind an older, disabled brother). For centuries, Confucius’s imperially bestowed honorific titles had been prefaced with the words “premier” or “first” or “perfected,” but here he is degraded simply to “number two.”

Illustrated biographies of Confucius had been created as sets of woodblock prints for centuries, but in none of them had Confucius lived an “evil life.” In this version, however, his daily routine consists largely of oppressing the weak and cheating the masses. Most of the illustrations in *Evil Life* depict fictive or apocryphal events, but some are based on classical texts (texts, however, that make no claims of historicity). The cover image of *Evil Life*, for example, is based on an incident from the chapter “Robber Footpad” in the *Zhuangzi*, a work of allegorical fantasy. In the *Zhuangzi*, Confucius encounters the tall and handsome Robber Footpad, only to be chastised by the bandit on charges of hypocrisy, greed, pedantry, and inhumanity. Drained and humiliated, Confucius slinks away, slumped over the reins of his carriage.¹¹ This passage of the *Zhuangzi* was of course understood as a fictive parody in its own day, but in the Cultural Revolution it was interpreted as a sober account of historic events.

It is precisely this moment of humiliation that is depicted on the cover of *Evil Life*: a disgraced Confucius scurries away from the scene of his humiliation by Robber Footpad, dejectedly slumped over the drawbar of a carriage pulled by a scrawny horse. Confucius is old, gray, and nearly lifeless; autumn leaves blow against a darkened sky. This is not the “premier teacher and perfected sage,” as em-

¹⁰ Xiao Gan, *Kong Lao'er*.

¹¹ For an English translation, see Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, pp. 298-305.

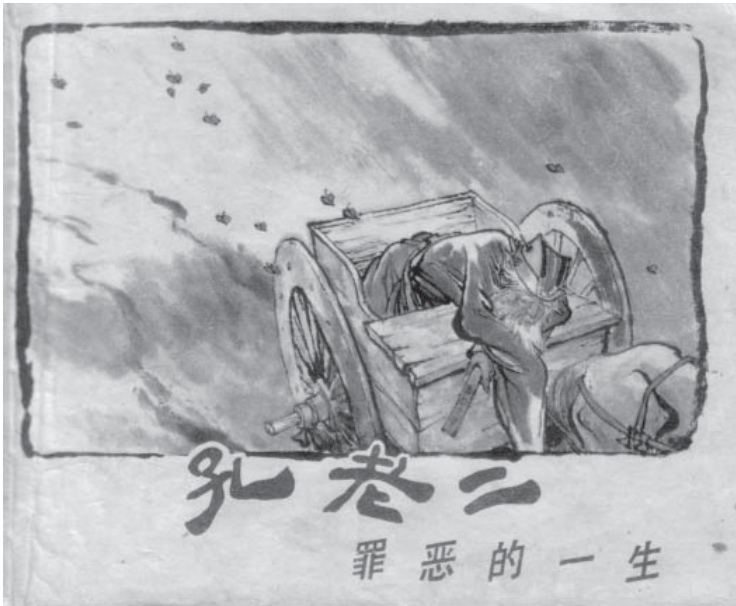


Figure 2.

perors used to call him, but a weakling who has endured a righteous upbraiding by a manly adversary.

In the *Zhuangzi*, Robber Footpad is a bandit, but in Cultural Revolution literature he is reimagined as a historic figure known as Liuxia Zhi (a name derived from the passage in the *Zhuangzi*). In the process of transformation, he also loses his taste for human flesh—in the *Zhuangzi* he was tall and good looking, but he was nonetheless a cannibal who enjoyed the occasional human liver and threatened to eat Confucius. Robber Footpad's former anthropophagic ways are forgotten in his new Cultural Revolution guise as a valiant Robin Hood who protects the weak from greedy tyrants.

Robber Footpad—or rather Liuxia Zhi—is often dramatically depicted in propaganda posters and pocket-novels in the very act of chastising Confucius. Booklets with titles such as *Liuxia Zhi Severely Berates Confucius* (*Liuxia Zhi tong chi Kong Lao'er*) were especially popular pedagogical works for educating children. Liuxia Zhi was an ideal role model for youngsters who needed to learn how to identify and attack “enemies” or “bad people.” Like other con-

temporary models of muscular revolutionary heroism, Liuxia Zhi is invariably depicted as a heavily-armed, tall, handsome figure who radiates youth, strength, bravery, and righteous indignation. In images printed in color, he wears red, a traditionally auspicious color that in modern times signifies revolutionary fervor. He often wears clothing of wild-animal fur, which shows his rustic purity and his ability to dominate the powers of nature.

This is how he appears on the cover of a small booklet for children titled, predictably, *Liuxia Zhi Severely Berates Confucius*¹² (Figure 3). A huge, armed Liuxia Zhi glares fiercely at the tiny, weaponless figure of Confucius groveling before him and points threateningly downward at Confucius with his outstretched arm. The diminutive Confucius, for his part, crouches in a posture of helplessness. Cowering and unthreatening, Confucius is painted in shades of grey, green, and blue—bloodless colors at the opposite end of the spectrum from the powerful reds of revolutionary strength. Confucius is old and shriveled, and elsewhere he is commonly depicted as nothing more than an animated skeleton. His long, clawlike fingernails reveal his wolflike nature. “Enemies” and “bad people” are often depicted as wolves or foxes in Cultural Revolution art and literature, and readers—even children—are encouraged to hunt, capture, and dispatch human enemies much as they would a man-eating wolf. No doubt Confucius will be easy prey for the fur-clad Liuxia Zhi.

Confucius’s diminutive stature and grayish-green coloring was typical of the general iconography of “bad” people such as collaborators with the Japanese, followers of the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, counterrevolutionaries, and so on. In fact, bad people were almost always depicted as smaller, shorter, and grayer than the “good” people who captured them, even when the bad people were grown adults and the good people were small children. The cover of the pocket-novel *Hunting Foxes in the Deep Mountains* for example, shows two young boys wearing red scarves pouncing on a gray-faced adult “enemy of the people” who is smaller than they are.¹³ Pocket-novels that overlooked this convention and depicted bad adults as

¹² Yan Zhenguo, *Liuxia Zhi*.

¹³ Wang and Yuan, *Shen shan lie hu*.



Figure 3.

being larger than good children were reissued in new editions with the offending images redrawn to express the proper political message. The message of course was that bad people were so small and weak that even a child, much less a Liuxia Zhi, could overthrow them.

Confucius's scolding by Liuxia Zhi was a favorite topic in works for children, and depictions of their encounter often appeared *within* other pictures. Many images show children teaching other children about Liuxia Zhi, and they depict the child-professors using posters of Liuxia humiliating Confucius as teaching materials for their "lectures." The child-teachers imitate the aggressive body posture of

Liuxia Zhi as they expound to their classmates. Presumably the real children who in turn saw *these* illustrations, which appeared as large propaganda posters and as small illustrations in children's monthlies such as *Red Little Guard* (*Hong xiao bing*), would then bring what they learned into real life.

Other images showed even more violent attacks by younger people against older people (a complete reversal of the traditional notion that one should respect one's elders) than that offered by Liuxia Zhi against Confucius. The illustrated booklet of children's songs titled *Heavy Gunfire for Criticizing Lin Biao and Confucius: Selected Children's Songs for Shanghai Little Red Guards*, for example, contains the rhyming song "Target Practice" (*Lian daba*) composed by and for second-graders.¹⁴ The song relates how a little boy and girl go out for rifle practice early one morning. Just seeing their targets—lifelike straw effigies of Confucius and Lin Biao—fills them with righteous hatred, and they quickly riddle Lin Biao's effigy with bullet holes and "send Confucius flying to heaven," as the last line goes. The accompanying illustration depicts a girl and boy armed with rifles opening fire on the straw figures of Confucius and Lin Biao, blowing them to pieces. Children might logically extend this treatment of Confucius to any other analogous adults, such as a teacher or other authority figure. Cultural Revolution booklets, periodicals, and pocket-novels produced expressly for children's consumption frequently show children engaged in military actions such as laying landmines, practicing with bayonets and lances, or throwing grenades. Such images are interleaved with more innocent images of children playing with kittens or stuffed animals.

In the propaganda art of the Anti-Confucius Campaign, Confucius was deeply associated with death. When he wasn't being used for target practice by second-graders, he was regularly depicted as a skeleton or as a frail, elderly man at death's door. He usually appeared with symbolic elements that suggested senescence, decay, and putrefaction: coffins, tombstones, skulls, spider webs, snakes, insects, falling leaves, and even mushrooms. Many images implied that he (or anyone symbolically associated with him) deserved to

¹⁴ *Pi Lin pi Kong meng kaipao*, pp. 22-23.

die. One maudlin depiction of his tombstone parodies a title given to him by past emperors: the older honorific title “Perfect Sage and First Teacher” (*zhi sheng xian shi*) has been replaced with homonymous characters that now read “Perfect Sacrificial Victim, the First To Die” (*zhi sheng xian si*).¹⁵

Confucius deserved to die, so the logic of Cultural Revolution literature goes, because in his own day he himself was a murderer responsible for sentencing to death someone named Deputy Mao (Shaozheng Mao). This incident appears no earlier than one of the final chapters of the *Xunzi*; in premodern times it was often considered spurious, but much was made of it in the Cultural Revolution.¹⁶ Since Confucius was a bloody executioner, he and followers and descendants also deserved to be “punished,” that is, executed. One of the most bizarre formulations of this line of thinking is the Cultural Revolution tale *Fiercely Smash the Main Hall* (*Nu dao Dacheng dian*). The *Dacheng dian*, or literally “Hall (*dian*) of Great (*da*) Completion (*cheng*),” is the special name given to the central hall of the Confucian temple in Qufu—or of any Confucian temple anywhere, for that matter. To destroy this hall is to metaphorically destroy Confucius and all that the figure of Confucius might represent. *Smash the Main Hall* first appeared as a story by the writer Xin Bin and was understood as a novelized historical chronicle of actual events. It became so popular that it then appeared in at least seven pocket-novel editions, each with a *different* set of illustrations.¹⁷

According to the pocket-novel versions of this tale, in the Ming dynasty there was once a brave young leader named Liu Liu who defended the poor and oppressed against the corrupt Ming imperial government. Ming historical documents do briefly record the existence of a Liu Liu, whom they describe merely as an insignifi-

¹⁵ Zhengzhou guo mian, *Pi Lin pi Kong huace*, p. 13.

¹⁶ Knoblock, *Xunzi*, vol. 3, p. 245.

¹⁷ Different editions of *Fiercely Smash the Main Hall* were variously produced by the Shandong office of People’s Publishing (Renmin) in March of 1975, by the Hebei office in May of 1975, by the Liaoning office in October 1975, and by both the Jilin and Shanghai offices in November 1975. Many other editions appeared under slightly different names or in abridged collections of stories about yet other heroes who had struggled against Confucius.

cant bandit. In pocket-novels, however, artists imagined Liu Liu as a handsome, fearless man who wore red robes or the skins of wild animals—that is, visually, he looked very much like Liuxia Zhi. In some versions of the story, Liu Liu is something of a “feminist” in that he appears in each illustration accompanied by mounted women warriors.

In this story, Ming imperial leadership is conflated with the leadership of the Kong (Confucius) family clan, which at the time of Liu Liu was led by a descendant of Confucius called Kong Zhai. Liu Liu leads his forces into Qufu to attack the oppressive Kong clan and free the land of their murderous grip. After fighting through the lines of the Ming/Kong forces and defending themselves from sinister Kong trickery and deceit, Liu Liu and his forces charge into the main hall of the Confucian temple and immediately set about destroying all its images.

Each illustrator conceived the actual “smashing” of the main hall slightly differently, but in each case Liu Liu’s forces attack the structure and its contents with gusto. They set about the images, altars, furniture, and even roof tiles with sledgehammers, axes, ropes, and staves; they stand on altars, spirit tablets, and temple plaques and pollute them with their feet; they burn everything combustible, including the building itself.¹⁸ But as if all this destruction were not enough to sate the reader, the high point of this destruction occurs when Liu Liu himself picks up an impossibly heavy bronze ritual vessel and hurls it at the head of the main image of Confucius, decapitating it. One might logically think that the bronze ritual vessel symbolizes the Confucian tradition here, but it does not. In the Anti-Confucius movement, such bronzes are understood as “Legalist” (and hence “good”) vessels inscribed with *fǎ*—laws, standards, or methods that were perceived to be the righteous alternatives to the arbitrary ritual system that privileged the “Confucian” slave-owning classes. By throwing the bronze vessel at Confucius’s head, Liu Liu

¹⁸ Temple plaques, or *bian’ò*, are large horizontal hanging wooden plaques (often bestowed by emperors) that represent the temple’s cultural authority. Spirit tablets are upright plinths that bear the name of the deceased person whose memory they commemorate; they are the site of offerings to the dead and are analogous to anthropomorphic images used for the same purpose.



(56) 这时，空空的泥胎里忽然发出一声惨叫——“哎哟，别砸啦！俺……俺出来！”只见泥象的断颈口里冒出一张蜡黄的脸，又是汗，又是灰。

Figure 4.

has struck a fatal blow, so to speak, at corruption, greed, and arbitrary privilege.

The story does not end here, however, as the tale takes an even more bizarre turn. Liu Liu hears a voice coming from the area of the main altar, but he sees no one—until, that is, the head of Kong Zhai (the living descendant of Confucius) emerges from the neck opening of the decapitated statue¹⁹ (Figure 4). Kong Zhai has been hiding in the hollow image of his forebear to avoid capture by Liu's troops. But just as in 1966 the body and the statue of Confucius both shared similar fates, so Kong Zhai will share the same fate as the image of his ancestor. Kong Zhai is dragged out of the temple and punished for his evil ways by summary decapitation on the temple steps. In only one version of *Smash the Main Hall* is the decapitation illustrated graphically; in most, it is confined to the text. Finally, in some editions, Liu Liu and his women warriors open the Kong granaries and, in the manner of a Chinese Robin Hood (who ten years

¹⁹ Xin Bin, *Nu dao Dacheng dian*, p. 56.

later would become the subject of pocket-novels of his own), use the temple's ritual vessels to ladle out grain to the starving local population that had been "skinned" by the once-powerful Kongs.

According to the Anti-Confucius Campaign interpretation of history, Liu Liu was neither the first nor last person to attack Qufu and desecrate the temple. The pocket-novel *Stories of Workers Who Struggled Against Confucius Over the Centuries*, for example, contains twelve stories—all very much like Liu Liu's—of people who from Warring States times to the Qing dynasty struggled against the Confucian temple.²⁰ Regardless of whatever these people might have done in reality, in the pocket-novels of the mid 1970s they are portrayed as having had no greater mission in life than destroying Confucian temples and images.

Whereas many of these figures are largely fictive (at least regarding their interest in Confucian temples), some are known from historical sources to have actually attacked images or spirit tablets of Confucius. Such was Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), the self-proclaimed younger brother of Jesus Christ whose Taiping ("Great Peace") forces controlled much of southern China by the 1860s. Hong was well known for destroying spirit tablets of Confucius (and other "idols") in his younger days, and his movement became more iconoclastic as it gained power. Hong's impetus to destroy images might have stemmed in part from Protestant missionary admonitions to eliminate graven images; moreover, he also had a vision of Confucius being dragged before the Christian God and beaten by angels. Hong Xiuquan was resurrected as a model of Confucius-hating iconoclasm in the 1970s—although the Christian aspects of his thought were carefully forgotten.²¹

Pocket-novels and booklets for children focused instead on Hong's youthful attack on the spirit tablet of Confucius in the school where he once taught, and they variously show him slicing it with a sword, smashing it dramatically against the floor, or crushing

²⁰ Liaoning University et al., ed., *Lishishang laodong renmin*).

²¹ For English translations of Taiping documents on Confucius and on images, see Michael, *Taiping Rebellion*, vol. 2, esp. 6-77; for the whipping by angels, see p. 57. See also Jonathan Spence's *God's Chinese Son* and Robert P. Weller's *Resistance, Chaos, and Control*.

it with bronze ritual vessels.²² Hong's smashing of the spirit-tablet of Confucius became the subject of a famous image-within-an-image propaganda poster. In the poster titled "The Main Lesson" (*Zhu ke*, Figure 5), a group of attentive children sit in front of an altar table where a smiling middle-aged peasant points to a painting of a man above the table.²³ A label tells us that the man in the painting is of course Hong Xiuquan, who in *his* painting stands before an altar table and smashes the spirit tablet of Confucius by throwing a heavy bronze vessel on it.

If one looks more closely, however, one notices that the "real" altar table where the children sit and the table that stands behind Hong in the painting appear remarkably similar. And in fact, a label on the real table identifies it as the very table in the painting: it was the table used by Hong Xiuquan himself! Thus, after reading the labels in the image and after noticing the Taiping artifacts and documents in the room, anyone who looks at this poster gradually realizes that it depicts not a regular classroom but the hallowed ground where Hong actually committed his revolutionary iconoclastic acts. The poorly dressed peasant is a docent in this "shrine"; the student's regular teacher is the bookish woman standing behind the children who has brought them on a field trip to learn the "main lesson" directly from "the people" (the peasant) and from Hong Xiuquan himself. (There is no small irony in a painting of an iconoclast becoming itself an icon and an altar within an altar, but presumably that is *not* the lesson a secular viewer is to take from this image.)²⁴

If iconoclasts were heroes, idol worshippers were outcasts. The person who worshipped most fervently at the feet of Confucius was none other than Lin Biao himself—at least, according to the official line of the Anti-Confucius Campaign. Never mind that Lin Biao's

²² One of the most beautifully painted of these is Shi Zhongjin's *Hong Xiuquan*.

²³ Dan Boqin and Chen Wenguang, "Zhu ke" (The main lesson). Collection of the author. For studies of propaganda posters, see Evans and Donald, eds., *Picturing Power*; Landsberger, *Chinese Propaganda Posters*; Taschen, ed., *Chinese Propaganda Posters*.

²⁴ On the use of Cultural Revolution artifacts in religious practice, see Landsberger, "Deification of Mao."



Figure 5.

photograph graced the cover of the 1966 *War Bulletin of the Investigation against Confucius* that reported the desecrations at Qufu. The campaign's visual propaganda intended to demonize both Confucius and Lin Biao.²⁵ At the time of his mysterious death, Lin was

allegedly plotting to overthrow Mao, and the campaign attempted to “prove” that Lin was secretly a disciple of the executioner Confucius. In the thousands of different images that show Lin Biao and Confucius together, artists resorted to every technique possible to elicit in the viewer a sense of hatred and revulsion for both men. The images are endlessly creative, in a most horrific fashion, in their invitation to the viewer to participate in the dehumanization, fragmentation, and execution of both figures.

Who actually created these images? Illustrated pocket-novels published by such government organs as the various offices of the People’s Publishing House (Renmin chubanshe) identified their artists and writers by name on the inside front cover. Many illustrators were well-known professional artists, and many were based in the Shanghai region. Many more images, however, are anonymous and were created by amateurs supplied with little more than a pen and a mimeograph machine. Selected paintings and drawings from local artists were reproduced in illustrated periodicals such as the *Art Report for Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers* (*Gong nong bing huabao*) or the *Art Journal for Workers, Peasants, and Soldiers* (*Gong nong bing huakan*), which were published by government agencies in various provinces. Large factories published their own booklets of anti-Confucius art that was presumably created by their own workers. Certificates of merit were given to the winners of “Criticize Lin Biao and Confucius” contests, and no doubt some of these competitions produced paintings and drawings.²⁶

Many images of Lin Biao and/as Confucius draw their power from a surreal, inchoate paranoia or from visual allusions to social taboos. Few seem intended for children. An entire article could be devoted to untangling the meanings of the interrelatedness of Lin’s and Confucius’s bodies. Some images, for example, show Lin and Confucius as conniving schemers who gleefully collaborate to hatch unidentifiable plots to take over the world; their distorted and sometimes interchangeable bodies have superhuman powers and are

²⁵ On folk demonology and modern political movements, see ter Haar, “China’s Inner Demons.”

²⁶ Collection of the author.

filled with hidden weapons or snakes. Other images are blatantly homicidal and show Lin and Confucius as failed schemers being decapitated by workers with shovels or axes; one cover of a famous booklet simply shows Lin's and Confucius's decapitated heads dripping with blood or tears.²⁷

Some images are mildly homoerotic and would appall someone with the overcharged masculinity of a Liuxia Zhi or a Liu Liu. One drawing, for example shows a naked Lin Biao in one leg of a monstrously large pair of pants; a clothed Confucius is in the other leg²⁸ (Figure 6). Moreover, modern folklore has it that Lin Biao secretly had calligraphic sayings of Confucius hanging, of all places, in his bedroom. As this "fact" was not made widely known until several years after Lin Biao's death—long after his household decorations had most likely been discarded—one suspects it is just another bit of politically salacious homophobia. Some images play at once on taboos against homoeroticism and necrophilia: in one, Lin Biao happily joins a smiling, skeletal Confucius in a coffin/bed.²⁹

Lin Biao himself had been dead for three years by the time the campaign against him and Confucius began. Why struggle against a dead man? Were "Lin" and "Confucius" actually coded signs for something or someone else, such as Zhou Enlai or another of Mao's rivals? For any enemy of Mao? For any "enemy" at all? Did it matter who "Confucius" was, just so that people who saw the images for iconoclasts became inspired to hate the enemy, whoever they might be, and became motivated to capture and punish them? To paraphrase the words of Gu Jiegang, the 1970s had many different kinds of Confuciuses, and they changed according to whatever people thought or said about him. Most people were not aware of that fact, and hence they ultimately didn't understand what the "real face" of Confucius was.

²⁷ See Qingjiangxian, ed., *Pi Lin Pi Kong manhua*, pp. 85 and 89; and the cover of Guangxi People's Publishing, ed., *Lin Biao yu Kong Lao'er*, respectively.

²⁸ Guangxi People's Publishing, ed., *Lin Biao yu Kong Lao'er*, p. 21. The text accompanying the image alludes to Lin's purported duplicity.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.



Figure 6.

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