Introduction

In the later half of the eighteenth century, the British East India Company sought to expand their trade with China, but the British traders soon found that they had little to offer the Chinese other than silver — and opium. Furthermore, the Qing emperors stipulated that the British trade only with a limited number of licensed merchants, did not allow the British to communicate directly with Qing officials, and limited the trade to the adjacent ports of Macao and Guangzhou (Canton). Furthermore, the taxes and fees charged by Qing officials in the port of Guangzhou were not to the liking of the British. The British East India Company continued to come to China because the tea trade was — despite the terms of trade — quite profitable. Nonetheless, the British East India Company was not satisfied with the terms of trade. Accordingly, with the cooperation of the British Crown, Lord Macartney (George Macartney, 1737-1806) was commissioned to go to the court of the Qianlong emperor (1711-1799; r. 1736-1796) as representative from George III of England (1738-1820). Lord Macartney was received with great ceremony by the Qing officials and by the elderly Qianlong emperor himself. Lord Macartney thus was able to communicate King George’s wishes to the Emperor: namely, that Britain desired a convenient offshore island as a permanent trading post, more ports opened to trade, and diplomatic representation in Beijing.

The documents below communicate the Qianlong emperor’s responses to these and related requests.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)


Excerpts from Two Edicts from the Qianlong Emperor,
On The Occasion of Lord Macartney’s Mission To China, September 1793

You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas, nevertheless, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilization, you have dispatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial. Your Envoy has crossed the seas and paid his respects at my Court on the anniversary of my birthday. To show your devotion, you have also sent offerings of your country’s produce.

…

As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court and to be in control of your country’s trade with China, this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained.

…
You, O King from afar, have yearned after the blessings of our civilization, and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy across the sea bearing a memorial. I have already taken note of your respectful spirit of submission, have treated your mission with extreme favour and loaded it with gifts, besides issuing a mandate to you, O King, and honouring you with the bestowal of valuable presents. Thus has my indulgence been manifested.

… Hitherto, all European nations, including your own country’s barbarian merchants, have carried on their trade with Our Celestial Empire at Canton. Such has been the procedure for many years, although Our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce. But as the tea, silk, and porcelain which the Celestial Empire produces are absolute necessities to European nations and to yourselves, we have permitted, as a signal mark of favour, that foreign hongs\(^1\) should be established at Canton, so that your wants might be supplied and your country thus participate in our beneficence. But your Ambassador has now put forward new requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne’s principle to “treat strangers from afar with indulgence,” and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes, the world over. …

Your Ambassador requests facilities for ships of your nation to call at Ningpo, Chusan, Tientsin and other places for purposes of trade. Until now trade with European nations has always been conducted at Macao, where the foreign hongs are established to store and sell foreign merchandise. Your nation has obediently complied with this regulation for years past without raising any objection. In none of the other ports named have hongs been established, so that even if your vessels were to proceed thither, they would have no means of disposing of their cargoes. Furthermore, no interpreters are available, so you would have no means of explaining your wants, and nothing but general inconvenience would result. For the future, as in the past, I decree that your request is refused and that the trade shall be limited to Macao.

**Questions:**

1. Into what Chinese institutional framework is the Qianlong emperor forcing relations with the British? How does this compare with the British assumptions about how relations between different countries should be carried out?
2. Think in terms of the Qianlong emperor’s point of view: Why should the positions laid forth here seem reasonable to him?
3. Can you think of any reasons that the Qianlong emperor could have reasonably known at the time (i.e., not things you know in hindsight) that should have inclined him to accept some or all of the British requests? If so, what might the arguments against those reasons be?

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\(^1\) Trading firms licensed by the Chinese government.
4. Why do you think it is important for diplomats to understand the worldview of the other party? Would it have been possible for the British in 1793 to change their request in order to get more of what they wanted? If so, how? If not, why not?

**Complete Documents**


**Two Edicts from the Qianlong Emperor,**

**On The Occasion of Lord Macartney’s Mission To China, September 1793**

[Edict I]

You, O King, live beyond the confines of many seas, nevertheless, impelled by your humble desire to partake of the benefits of our civilization, you have dispatched a mission respectfully bearing your memorial. Your Envoy has crossed the seas and paid his respects at my Court on the anniversary of my birthday. To show your devotion, you have also sent offerings of your country’s produce.

I have perused your memorial: the earnest terms in which it is couched reveal a respectful humility on your part, which is highly praiseworthy. In consideration of the fact that your Ambassador and his deputy have come a long way with your memorial and tribute, I have shown them high favour and have allowed them to be introduced into my presence. To manifest my indulgence, I have entertained them at a banquet and made them numerous gifts. I have also caused presents to be forwarded to the Naval Commander and six hundred of his officers and men, although they did not come to Peking, so that they too may share in my all-embracing kindness.

As to your entreaty to send one of your nationals to be accredited to my Celestial Court and to be in control of your country’s trade with China, this request is contrary to all usage of my dynasty and cannot possibly be entertained. It is true that Europeans, in the service of the dynasty, have been permitted to live at Peking, but they are compelled to adopt Chinese dress, they are strictly confined to their own precincts and are never permitted to return home. You are presumably familiar with our dynastic regulations. Your proposed Envoy to my Court could not be placed in a position similar to that of European officials in Peking who are forbidden to leave China, nor could he, on the other hand, be allowed liberty of movement and the privilege of corresponding with his own country; so that you would gain nothing by his residence in our midst.

Moreover, Our Celestial dynasty possesses vast territories, and tribute missions from the dependencies are provided for by the Department for Tributary States, which ministers to their wants and exercises strict control over their movements. It would be quite impossible to leave
them to their own devices. Supposing that your Envoy should come to our court, his language and national dress differ from that of our people, and there would be no place in which he might reside. It may be suggested that he might imitate the Europeans permanently resident in Peking and adopt the dress and customs of China, but, it has never been our dynasty’s wish to force people to do things unseemly and inconvenient. Besides, supposing I sent an Ambassador to reside in your country, how could you possibly make for him the requisite arrangements? Europe consists of many other nations besides your own: if each and all demanded to be represented at our Court, how could we possibly consent? The thing is utterly impracticable. How can our dynasty alter its whole procedure and regulations, established for more than a century, in order to meet your individual views? If it be said that your object is to exercise control over your country’s trade, your nationals have had full liberty to trade at Canton for many a year, and have received the greatest consideration at our hands. Missions have been sent by Portugal and Italy, preferring similar requests. The Throne appreciated their sincerity and loaded them with favours, besides authorizing measures to facilitate their trade with China. You are no doubt aware that, when my Canton merchant, Wu Chaop’ing, was in debt to the foreign ships, I made the Viceroy advance the monies due, out of the provincial treasury, and ordered him to punish the culprit severely. Why then should foreign nations advance this utterly unreasonable request to be represented at my Court? Peking is nearly 10,000 li from Canton, and at such a distance what possible control could any British representative exercise?

If you assert that your reverence for Our Celestial dynasty fills you with a desire to acquire our civilization, our ceremonies and code of laws differ so completely from your own that, even if your Envoy were able to acquire the rudiments of our civilization, you could not possibly transplant our manners and customs to your alien soil. Therefore, however adept the Envoy might become, nothing would be gained thereby.

Surveying the wide world, I have but one aim in view, namely, to maintain a perfect governance and to fulfill the duties of the State; strange and costly objects do not interest me. If I have commanded the tribute offerings sent by you, O King, are to be accepted, this was solely in consideration for the spirit which prompted you to dispatch them from afar. Our dynasty’s majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country’s manufactures. This then is my answer to your request to appoint a representative at my Court, a request contrary to our dynastic usage, which would only result in inconvenience to yourself. I have expounded my wishes in detail and have commanded your tribute Envoys to leave in peace on their homeward journey. It behoves you, O King, to respect my sentiments and to display even greater devotion and loyalty in the future, so that, by perpetual submission to our Throne, you may secure peace and prosperity for your country hereafter. Besides making gifts (of which I enclose a list) to each member of your Mission, I confer upon you, O King, valuable presents in excess of the number usually bestowed on such occasions, including silks and curios—a list of which is likewise enclosed. Do you reverently receive them and take note of my tender goodwill towards you! A special mandate.
[Edict II]

You, O King from afar, have yearned after the blessings of our civilization, and in your eagerness to come into touch with our converting influence have sent an Embassy across the sea bearing a memorial. I have already taken note of your respectful spirit of submission, have treated your mission with extreme favour and loaded it with gifts, besides issuing a mandate to you, O King, and honouring you with the bestowal of valuable presents. Thus has my indulgence been manifested.

Yesterday your Ambassador petitioned my Ministers to memorialize me regarding your trade with China, but his proposal is not consistent with our dynastic usage and cannot be entertained. Hitherto, all European nations, including your own country’s barbarian merchants, have carried on their trade with Our Celestial Empire at Canton. Such has been the procedure for many years, although Our Celestial Empire possesses all things in prolific abundance and lacks no product within its borders. There was therefore no need to import the manufactures of outside barbarians in exchange for our own produce. But as the tea, silk, and porcelain which the Celestial Empire produces are absolute necessities to European nations and to yourselves, we have permitted, as a signal mark of favour, that foreign hongs\(^2\) should be established at Canton, so that your wants might be supplied and your country thus participate in our beneficence. But your Ambassador has now put forward new requests which completely fail to recognize the Throne’s principle to “treat strangers from afar with indulgence,” and to exercise a pacifying control over barbarian tribes, the world over. Moreover, our dynasty, swaying the myriad races of the globe, extends the same benevolence towards all. Your England is not the only nation trading at Canton. If other nations, following your bad example, wrongfully importune my ear with further impossible requests, how will it be possible for me to treat them with easy indulgence? Nevertheless, I do not forget the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world by intervening wastes of sea, nor do I overlook your inexcusable ignorance of the usages of Our Celestial Empire. I have consequently commanded my Ministers to enlighten your Ambassador on the subject, and have ordered the departure of the mission. But I have doubts that, after your Envoy’s return he may fail to acquaint you with my view in detail or that he may be lacking in lucidity, so that I shall now proceed to take your requests one by one and to issue my mandate on each question separately. In this way you will, I trust, comprehend my meaning.

1. Your Ambassador requests facilities for ships of your nation to call at Ningpo, Chusan, Tientsin and other places for purposes of trade. Until now trade with European nations has always been conducted at Macao, where the foreign hongs are established to store and sell foreign merchandise. Your nation has obediently complied with this regulation for years past without raising any objection. In none of the other ports named have hongs

\(^2\) Trading firms licensed by the Chinese government.
been established, so that even if your vessels were to proceed thither, they would have no means of disposing of their cargoes. Furthermore, no interpreters are available, so you would have no means of explaining your wants, and nothing but general inconvenience would result. For the future, as in the past, I decree that your request is refused and that the trade shall be limited to Macao.

2. The request that your merchants may establish a repository in the capital of my Empire for the storing and sale of your produce is even more impracticable than the last. My capital is the hub and centre about which all quarters of the globe revolve. Its ordinances are most august and its laws are strict in the extreme. The subjects of our dependencies have never been allowed to open places of business in Peking. Foreign trade has hitherto been conducted at Macao, because it is conveniently near the sea, and therefore an important gathering place for the ships of all nations sailing to and from. If warehouses were established in Peking, the remoteness of your country lying far to the northwest of my capital, would render transport extremely difficult. Possessing facilities at Macao, you now ask for further privileges at Peking, although our dynasty observes the severest restrictions respecting the admission of foreigners within its boundaries, and has never permitted the subjects of dependencies to cross the Empire’s barriers and settle at will amongst the Chinese people. This request is also refused.

3. Regarding your nation’s worship of the Lord of Heaven, it is the same religion as that of other European nations. Ever since the beginning of history, sage Emperors and wise rulers have bestowed on China a moral system and inculcated a code, which from time immemorial has been religiously observed by the myriads of my subjects. There has been no hankering after heterodox doctrines. Even the European (missionary) officials in my capital are forbidden to hold intercourse with Chinese subjects; they are restricted within the limits of their appointed residences, and may not go about propagating their religion. The distinction between Chinese and barbarian is most strict, and your Ambassador’s request that barbarians shall be given full liberty to disseminate their religion is utterly unreasonable.

It may be, O King, that the above proposals have been wantonly made by your Ambassador on his own responsibility, or perhaps you yourself are ignorant of our dynastic regulations and had no intention of transgressing them when you expressed these wild ideas and hopes. I have ever shown the greatest condescension to the tribute missions of all States which sincerely yearn after the blessings of civilization, so as to manifest my kindly indulgence. I have even gone out of my way to grant any requests which were in any way consistent with Chinese usage. Above all, upon you, who live in a remote and inaccessible region, far across the spaces of ocean, but who have shown your submissive loyalty by sending this tribute mission, I have heaped benefits far in excess of those accorded to other nations. But the demands presented by your Embassy are not only a contradiction of dynastic tradition, but would be utterly unproductive of good result to yourself, besides being quite impracticable. I have accordingly stated the facts to you in detail, and it is your bounden duty reverently to appreciate my feelings and to obey
these instructions henceforward for all time, so that you may enjoy the blessings of perpetual peace. If, after the receipt of this explicit decree, you lightly give ear to the representations of your subordinates and allow your barbarian merchants to proceed to Chekiang and Tientsin, with the object of landing and trading there, the ordinances of my Celestial Empire are strict in the extreme, and the local officials, both civil and military, are bound reverently to obey the law of the land. Should your vessels touch shore, your merchants will assuredly never be permitted to land or to reside there, but will be subject to instant expulsion. In that event your barbarian merchants will have had a long journey for nothing. Do not say that you were not warned in due time! Tremblingly obey and show no negligence! A special mandate!
A MADMAN'S DIARY

Two brothers, whose names I need not mention here, were both good friends of mine in high school; but after a separation of many years we gradually lost touch. Some time ago I happened to hear that one of them was seriously ill, and since I was going back to my old home I broke my journey to call on them, I saw only one, however, who told me that the invalid was his younger brother.

"I appreciate your coming such a long way to see us," he said, "but my brother recovered some time ago and has gone elsewhere to take up an official post." Then, laughing, he produced two volumes of his brother's diary, saying that from these the nature of his past illness could be seen, and that there was no harm in showing them to an old friend. I took the diary away, read it through, and found that he had suffered from a form of persecution complex. The writing was most confused and incoherent, and he had made many wild statements; moreover he had omitted to give any dates, so that only by the colour of the ink and the differences in the writing could one tell that it was not written at one time. Certain sections, however, were not altogether disconnected, and I have copied out a part to serve as a subject for medical research. I have not altered a single illogicality in the diary and have changed only the names, even though the people referred to are all country folk, unknown to the world and of no consequence. As for the title, it was chosen by the diarist himself after his recovery, and I did not change it.

Tonight the moon is very bright.
I have not seen it for over thirty years, so today when I saw it I felt in unusually high spirits. I begin to realize that during the past thirty-odd years I have been in the dark; but now I must be extremely careful. Otherwise why should that dog at the Chiao house have looked at me twice?
I have reason for my fear.

II

Tonight there is no moon at all, I know that this bodes ill. This morning when I went out cautiously, Mr. Chiao had a strange look in his eyes, as if he were afraid of me, as if he wanted to murder me. There were seven or eight others, who discussed me in a whisper. And they were afraid of my seeing them. All the people I passed were like that. The fiercest among them grinned at me; whereupon I shivered from head to foot, knowing that their preparations were complete.

I was not afraid, however, but continued on my way. A group of children in front were also discussing me, and the look in their eyes was just like that in Mr. Chiao’s while their faces too were ghastly pale. I wondered what grudge these children could have against me to make them behave like this. I could not help calling out: “Tell me!” But then they ran away.

I wonder what grudge Mr. Chiao can have against me, what grudge the people on the road can have against me. I can think of nothing except that twenty years ago I trod on Mr. Ku Chiu’s* account sheets for many years past, and Mr. Ku was very displeased. Although Mr. Chiao does not know him, he must have heard talk of this and decided to avenge him, so he is conspiring against me with the people on the road. But then what of the children? At that time they were not yet born, so why should they eye me so strangely today, as

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*A Ku Chiu means “Ancient Times.” Lu Hsun had in mind the long history of feudal oppression in China.
I see that woman's "bite several mouthfuls out of you," the laughter of those green-faced, long-toothed people and the tenant's story the other day are obviously secret signs. I realize all the poison in their speech, all the daggers in their laughter. Their teeth are white and glistening: they are all man-eaters.

It seems to me, although I am not a bad man, ever since I trod on Mr. Ku's accounts it has been touch-and-go. They seem to have secrets which I cannot guess, and once they are angry they will call anyone a bad character. I remember when my elder brother taught me to write compositions, no matter how good a man was, if I produced arguments to the contrary he would mark that passage to show his approval; while if I excused evil-doers, he would say: "Good for you, that shows originality." How can I possibly guess their secret thoughts — especially when they are ready to eat people?

Everything requires careful consideration if one is to understand it. In ancient times, as I recollect, people often ate human beings, but I am rather hazy about it. I tried to look this up, but my history has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: "Virtue and Morality." Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words — "Eat people."

All these words written in the book, all the words spoken by our tenant, gaze at me strangely with an enigmatic smile.

I too am a man, and they want to eat me!

IV

In the morning I sat quietly for some time. Old Chen brought lunch in: one bowl of vegetables, one bowl of steamed fish. The eyes of the fish were white and hard, and its mouth was open just like those people who want to eat human beings. After a few mouthfuls I could not tell whether the slippery morsels were fish or human flesh, so I brought it all up.

I said, "Old Chen, tell my brother that I feel quite suffocated, and want to have a stroll in the garden." Old Chen said nothing but went out, and presently he came back and opened the gate.

I did not move, but watched to see how they would treat me, feeling certain that they would not let me go. Sure enough! My elder brother came slowly out, leading an old man. There was a murderous gleam in his eyes, and fearing that I would see it he lowered his head, stealing glances at me from the side of his spectacles.

"You seem to be very well today," said my brother.

"Yes," said I.

"I have invited Mr. Ho here today," said my brother, "to examine you."

"All right," said I. Actually I knew quite well that this old man was the executioner in disguise! He simply used the pretext of feeling my pulse to see how fat I was; for by so doing he would receive a share of my flesh. Still I was not afraid. Although I do not eat men, my courage is greater than theirs. I held out my two fists, to see what he would do. The old man sat down, closed his eyes, fumbled for some time and remained still for some time; then he opened his shifty eyes and said, "Don't let your imagination run away with you. Rest quietly for a few days, and you will be all right."

Don't let your imagination run away with you! Rest quietly for a few days! When I have grown fat, naturally they will have more to eat; but what good will it do me, or how can it be "all right"? All these people wanting to eat human flesh and at the same time stealthily trying to keep up appearances, not daring to act promptly, really made me nearly die of laughter. I could not help roaring with laughter, I was so amused. I knew that in this laughter were courage and integrity. Both the old man and my brother turned pale, awed by my courage and integrity.

But just because I am brave they are the more eager to eat me, in order to acquire some of my courage. The old man went out of the gate, but before he had gone far he
said to my brother in a low voice, "To be eaten at once!" And my brother nodded. So you are in it too! This stupendous discovery, although it came as a shock, is yet no more than I had expected: the accomplice in eating me is my elder brother!

The eater of human flesh is my elder brother!
I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!
I myself will be eaten by others, but none the less I am the younger brother of an eater of human flesh!

V

These few days I have been thinking again: suppose that old man were not an executioner in disguise, but a real doctor; he would be none the less an eater of human flesh. In that book on herbs, written by his predecessor Li Shih-chen,* it is clearly stated that men's flesh can be boiled and eaten; so can he still say that he does not eat men?

As for my elder brother, I have also good reason to suspect him. When he was teaching me, he said with his own lips, "People exchange their sons to eat." And once in discussing a bad man, he said that not only did he deserve to be killed, he should "have his flesh eaten and his hide slept on."** I was still young then, and my heart beat faster for some time, he was not at all surprised by the story that our tenant from Wolf Cub Village told us the other day about eating a man's heart and liver, but kept nodding his head. He is evidently just as cruel as before. Since it is possible to "exchange sons to eat," then anything can be exchanged, anyone can be eaten. In the past I simply listened to his explanations, and let it go at that; now I know that when he explained it to me, not only was there human fat at the corner of his lips, but his whole heart was set on eating men.

*A famous pharmacologist (1718-1793), author of Ben-cao-gang-mu, the Materia Medica.

**These are quotations from the old classic Zuo Zhuan.

A MADMAN'S DIARY

VI

Pitch dark. I don't know whether it is day or night. The Chao family dog has started barking again.

The fierceness of a lion, the timidity of a rabbit, the craftiness of a fox...

VII

I know their way; they are not willing to kill anyone outright, nor do they dare, for fear of the consequences. Instead they have banded together and set traps everywhere, to force me to kill myself. The behavior of the men and women in the street a few days ago, and my elder brother's attitude these last few days, make it quite obvious. What they like best is for a man to take off his belt, and hang himself from a beam; for then they can enjoy their heart's desire without being blamed for murder. Naturally that sets them roaring with delighted laughter. On the other hand, if a man is frightened or worried to death, although that makes him rather thin, they still nod in approval.

They only eat dead flesh! I remember reading somewhere of a hideous beast, with an ugly look in its eye, called "hyena" which often eats dead flesh. Even the largest bones it grinds into fragments and swallows: the mere thought of this is enough to terrify one. Hyenas are related to wolves, and wolves belong to the canine species. The other day the dog in the Chao house looked at me several times; obviously it is in the plot too and has become their accomplice. The old man's eyes were cast down, but that did not deceive me!

The most deplorable is my elder brother. He is also a man, so why is he not afraid, why is he plotting with others to eat me? Is it that when one is used to it he no longer thinks it a crime? Or is it that he has hardened his heart to do something he knows is wrong?

In cursing man-eaters, I shall start with my brother, and in dissuading man-eaters, I shall start with him too.
Actually, such arguments should have convinced them long ago. . . .

Suddenly someone came in. He was only about twenty years old and I did not see his features very clearly. His face was wreathed in smiles, but when he nodded to me his smile did not seem genuine. I asked him: "Is it right to eat human beings?"

Still smiling, he replied, "When there is no famine how can one eat human beings?"

I realized at once, he was one of them; but still I summoned up courage to repeat my question:

"Is it right?"

"What makes you ask such a thing? You really are . . . fond of a joke. . . . It is very fine today."

"It is fine, and the moon is very bright. But I want to ask you: Is it right?"

He looked disconcerted, and muttered: "No. . . ."

"No? Then why do they still do it?"

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? They are eating men now in Wolf Cub Village, and you can see it written all over the books, in fresh red ink."

His expression changed, and he grew ghastly pale. "It may be so," he said, staring at me. "It has always been like that. . . ."

"Is it right because it has always been like that?"

"I refuse to discuss these things with you. Anyway, you shouldn't talk about it. Whoever talks about it is in the wrong!"

I leaped up and opened my eyes wide, but the man had vanished. I was soaked with perspiration. He was much younger than my elder brother, but even so he was in it. He must have been taught by his parents. And I am afraid he has already taught his son: that is why even the children look at me so fiercely.

Wanting to eat men, at the same time afraid of being eaten themselves, they all look at each other with the deepest suspicion. . . .

How comfortable life would be for them if they could rid themselves of such obsessions and go to work, walk, eat and sleep at ease. They have only this one step to take. Yet fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers, friends, teachers and students, sworn enemies and even strangers, have all joined in this conspiracy, discouraging and preventing each other from taking this step.

Early this morning I went to look for my elder brother. He was standing outside the hall door looking at the sky, when I walked up behind him, stood between him and the door, and with exceptional poise and politeness said to him:

"Brother, I have something to say to you."

"Well, what is it?" he asked, quickly turning towards me and nodding.

"It is very little, but I find it difficult to say. Brother, probably all primitive people ate a little human flesh to begin with. Later, because their outlook changed, some of them stopped, and because they tried to be good they changed into men, changed into real men. But some are still eating — just like reptiles. Some have changed into fish, birds, monkeys and finally men; but some do not try to be good and remain reptiles still. When those who eat men compare themselves with those who do not, how ashamed they must be. Probably much more ashamed than the reptiles are before monkeys.

"In ancient times Yi Ya boiled his son for Chieh and Chou to eat; that is the old story." But actually since the creation

* According to ancient records, Yi Ya cooked his son and presented him to Duke Haun of Chi who reigned from 689 to 643 B.C. Chieh and Chou were tyrants of an earlier age. The madman has made a mistake here.
of heaven and earth by Pan Ku men have been eating each other, from the time of Yi Ya’s son to the time of Hsu Hsi-lin,* and from the time of Hsu Hai-lin down to the man caught in Wolf Cub Village. Last year they executed a criminal in the city, and a consumptive soaked a piece of bread in his blood and sucked it.

“They want to eat me, and of course you can do nothing about it single-handed; but why should you join them? As man-eaters they are capable of anything. If they eat me, they can eat you as well; members of the same group can still eat each other. But if you will just change your ways immediately, then everyone will have peace. Although this has been going on since time immemorial, today we could make a special effort to be good, and say this is not to be done! I’m sure you can say so, brother. The other day when the tenant wanted the rent reduced, you said it couldn’t be done.”

At first he only smiled cynically, then a murderous gleam came into his eyes, and when I spoke of their secret his face turned pale. Outside the gate stood a group of people, including Mr. Chao and his dog, all craning their necks to peer in. I could not see all their faces, for they seemed to be masked in cloths; some of them looked pale and ghastly still, concealing their laughter. I knew they were one band, all eaters of human flesh. But I also knew that they did not all think alike by any means. Some of them thought that since it had always been so, men should be eaten. Some of them knew that they should not eat men, but still wanted to; and they were afraid people might discover their secret; thus when they heard me they became angry, but they still smiled their cynical, tight-lipped smile.

Suddenly my brother looked furious, and shouted in a loud voice:

“Get out of here, all of you! What is the point of looking at a madman?”

* A revolutionary at the end of the Ching dynasty (1644-1912), Hsu Hai-lin was executed in 1907 for assassinating a Ching official. His heart and liver were eaten.

A MADMAN'S DIARY

Then I realized part of their cunning. They would never be willing to change their stand, and their plans were all laid; they had stigmatized me as a madman. In future when I was eaten, not only would there be no trouble, but people would probably be grateful to them. When our tenant spoke of the villagers eating a bad character, it was exactly the same device. This is their old trick.

Old Chen came in too, in a great temper, but they could not stop my mouth. I had to speak to those people:

“You should change, change from the bottom of your hearts!” I said. “You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world.

“If you don’t change, you may all be eaten by each other. Although so many are born, they will be wiped out by the real men, just like wolves killed by hunters. Just like reptiles!”

Old Chen drove everybody away. My brother had disappeared. Old Chen advised me to go back to my room. The room was pitch dark. The beams and rafters shook above my head. After shaking for some time they grew larger. They piled on top of me.

The weight was so great, I could not move. They meant that I should die. I knew that the weight was false, so I struggled out, covered in perspiration. But I had to say:

“You should change at once, change from the bottom of your hearts! You must know that in future there will be no place for man-eaters in the world....”

XI

The sun does not shine, the door is not opened, every day two meals.
I took up my chopsticks, then thought of my elder brother; I know now how my little sister died: it was all through him. My sister was only five at the time. I can still remember how lovable and pathetic she looked. Mother cried and cried, but he begged her not to cry, probably because he had eaten her himself, and so her crying made him feel ashamed. If he had any sense of shame....
My sister was eaten by my brother, but I don't know whether mother realized it or not.
I think mother must have known, but when she cried she did not say so outright, probably because she thought it proper too. I remember when I was four or five years old, sitting in the cool of the hall, my brother told me that if a man's parents were ill, he should cut off a piece of his flesh and boil it for them if he wanted to be considered a good son; and mother did not contradict him. If one piece could be eaten, obviously so could the whole. And yet just to think of the mourning then still makes my heart bleed; that is the extraordinary thing about it!

XII

I can't bear to think of it.
I have only just realized that I have been living all these years in a place where for four thousand years they have been eating human flesh. My brother had just taken over the charge of the house when our sister died, and he may well have used her flesh in our rice and dishes, making us eat it unwittingly.
It is possible that I ate several pieces of my sister's flesh unwittingly, and now it is my turn...

How can a man like myself, after four thousand years of man-eating history — even though I knew nothing about it at first — ever hope to face real men?

XIII

Perhaps there are still children who have not eaten men?
Save the children...

April 1918
T H E S I X T E E N P O I N T S : G U I D E L I N E S F O R
T H E G R E A T P R O L E T A R I A N C U L T U R A L R E V O L U T I O N ( 1 9 6 6 )

Introduction

Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong (1893-1976) had lost a substantial degree of power in the aftermath of the disastrous Great Leap Forward (1959-1961). As a result, the Communist Party pursued a number of social and economic policies, of which Mao did not approve. In 1966, the Chairman launched the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” as a way of attacking his enemies within the Party leadership, most notably President Liu Shaoqi (1898-1969) and Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997).

The document below is an early statement of Mao’s goals as articulated in a decision of the Party Central Committee.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

The Sixteen Points:
Guidelines for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966)

... 

Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, and customs, and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds, and endeavor to stage a comeback. The proletariat must do just the opposite: it must meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society. At present our objective is to struggle against and crush those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic “authorities” and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and transform education, literature, and art and all other parts of the superstructure that do not correspond to the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system.

The masses of the workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionary intellectuals, and revolutionary cadres form the main force in this Great Cultural Revolution. Large numbers of revolutionary young people, previously unknown, have become courageous and daring pathbreakers. ...
Questions:

1. Mao Zedong and the Communist Party’s Central Committee do not state the names of those “persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road.” If you were a Chinese person reading this in 1966, and if you yourself were not clear on exactly which individuals were the targets, what would you do?

2. What steps would you take to carry out this Central Committee policy in your own local community or your own high school, college, or university?

3. If you identified yourself as a “revolutionary intellectual,” whom would you attack and overthrow?

The Sixteen Points:
Guidelines for the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966)

1. A New Stage in the Socialist Revolution

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution now unfolding is a great revolution that touches people to their very soul and constitutes a new stage in the development of the socialist revolution in our country, a deeper and more extensive stage. …

Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture and customs, and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds, and endeavor to stage a comeback. The proletariat must do just the opposite: it must meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs, and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society. At present our objective is to struggle against and crush those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic “authorities” and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes, and transform education, literature, and art and all other parts of the superstructure that do not correspond to the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system.

2. The Main Current and the Zigzags

The masses of the workers, peasants, soldiers, revolutionary intellectuals, and revolutionary cadres form the main force in this Great Cultural Revolution. Large numbers of revolutionary young people, previously unknown, have become courageous and daring pathbreakers. They are vigorous in action and intelligent. Through the media of big character
posters and great debates, they argue things out, expose and criticize thoroughly, and launch resolute attacks on the open and hidden representatives of the bourgeoisie. …

Since the Cultural Revolution is a revolution, it inevitably meets with resistance. This resistance comes chiefly from those in authority who have wormed their way into the party and are taking the capitalist road. It also comes from the old force of habit in society. At present, this resistance is still fairly strong and stubborn. However, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is, after all, an irresistible general trend. There is abundant evidence that such resistance will crumble fast once the masses become fully aroused. …

9. Cultural Revolutionary Groups, Committees, and Congresses

Many new things have begun to emerge in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The cultural revolutionary groups, committees, and other organizational forms created by the masses in many schools and units are something new and of great historic importance.

These cultural revolutionary groups, committees, and congresses are excellent new forms of organization whereby under the leadership of the Communist Party the masses are educating themselves. They are an excellent bridge to keep our party in close contact with the masses. They are organs of power of the Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

The cultural revolutionary groups, committees, and congresses should not be temporary organizations but permanent, standing mass organizations. They are suitable not only for colleges, schools, government, and other organizations but generally also for factories, mines, and other enterprises, urban districts, and villages.

It is necessary to institute a system of general elections, like that of the Paris Commune, for electing members to the cultural revolutionary groups and committees and delegates to the cultural revolutionary congress.
Let's do away with student essays

June 15, 2007

As a reasonably competent writer in school, I participated in quite a few essay competitions. Before each event I had first to brainwash myself and check to see what slogans were in fashion at the time. In the days when there was great concern about the "Seven Improper Behaviors," for instance, you would need to cook up a story related to this theme. If I told how somebody was about to spit and how I dashed over, stretched out a hand, and caught the gob of phlegm just before it hit the ground, and threw in some praise of our great country for good measure, I'd be sure of getting a high mark. Unfortunately, I only ever won second prize, because there was always somebody who succeeded in singing China's praises even more effusively than I did. Even today I still feel like saying to those first-prize winners, "I really scraped the bottom of the barrel with my essays—how did you manage to be even more shameless?"

In recent years a number of no-hopers in the university entrance examination have submitted essays that were awarded zero points. I've had a look at these essays, and what they all have in
common is this—they truthfully express the author’s opinion. But our educational system does not permit the truthful expression of opinion—what it tries to do is discourage you from having your own views, and then, using teaching materials that are decades old, tell you that this is right and that is wrong. If you don’t agree, it’s not as though you’re taking your life in your hands—all that will happen is that you will be expelled or will get no points. Or maybe you will pick up a few—as long as you make an attempt to answer, the grader is not supposed to give you a zero. But the only real difference between the successful essay and the failed one is that you think this way and I think that: What’s the logic in you getting full points and my getting none? Even if I haven’t bought into the master narrative, I should at least qualify for a consolation prize, no? And for an essay—something that lacks an objective grading criterion—to be evaluated on the basis of the appraiser’s personal tastes and incorporated into a university entrance exam that professes to be fair: This in itself is unfair.

Fortunately, though students care about the marks they get for their essays, they have little interest in the essay assignments. It’s things written off as junk culture that enable them to salvage a few shreds of imagination and creativity.

It’s fair to say that many people’s experience of telling lies starts with writing essays, just as their limited experience of telling the truth starts with writing love letters. From an early age, model essays and essay-writing textbooks convey to students that the function of an essay is to eulogize and extol—to expose and censure, on the other hand, is considered negative and downbeat, dark and bleak. Some people may like to use Lu Xun as an example of how to get a point across,* but the role he plays in the school textbooks is eulogy and extolment too, with him as the lead vocalist. Praise and appreciation are good things, of course—who doesn’t like praise.

and appreciation? The problem is that the subjects we can praise and appreciate are dictated to us. You’re not allowed to eulogize a girl’s butt, for instance, or extol a hooker’s technique. All kinds of restrictions force our essays into a straightjacket, until in the end everything we write is fake.

Naturally, loyalists of the old guard may well say that no matter the quality of the essay, this kind of writing does develop a student’s ability to deploy language and create sentences, just as mathematics, though it has limited application after a certain point, fosters skill in logical analysis. Such people exemplify exactly the kind of blinkered and defective thinking that Chinese education fosters. They are simply underestimating their own intelligence. The ability to write develops hand in hand with skill in logical analysis. After you learn to read and accumulate some experience in reading, you are naturally capable of writing essays—if you can talk, you can write. Of course, some people can write better than others, and there’s not much one can do about that. At the same time, the ability to analyze things logically is not something one can acquire or enhance just through working on a few math problems—that’s just self-deception. Many scam artists capable of meticulous thought and impeccable logic have never had much education, whereas most people taken in by a scam will happily tell you the area of a shape in trigonometry. Our education system likes to give the impression that people have no natural talent and get everything from education. That way, after you leave school, you will naturally accept that human beings have no inherent rights—that rights are something only conferred by the government.

Education in other countries does not fixate on this same specialized concept of “writing essays,” but I don’t remember hearing that people in those countries have trouble putting words together to form a coherent piece of writing. And conversely, in our case, although people here have been learning to write essays for many decades now, fewer and fewer seem to be capable of doing so.

Reading a lot is much more beneficial than writing a lot of

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* Work by Lu Xun (1881–1936), an influential left-wing writer, has been regularly included in the Chinese school curriculum since 1949.
essays—which, in reality, just means studying a lot of model essays so that you can imitate the topic assigned. Essay assignments not only weaken your ability to write, but they subconsciously tell you that saying things you don’t mean is normal and necessary, that it’s the very secret of survival. That is the sole value to students of writing essays—writing essays alerts them early on to the reality that speaking the truth will only lead to trouble. But essays also have the effect of destroying their interest in literature.

Someone is bound to say that I am simply being contradictory, that I’m not capable of constructive suggestions—if everyone stops writing essays, then what on earth will they write? That’s a typical example of the impoverished analytical ability you’re left with after our education is through with you. It’s simple—just don’t write! Writing essays essentially is a hobby, a love, like gardening or fishing—it’s not something you can force people to do. Naturally, there will be some who like it and some who don’t. So let the ones who like to write essays write real essays, and let the ones who don’t like to write essays write love letters, and let the ones whose love letters go unanswered write a journal, and let the ones who like to write fake, pretentious, empty-headed essays serve as our leaders—that way everyone will be happy.

Insults to China

August 11, 2007

It doesn’t take much, it seems, to insult our nation. Often on our news broadcasts we see reports that in some country or other a shop sign or T-shirt or literary or art work is suspected of insulting China. There was a story the other day about a pet shop somewhere that incorporated a parody of Tiananmen Square in its signage and was forced to take the sign down after protests by our foreign ministry.

That certainly counts as high-level attention. If I were to poke fun at the White House or the Kremlin at a shop of mine, I’m sure I could live my whole life through and still be waiting for the United States or Russia to complain.

We Chinese people have very thin skins. We respond very poorly to any kind of unfavorable opinion, whether in the form of jokes, satire, or criticism. To us, this all counts as insults to China. In movies, we are always encountering problems of this kind. Mission: Impossible, I remember, was suspected of insulting China—on account of a shot of laundry drying on a balcony, apparently. For this to have become an issue gives you the feeling that hanging clothes out to dry is something that we Chinese never do—they’ve taken
some custom common in India and accused us of it! Oh, dear—now I’ve insulted India.

Now it’s Pirates of the Caribbean and Mission: Impossible 3 that have offended us. Every time there’s a movie that is said to insult China, I make a point of watching the uncensored version, and more often than not I come away completely baffled. For evidence of insults to China, what I see instead are a lot of Americans making complete fools of themselves and foreigners being humiliated by the power of Chinese kung fu. And from the big movies these days, more and more people are aware that this is a nation that can’t afford to make jokes. Apart from enthusing about the looks of the Oriental Pearl, it’s best not to say anything else. It’s like with a little kid—if you crack a joke at their expense, they will make such a fuss that in the end nobody dares say anything funny. This is a completely different matter from respecting someone.

Maybe the problem is that I’m just not sensitive enough. Sensitivity and frailty are two major traits that we Chinese are expected to have, as a way of distinguishing ourselves from other nationalities. In this area I suffer from a real deficit: When someone tells me that there are various things they don’t like about my native home, I seem never to get angry. All that happens is that I discuss the problems they raise one by one, identifying those that are genuinely widespread, those that are special cases, and those that are common throughout the world, and while I’m at it I mention a few other issues they have overlooked.

But when I mention problems in someone else’s hometown, they often respond as though I have committed an act of gross indecency in front of their mother. If I ask, for instance, why the people are so given to cursing others, they will answer with a torrent of abuse. I have never been able to understand this: So often, if we are born in a place, if we live in a place, it’s not because we are in love with it, but because we had no choice—we weren’t smart enough to avoid being born there. If you’re not actually in love with it, the only explanation for your extreme response has got to be that you’re just too wound-up, as though disrespect to your homeland is a personal insult. Even though these people privately have a whole heap of grievances against their homeland, their employer, and their school, they just can’t endure for an outsider to scold them. “Even though I have no control over my own domain,” they think, “if you criticize it then you’re cursing me.” When you see how they go for the jugular, you realize you have somehow damaged their faith in themselves.

But if I were to say to them, “Actually, I’m God. Sorry I made those unkind remarks about that homeland you love so much. I’m so touched by your determination to defend your country’s honor at the cost of your life that I’m going to reward you with a chance to be reborn,” I’m pretty sure that eighty percent of them would be off like a shot to be reborn in America, while the others would all be frantically trying to decide which country in Europe would make the best destination.

What’s more, this kind of logic is highly elastic. So, if one day Europeans say something bad about Asians, don’t expect the Japanese and the Koreans to be all up in arms—it will be we Chinese who react most intensely. And if one day extraterrestrials were to announce that we earthlings are fools, again it will be we Chinese who take this most to heart. If we encounter that kind of provocation, there’s no doubt that we will organize—in best Chinese style—several hundred thousand people to assemble in the grasslands and form four gigantic words: “We are not idiots!” We’ll do that in part, of course, to show those aliens what we’re made of, but more importantly because this will give us a chance to get into the Guinness Book of World Records.

The reason why we Chinese so often feel insulted is that we have
so little self-respect. We like to think of ourselves as intimidating, sure enough: "People better not offend us! Our foreign ministry is going to take action if any little foreign shop takes liberties with our cultural icons! Just one impertinent sign is going to bring down the whole weight of Chinese disapproval on its head! Our film bureau can prohibit the import of any movies that we don't like!"

But do you really think this is the way to win people's respect? Actually, they're shaking their heads over how infantile we are. And we have no firm position on things, anyway. If a country compliments us, for example, then we're over the moon: "We're brothers, you and I! We just adore your splendid nation!" But if you indulge in any of that China-insulting, then we'd aim all our missiles at you if we could. And it doesn't take much for us to feel insulted—anything that's not praise sounds to us like disrespect.

Shut the door and have a look at our domestic discussion forums: When people talk about the Japanese or Koreans or Indians, you see lots of derogatory epithets, and in our chat rooms, shop signs, and news coverage, there's plenty of content that could be seen as insulting to Korea or America or Japan or India, and we regard the deliverers of these insults as patriotic heroes (of a minor sort, admittedly), and there's nothing to stop them carrying on like this, since we've never seen any sign of other countries' Internet users or media or foreign ministries registering protests and taking punitive action. So, our citizens have a long way to go before they qualify to be citizens of a great country—our citizens, in fact, still don't amount to being a "people" in the full sense of the word. Don't try to comfort yourself with the thought that these attitudes reflect cohesiveness and unity when dealing with the outside world. If the Americans were to say, "Chinese people are bastards," I have no doubt that we would be all ready to form a huge army to punish our assailants. But all the Americans would need to do is arrange for a few undercover agents to spread dissension in our ranks, saying things like "Shanghai people are bastards," "Beijing people are bastards," "Henan people are bastards," and "Guangzhou people are bastards," and I reckon that the whole army would be in complete tatters long before it got anywhere near the United States.

If and when the day comes that we are no longer always crying and wailing about how other people are insulting us, that'll be the time when there is no more risk of civil war in China.
It's been several days since we saw the last of 2011. When I was in school, I hated having to write end-of-year reports, because—apart from the fact that I had nothing to report—I always felt there was no reason I should have to bare my soul to someone who forces you to perform a pre-appointed task, and I was sure I'd remember the things that deserved to be remembered. Later I discovered that memory isn't actually so reliable, so these days I'm willing to write things down.

Last year my performance in motor racing wasn't bad at all. Out of the eleven races in the national tournament, apart from the two occasions where my car broke down, I made it onto the prize-winners' podium on nine occasions and won the first championship for the Shanghai Volkswagen 333 team and turbo race. Last year I also won the first overall champion of the year title for the Subaru China rally team. The last time I won this title was in 2009. If you add in the championships I won in 2007 and 2008, I have won four first-place finishes overall. For that I want to thank my team colleagues and technicians. It was in 1993 that I saw the Hong Kong-
Beijing rally competition on TV for the first time, and that's when I got it into my head to race for the national team when I grew up. Sitting in front of the TV that day, I had a fantasy; now, eighteen years later, I have lived up to my aspirations as an eleven year old, and I'm very pleased. This doesn't mean that I'm urging everyone to always pursue their dream, because from 1993 to 2003 I completely forgot what I thought about that time in front of the TV. Only later, when circumstances allowed, did I consciously begin to practice driving. Maybe sometimes one clings stubbornly to something, and maybe sometimes one simply picks it up again when the moment is right—this can be true both of career goals and romantic attachments. Of course, this all depends on the individual and the situation—it's not a universal principle, but a matter of luck. I'm not proselytizing like someone you see hawking their books on the airport television.

In 2011 my friend Liu Caodong died. As the best rally driver in China he was my greatest rival. I managed to beat him in 2009, but lost to him in 2010. And in the blink of an eye, it's now been over three years since Xu Lang left us—in his time he was king of rally racing. I have a bone to pick with both of them, because their deaths have taken a lot of the excitement out of a victory. With them gone, even when I win it feels a bit of a shame, a bit like a monkey becoming king of the jungle because there are no more tigers. It's much the same story in the other things I do: In the absence of a hero, the striping makes his name. Being both a monkey and a striping, I seem to be a Gemini this coming year. I just wish I could have another race with Liu and Xu. Of course it makes no sense to say that—they're not going to come back to life, and I don't plan to die just yet. I say that simply to show how I cherish their memory.

Some leave us, and others join us. This last year I became a father. I love my daughter of course, but—more importantly—she loves me. As I expected, Daddy was her first word. A reporter asked me my preference: boy or girl. My answer was along these lines: I just hope that my daughter will be happy, and I am not concerned whether or not she is successful in the Chinese sense. Just so long as she has a good character I'm willing to create the best possible environment for her, sheltered from the pressures of this ruthless and unscrupulous society. Of course, she should do just what she wants to do, and she can try anything she fancies—all I am is a safety net when she takes a risk in climbing high. If in the future I suffer some setback that makes it difficult to support my daughter, then I've got no problem being a chauffeur for Robin Li, grinding ink for Bai Ye, or holding up a light for Chen Kaige.* Naturally I want to have a bigger family, and if I have a son then he's going to have to put up with things as they are, find a foothold in this reality, and pull out the stops to support himself and change society for the better.

2011 saw a big change in my own essays, but the shift actually began earlier. In my posts of 2009 and 2010 I would seize on the problems of the day and criticize the government, moved by a sense of disgust at things that were happening. Though I hate restrictions, I am also public-spirited enough to warn people about a hole in the road if I see one when I'm out driving at night. Every day I was looking forward to the time when China would suddenly turn into a society like the United States or Taiwan. I even felt that Hong Kong or Singapore are both imperfect, that the system is the root of all evil, that the system inevitably generates enormous abuses. For these criticisms I earned a lot of compliments, and I began to revel in all this appreciation and even subconsciously tried to cater to it. By 2010, many of my critiques hinged on assumptions of guilt and represented only variations on the same theme: The system is bad, the government is corrupt, tragedies are happening, and the people need help. In any society, I think, this kind of criticism is bound to be welcomed by readers at large: If the rulers are greedy and corrupt, there is bound to be serious antagonism between officials

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* Robin Li is the CEO of Baidu, China's biggest Internet search engine; Bai Ye is a prominent Chinese literary critic; Chen Kaige is a well-known Chinese film director. At various times, Han Han has been critical of all three.
and the population. Anywhere you go, people like it when you say: "We're really in bad shape here! Your boss is a complete jerk—he's made a mess of so many things, but still he gets driven around in a smart car and has a mistress on the side. With all your talents, you deserve a lot more than you have—and what qualifies that asshole to be your boss, anyway? Everyone has the right to be boss or to change the boss, and the things he's got should be yours." With the exception of the boss, who won't be pleased to hear this, everyone else will feel you've expressed their thoughts exactly. If I write that kind of essay, and throw in a few little jokes for good measure, everyone's bound to agree that I've put things very well, and those who disagree with me will be written off as Fifty-centers, as the running dogs of the powerful, as enemies of the people. Even if someone wants to criticize me, they will first have to write a couple of pages that sing my praises before they can raise a couple of mild objections, otherwise they will easily provoke dissatisfaction and get branded with one negative label or another, in much the same way as the targets of my criticism like to pin labels on their opponents, with no room for consultation and compromise. When I discovered that people critical of me were getting fewer and fewer (or were becoming more and more cautious), I naturally was happy for a while, but later I came to feel uncomfortable with the whole scene, for I knew that no matter how right I was, I had to be wrong somewhere.

So, with time, I gradually reached the conclusion that a good writer shouldn't just train his sights on the high and mighty, he should also be ready to clip the wings of the masses. I began to make some changes early in 2011, with essays like the one about Village Chief Qian Yunhui, "Do we need the truth, or just the truth that fits our needs?" Of course, if both the mighty and the weak come in for criticism, I'll give priority to criticizing the former, for the simple reason that they're the ones who've got it easy, and ordinary citizens have got the raw end of the deal. But that's not to say that a good writer should suck up to the common people uncondition-

ally, without a bottom line. If you say the people are so good and so right, so warm-hearted and so civilized, that they should have this and that and enjoy such-and-such and so-and-so, that the people have all kinds of God-given rights, that the people's eyes are not only gleaming with intelligence but are perfectly proportioned, as well... these phrases actually are no different for the kinds of insane flattery that Mao Zedong heaped on the masses before he took control, when they were just gambling chips in his effort to achieve power and prestige.

Some years ago, I was a committed revolutionary, believing that all one-party dictatorships had to be overthrown, that there had to be a multiparty democracy, direct elections, a tripartite division of power, and a nationalization of the armed forces. Friends would take issue with me then, arguing that a lot of people would get killed, that there'd be chaos, and that things would only get worse. My view at the time was: "Not necessarily—if we don't try it, how will we ever know? What you're telling me is just the ruling class's rationale for doing nothing, and besides, there's a price to pay whatever you do—if you don't take more extreme, more radical action, how are you going to eradicate the disease? It takes a big upheaval to create the conditions for excellent government. Besides, if the country ends up in chaos, it might give me the chance to be a warlord."

But gradually I have realized that this attitude doesn't differ very much in its emotional tenor from a dictator's offhand attitude: "Once I'm dead, the whole roof can come down, as far as I'm concerned." Extreme idealists who have lost connection with reality aren't necessarily the temperamental opposites of those who in reality are extreme authoritarians, and they may actually be sentimental bedfellows, although the banners they brandish may say completely different things. There's a good chance you'll end up as precisely the kind of person you once detested.

Therefore, I have no aspirations in other directions, but I will continue to keep demanding all the constitutionally permitted free-
doms that have a bearing on my work—whether I'm sitting or standing, walking or writing or talking, I'll keep on demanding freedom until you can't stand it. We need to keep pushing; otherwise there will be no change. As for my writing, I hope in the New Year to be able to write things for my own pleasure, and I don't plan to suck up to anybody except my daughter. I'll write when I want, and leave ellipses when I don't.