

tiveness of the masses in order to speed our economic construction. Putting politics in command is no substitute for economic principles, still less for concrete measures in economic work.

[Peng, "Letter of Opinion," July 14, 1959, *Selections from People's Republic of China Press* 4032; trans. adapted from Selden, *The People's Republic of China*, pp. 476–485]

WU HAN: "HAI RUI SCOLDS THE EMPEROR," JUNE 19, 1959

Wu Han was a prominent historian and the author of a noted biography of the founder of the Ming dynasty, as well as a high official in the Beijing municipal government. Although Mao had originally encouraged Wu to write on the Ming official Hai Rui, these writings came to be seen as the latest manifestations of an age-old Chinese tradition — writing about the past to indict the present. Wu later developed the essay below into a play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*, wherein some saw the courageous Ming official as Peng Dehuai and the autocratic emperor as Mao. A 1965 article condemning this play served as the opening salvo of the Cultural Revolution, a major onslaught on supposedly traditional values obstructing the revolutionary transformation.

In feudal times, the emperor was so inviolable that even his name was not to be used or mentioned in any manner. Violation of this taboo was regarded as a serious crime. It was not unusual for the violator to lose his arms or legs, even though he was otherwise innocent.

As to the scolding of an emperor, it was almost unheard of in history. However, it was a different matter entirely when Wu Wang of Zhou scolded the Emperor Zhou of the Shang dynasty after the latter had been defeated in 1122 B.C., or when the rebel Li Zicheng scolded the Chongzhen emperor of the Ming dynasty after [the] Ming was overthrown in 1644. In both cases it was the victor who scolded the defeated monarch.

Because it was impossible to scold an emperor in the old days, it is very gratifying to learn from history that someone really did scold an emperor. Perhaps for this reason did many people enjoy seeing the play *Empress He Scolds the Emperor*. If the people were not permitted to scold the emperor when they wanted to, they might do it on the stage and get tremendous satisfaction out of it. . . .

In any event, there was a man who really did scold an emperor. This man was the famous Ming dynasty statesman Hai Rui. According to the *Ming History*, volume 226, some of the bitter words used by Hai Rui to scold the Jiajing emperor were: "You have been increasing taxes, bankrupting the state treasury, and neglecting state affairs for more than ten years, and now the matter becomes even worse. People are now using your imperial title 'Jiajing' to signify 'Every

house is empty' [a pun, because both phrases have the same pronunciation in Chinese]. . . ."

The Jiajing emperor of the Ming dynasty became so lazy toward the end of his reign that he lived in the Western Park doing nothing but worshiping and writing Daoist charms. A charm is a letter to God, and it must be well written. Both Grand Secretaries Yan Gao and Xu Jie had written beautiful charms and because of this talent only, they had each become prime minister. During their premiership the government was extremely corrupt. Anyone who dared to speak out in the royal court would be arrested, imprisoned, exiled, or even executed. For these reasons all court officials were afraid of speaking out.

But courageous Hai Rui sent a petition to the emperor in February 1566 proposing a drastic reform. The petition stated:

How would you compare yourself with Emperor Wen Di of the Han dynasty?<sup>2</sup> You did a fairly good job in your early years, but what has happened to you now? For nearly twenty years you have not appeared in the imperial court, and you have appointed many fools to the government. By refusing to see your own sons, you are mean to your own blood; by suspecting court officials, you are mean to your subordinates; and by living in the Western Park refusing to come home, you are mean to your wife. Now the country is filled with corrupt officials and weak generals; peasants begin to revolt everywhere. Although such things happened when you were enthroned, they were not as serious as they are today. Now Yan Gao has resigned [as Grand Minister], but there is still no sign of social reform. In my judgment you are much inferior to Emperor Wen Di.

The Jiajing emperor always compared himself with Emperor Yao, but Hai Rui said that he was even worse than Wen Di. No wonder he became angry with Hai Rui.

Hai Rui's petition continued:

The dynasty's officials know that the people have been dissatisfied with you for some time. By engaging in occultism and searching for immortality, you have confused yourself. Your shortcomings are numerous: rudeness, short-temperedness, self-righteousness, and deafness to honest criticism. But worst of all is your search for immortality. . . .

You should realize the impossibility of achieving immortality and repent past mistakes. You should attend the imperial court regularly and discuss national affairs with your court officials. This is the only way to

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2. Traditionally regarded as a role model.

redeem yourself. By doing so you may still be able to make yourself useful to the country during your remaining years.

The most urgent problems today are the absurdity of imperial policies and the lack of clarity of official responsibilities. If you do not tackle these problems now, nothing will be accomplished.

After having finished reading Hai Rui's petition, the emperor threw it angrily on the floor and ordered the palace guard to arrest Hai Rui. Eunuch Huang Jin told the emperor: "It is said that Hai Rui already expects death, has bade farewell to his wife, prepared his funeral arrangements, and dispersed all his servants. Therefore he will not run away, and the arrest is quite unnecessary. He is very simple and straightforward in his nature and has a good reputation among the people. He is an honest official and never steals anything from the public."

When the emperor learned from the eunuch that Hai Rui was not afraid of death, the emperor began to wonder and picked up the petition from the floor and read it over again. However, he could not make up his mind what to do with Hai Rui. . . . One day he became so angry that he beat the imperial concubines. Some concubines complained, "He was scolded by Hai Rui and he tries to take it out on us."

The emperor then sent an investigator to find out who else had been conspiring with Hai Rui. Many colleagues tried not to get involved and avoided Hai Rui. Hai Rui stayed at home waiting to be arrested. . . .

Soon [however] the emperor became ill. He discussed with Grand Secretary Xu Jie the possibility of letting the crown prince succeed him and said, "What he [Hai Rui] said about me was right, but how could I go to court every day with this illness." He continued, "It was my own fault in getting this sickness, otherwise I could go to court every day to attend to state affairs. Then I would never have been scolded by him." Finally the emperor ordered the arrest of Hai Rui. Although Hai Rui was sentenced to death by the Ministry of Justice, the emperor never ratified the execution. Two months later the emperor died. The new emperor pardoned Hai Rui and restored him to his previous position as the director of census.

Many people supported Hai Rui's scolding of the emperor and sympathized with him. Hai Rui became very famous in his time. However, he was impeached again in 1586. This time many young scholars who had passed the civil service examination . . . courageously defended Hai Rui in court and said, "We have heard the name of Hai Rui since we were ten. Hai Rui is the greatest statesman of our time; he will be respected for thousands of years to come. His noble character is as high as the sky, very few people can compare with him." These were some of the typical praises he received from the young people of his day. When Hai Rui died, the people in Nanjing closed shops. When his body reached the Yangzi River, people, in white dress to mourn his death, filled

both banks for more than a hundred miles. These actions manifested how great Hai Rui was and how he was respected by his fellow men.

[*People's Daily*, June 19, 1959; trans. adapted from Fan,  
*The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, pp. 72–78]

## THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Despite its name, the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” emerged not from the “proletariat” but from a power struggle at the top in which certain leaders, including Mao, sought to enlist the “masses” (especially students) in a campaign against moderate leaders then in control of the Party and state administration. The initial battle cry “To rebel is justified” was taken from an early speech by Mao (see p. 453), but “rebellion” came to mean almost anything, depending on whatever group was activated to engage in generalized “class struggle,” and before long the movement deteriorated into an anarchy of cross-purposes and violent infighting.

The *Sixteen Points*, briefly excerpted here, are taken from a decision of the Party Central Committee, engineered by Mao, Lin Biao, and their cohorts in 1966. They are perhaps the closest thing to a coherent statement of Mao’s original purposes in attacking “those in authority taking the capitalist road.”

### THE *SIXTEEN POINTS*: GUIDELINES FOR THE GREAT PROLETARIAN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

#### 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.