

appearance. It should be noted, however, that the mass-line in policing was strengthened, not as a result of the triumphant march forward of socialism but, on the contrary, of a crisis in policing brought on by economic reform.

Will such resurrections, then, lead China 'back to the future', back to a popular/populist form of socialism? Probably not, although these measures will continue to function adequately, to be maintained and even extended. Campaigns will lower—albeit temporarily—certain types of crime and the expanded role

of the neighbourhood committees will aid the police in maintaining social order in the community. What the mass line in policing is less competent at doing—and in the present political climate this is possibly a fatal flaw—is policing middle and high ranking party and government officials who are involved in corrupt practices.

The ultimate question, then, is not whether we go 'back to the future' but whether the mass line in policing is capable of doing anything other than policing the masses. To construct a means of policing the

higher echelons of the party would require a degree of political movement the current leadership is clearly not willing to countenance. In place of reform, the current leadership offers to resurrect Lei Feng and Mao. For all too many Chinese, however, Lei Feng and Mao are not a means by which China can go 'back to the future' but are themselves back in the past. For all too many Chinese, it's now time to move forward.

MICHAEL DUTTON teaches in political science at Melbourne University.

Maintaining the rage

A small voice of dissent can still be heard in China, and, according to Linda Jaivin, it's becoming louder, without, it seems, the party cadres noticing.

There's nothing like rock 'n roll fever to warm up those cold Beijing nights. Last February, braving sleet and biting winds, fans pocked the 18,000-seat Workers' Stadium two nights in a row for China's first rock festival. Performing were six of the best of the capital's 30-odd local bands: the all-female Cobra, the heavy-metal Tang Dynasty, Breath, Circumstances, ADO, and 1989.

When Wei Hua, lead singer of Breath belted out her signature tune, "Don't Even Think of Stopping Me", the audience exploded. As the former

Central Television newsreader sang, tears streaming down her face, "I will find a way to cast off these ropes and take a hold of life; the sun will shine down on me," the crowd waved burning matches, cigarette lighters and even flaming programs in response.

There's no doubt about it, rock is hot in China. In a sense, *yaogun* (rock 'n roll) is to young urban Chinese today what 'misty poetry' was to Chinese youth of the early 1980s: a secret language defying comprehension by the adult establishment and a shared code for self-expression that implicitly rejects the values of official culture. Even in its heyday, however, misty poetry enjoyed a limited audience at best; rock reaches the masses. And you can dance to it.

Rock in China has come a long way since April 1985, when British pop group Wham staged the nation's first rock concert and the few brave fans who tried to dance in the aisles were dragged off by police. Few observers could then have imagined that, within a few years, China would boast a fully fledged rock scene, complete with home-grown bands,

commanding legions of screaming fans.

Cui Jian, China's No. 1 rock star, a one-man phenomenon in faded army fatigues and work boots who writes songs with titles like "Rock for the New Long March" was one of the sparks that ignited the prairie fire of rock. A former trumpeter with the Beijing Philharmonic, the baby-faced Mr Cui appeared on Beijing's Central Television in November 1985 singing what is still an enduringly popular tune, "Nothing to my Name".

I want to give you hope
I want to help make you free
But all you ever do is laugh at me,
'cause
I've got nothing to my name.

A trend was born. Beijing quickly became the Jinggangshan of Chinese rock, a revolutionary base area, if you will, from which the rock message was spread. While rock has reached many areas of the country, including Lhasa, it remains primarily an urban phenomenon. The secret of rock's appeal was hinted at in the 1988 short story "The Rock 'n Roll

Generation" by the army writer Liu Yiran. The story encapsulates the high-spirited mood of anti-authoritarian rebellion that suffused the air one year later when the students of Beijing took to the streets under the banners of democracy and freedom. In the story, breakdancing, sex and rock are the key to the young protagonist's search for personal liberation and fulfilment. His irreverent antics at one point lead his relatively straight-laced girlfriend to ask him what was next—rocking into Zhongnanhai (the Communist Party's headquarters)? He never made it there, but the participants in the 1989 protest movement did: during the protests, breakdancing, rock and sex were part of life on Tiananmen Square, at the doorstep of Zhongnanhai. By day the protesters chorused the Internationale; by night, they grooved to Cui Jian.

Rock is, of course, a foreign import. Several of the most popular Beijing bands, such as 1989, even have foreign members. (ADO, Cui Jian's original band, recently disbanded when its foreign members left China.) In the capital, expatriates may also play a major role in arranging gigs, such as open, multi-band, mixed-crowd dance parties staged at such surprising locations as the ancient Observatory Tower. For all that, however, yaogun is definitely rock with Chinese characteristics.

The Taiwan singer-songwriter Hou Dejian, who defected to China in 1983 and was shipped back to Taiwan last year, was the first to introduce traditional instruments like the suona to Chinese rock arrangements; it's now almost a cliché. The films *Yellow Earth* and *Red Sorghum* sparked a fad for Shaanxi folk music which has since melded with rock to form a new, hybrid genre known as the northwest wind. But even when, musically speaking, Chinese rock is indistinguishable from its Western counterparts, its lyrics reflect the special problems, feelings and concerns of contemporary Chinese urbanites.

As in the Soviet Union, rock is a forum for social protest that may have no other safe outlet. This protest may be elliptical, as in Cui Jian's "Nothing to My Name" or it

may be explicit, as in the raucous "Official Banquet Song", a witty description of cadre gluttony that doesn't miss a beat:

I'm a big official so I eat and
drink, eat and drink.
To the Mongolian restaurant we
go for hot pot,
To Quanjudé for Peking duck.
Anyway, it's not my money,
So eat and drink and all be
merry!

The Communist Party of China hasn't figured out what it thinks about the rock revolution. It's done the twist a number of times already on musical issues. Having banned Beethoven and Debussy in the Cultural Revolution, it was forced to rehabilitate them afterwards. In the early 80s it proscribed the sentimental love songs of Taiwan's Teresa Teng, but a few years later attempted to get her to play Beijing. By the time disco became the rage in China in the mid-80s—long after it was dead in the West—there was such ideological confusion that it was declared either spiritual pollution or excellent exercise for the elderly, depending on the commentator.

Chinese disco reached its creative apex with the release of disco versions of the revolutionary model operas. Then Cui Jian, dubbed "the atom bomb of Chinese rock" by Taiwan's *China Times Weekly*, burst on the scene. Almost immediately, ideologues and cultural conservatives swooped in with criticisms of his "extreme individualism" and "bourgeois liberalisation". His songs, they claimed darkly, had "negative ideological content". It's said that a high-ranking municipal official even denounced "Nothing to My Name" as absurd—how could a Chinese youth have nothing to his name when he had socialism?

Today, despite ongoing purges in other areas of cultural and intellectual life, the beat goes on. Some people in the party even seem to have concluded that if you can't fight 'em, co-opt 'em. The latest revolutionary model television series, *On the Road: A Century of Marxism*, the party's answer to the popular, controversial and now-banned *River Elegy*, features a title song sung by the rock star Liu Huan.

The lyrics are matched with images representing a short history of Chinese communism: Marx ("You're a seed of fire..."), Lenin ("a prophecy"), Mao ("a banner") and Deng ("you spoke the truth..."). Yeah, yeah, yeah.

As a result of this sort of thing, one Beijing punk rocker practically spits when he hears the word yaogun because "they use it now". He makes no compromises himself. Spewing beer over the heads of his audience and beating up on his bass player, his head partially shaven and a snarl on his face, he sings songs like "We Live in a Garbage Dump":

The place where we live
Is like a garbage dump.
We're all insects
Fighting and squabbling
We eat our conscience
And shit our thoughts...
Is there anything we can do?
Nope.
Tear it down.

While Beijing remains the home of Chinese rock, even Guangzhou, where the mellower sounds of Hong Kong Canto-pop dominate the scene, has produced a major rock talent in Xie Chengqiang, composer of "What's the 90s Gonna Bring?". Mr Xie, a Shandong native who was raised in Guangzhou, comes complete with all the standard rock star equipment: black clothing, dark glasses and a voice that was raked out of the gravel. In the underground music video of "What's the 90s Gonna Bring?" images of Sun Yat-sen, old people practising tai chi, a map of China burning, and Guangzhou street scenes alternate with visions of Mr Xie bound in red silk, tearing a seal of black tape from his mouth and smashing walls with his guitar.

What is the 90s gonna bring for Chinese rock? It's anyone's guess. As an article in the Chinese-produced English-language magazine *Nexus* observes, Chinese rock "like Chinese socialism, is still at its primary stage".

LINDA JAIVIN is a Canberra-based freelance journalist. She is currently writing a book on singer Hou Dejian. This piece is reproduced from *Asian Wall Street Journal* with the permission of the author.