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## Upheaval in China; Chinese take Umbrage At Attack on Mao Portrait

By **SHERYL WUDUNN** and **SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES** MAY 24, 1989

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Mao Zedong's giant portrait on Tiananmen Square, a striking symbol of Chinese Communism, was defaced today by three men who splattered paint across its face.

After the defacement, which occurred as a heavy rain was about to fall upon the city, the portrait was hurriedly covered up by a large green tarpaulin.

If the purpose of the action was to encourage contempt for Mao, the opposite seemed to happen. Even the demonstrators, whose ideal of democracy is very far from anything Mao encouraged, were furious with the defacement and suggested that the culprits must have been agents provocateurs. 'Pretext for a Crackdown'

"Chairman Mao was our savior, and without him there would be no new China," said a 36-year-old driver from a northeast province who was in Beijing. "It must be Li Peng who sent someone here to do this to create a pretext for a crackdown. The students would not do this kind of thing."

There was no indication that Prime Minister Li was the culprit. Instead, the Government arrested three men from Hunan Province, Mao's home region. The brief account on the official New China News Agency did not explain why the three men, in their 20's, had defaced the portrait.

In the late evening, the vandalized portrait of Mao was replaced by a new one, as a crowd of about 20,000 people cheered on.

Modern China has an uneasy ambivalence toward Mao, who died in 1976. People remember with fondness the honesty and selflessness of the Maoist period but resent the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and the economic backwardness in which Mao left China. 'Mao Was a Good Guy'

Lately, some workers and students have taken to wearing Mao buttons and pins, apparently to suggest their longing for the Maoist days of egalitarianism, honesty and selflessness. That same fondness for Mao was apparently behind the telephone calls from area residents that the Government reported, urging severe punishment for those who defaced the portrait.

"Mao was a good guy," said a young man who had clapped enthusiastically for the arrival of a new and clean portrait. "There was no need to abuse him like that."

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