NO TEA PARTY

Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals: *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006. Pp. 693, plus index, bibliography, and glossary. $35.00.)

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Timed to appear on the 40th anniversary of the launching of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (coinciding with the 30th anniversary of its end), this book is both a magisterial conclusion to the senior author's three-volume *Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (1974, 1983, 1997, Columbia University Press) and an authoritative summation of what we now know about the event itself, after some thirty years of voluminous research. As we have come to expect, the scholarship is meticulously comprehensive, utilizing not only the published memorial literature and secondary sources of mainland authors but letters, interviews with former participants, police interrogation records, speech transcripts, diaries, and other primary sources. In preference to the *dazibao* collections exploited by previous scholars, the authors rely heavily on the so-called *dongtai bao* (current information bulletins) circulated with great frequency by Red Guard organizations for their members. They emerge with a narrative familiar to specialists in its broad outlines, but in a "thick description" spiced with new anecdotes, illustrations, and character-revealing incidents, all written with clarity, verve, and wit. Consistent with the three-volume *Origins* (extensively quoted in the first half), the basic story line is one of political conspiracy (by Mao and his coterie, in contrast to early Maoist visions of "capitalist-roaders" in the Party plotting a counterrevolutionary "coup"). Because of the elaborately consensual organization of the CCP hierarchy over which Mao presided as the revered (if, whenever possible, ignored) helmsman, this took some fancy maneuvering on his part, mildly demurring or even seeming to assent to policies that he would later sharply repudiate. All of this plotting culminated in wholesale purges, elite humiliations, mass turmoil verging on civil war and economic anarchy. This verdict somewhat ironically corresponds closely with the (now muted) retrospective indictment of the CCP itself (at the 6th Plenum of its 11th Congress in July 1981) and in stark contrast to the halcyon, emancipatory spirit that greeted the onset of the movement as depicted on the book's cover.

The Cultural Revolution (CR) represents, on the one hand, the end of the Maoist era, but it is an important watershed in other ways as well. By exploding the Party-movement framework within which all previous movements had been organized and unleashing voluntarist groups to take the initiative based on their own interpretation of official rhetoric, the CR, in effect, made it impossible for mass movements to continue. The myth of elite unity was shattered as never before, unveiling vicious internecine hatreds and pitting whole families against one another. The universalistic

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implications of populist revolution ideology were brought into such violent contradiction to the more particularistic organizing principles of Chinese Leninism and the dictates of political economic efficiency (as Andrew Walder inter alia pointed out) that Maoist ideology suffered a mortal credibility gap. The cult of the supreme leader resulted in such a concentration of power in the hands of one man, who is exposed here not only as the movement's initiator but the backstage string-puller behind nearly every zig and zag in its tortuous progression, that it, too, was dismantled soon after his death.

Inasmuch as Mao Zedong stands clearly identified as the upheaval's *primum mobile*, without which it could not have occurred or continued (and who defended it to his last breath), and in view of his country's adverse verdict on its impact (despite continuing deference to Mao himself), how could he have been so wrong? Here the authors depart somewhat from the straightforward political conspiracy theory outlined in the *Origins*, conceding that if all Mao had wanted was a purge of his elite political opponents, he could have ended the movement by the end of 1967 (359). Although at this point they toy with the possibility that he could also have been motivated by the ideological aspirations articulated in the movement's rhetoric, the authors have largely disqualified themselves from further exploring this possibility by their obvious contempt for "Marxist-Leninist gobbledygook" (cf. 47, also Mao's "hopelessly utopian musings" on bourgeois right; 143).

Gobbledygook or not, their ideological agnosticism sucks the meaning out of the narrative, leaving only a long string of anecdotes of seemingly pointless sadism (e.g., the teenage contract killer, the cannibalism). At the same time, this contempt may, to some extent, be warranted: after all, if Mao was inspired by the desire to forge a new socialist human being more dedicated to the public weal in the fires of revolutionary class struggle it should have soon dawned on him that the vandalistic iconoclasm that exploded from the very outset of the movement would be difficult to reconcile with any workable socialism. Yet to him *Schadenfreude* was glorious, as the authors demonstrate in a series of choice quotations: people should be allowed to commit suicide—we have too many people already; long live all-round civil war—it's good to let people fight each other because otherwise they may never become acquainted. This distinctively brutal, anarchist vision of revolutionary socialism had been implicit in Mao's thinking since he toasted peasant violence ("revolution is not a tea party") in 1927—clearly since the crash of the Leap, he accumulated a lot of elite grudges, and his unique tolerance for the unthinkably disastrous enabled him to outmaneuver and destroy his colleagues. Though he had, indeed, achieved his political objectives by late 1966, he could not easily rein in the movement he had unleashed without accepting responsibility for unleashing it, and so he decided after the February Adverse Current to let it run its course (at least until those who could be expected to lead such a reversal of verdicts had been politically destroyed).

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Different readers will profit from different parts of the book, but I found the last half (post-1969) to be more interesting and original than the first. Although the destruction of Liu Shaoqi may have been the most tragic incident, it proved not to be politically irreversible because of Mao's oddly misplaced faith in Deng Xiaoping. But the conspiracy against Lin Biao—culminating in his violent death while fleeing from the country on September 13, 1970—seems to have been a mortal blow to the radical movement to which Mao had dedicated his last years, an ideologically unnecessary power play, implausibly justified in polemics that identified him first as a leftist and then as an ultra rightist Confucian. The subtle chain of almost comic Alphonse-Gaston offers and counteroffers of the position of chief of state (which Liu Shaoqi had vacated and Mao did not wish refilled) is described by the authors so as to absolve Lin of any interest in the position. Why then did Mao undertake his destruction? Partly, perhaps, because like a chess grandmaster he had strategic skills that he simply enjoyed demonstrating (he boasted at the time of his tactics as "throwing stones, mixing in sand, and digging up the cornerstone"). The authors explain it in terms of the need to remove the PLA from politics—as if the sycophantic Lin Biao would have fought this? Although others may think it more plausible that Mao (an extremely suspicious man) perceived Lin's interest in the position, perhaps to compensate for the political withdrawal of his PLA, surely this little spat did not necessitate line struggle to the death. Mao went into health-threatening depression for months in the wake of the incident, followed by the rehabilitation of thousands of purged cadres (including Deng). Yet this was not the end of the CR, which continued to oscillate back and forth between radical movements of criticism and moderate attempts to restore a semblance of order until Mao finally succumbed to Lou Gehrig's disease in 1976. Why Mao maintained this erratic pattern, refusing to eliminate one irreconcilable side or the other remains a puzzle—perhaps he remained ambivalent to the end, bereft of any clear positive vision, able to define the nation's way forward only inversely, by assailing a succession of symbolic "targets."

The authors cogently conclude that the most important impact of the CR was as a "negative model" to be criticized and systematically negated in the form of Deng Xiaoping's ongoing reform and opening movement, wherein "Mao's worst revisionist nightmare has been realized, with only himself to blame" (459). Yet one may argue that this great upheaval's legacy also included more positive repercussions. Two come to mind. Inspired by their Chairman, the Chinese "masses" were able to demonstrate to themselves a political power never experienced since the revolution itself, which is perhaps what the Chairman had in mind and why he let the thing continue so long despite being unable to control it. Although the policy impact so far seems to have been for the Party to suppress mass spontaneity more consistently and rigorously than the Chairman was willing to do, we shall have to see whether and how long the role of politically deactivated market participants remains an acceptable political alternative for the

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Chinese people. Second, Mao bequeathed to Chinese political theater the role model of the wrathful godfather returning from the brink of the grave to set things right. Although Deng Xiaoping has done much to ban this fearsome prospect with his institutionalization of term limits and mandatory retirement, he himself incarnated the role not once but twice in his career: first by pushing aside Zhao Ziyang and mobilizing the cohort of elders to execute the violent repression of the Tiananmen protest movement, and second with his 1992 "southern voyage" (*nanxun*) designed to regenerate the momentum of the reform movement he had initiated.

This is, in sum, a rich and comprehensive contribution to Cultural Revolution studies. The Cultural Revolution is an event that can never have a "last word," but this intricate analysis of the intimate treachery of CCP elite politics is likely to be definitive for some time.

–Lowell Dittmer

THE ASSERTION OF RIGHTS IN RURAL CHINA

Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li: *Rightful Resistance in Rural China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 179. $70.00. $24.99, paper.).

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Unlike critical intellectuals in China's cities, who tend to make sweeping demands such as calling on the Chinese government to reassess its military crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, Kevin J. O'Brien and Lianjiang Li show in their insightful study of people whom they call "rural rightful resisters" that China's villagers usually protest against everyday injustices. Nevertheless, their study reveals that when villagers challenge the misconduct of local officials in village elections, finances, and land use, they specifically cite the government's own policies, laws, and regulations, which they assert the local officials disregard or misinterpret. In so doing, they put pressure on local officials to live up to the government's official commitments.

As the authors point out, due to greater mobility, media access, and the introduction of cell phones, tape recorders, copiers, and the Internet, China's villagers since the 1990s have become increasingly more knowledgeable of government policies and sensitive to their own exploitation. At the same time, China's current party head Hu Jintao and prime minister Wen Jiabao, who in their younger days served in poor inland rural provinces, acknowledge the growing economic inequalities between China's rural communities and urban areas due to China's move to the market. They have held local officials accountable for illegal land grabs, forced resettlement, and collusion with developers that have sparked growing protests. Thus, as policies beneficial to farmers are turned into laws made public through newspapers,

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