



# Culture, Class, and Revolution in China's Turbulent Decade: A Cultural Revolution State of the Field<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article surveys the recent scholarship on China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) from a variety of disciplines. It selects three keywords – culture, class, and revolution – and shows how contemporary research has reframed our understanding of each concept. Studies of culture argue that Cultural Revolution culture was an integral part of China's 20th century project of modernization, examinations of class challenge the role of class status in explaining action while offering new frameworks for understanding class, and analyses of the “revolution” in the Cultural Revolution question how we locate it within the history of 20th century China.

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What was China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), and why did it happen? How did it shape the lives of the Chinese people, and what are its legacies? How should it be understood in the context of a history of the People's Republic of China that was founded in 1949; how does it relate to a longer “century of revolution”? Among Chinese and Western scholars alike, these questions are shaping a new generation of research on the Cultural Revolution. Based on limited opening of official archives, wider access to print and digital sources, new oral history projects, and an increasing openness in China, new scholarship on the Cultural Revolution is changing the way we think about China's turbulent decade. These studies have offered local cases placed into national context, emphasized the causes and effects of revolution at the grassroots, and introduced complexities that challenge our ability to tell one overarching story about the Cultural Revolution. This article examines such new scholarship by focusing on three keywords that appear in “The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”: culture, class, and revolution. For the purposes of this survey, I do not attempt to cover all new work; my focus remains on Western scholarship while including some Chinese examples, on studies that take the Cultural Revolution as the main subject, and on works that unfortunately still privilege the urban experience. Nonetheless, I analyze the themes of culture, class, and revolution as they have appeared in recent scholarship as an entrée into the questions these themes ask and answer. How did the Cultural Revolution treat traditional Chinese culture, and in what ways was the new revolutionary culture “modern”? How were categories of class debated during the period, and how did they affect action? What was revolutionary about Cultural Revolution?

Cultural Revolution studies today build on a long and interdisciplinary tradition of scholarship. The first generation of Western studies on the period were written by political scientists and sociologists who wrote about the movement as it unfolded, often using Hong Kong as their listening post and interviewing refugees as they escaped from South China. Examples of this work include Lynn White's *Policies of Chaos*, which used class labels and patron–client relationships to explain how class influenced individual defenses of self-interest and resulted in so much violence.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, in Hong Kong, Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger interviewed hundreds of refugees from Guangzhou to study the pattern

of conflict among high school students, arguing that a combination of narrowing upward mobility and a struggle to gain political credentials resulted in factionalism.<sup>3</sup> As Escherick, Pickowicz, and Walder explain in a recent essay, the outbreak of Cultural Revolution afforded China watchers an opportunity to study state–society relations, using contemporary political struggles to identify and evaluate conflicts among different groups in Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this focus on state and society, political scientists like Roderick MacFarquhar studied the Cultural Revolution’s high politics; MacFarquhar’s three-volume *Origins of the Cultural Revolution* remains authoritative, and his recent book with Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, is considered the most comprehensive survey in English.

In China, assessments of the Cultural Revolution remain constrained by contemporary politics and official pronouncements. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution and the trial of the Gang of Four, the Communist Party issued a 1981 Resolution on “Some Questions of Party History.” This postmortem assessment summarized the phases of recent history, blamed Lin Biao, Jiang Qing, and the rest of the Gang of Four, and explained how Mao’s ideas of “cultural revolution” were neither based on Marxism–Leninism nor appropriate to Chinese conditions. The 1981 Resolution laid responsibility for the Cultural Revolution squarely at the feet of Mao but stressed that his were the errors of a “great proletarian revolutionary.”<sup>5</sup> Wang Nianyi’s 1989 classic *Da dongluan de niandai* (The Age of Great Turmoil) shows how the resolution shaped contemporary historical writing. Following the resolution in lockstep, he argues that Mao was indeed responsible for launching the Cultural Revolution but that he was misguided in using wartime tactics in an era of peace, in expanding class struggle to the party itself and in using his power autocratically and arbitrarily.<sup>6</sup>

More recent Chinese scholarship, Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik suggests, demonstrates that Chinese scholars have moved past this official assessment, collecting their own archival materials and conducting oral histories. In this way, she argues that unofficial historiography is actually leading official historiography.<sup>7</sup> Notable among this “unofficial historiography” is Jin Dalu’s four-volume study of Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. In his writings, Jin rejects the ideological justifications behind previous studies, calling instead for “scholarship above all” and “historical sources as the foundation.” Jin stresses the following: that bureaucratic systems remained in place, so studies at different levels (the central state, the province, the locality, and the work unit) should seek to understand how units interacted, that one should study both politics and social life, with politics as the “skeleton” and daily life as the “flesh and blood,” and that, by extension, one should look for the ordinary in the extraordinary (the ways in which social life carried on in tumultuous politics) as well as the extraordinary in the ordinary (the ways in which the era did transform everyday life).<sup>8</sup> However, despite a flowering of “unofficial historiography,” history written in China must still pass muster with the censors or seek publication abroad. For example, a recent book on Cultural Revolution fashion in Guangzhou by the sociologist Sun Peidong was published by the People’s Press, suggesting that the most established publishing house in China welcomes serious scholarship, in this case showing how ordinary people challenged the strictures of ideology to differentiate themselves through clothing.<sup>9</sup> However, the more theoretical sections of the manuscript did not pass the censors; in China, one can write about the “flesh and blood” of ordinary life, but implications of heart and mind await further political opening.

In the West, our access to increasingly available sources and oral histories have also resulted in more and more interdisciplinary studies that focus on both the “skeleton” of politics and the “flesh and blood” of daily life. This scholarship, in turn, has allowed us to challenge many

of the prevailing notions about the Cultural Revolution that persist both in academic literature and in popular culture. Returning to our keywords – culture, class, and revolution – recent scholarship has done the following. Previous work on culture, heavily influenced by contemporary reports and the memoirs of émigré intellectuals, suggested that the Cultural Revolution was the wholesale destruction of traditional culture, offering little new culture save for propaganda. Recent work across the disciplines has shown that elements of “old” culture were preserved, that revolutionary culture was indeed culture, and that its modernization during the Cultural Revolution should be taken in its 20th century context. An earlier generation of sociologists used analyses of class categories to show how factions resulted from groups protecting their class and class privilege. Recent studies have challenged this view, proposing in some cases that mixed factions and class alliances defy simple class categories, and in another case that class was not the primary factor in factionalization at all. Finally, reassessments of the Cultural Revolution raise the question, what was revolutionary about the Cultural Revolution? While earlier scholarship highlighted continuities between China’s imperial past and an autocratic Mao era (with a Republican interregnum from 1912–1949), recent work suggests that the Mao era is the aberration. How we choose to define culture, analyze class, and periodize revolution will affect how we frame the Cultural Revolution’s place in history.

### *The Culture of the Cultural Revolution*

Image 1. *Red Detachment of Women* (1971), Shanghai People’s Publishing House. All images courtesy of the Shanghai Propaganda Poster Art Center.



Culture was central to the Cultural Revolution for many reasons. Though this period is often defined as a political struggle, for its ordinary actors and to many outside observers, this was a movement to transform society through culture. As Rebecca Karl has argued, one

should understand the Cultural Revolution “not merely...as a bid for state power, but as an attempt to seize politics—the power of mass culture and speech for revolution.”<sup>10</sup> At its outset, the Central Committee in August 1966 defined the Cultural Revolution as the establishment of “new ideas, culture, customs, and habits,” and the transformation of the education, literature, and art of the superstructure, a mass movement to raise revolutionary consciousness.<sup>11</sup> The opening salvos of the movement are often linked to a theater play by Wu Han, an historian of the Ming dynasty. In the play, an upright official called Hai Rui is cashiered for criticizing imperial policies. Thus, Mao’s wife Jiang Qing’s attack on the play became a way to topple party officials who had been close to Wu Han.<sup>12</sup> From the launch of the movement, Jiang Qing had outsize influence on both politics and cultural policy; herself trained as an actress, she directed many aspects of cultural production, especially the revolutionary operas and ballets that came to be known as “model works.” Despite this prevalence of culture, however, early studies of the Cultural Revolution tended to focus on high or local politics; more recently, scholarship has taken culture as a main subject. We might think of culture as encompassing three realms: new cultural products like the model works, “old” culture which the Cultural Revolution purportedly jettisoned, and new cultural practices around Mao statues, political slogans, and the ever-present “Little Red Book.”

The Communist Party’s attention to culture, of course, long predated the Cultural Revolution. In a recent book on early Communist mobilization in the coal mining town of Anyuan, Elizabeth Perry argues that one of the keys to the Party’s success was “cultural positioning, or the strategic deployment of a range of symbolic resources (religion, ritual, rhetoric, dress, drama, art, and so on) for the purposes of political persuasion.”<sup>13</sup> In the 1930s and in their base area in Yan’an, the Party further articulated its cultural policy, using the military as an initial testing ground for propaganda, cultivating arts workers, and adapting folk music and dances to promote political messages. As David Holm has argued, this “official cultural ideology” was part of a revolutionary strategy that included culture as a “tool of government and as an aspect of human consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> In Yan’an, where Mao solidified his political power, he also theorized the relationship between art and politics. In his 1942 “Talks on Literature and Art,” Mao argued that while art would play a fundamental role in revolution, it would be subordinate to politics, “art obeys both class and party, and the revolutionary task of a given revolutionary age.”<sup>15</sup> For the decade of the 1950s, Chang-tai Hung has proposed that political culture was crucial to solidifying the new regime’s rule; in *Mao’s New World*, he explains, political culture “shaped social opinions, rewrote the past, changed attitudes, and helped create a novel and promising milieu.”<sup>16</sup> Culture was thus both a reflection of class and a tool of class, so that for the Red Guards of the Cultural Revolution, destroying the old and creating the new was to make revolution.

What kind of new culture was produced during the Cultural Revolution? Though popular perceptions, including the raft of memoirs that have been published in the West, have often dismissed Cultural Revolution culture as propaganda, scholars argue that artistic production should be taken on its own terms. The model works, as Paul Clark and Barbara Mittler have argued, were innovations and were appreciated as such. Clark suggests that “innovation and experimentation in the field of culture in these ten years contrasts with the orthodox emphasis on destruction and failure.”<sup>17</sup> Using oral histories with musicians and composers, as well as memories from ordinary people who lived through the period, Mittler similarly proposes that while the model works were propaganda, they were popular and remain so because they were simply good art.<sup>18</sup> In recent ethnomusicology research by Yawen Ludden, interviews with over 50 performers and composers suggest that the scores of

Yu Huiyong, the principal composer behind the model works, “represent the peak of artistic achievement during the Cultural Revolution.”<sup>19</sup> Such analyses of culture on its own terms extend beyond the model works. One could similarly locate innovation and creativity in visual arts like painting, for example.<sup>20</sup> Even in the field of popular scientific culture, as Sigrid Schmalzer has shown, the Cultural Revolution produced its own conceptions of humanity.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to the Red Guards’ call to destroy all of China’s traditional culture, the production of new culture rested on “old culture.” Scholars have shown that Cultural Revolution culture was part of a longer continuum of modernizing Chinese traditions. For example, the art historian Julia Andrews suggests that Cultural Revolution cartoons, posters, and paintings, “like the policies that produced [such art], may trace its origins and esthetic principles to the early history of the Communist Party, and like them [the art] is the result of a continuous development pushed onto an extremist byway.”<sup>22</sup> Treating all manner of cultural production from music to comic books, Mittler also argues that Cultural Revolution culture was built on Chinese traditions. While a revolutionary opera, for instance, told a modern story, it was based on traditional musical conventions. From the use of stock characters to the performers’ gestures, from declamatory practices to the Chinese percussion accompanying stage movement, the composition of model works were based on “old” cultural forms.<sup>23</sup> Nor was foreign culture, despite the rhetoric, eliminated. As Richard Kraus shows for classical music and Xiaomei Chen demonstrates for theater, European concert music continued to be played and Western dramas were still acted.<sup>24</sup> Cultural Revolution culture was not entirely new.

Of course, this is not to say that traditional and foreign culture did not come under attack. Rather, old culture persisted and in some cases was defended. Dahpon Ho, for example, shows that during the “Attack on the Four Olds” movement, local people in the town of Qufu defended their local Confucius temple, going as far as to engage in armed combat.<sup>25</sup> Using revolutionary rhetoric, museum officials in Shanghai also acted to protect art in the Shanghai Museum and in private collections; archival evidence suggests that this kind of response was centrally directed and part of a nationwide movement.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the political upheavals of the Mao era created a significant opportunity for what Di Yin Lu calls “salvage archeology,” during which art and artifacts were saved from recycling mills and smelting plants.<sup>27</sup> Political campaigns, then, could have an opposite effect, and unofficial responses could be far from what was reported in the official media. In Barbara Mittler’s oral histories, for example, lists of forbidden books actually provided youths with a reading list and attacks on Confucius ironically led to greater understanding of the sage. One historian found that participating in such campaigns sparked his own interest in history, explaining that “even while we criticized, we would realize that there is something valuable in all that, too.”<sup>28</sup>

Finally, studies that have focused on the reception of culture and revolutionary culture practice have added to an increasingly variegated picture. On the one hand, Daniel Leese’s study of the cult of Mao demonstrates that “performances of loyalty or revolutionary integrity thus became necessary if one did not want to find oneself being excluded from the ranks of the people.” Using the category of ritual to frame all aspects of the Mao cult from loyalty dances to Mao commodities, Leese argues that the cult was first a means of mobilization and then a way to discipline and control.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, studies like Clark’s and Mittler’s suggest a persistence of unofficial cultures and interpretations. However, these portrayals need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, they suggest that in the face of a

predominant revolutionary culture, there remained unofficial and diverse responses. The Cultural Revolution had many cultures.

*The Cultural Revolution and the Problem of Class*

Image 2. *Working Class Must Lead All* (1969), Shanghai People's Fine Art Publishing House



Scholars have long used the framework of class to explain what the Cultural Revolution was and why it happened. It was, after all, the Great *Proletarian* Cultural Revolution, and as a political movement, it was not only an opportunity to engage in class struggle but also – for those with unfavorable class labels – to redefine the categories of class. In Maoist China, one's class label had deep political implications and everyday economic consequences. On the eve of the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, Mao defined the “people” to include the working class, the petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. Opposed to the people were the “reactionaries,” or the landlords, the bureaucratic capitalists, and “Nationalist reactionaries.” This distinction between the people and enemies is significant because only the people had political rights; New China would have “democracy among the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries.”<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, a system of over 60 class labels was developed, which included both political and economic designations and often further subdivided: For example, there

were eight kinds of landlords, and even the “middle peasant” had three subcategories of well-to-do middle peasant, new middle peasant, and old middle peasant. In addition, class was increasingly seen to be hereditary, so that a child of a “bad class element” suffered for his class origins.<sup>31</sup> All aspects of life – from education to job assignment to marriage – rested on these categories; struggles over class status were therefore high stakes.

The first analyses of the Cultural Revolution that appeared in the 1980s, unsurprisingly, focused on class. On the Chinese side, scholars followed the 1981 party resolution in showing that the Cultural Revolution’s definitions of class and class struggle were incorrect and misguided. For Wang Nianyi, for example, the ideology of the Cultural Revolution adhered not to Marxism, Leninism, or even Mao Zedong Thought. The definition of class in the Cultural Revolution was not properly Marxist–Leninist class as related to the means of production, and the Cultural Revolution’s claim to continuous revolution neither followed Marx’s definition of one class overthrowing another nor did it accord with the Chinese experience of having entered the socialist stage.<sup>32</sup>

In 1989, at the same time Wang Nianyi was writing, the sociologist Lynn White questioned the then-state-of-the-field, saying that official, popular, and scholarly studies had obscured the causes of the Cultural Revolution’s violence. Neither understandings that laid the blame at mass hysteria or at official policies were adequate, White argued, to explain why the Cultural Revolution broke out in 1966 nor why it took the shape that it did. Instead, White posited that three pre-Cultural Revolution administrative policies created the conditions for its outbreak and development. First, the policy of labeling individuals in Mao’s China cultivated consciousness of status groups and a concurrent desire to defend (or claim) the rights linked to such labels. Second, the hierarchy of work units in which all one’s life choices were governed by one’s boss led to a system of patron–client relationships that, in the Cultural Revolution, led to extremes in either defending or exacting vengeance on one’s patron. Finally, cycles of political campaigns led to a society in which people policed each other and violence was legitimated.<sup>33</sup> The idea of these “policies of chaos” influenced research and teaching for the following generation; Red Guard violence was seen as either a way for individuals to transcend bad class labels or to demonstrate their own revolutionary mettle.

Three recent works complicate this class framework. In *The Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China’s New Class*, the sociologist Joel Andreas studies the Red Guards at elite Qinghua University and argues that students did not divide so neatly along class lines. He suggests that the middle school pattern that was used in earlier studies is not necessarily representative; his university students were much more diverse to begin with, and the Qinghua factions included students and leaders from across the political spectrum. Andreas’ work proposes that we examine alliances between groups as much as fissures and that we view class in terms of *capital*. Though in the early years of the PRC, Andreas finds that the pre-1949 elite (who had economic and cultural capital under the former regime) was undermined by a new elite (who had political capital); the students and faculty of Qinghua represented *both* political and cultural (or educational) capital. He concludes that “factional conflict was not a struggle between classes,” and that in the end because, the aim of the Cultural Revolution was to attack both political and cultural capital (by denouncing enemies within the party and intellectuals, respectively), “ultimately it forged inter-elite unity.”<sup>34</sup> In the resultant alliance between political and cultural elites Andreas locates the origins of China’s leadership today.

By contrast, Andrew Walder's *Fractured Rebellion* calls into question our ability to use class to explain factionalization at all. Though he originally hypothesized that Red Guard factions were formed based on members' access to political networks, Walder's research on Red Guards in institutions across Beijing shows that factions formed not around class status but around student reactions to work teams. Work teams are a traditional party practice in which groups of party officials from outside an institution are sent in to assess and direct the course of a political movement. Walder argues that students formed factions based first on whether to support or reject the initial work team and then around redressing grievances against the work teams' prior action. Factionalization was then exacerbated by attacks on the institutions that originated the work teams; the minority that had opposed the work team was given license by the Central Cultural Revolution Group to attack the bureaucratic units that had sent in the work teams, and the majority in turn denounced the CCRG and the minority factions as antiparty. Thus, while political labels may have animated both action and counteraction as students fought to keep or overturn the labels in their personal dossiers, Walder argues that the motivation for students' immediate behavior was based on their previous and extremely localized encounter with the work teams.<sup>35</sup> Contingency rather than class, in this analysis, explains political action.

A forthcoming book by the anthropologist Yiching Wu offers yet another framework for understanding class in the Cultural Revolution. Wu examines what he calls "revolution at the margins" or alternative narratives of political protest that emerged in the Cultural Revolution in multiple places and at different junctures in time. These alternative narratives did exactly as the Cultural Revolution prescribed: They critiqued the emergence of class privileges and class rule in New China. One of Wu's examples is a young factory worker in Beijing called Yu Luohe, whose widely circulated writings challenged the "bloodline theory" of class, in which class is inherited. Instead, Yu argued that political consciousness should determine one's revolutionary nature. Though on first reading it appears that Yu's ideas followed the spirit of the Cultural Revolution, they were actually a deep-rooted critique of a longstanding system. In Yu's analysis, the Party had created a caste-based system, and the direction of the Cultural Revolution in fact threatened to perpetuate these class contradictions. Wu argues that Yu "fashioned a new political language that subverted and potentially radicalized the Cultural Revolution's official ideology."<sup>36</sup> In other examples from across China, Wu finds that Yu Luohe's critique of the new classes was echoed in other social protests, from the socioeconomic grievances of workers in Shanghai to a rebel group in Mao's home province of Hunan. By highlighting the emergence of such class critiques and their subsequent brutal suppression, Wu's intellectual history of the Cultural Revolution asserts that class did indeed matter to those who took the Cultural Revolution at face value. The state's crackdown and restoration of order was then a double betrayal; in dismissing the Red Guards and asserting military control, it ended Cultural Revolution as we imagine it, and by executing Yu Luohe as a counterrevolutionary, it extinguished its own meaning of revolution.

New research on the role of class in the Cultural Revolution calls for a reconsideration of how we use define class and assign explanatory power to its categories. It is not to say that rigid class hierarchies did not exist or that class status did not dominate everyday life. Rather, class itself must be historicized, and under these new interpretations: 1) definitions of class were multivalent and multilayered; 2) class status might have conditioned action but not determined it; and 3) critiques of the Cultural Revolution were also rooted in class. Recent scholarship suggests that if the Cultural Revolution was not simply a conflict between classes, it remained a conflict *about* classes and who had the power to define them.

*Whither Revolution?*

Image 3. *Long Live the Victory of the January Revolution* (1968), Shanghai People's Fine Art Publishing House



What was revolutionary about the Cultural Revolution, and how does it fit into the history of the recent Chinese past? Much is at stake in determining how one periodizes the Cultural Revolution, either within the years of the turbulent decade or within the longer trajectory of the 20th century. It has been standard to date the Cultural Revolution from its outbreak in 1966 to the death of Mao in late summer 1976. But as the aforementioned studies have shown, it is possible to periodize it differently within those years. Studying the Mao cult, for example, Daniel Leese argues that its “most important period is clearly presented by the years 1966 to 1969, [but] the internal periodization follows a different timeline, most clearly visible in the shift from employing the cult as a means of mobilization toward fostering compliance in late 1967.”<sup>37</sup> Yiching Wu similarly demarcates a slim window for revolution; in viewing the Cultural Revolution as a failure of its own revolutionary promise, he locates the turning point with the January Revolution of 1967 and its reassertion of authoritarian control.<sup>38</sup> Despite the rhetoric of revolution, Leese and Wu’s internal periodization suggests that the Cultural Revolution was only revolutionary in its beginnings.

From the Chinese point of view, the official narrative periodizes the entire Cultural Revolution as a break. Under this interpretation, the turbulent decade was merely an aberration

in China's long march to wealth and power. As Arif Dirlik has observed, the Party takes great pains to separate "Mao the Cultural Revolutionary" and Mao as the architect of "Chinese Marxism," an ideology that includes not only Mao's original writings on New Democracy but also is the intellectual forefather to the post-Mao "socialism with Chinese characteristics."<sup>39</sup> The Party's 1981 resolution continues to reverberate in Chinese scholarship today. In a recent book of essays, for example, the historian Jin Chunming explains that the Cultural Revolution was the height of the Party's leftist mistakes, with a teachable lesson for China's unique path to socialism.<sup>40</sup> The continued prevalence of such an explanation is a testament to the state's ability to impose a narrative on the Cultural Revolution.

In contrast to rupture, whether short or long lived, the studies of culture examined here have identified continuity. Recent research traces cultural production in the Cultural Revolution to its predecessors and to present day legacies. Thus, the incorporations of Western instruments into model operas that themselves originate in Beijing operatic traditions, or the Sinification of a Western form like ballet, both become part of China's search for modernity. The preservation of Chinese historic sites or objects of antiquity, like the use of banned book lists as guides for what *to* read, demonstrate the persistence of Chinese tradition. Following Mao's maxim to use the foreign to serve China and the past to serve the present, recent studies have shown that the production and experience of culture followed previous patterns. Cultural Revolution culture is but one node in 20th century modernization.

Two of the abovementioned studies on class also find continuity, between Mao and post-Mao China. Both Andreas and Wu view the Cultural Revolution as a turning point in China's class experiment, and both see the Cultural Revolution as a crucible in which class was redefined, but ultimately the authors diverge on what the Cultural Revolution was and what it resulted in. For Andreas, interested in whether the Chinese revolution aimed to eliminate class and how China today came to be ruled by a technocratic class, the Cultural Revolution was a turning point in which the goal of class leveling was abandoned. The Cultural Revolution itself created a new technocratic class, and "red" and "expert" were not fundamentally contradictory but had their origins in Qinghua University's red engineer. For Wu, "while the Cultural Revolution disclosed and challenged the problems of China's postrevolutionary regime in major ways, it failed to resolve them."<sup>41</sup> In Wu's interpretation, the post-Mao reform era was a concession to the interests of the marginalized but only in a bid to retain power. The reform era was thus an economic answer to political and social demands, and the Cultural Revolution turn – in foreclosing discussion of class in China today – has provided for the resilience of the autocratic state.

### *Conclusion*

This article has aimed to introduce Cultural Revolution studies across multiple disciplines by placing its scholarship in historical context, by considering how recent treatments of culture and class have traced continuities and proposed new frameworks, and by suggesting that defining the "revolution" of the Cultural Revolution is crucial to periodizing China's "century of revolution." These new research directions, however, are far from completely realized. As the introduction explained, archival collections are more closed than open, and colleagues working in China do so at professional and sometimes personal risk. Today, almost 30 years after the author Ba Jin called for a national Cultural Revolution museum, there are only a few private attempts to create memorials and exhibitions. The first state-sponsored Cultural Revolution historic site, a graveyard for Red Guards in the city of Chongqing, was approved in 2009 but its gates are locked and chained.<sup>42</sup> Many barriers to scholarly debate or open public reckoning remain.

Nonetheless, these recent studies can tell us something new about the Cultural Revolution, about the Mao period, and about China's modern revolutions. Taken together, the studies on culture and the studies on class tell a story of continuity. In the case of culture, it has been shown that the Cultural Revolution was part of a longer pattern of modernizing Chinese tradition. In the example of class, Wu's narrative of the suppression of class critique and Andreas' explanation of the rise of a new class demonstrate revolution's failure. But if the consequences of the Cultural Revolution did not bring to bear cultural upheaval and class leveling, it does not mean that it did not have this potential. Thus, a story of continuity can admit cultural innovation, individual mobilization, and political critique. In the seeds of the Cultural Revolution, there was both continuity and change, and one way to reconcile the two is to say that it effected the former despite inspiring the latter. If China's current leaders fear open debate on the Cultural Revolution period, it is because doing so would question the meaning of the Chinese revolution itself, to which the Party remains the heir.

### Short Biography

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<sup>2</sup> White, *Policies of Chaos*.

<sup>3</sup> Chan et al., "Students and Class Warfare," 397.

<sup>4</sup> Escherick et al., *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History*, 3–5.

<sup>5</sup> Schoenhals, *Not a Dinner Party*, 296–303.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, *Da dongluan de niandai* (The age of great turmoil), 472 and 477.

<sup>7</sup> Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "In Search of a Master Narrative," 224.

<sup>8</sup> D. Jin, *Feichang yu zhengchang* (Extraordinary and ordinary), 430–440.

<sup>9</sup> Sun, *Shishang yu zhengzhi* (Fashion and politics).

<sup>10</sup> Karl, *Mao Zedong and China*, 117–118.

<sup>11</sup> Schoenhals, 33–43.

<sup>12</sup> MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 14–19.

<sup>13</sup> Perry, *Anyuan*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Holm, *Art and Ideology*, 8–9 and 15–37.

<sup>15</sup> Cheek, *Mao Zedong and China's Revolutions*, 116–117.

<sup>16</sup> Hung, *Mao's New World*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Mittler, *A Continuous Revolution*, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Ludden, "Making Politics Serve Music," 153.

<sup>20</sup> Andrews, "The Art of the Cultural Revolution," 27–58.

<sup>21</sup> Schmalzer, *The People's Peking Man*.

<sup>22</sup> Andrews, 31.

- <sup>23</sup> Mittler, 53–64.
- <sup>24</sup> Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, and Chen, *Acting the Right Part*.
- <sup>25</sup> D. Ho, “To Protect and Preserve,” 64–95.
- <sup>26</sup> D. Y. Ho, “Revolutionizing Antiquity.”
- <sup>27</sup> Lu, “Seizing Civilization.”
- <sup>28</sup> Mittler, 15–16.
- <sup>29</sup> Leese, *Mao Cult*, 127.
- <sup>30</sup> De Bary and Lufrano, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 424–425.
- <sup>31</sup> Wu, *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, 68–83 (Please note that these numbers refer to manuscript pages).
- <sup>32</sup> Wang, 472 and 477.
- <sup>33</sup> White, *Policies of Chaos*.
- <sup>34</sup> Andreas, *Rise of the Red Engineers*, 106 and 13.
- <sup>35</sup> Walder, *Fractured Rebellion*.
- <sup>36</sup> Wu, *Revolution at the Margins*, 116.
- <sup>37</sup> Leese, 24.
- <sup>38</sup> Wu, 26.
- <sup>39</sup> Dirlik, “Mao Zedong in Contemporary Chinese Official Discourse,” 17.
- <sup>40</sup> C. Jin, *Da biandong niandai de tansuo* (Exploring the era of great change), 57–62.
- <sup>41</sup> Wu, 357.
- <sup>42</sup> Zhang, “Grieving at Chongqing’s Red Guard Graveyard,” 24–47.

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