The Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis. By Yiching Wu. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. xxii + 335. $49.95/£36.95.

Anthropologist Yiching Wu finds common cause with a brave handful of young rebels whose ideas went far beyond what Mao Zedong had envisioned when he launched the Cultural Revolution in 1966. Mao called on young people to rebel against individual "capitalist roaders in positions of power" (走資本主義道路的當權派). The thinkers profiled by Wu in *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, however, critiqued the entire power structure itself (except for Mao, whose position was sacrosanct), arguing that the only way to combat exploitation was to replace the state with mass rule.

Wu's goal is to write a critical history of the Cultural Revolution by focusing on dissidents who "formulated . . . intellectually novel analyses of China's statist-socialist system and its associated forms of social-class inequality" (p. 12). For Wu, the Cultural Revolution was a failure because it did not adequately address the power imbalances and widespread grievances highlighted by such figures as Yu Luoke 遇羅克, a twenty-four-year-old factory apprentice in Beijing who railed against inherited privilege, and Yang Xiguang 楊曦光, a nineteen-year-old Hunanese student who called for a "People's Commune of China" (中華人民公社). Not surprisingly, these heterodox writers were harshly suppressed in 1968 when Mao demobilized the rebels and recentralized power in the hands of military-dominated Revolutionary Committees. Yu was executed and Yang was imprisoned.

The main contribution of *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins* is that it shows how messy and contingent events were in 1966 and 1967. Far from being masterminded or controlled by Mao or other central leaders, factional struggles and political arguments in cities and provinces throughout China took on their own local dynamics and found their own temporary resolutions before elite officials could intervene. Echoing recent studies by Dong Guoqiang 董國強 and Andrew G. Walder,[1] Wu finds that factional alliances and conflicts were determined neither by the social

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[1] Andrew G. Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, "Nanjing's Failed 'January Revolution' of 1967: The Inner Politics of a Provincial Power Seizure," *The China Quarterly* 203 (September 2010), pp. 675–92; Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, "Factions in a Bureaucratic Setting: The Origins of Cultural Revolution Conflict in Nanjing," *The China Journal* 65 (January 2011), pp. 1–25; Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, "From Truce to Dictatorship: Creating a Revolutionary Committee in Jiangsu," *The China Journal* 68 (July 2012), pp. 1–31.

class backgrounds of participants or by central fiat, but were shaped by practical concerns about how to survive in a fast-changing environment.

Wu's local approach is especially effective in his chapter about Shanghai's January Revolution of 1967, in which he argues that Shanghai's worker rebels had their own agendas and were not merely following central leaders' orders. Instead, Wu writes, "the events in early January were largely ad hoc responses by some local forces that did not present articulate and coherent political meanings. They represented, so to speak, practical or makeshift solutions in a highly fluid situation with a variety of interpretive and political possibilities" (p. 120). By paying close attention to when meetings occurred and when important proclamations were published, Wu shows the inaccuracy of official narratives that portrayed Shanghai's worker rebels as eager to restore production and oppose "economism" (meaning workers' agitation for raises, back pay, bonuses, and other socioeconomic demands). Although the worker rebels in Shanghai had more autonomy in January 1967 than previously imagined, Wu also shows that the demobilization of mass groups and the recentralization of power followed quickly thereafter. The opportunity for systemic change in Shanghai was fleeting.

Rather than uncovering little-known events, Wu reinterprets prominent episodes. Readers familiar with earlier generations of Cultural Revolution scholarship will already know about Wu's case studies: official class status labels during the Mao years (the subject of Wu's Chapter 2); Yu Luoke's critique of the "bloodline" theory of revolutionary reliability (Chapter 3); and the worker rebellion in Shanghai (Chapter 4). Richard Kraus wrote *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* more than three decades ago and Yu Luoke's famous essay about class background was translated and published in English in 1976.[2] Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun's 李遜 richly sourced *Proletarian Power* remains one of the best books about Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution.[3] And although Wu's fifth chapter about the Yang Xiguang and the Shengwulian 省無聯 rebel group in Hunan contains the most original material in

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[2] Richard Curt Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981); Gordon White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1976). More broadly, Song Yongyi 宋永毅 and his collaborators have written about such "heterodox" writers as Yu Luoke, Yang Xiguang, and the Li Yizhe 李一哲 group. See Song Yongyi and Sun Dajin 孫大進, eds., *Wenhua dageming he tade yiduan sichao* 文化大革命和它的異端思潮 [Heterodox Currents of Thought in the Cultural Revolution] (Hong Kong: Tianyuan shuwu, 1997); and Song Yongyi and Zhou Zehao 周澤浩, "Guest Editors' Introduction," *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2001), pp. 3–16.

[3] Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

the book and was new to me, I learned from Wu's endnotes that sociologist Jonathan Unger conducted interviews with Yang and published an article about him in 1991.[4]

The existence of previously existing scholarship about Wu's main themes made me pay close attention to the newness of his sources. It is difficult to generalize about Wu's sources because each chapter is so different. The richest sources come from Hunan, where Ministry of State Security agents once detained Wu because he was gathering grassroots documents about the province's Cultural Revolution. From local newspapers to Red Guard bulletins to rare collections of speeches and essays, many of the sources in Chapter 5, denoted by "AC" (author's collection) in the notes, meet the high standard of Cultural Revolution research set by such scholars as Michael Schoenhals. Chapter 5 is also bolstered by Wu's interviews with a former rebel named Liu and with an ex-classmate of Yang Xiguang. The sources in Wu's other chapters about class labels, Yu Luoke, and Shanghai's January Revolution are less impressive by comparison. Although Wu adds some new sources and makes good use of Song Yongyi's CD-ROM database of Cultural Revolution speeches and documents to bring the familiar stories up to date, certain parts of the chapters read like summaries of earlier work.

Wu is correct that the heterodox critics he celebrates operated at the margins of the Cultural Revolution—meaning that they deviated from a mainstream that permitted no alternatives to authoritarian dictatorship—but they were not necessarily from the margins of Chinese society, nor have they been marginalized in previous scholarship about the Cultural Revolution. Wu does provide a few glimpses of genuinely marginalized voices that have been neglected by scholars. For example, Wu unearthed a Hunanese handbill from September 1967 titled "Program of revolutionary rebellion of the Mao Zedong Thought Association of Hundreds of Millions of Peasants" (p. 176). The document demanded equality for peasants *vis-à-vis* workers and officials, making a strong case that peasants had been marginalized in Mao's China. Unfortunately, this tantalizing source is not linked to the rest of Wu's chapter about Hunan. It is unclear who wrote it, how others reacted to it, and what happened to the purportedly huge group. Digging deeper to answer these questions would have enhanced the originality of Wu's contribution.

Another example of a marginal person who has been neglected by scholars is Zhou Guohui 周國輝 . Zhou was a university student in Hunan who "authored several widely circulated speeches" criticizing revolutionary committees (p. 182). According to his endnotes, Wu possesses a rare eight-page booklet of Zhou's speeches published in 1968, but instead of telling curious readers what Zhou actually said, Wu moves

[4] Jonathan Unger, "Whither China?: Yang Xiguang, Red Capitalists, and the Social Turmoil of the Cultural Revolution," *Modern China* 17, no. 1 (January 1991), pp. 3–37.

on to discuss another student, Zhang Yugang 張玉綱 , whose writings have already been brought to light by Song Yongyi and Sun Dajin. Although the Hunanese peasant handbill and Zhou Guohui's speeches seem like missed opportunities to more deeply examine voices from the Cultural Revolution about which scholars know very little, they also signify how much more research remains to be done on the Mao years. I hope that Wu will apply his source-gathering and analytical skills to more unknown elements of the Cultural Revolution in his future projects.

Wu ends the book with a final chapter and an epilogue that link the Cultural Revolution to China's post-Mao turn toward capitalist development. Wu argues that in order to comprehend the post-Mao concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, it is necessary to understand how the radical political possibilities of the Cultural Revolution were suppressed, sustaining systems of domination and inequalities that persisted after Mao died. Wu cites economist Barry Naughton's point that the Mao years laid a foundation of economic infrastructure and human capital that eased China's transition to capitalist development, but he pushes this argument even further. Global capital flows toward China today, Wu writes, because the "authoritarian state apparatus . . . relentlessly prevents labor self-organization and suppresses popular unrest for the production of a disciplined (and low-priced) labor force" (p. 234). Wu traces the roots of this phenomenon to the suppression of marginal voices at the outset of the Cultural Revolution.

This argument seems plausible, but is difficult to assess because Wu's writing on the post-1968 years lacks the depth of his chapters about the 1966–1968 period. In order to make convincing points about the 1970s and 1980s, Wu would have needed to base his argument on the same type of painstaking primary source research on which he built his chapter about Hunan. Instead, he summarizes a long series of events and trends that have already been written about elsewhere.

Why all of the synthesis and summary? Wu is trying to reach an audience beyond the China Studies scholars who are already familiar with the basic outlines of the Tiananmen Square incident of April 1976, the Democracy Wall movement, and the events of May and June 1989. Wu wants to reach readers who might not be experts about China but who nod their heads and feel included in the "us" when they read in the epilogue that "it remains a vital challenge for us to envision more inclusive and robust ways to think about socialism, revolution, democracy, and freedom as integrally constitutive of a common political project, their inherent tensions notwithstanding. The central problem is therefore how to develop a socialist project, as E. P. Thompson once put it, 'which is both democratic and revolutionary in its means, its strategy and objectives'" (p. 237). Wu's "us" excludes readers whose "central problem" might differ from his. Fortunately, people who picked up the book aiming to learn new things about the Cultural Revolution can also come away

satisfied. Whether readers feel included or excluded by Wu's political agenda, the stories of Yu Luoke, Yang Xiguang, and the Shanghai workers rebels make clear the difficulty of challenging entrenched power structures.

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