China in the 60s and its legacy – "The Margins and the Center": For a New History of the Cultural Revolution

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"There is irrefutable evidence that the rotten heads of the United Departments plotted to instigate a Second Shanghai Riot! They cannot get away with it!" (ca. 1967, via chineseposters.net)

At the end of the Qing dynasty and in the early twentieth century, a significant number of Chinese revolutionary activists and theorists believed that anarchism was China's most promising revolutionary path, and that was in part because it corresponded most closely to the actuality of social existence. The vast majority of the population, after all, lived their lives with next to no relationship with the state, whose functionaries almost never reached the village level, and whose levies and regulations were for the most part administered by members of the local elite, with ties to their communities that were many and varied. Peoples' lives were marked by various forms of community and solidarity—self-help, religious, ceremonial, clan-based, labor-cycle, and market-network related—and these forms of solidarity had made many communities capable of resistance and mobilization in the face of external threats, including imperial authoritarian overreach. Those early theorists of revolution felt that these local social capabilities could be strengthened and politicized in an egalitarian direction, and that the emergent energies of the polity to come would lie precisely in these local forms, rather than national state authority. [1]

The anarchist revolution never came, of course, and most anarchist activists, and the social forces they represented, were absorbed, as one-time semi-anarchist Mao Zedong was, into either the Nationalist (KMT) or Communist (CCP) parties. Both parties, in the course of their struggle for state power, were forced to respond to or ally with local formations in a number of ways, and this made for a number of local variants in revolutionary practice. [2] For both, however, the ultimate project was strong state power, a version of which the CCP attained in 1949. Most western observers of the PRC, in the Maoist and reform periods, assume a strong central state. Figures like Mao or Deng Xiaoping give a picture of sovereign authority that has led many to ascribe to them a dirigisme that has for the most part been less thorough than widely assumed.

Unlike in the Qing dynasty, officialdom in the PRC penetrated to nearly all levels of society, but, particularly in the reform period, the interests and practices of local officials have often been at some variance from those at the center. I remember being initially surprised, when taking a bus in 1991 through coastal Fujian province—an area that had emerged as a center of new export-oriented manufacturing in the post-1978 reform period—by the number of red billboards exhorting local enterprises to pay their taxes as required. The billboards wouldn't have been there had taxes been paid. The center's inability to manage revenue collection created fiscal difficulties for the state and necessitated policy changes in the middle of the reform period.

The localities have consistently shown a high level of resilience and semi-autonomy. During the double-digit growth years, this bifurcation of authority was generally useful to the center. [3] The local officials' front-line status made them take the brunt of protests from workers, residents with

environmental NIMBY issues, or from those—pensioners, retirees, those with ambiguous residential status—with unmet financial claims on the state, and the violent repression those protests often met, as the testimony of participants nearly always revealed, contrasted with a faith and confidence in the authorities in Beijing, a strong testimony to the center's legitimation efforts. The ability of local officials to profit—legally and illegally—from commercial, enterprise, and property development, or from management of Foreign Direct Investment, played a central role in transforming them into stake-holders in, rather than conservative obstructers of, the central state's reform process. This pattern of often extreme local divergence has served the state in other ways. New forms of capital accumulation could be tested locally before being applied on a wider scale. Shanghai, by all economic measures the most advanced city/region in China from the mid-19th century until the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s, was left out of the first wave of market and FDI reforms, which were concentrated in the Pearl River Delta region and in Fujian province, across the straits from Taiwan; if the reforms proved to be a failure, failure was not deemed to be an option for Shanghai, whose capitalist takeoff waited until the 1990s, after the "successful" implementation of reform in the south. In the last decade, the central government has been able to take advantage of regional disparities in order to accomplish internal spatial fixes of the kind employed by capital globally: the massive infrastructural and financial investments in Sichuan province and elsewhere in the west have helped to balance and counteract growing workers' power and concomitant wage increases in the coastal regions. For the most part, the state has well weathered the chaotic dynamic between local and central power, and has thrived. The citizenry, absorbed into a shifting and precarious capitalist labor market as well as into a multi-tiered consumer society, adept at channeling social aspirations through mass-mediation and the attendant consolidation of mechanisms of identification with a largely mythic promise of individual self-fulfillment and upward mobility, is left with fewer and fewer social resources.

This particular center/local dynamic may be coming to an end. I write this in September 2014 in Shanghai, and a several hundred person strong delegation of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the body charged with the massive anti-corruption campaign instigated by President Xi Jinping, has recently arrived and installed themselves in a local hotel. It is widely assumed that its targets are in high places, and the local papers report and speculate about the meaning of events such as one last week, when a neighborhood residents group who had in years past unsuccessfully struggled against a local real estate development presented the commission with a sheaf of purportedly incriminating documents, which the commission then agreed to review. Around the country, local officials are falling by the day, in what is proving to be a relentless and wide-sweeping campaign. If Xi Jinping is successful in creating a rationalized, functionalist bureaucracy, one which for the most part no longer views land and contracts as local resources to be mined, but serves more purely an instrument of the will of the state, he will have reached a level of central state authority well beyond that of any of his predecessors. This is not guaranteed, of course, and an achievement even of that scale might be open to later reversal, but it could significantly alter the terrain of political possibility. Many voices on the Left in China continue to place their hopes in the central government, which they view as capable of a decisionism that would, with the right ideological orientation, be able to contain the market within a new social compact. [4] I suspect that they will prove to be mistaken. It is easy to overestimate the political capacity to contain market forces.

Few leftist intellectuals write of political initiative or creativity coming from the people themselves—they see intellectuals as fulfilling that role. Labor activism remains largely within the local dynamic described above; there remain significant institutional and political barriers to broader, trans-local mobilization. Although the Yue Yuen (shoe manufacturing) strikes in the spring of 2014 had a wider reach than previous labor actions, it is too soon to evaluate what this portends for the future. Still, given that a militant politics has to date largely been confined to "the margins," and given the present fairly bleak political terrain, an examination of historical manifestations of

political creativity at the mass level might have greater than historiographical importance.

Wu Yiching's re-interpretation of the Cultural Revolution—T*he Cultural Revolution at the Margins: Chinese Socialism in Crisis* (Harvard University Press, 2014)—is such a study, and it is a story whose dynamic bears an important relation to the historical vicissitudes of the local/center dynamic. Considering its historical and continuing political importance, including in much recent radical philosophy, the Cultural Revolution (CR) remains one of the most under-studied phenomena of the 20th century. This is a particularly acute problem in China, where the negation of the Cultural Revolution and the prevention of its recurrence form a central pillar of state ideology, and where the relative absence of sustained analysis and discussion of the period has foreclosed a deeper understanding of the changing nature of what has constituted politics in China over the last half century. This, and the prohibition of discourse on that other and more ambiguous outburst of the political—the late 1980s protests that culminated in the so-called Tiananmen Square movement in 1989—has been central to the state's ongoing depoliticization process.

Although the state prohibition on open and widespread discourse on the Cultural Revolution remains in place, there has, over the last ten or twelve years, been a steady and slow accumulation of scholarship in Chinese, [5] as well as in western languages. There is of course much archival and empirical work that remains to be done. But mostly absent in recent work are new historical syntheses that make clear, original, and cogent claims for the broadly political character of the Cultural Revolution, and for its legacy into the reform period. In addition to performing important and analytically rich historical and political syntheses, Revolution at the Margins contains much new scholarship as well, based on newly available material, including interviews, and work in archives that have rarely been consulted. Wu's notion of "margins" is not geographically based—his case studies include events in Beijing and Shanghai—but refers to popular-based political movements and analyses that arose outside of official state organs, made possible by the irruption of political groups and tendencies over which there initially existed little official control.

The view that the mass politics of the Cultural Revolution was merely a case of mass manipulation, or a distorted effect of central CCP power politics, has fortunately lost much of its authority in recent years, even though machinations in the central leadership remain central to the most recent comprehensive English-language history, Macfarquahar and Schoenhals's *Mao's Last Revolution*. [6] But no analytical framework of similarly broad interpretive scope has arisen to replace this. The argument for the primacy and originality of the margins is thus an important one. Those studies that do investigate politics "from below"—and there have been many good ones recently [7] —tend to focus on group identity, interest, or structural antagonism, and generally downplay non-functionalist dimensions of the political.

Wu's thesis is that the irruption of new political energies in the early period of the Cultural Revolution was initially facilitated but not controlled by the center, that it represented new responses to long-standing grievances and discontent as well as emergent forms of political imagination, and that the state's response to that irruption decisively shaped the character of the party-state itself, beginning as early as 1968 and continuing up to the present day. Wu does not ascribe to the "margins" more political and ideological coherence than they actually possessed; politics at the margins was tentative, messy, heterogeneous, and out of control. The state's active policy of containment not only led to the premature end of political and ideological experimentation, but made containment itself, and the resultant energies of political neutralization, a core component of state function. Wu writes of the object of containment:

"The freeing of political interpretation from the neat categories of official thought created a carnivalesque space in which officially sanctioned ideas and heretical meanings coexisted and impinged upon one another; and orthodox notions—while being ritualistically invoked—were nevertheless sur-

reptitiously appropriated and creatively modified into new interpretations." (13)

The mass political activism characteristic of the Cultural Revolution, however, was not necessarily the direct expression of preexisting social discontent and grievances. Rather, this activism was often the result of novel forms of political language and action in a turbulent process that few participants fully comprehended. In espousing explosive slogans such as "Bombard the headquarters" and "Rebellion is justified", Mao—China's party chief turned rebel leader—set in motion new dynamics that radically disrupted the existing arrangements of politics. With the abrupt separation of Mao's charismatic authority from the party apparatus, superior political understanding was no longer the monopoly of the party. Indeed, the basic rationale of the mass politics characteristic of the Cultural Revolution was that Mao's Thought could be grasped directly by the general populace, unmediated by the party. Although everyone was speaking in the name of Mao, Mao's fragmentary ideas were variously interpreted in fluid circumstances and were appropriated for diverse purposes—to rationalize interpersonal conflicts and factional rivalries, to articulate popular grievances, or to justify attacks on political authorities… Giving new meanings to a myriad of antagonisms that had hitherto remained latent, the events of the Cultural Revolution had a logic and dynamic of their own, and in ways that neither the Supreme Leader nor any determinate political programs could fully control or even foresee. (51)

Important corrective approaches to the Cultural Revolution, [8] Wu's included, treat its politics according to a specific historical periodization that centers on the changing nature of political actors and small-group composition, the nature of antagonisms, and the character of containment/institutionalization. Wu's periodization is not, of course, neat and tidy, and the movement was certainly subject to numerous local variations. In the following summary of the historical sequence, for readers unfamiliar with the movement's contents, I will make occasional note of Wu's interpretive periodization schema, but will address his specific arguments in the following section.

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The Cultural Revolution began in the late winter of 1966, with a power struggle waged by Mao and his allies against others in positions of central authority deemed to be following a "revisionist" line antagonistic to Mao himself. Mao and his anti-revisionist allies consolidated their power from February on, culminating in the May 16 establishment of the "Cultural Revolution Group," whose most prominent members included his wife, the radical Jiang Qing, as well as Kang Sheng, polemicist Yao Wenyuan, and theorist Zhang Chunqiao. On May 25, Beijing University philosophy lecturer Nie Yuanzi posted the first "big character poster" attacking the university leadership and its suppression of revolutionary fervor, a poster that Mao publicly approved. Almost immediately, Red Guard groups arose at nearly every university and middle school in Beijing, and this was soon to be emulated around the country. In the early summer of 1966, then-President Liu Shaoqi, later to become the major target of the anti-revisionist campaign, sent "work teams" to the schools and universities to direct and supervise student activism. This attempt to suppress these nascent energies met with substantial student opposition. The Cultural Revolution Group also recognized the work teams as counterrevolutionary, and these teams were withdrawn in July. At that point, the "pluralization" phase, as Alessandro Russo has called it, developed rapidly, as numerous and varied Red Guard groups sprang up, often in conflict with each other. Although the composition of the Red Guards was diverse, Wu observes that in this early period, the children of revolutionaries and cadres, those who were "Born Red," played a dominant role. These young people primarily targeted those with "bad class backgrounds," which they believed made them real or potential agents of counter-revolution. Beijing's demographics—it had a negligible working class population and a disproportionately high number of government functionaries—shaped this dynamic. This, according to Wu, contributed to the strategic and ideological predominance of the "bloodline" theory of revolutionary identity in the early period. The summer and early fall of 1966 were marked by numerous

incidents of violent attack on those with bad class backgrounds, as well as destruction of historical monuments from imperial times. In Wu's analysis, the high degree of violence in this period was not unrelated to the ideological domination of the bloodline position, and he musters research to suggest, here and elsewhere in the book, that the worst violence in the Cultural Revolution was not characteristic of the Cultural Revolution as a whole, but was the product of distinct political conjunctures.

The Cultural Revolution Group was tepid in its support of the "bloodline" analysis, however, and over the fall, the targets increasingly included all those in positions of authority, irrespective of class background. This, according to Wu, both allowed for broader participation in the movement and occasioned significantly more political creativity than had been possible under the more rigid identity politics of the previous months. The most significant events of late 1966 and early 1967 occurred in Shanghai, where, in contrast to Beijing, large numbers of workers became active in the movement. The Shanghai events are among the most studied in the Cultural Revolution, but interpretations vary. Over the course of the autumn, workers organized around a disparate range of grievances—pay, employment status, residence and relocation, workingconditions, and factory governance, and in November, a loose coalition of groups took shape, naming itself the Workers' General Headquarters (WGHQ). Foremost among their demands was recognition and legitimacy, for the directives from the Cultural Revolution Group were, in the fall of 1966, somewhat ambiguous on the question of workers' participation. Other groups sprang up as well, including the Scarlet Guards, who were defenders of the Shanghai municipal authorities, against whom the WGHQ were arrayed. Events came to a climax in late December and early January of 1967, as WGHQ and allied groups' militancy reached a boiling point—institutions were taken over, and the situation in general was akin to that of a general strike. Zhang Chunqiao of the Cultural Revolution Group came to Shanghai in January and officially recognized the WGHQ as a revolutionary group. February 5, 1967 witnessed the formation of the famous Shanghai Commune, which was heralded as a new model for a politics developing out of the seizure of power from below. Earlier than this, however, units of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) had been sent into Shanghai to assist in the revolutionary seizure of power, and the PLA constituted, in Wu's analysis, an energy of order and, at times, containment.

As events progressed in Shanghai, Mao had second thoughts about the Commune, and ordered it disbanded on February 24 in favor of a new administrative form that had emerged in the northeast. In Shanghai, as elsewhere in China, the Cultural Revolution was to be overseen by Revolutionary Committees, comprising members of the PLA, representatives of rebel groups, and party cadres. Throughout the late fall and winter, and throughout the brief life of the Commune, groups with varied compositions and agenda proliferated, with demands that their grievances be addressed and that they participate in power sharing. The situation before, during, and after the Commune was very fluid. Although the Revolutionary Committee mode of governance was intended to be followed nationwide, its implementation was slow and uneven, and Shanghai remained the scene of inter-factional struggle until the summer of 1967. The events in Shanghai precipitated many other attempts to seize power throughout the country during the winter and spring of that year.

In the spring of 1967 in Wuhan, a strategically and industrially important city in central China, the PLA intervened militarily against the city's large, radical Red Guard faction, despite being ordered to desist by the Cultural Revolution Group. When two representatives of the Cultural Revolution Group arrived in the city, one was assaulted. This prompted a brief campaign against "capitalist roaders in the army," and the damage to the PLA's legitimacy encouraged widespread defiance against their authority. This confluence of events convinced many in the central leadership that the country was threatened with total chaos. In September of 1967, Mao began a campaign to end factional conflict, and rapidly put the Cultural Revolution under the control of the Revolutionary Committees. This met considerable resistance in many quarters, but by the end of 1967 it was clear that this was the

center's chosen course.

Over the first half of 1968, the movement and factions were largely contained, and the focus shifted to the institutionalization of the Cultural Revolution's successful power struggles to date. By September of 1968, Revolutionary Committees were in place in every province. Between late 1968 and 1972, the Revolutionary Committees went after thousands of people accused of factional fighting and counterrevolutionary activities, and as several scholars have noted, these purges marked the most violent period of the Cultural Revolution. [9] By 1972, the PLA had emerged as the strongest administrative force in the country. In the factories and the schools, the politics and values of the Cultural Revolution remained in force, as evident in the "worker-peasant-soldier" universities, the universities-in-the-factories, continued discussion of organizational forms, etc. Although the Red Guards had ceased to exist, this final period witnessed periodic national campaigns (criticize Lin Biao, etc.) as well as struggles within particular factories. The period was also marked by power struggles within the central leadership, the most salient event of which was an aborted coup by PLA supporters of Lin Biao in 1971. Following its defeat, the PLA's authority again came into question. The Cultural Revolution continued until 1976, when the "Gang of Four" was arrested.

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Critique of bureaucratic class privilege was central to Cultural Revolution politics, and Revolution at the Margins makes distinctive analytical contributions to our understanding of the nature of class, class analysis, and class conflict in the PRC. It begins by recognizing the incommensurate and discrepant temporalities of post-1949 class politics. The codification of class categories was first made on the basis of family origin, i.e., with reference to a social system whose field of antagonism had for the most part ceased to exist by the 1960s, but which were insisted upon, in part, to guarantee a form of affirmative action for those with "good" class backgrounds, and thus avoid the unintended reproduction of class privilege. [10] Yet these bureaucratized and reified class categories, which had become a defining element of individual identities, had taken on a life of their own, divorced, for the most part, from actual social relations. At the same time, a privileged bureaucratic stratum was in formation, with well-defined benefits for each administrative level. Mao's alarm at the emergence of this new class structure—he was determined to avoid China's revolution following the Soviet revisionist path—added a new dimension of antagonism to the social field. Existing class discourse proved an awkward vehicle for this newly superimposed language of critique of bureaucratic class privilege. A consequence, Wu writes, was that

"Instead of giving rise to a conception of class adequate to Chinese socialism, the reification of class and compression of class analyses centering on old and new—or prerevolutionary and postrevolutionary—social relationships ended up creating a hopelessly incoherent ideological space in which sharply different politics of class interpenetrated and fused, with new types of social conflict continually represented as manifestations of the titanic battles of the past between the revolutionary forces and the agents of the ancient regime." (49)

Although much existing scholarship on post-1949 class recognizes the incoherence of PRC class discourse, it remains far less analytically precise on this incommensurability and its consequences. Wu suggests the political and theoretical work at the margins proposed various ways out of that incoherence. The party-state's containment and repression of those initiatives culminated, ultimately, in the suppression of class discourse altogether as the reform period progressed. Today, for example, the word "class" (*jieji*) is frowned upon, in favor of the less fraught term "stratum" (*jieceng*). Another characteristic of class in China today, although Wu neglects to mention this, is that members of families with "bad" class backgrounds have been disproportionately represented in the ranks of university students, in executive positions, and in arts and letters. This phenomenon is not uncommon in postsocialist societies, wherein pre-revolutionary elites, such as the Polish

szlachta, have managed to recapture substantial social and economic privilege after decades of social restructuring. This re-emergence might make one look more sympathetically at the redistributive identity-based class politics of the earlier period.

One significant force on the margins was Yu Luoke, whose writings represented a major challenge to official class discourse. Yu Luoke is best known for his polemical essay against the bloodline theory, "On Class Origins," published in January 1967. It was critical not only of the rigidity of codified class identity, but also of the capacity of such a system to produce a new elite class. Wu makes the strong claim that Yu Luoke's position was in no way a functionalist expression of a particularist interest, derived from his own (privileged background) class position as defined by the system, and thus a harbinger of a later liberal universalizing human rights discourse, as some have claimed, but rather a significant attempt to reframe the revolution-era discourse of class in its entirety, turning it to questions of "moral autonomy" and "human dignity." Although, as I mentioned earlier, members of the Cultural Revolution Group also expressed reservations of the bloodline theory, the broadly anti-authoritarian and popular democratic implications of Yu's analysis were considered too great a challenge to the CCP. Yu, variously branded as a Trotskyist or an anarchist, was arrested in January 1968 and executed in 1970. Wu suggests that the state's reactive foreclosure of this discussion of class was a formative component of its growing neutralization function, a function kept alive today in state bromides on the "harmonious society."

Wu offers a new and original interpretation of the Shanghai events. The spread of the Cultural Revolution beyond students and into the working population was not part of the revolution's original plan. The PRC was of course a developmentalist state, and Mao was consistent in his insistence on the importance of maintaining production levels. Although approving of workers' radicalism in the strictly political sphere—the challenge to the power of municipal authorities, for example—concerns were raised, for the first time in PRC history, about "economism." For on the surface, "economistic" concerns were indeed a primary activator of the Shanghai mobilizations. There were good reasons for this. Massive numbers of workers had been laid off in the early sixties, many sent to the countryside where they met a severe reduction in living standards. A system had grown in place whereby peasants from nearby agricultural areas were brought into factories seasonally, according to production schedule needs, and at vastly lower wages than those of urban workers; in many factories they represented 30% or more of the workforce. The housing crisis was acute, with urban residents reduced to an average of around three square meters per person. Although state rhetoric designated the working class as the masters of the country, in Shanghai, their position seemed to be deteriorating.

In late 1966 and early 1967, though, when state authority was at its nadir and when radical worker power was at its apogee, demands for back pay and benefits were often rapidly met, depleting enterprise and municipal coffers. The charge of "economism" was the language the state authorities used to curb this alarming tendency, and this charge was echoed by their epigones in the movements. And yet, as in the discourse of class, "economism" failed to capture what Wu sees as an underlying dynamic of an inchoate politics, an understanding of which requires a consideration of the relation between the economic and the political in socialist societies.

"Although working-class struggles over wages and the length of the workday under capitalism may be viewed as economistic (or "economic-corporate" to borrow a term from Antonio Gramsci) and thus structurally intrinsic to a capitalist system, the same may not be true of similar struggles in state-socialist societies in which economic and political spheres lack differentiation and in which extraction of surplus-labor is achieved through extra-economic means… But in certain forms of non-capitalist society (including state-socialist society), the amalgamation of economic and political powers makes possible extraction of surplus labor through the coercive apparatus of the state. In such contexts, contests over economic issues challenge the state power underlying surplus extraction,

and apparently economic struggles often become inseparable from political conflicts." (107)

The CCP, Wu holds, functioned very early on in the radical phase of the Cultural Revolution as a force of containment, a force visible even in the proclamation of the Shanghai Commune itself. Wu's analysis of the complex sequence of events in January and February is extremely detailed. Zhang Chunqiao, in this analysis, does not emerge as a spokesperson/theorist of a new worker's politics, and the Commune is not the expression of workers' victories. Rather, the state from the start worked to forestall the development of a mass politics that had yet to coalesce and which could have, given space, time, and opportunity, created a new political discourse, expanding its initially prominent "economistic" concerns more fully into the social and political field. The proclamation of the Commune had a dual character. It galvanized political imagination elsewhere in the country, as Wu demonstrates in his chapter on the Shengwulian group in Hunan province (see below), but it was at the same time an attempt to reassert order, albeit within the parameters set by the political achievements of the rebel groups.

The document "Whither China," written by Yang Xikuang for the Shengwulian group, which formed in Hunan province in September 1967 in reaction to the deradicalization of the Cultural Revolution then in progress, reflected the lessons that its author had learned from the Shanghai Commune—that the way to build communist society was through the wholesale elimination of the bureaucratic stratum, and the multiplication of communes. It is an extraordinary document, and I recommend it to readers of this review [11]. Rejecting the view that Shengwulian's composition reflected a form of interest politics—its members were commonly drawn from those deemed to have been left out of the Cultural Revolution's main thrust, such as decommissioned soldiers, urban "rusticates" who had left the villages to which they had been sent and returned to the countryside, and others—Wu holds that it was rather this marginal status that gave energy to a broader and more general critique of bureaucratic authority. Based on interviews and on archival work in Hunan (for which Wu was jailed and subject to interrogation), Wu gives a remarkably clear history of the organizational precedents for the Shengwulian group in Hunan—this itself is a remarkable feat of historiography—and the specific historical conjunctures to which it was a response. The chapter also makes clear that Yang Xiguang, member of Shengwulian and author of the famous "Whither China" essay, was not the only active intellectual in the movement. Wu makes clear that the standard view of Shengwulian as a movement of the disaffected and persecuted is not an inaccurate one, but argues convincingly that the group's politics are not reducible to that.

"The combination of locally based demands and the development of novel political ideas that informed and gave new meaning to specific incidents and grievances had a potentially explosive impact on the mass politics of the Cultural Revolution. But such ruptural moment did not materialize. Condemned as "anarchist" and anti-party, these critical currents were swiftly crushed by national and local authorities. The political and theoretical activities of the activists were suppressed ruthlessly. They were denounced for calling for the discarding of party leadership and deliberately propagating a false image of a self-perpetrating bureaucratic class. With the reassertion of organizational regimentation and interpretive control, critical voices emergent in the movement were silenced, and political orthodoxy was reimposed." (185)

The Shengwulian group was active as the most radical phase of the CR was winding down, as the party was consolidating the policies of containment and neutralization that crystallized in reaction to developments such as those described above. The Shengwulian presented a particularly radical challenge to the newly consolidated state orthodoxy, and Wu's analysis makes clear why it met with such a heavy state response.

The Shengwulian was one of many popular anti-bureaucracy movements around the country that arose from the end of 1967 and into 1968, when all of them met the heavy hand of the state and suf-

fered the same fate as Shengwulian's. Indeed, as Wu shows from a survey of mostly Chinese-language scholarship, the most violent phase of the CR was a consequence of violence perpetrated by the state against these late-period militants. The period between 1970 and 1976 is a significant gap in Wu's historical coverage, even given that the book is not intended to be a "history" of the CR. This is the most under-researched period of the CR, and we will need to await further scholarship before this period can be evaluated more fully. [12] Extra-party mass movements had ceased to exist, but as I mentioned above, struggles continued within schools and factories as the CR was institutionalized. Although the period was indeed characterized by purges of "class enemies," it is likely that in this period, as in earlier periods, there were a range of antagonisms that were carried out within this discursive frame. It is possible that further research on this period might reveal "micro-margins," within particular institutions, and thus complicate Wu's analysis of neutralization and containment.

Wu continues his analysis of the anti-bureaucratic tendencies by skipping to the immediate post-Mao period in the late 70s, treating material more familiar to readers of English-language scholarship—Li Yizhe, Chen Erjin, and Democracy Wall, commonly taken as the first stirrings of western-style human rights and liberal democracy discourse. Wu places this irruption of late Seventies politics within the context of the grassroots anti-bureaucratic movements that arose in late 1967 and early 1968, and makes a clear and convincing case for the many continuities he finds between movements of the two periods. The economic and political shifts of the immediate post-Mao years had, of course, created the latter opening, and political contingency made it initially expedient for the Deng Xiaoping reformist faction to use and tolerate the movement. Containment and neutralization of these energies would take a new form, however, with the 1978 Deng-ist reforms, which Wu analyzes according to Gramsci's notion of "passive revolution," whereby the earlier antagonisms were displaced into and neutralized by the new context of market reforms. The state logic of containment that arose in 1968 perdured, albeit in a new form.

Here, although it is not discussed in *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*, I believe it would be useful to return to the reform-period center/local dynamics discussed at the beginning of this essay, which, as I suggested, represent a different version of politics and economics at the margins. Wu's late-Seventies "margins" are worker-intellectual anti-authoritarian activists, who continued, in a different form and in new language, the radical anti-bureaucratic politics of the Cultural Revolution. Equally significant in the early reform period were spontaneous village-level reorganizations of rural industrial production. There remain significant ideological and political disputes about the nature of this development. Many on the Chinese Left hold that in its initial phases, these represented popular, locally based mutations of a cooperative mode of production, at more remove from state control, but in which the development of ownership and private property rights was not on the political-economic agenda. I tend to concur with this judgment. [13] This is also, however, one argument made by the "continuity" school in China, which sees in the early Deng-era reforms significant continuities with Mao-era socialist developmentalism, but without bureaucratic and authoritarian shackles of the earlier period, in other words, a politically progressive development. There are significant political implications in these claims for continuity. In this school's analysis of the present period, to summarize somewhat crudely, China remains a socialist country, and in the absence of universal private-property rights, and minus the consolidation of a distinct capitalist class with its own social power, the state retains the capacity—although it has largely chosen not to exercise this capacity—to shape development along socialist and egalitarian lines, given the rapid development of productive forces and China's participation in the global economy on its own terms. [14] This is certainly an overestimation of the Chinese state's ability or will to create a socio-economic system that represents a serious alternative to globally dominant modes of capitalist accumulation. It does represent a conviction that the CCP is a power wherein the political and the economic spheres continue to have a different relationship than elsewhere in the capitalist world, and that socialist or social-democratic

political and ideological hegemony within the party remains a possibility.

I would suggest, rather, that the course of the reform period, especially beginning in the 1990s, with its massive acceleration of private enterprise development and capitalist market relations, even within the state-owned enterprises, represented a reshaping of the center/local or center/margin dynamic, locating it no longer in the realm of politics, but in the realm of differentiated capitalist spatiality. To date, this has served the state reasonably well. But the negative consequences—corruption, over-capacity, local debt, environmental degradation—not only render the economy more prone to crises but, more importantly, threaten state legitimacy. Current efforts to reassert central control and rationalize the bureaucracy are intended to address these threats. It is doubtful that this effort, even if successful, could immunize China against capitalist crisis. But it could very possibly, in the near future, in any case, weaken the capacity for innovation or political creativity at "the margins."

The Chinese Left was generally enthusiastic about developments in Chongqing at the end of the first decade of this century. Bo Xilai, Chongqing party chairman, announced a series of social-democratic reforms and an expansion of the government-owned sector of the economy, and revived, though the singing of "red songs" and other public forums, some of the populist language of the Mao era. As I have written elsewhere, developments in Chongqing departed in very few ways from the market-reform state's developmentalist path, and it was questionable whether the modest social-democratic reform programs were economically sustainable, or whether they were, as Bo Xilai's champions claimed, exportable to the country at large and not merely a slightly progressive version of the spatial fix. [15] Bo fell from power in 2012—and the extent to which this was a political or a criminal affair is still debated. Many leftist supporters reacted with alarm when then Premier Wen Jiabao raised the specter of the Cultural Revolution in his denunciation of Bo. Although there was nothing especially radical in Bo's politics, the Cultural Revolution language signaled central concern over the political implications of excessive local deviation. His fall was likely to end, for the time being at least, of any possibility of significant innovation at the local level.

Existing scholarship on the Cultural Revolution in China generally adheres to the official state view of "ten years of disaster" or restricts itself to detailed, often regionally specific empirical study. It is difficult to do more than that, and the political argument that Wu is advancing here would not be possible in China. In English-language scholarship, another set of constraints obtains. One is what Jacques Rancière once referred to as the "police view of history": the historian functions as the cop at the scene of an incident, urging witnesses to move along by saying "nothing happened": the CR as disastrous aberration without anything significant at the level of content. More serious studies commonly focus on planes of antagonism either at the level of the CCP higher bureaucracy, or between factions among the people, factions whose own organizational logics are interpreted in various ways, most commonly according to material or corporate group interest, and to the relationship or non-relationship between politics at the center and in the extra-party organizations.

Wu's achievement in this book is to consider the primary antagonism as that between the party state bureaucracy and the "marginal" political forces that arose either in the early period of the CR or in reaction to the containment/consolidation of late 1967 and into 1968. His analysis overlaps with, but is ultimately quite different from, that of Perry and Li, for whom worker politics in the CR was primarily an expression of worker interest. For Wu, as outlined above, has a more nuanced sense of "interest." It also has some overlap with, but is ultimately quite different from the very interesting work of Alessandro Russo, who has a much more sanguine view of the anti-bureaucratic politics of Mao and others in the Cultural Revolution Group. Wu's book makes a coherent and important argument about the political content of popular movements in the CR, even though these politics remained inchoate, and the deep impact that these movements had on the nature of the party state. The legitimacy of the contemporary Chinese state rests on the twin pillars of developmentalism and

"maintaining stability" (*weiwen*). The latter is of course a notoriously fluid term, and serves a number of purposes—suppression of popular protest movements, militarization of ethnic-minority regions, controls on the internet—but it is widely understood to refer in no small part to the "chaos" (*luan*) of the not-so-distant past. In keeping with the logic of negation that this position embodies, the state thus remains within the parameters set by the Cultural Revolution, which makes Wu's study so vital today.

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P.S.

* "The Margins and the Center: For a New History of the Cultural Revolution"http://viewpointmag.com/2014/09/28/the-margins-and-the-center-for-a-new-history-of-the-cultural-revolution/

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Footnotes

[1] Arif Dirlik, Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution. Berkeley: University of California, 1993. Peter Zarrow, Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture. New York: Columbia University, 1990.

[2] For a detailed study of CCP relations with political and social formations in a particular location during the revolution, see Elizabeth Perry, Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition. Berkeley: University of California, 2012.

[3] This center/local dynamic is discussed in Jean C. Oi, Rural China Takes Off: Institutional Foundations of Economic Reform, Berkeley: University of California 1999, and David Zweig, Internationalizing China: Domestic Interests and Global Linkages, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.

[4] For samples of this view, see Hu Angang, Wang Shaoguang, Zhou Jianming, and Han Yuhai, Renjian zhengdao. (The Right Path for Humanity). Beijing: Zhongguo renmindaxue chubanshe, 2011. Luo Gang, Renmin zhishang: cong 'renmin dangjiazuozhu' dao 'shehui gongtong fuyu'The people come first: from "the people as masters of their own destines" to "common social prosperity"). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2012.

[5] Some mainland scholars still need to publish their work outside of China. Li Xun, Da bengkui: shanghai gongren zaofanpai yu wangshi. (The great breakdown: The lost history of the rebel faction of Shanghai workers) Taibei: Shibao wenhua chubanshe, 1996. Xu Hailiang, Donghu fengyunlu: Wuhan wengede qunzhong jiyi (Wind and clouds over East Lake: popular memories of the Cultural Revolution in Wuhan). Hong Kong: Yinhe chubanshe, 2005. An example of an exhaustive and well-researched study published in China is Jin Dalu, Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai wenge shiqide shehui shenghuo (The normal and the extraordinary: Social life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution, 2 vols.). Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011. Although Xu's book

is sympathetic to the rebel factions, Li's is not.

[6] More nuanced studies of the Cultural Revolution include Joel Andreas, Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and China's New Class. Stanford 2008; Paul Clark, The Cultural Revolution: A History. Cambridge University Press 2008, centering on cultural production in the period; Han Dongping, The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village. Monthly Review Press, 2008. Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution. Westview, 1997; Andrew Walder, Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement. Harvard 2009.

[7] See footnote 6

[8] See especially the work of Alessandro Russo, who treats Cultural Revolution periodization with great theoretical precision. Alessandro Russo (1998) "The Probable Defeat: Preliminary Notes on the Chinese Cultural Revolution," Positions 6(1), Spring: 179-202. Alessandro Russo (2005) 'The Conclusive Scene: Mao and the Red Guards in July 1968', Positions 13 (3), Winter: 535-574. For a useful review of the political character of Cultural Revolution scholarship, see Alexander Day, "Interpreting the Cultural Revolution Politically," Inter-Asia Cultural Studies 7.4 (Dec. 2006): 705-712.

[9] Richard Kraus makes this point in The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford University Press, 2012

[10] Sheila Fitzpatrick identifies a similar dynamic in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, when class categorization—difficult though it was to carry out—was also a state preoccupation. This effort resulted in a new dimension of "class relations" that has interesting parallels to the situation Wu describes: "The main way class was significant in Soviet society was as a state classificatory system determining the rights and obligations of different groups of citizens. By stressing class, in another paradox, the regime had managed to engineer something like a reversion to the old and despised estate system, where your rights and privileges depended on whether you were legally classified as a noble, a merchant, a member of the clerical estate, or a peasant. In the Soviet context, "class" (social position) was what defined your relationship to the state." Sheila Fitpatrick, Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 11. See also Sheila Fitzpatrick, "The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society," in Russia in the Era of NEP. Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture, ed. by Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch, and Richard Stites. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 12–33.

[11] available as of September 2014 at http://www.signalfire.org/?p=6810 or http://anti-imperialism.com/2012/10/17/whither-china-1968/

[12] Although see Jin Dalu, op cit.

[13] The debate between Yasheng Huang and Joel Andreas illustrates some of the issues at stake here. Joel Andreas, "A Shanghai Model? On Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics," New Left Review, II ,65: 63-85. 2010; Yasheng Huang, "The Politics of China's Path: A Reply to Joel Andreas," New Left Review, II, 65: 87-91. 2010.

[14] See, for example, Zhang Xudong, "Zuowei 'zhuquanzhe' de Deng Xiaoping: Deng Xiaoping danchen 110 zhounian jinian yu sikao zhiyi" (Deng Xiaoping as "sovereign power": recollections and thoughts on the 110th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's birth). Guanchazhe wang, August 20,

2014. http://www.guancha.cn/zhang-xu-dong/2014_08_20_257504_s.shtml. Accessed September 11, 2014.

[15] See Christopher Connery, “The Chongqing Way.” Forthcoming 2015, boundary 2.