

LYNN T. WHITE

# Policies of Chaos

*The Organizational Causes of Violence in  
China's Cultural Revolution*



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## *Policies of Chaos*

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CENTER OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,  
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

LYNN T. WHITE III

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The Organizational Causes of Violence  
in China's Cultural Revolution

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*For my father  
and my mother*



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*Princeton, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, 1988*

## Abbreviations

BR	<i>Beijing Review</i>
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CNA	<i>China News Analysis</i> , Hong Kong
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CR	Cultural Revolution
CYL	Communist Youth League
DGB	<i>Dagong bao</i> (L'Impartial), Shanghai, Tianjin, and Hong Kong
ECMM	<i>Extracts from China Mainland Magazines</i> , Hong Kong
GMD	Guomindang
GMRB	<i>Guangming ribao</i> (Bright daily), Beijing
GRRB	<i>Gongren ribao</i> (Workers' daily), Beijing
HQ	<i>Hongqi</i> (Red Flag), Beijing
JFRB	<i>Jiefang ribao</i> (Liberation daily), Shanghai
LDB	<i>Laodong bao</i> (Labor news), Shanghai
NCNA	<i>New China News Agency</i> , Shanghai unless noted
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
QNB	<i>Qingnian bao</i> (Youth news), Shanghai
RMRB	<i>Renmin ribao</i> (People's daily), Beijing
SEM	Socialist Education Movement
SCMM	<i>Survey of China Mainland Magazines</i> , Hong Kong
SCMP	<i>Survey of the China Mainland Press</i> , Hong Kong
SHGS	<i>Shanghai gongshang</i> (Shanghai industry and commerce)
SHGSZL	<i>Shanghai gongshang ziliao</i> (Materials on Shanghai industry and commerce)
SHNL	"Shanghai Newsletter," in <i>South China Morning Post</i> , Hong Kong
SHWB	<i>Shanghai wanbao</i> (Shanghai evening news)
SN	<i>Shanghai News</i>
URI	Union Research Institute, Hong Kong
WHB	<i>Wenhui bao</i> (Documentary news), Shanghai
XDRB	<i>Xingdao ribao</i> (Singapore daily), Hong Kong
XMBWK	<i>Xinmin bao wankan</i> (New People's evening gazette), Shanghai
XMWB	<i>Xinmin wanbao</i> (New people's evening news), Shanghai
XWRB	<i>Xinwen ribao</i> (News daily), Shanghai
YB	<i>Yi bao</i> (Further news), Shanghai
ZGQN	<i>Zhongguo qingnian</i> (China youth), Beijing
ZGQNB	<i>Zhongguo qingnian bao</i> (China youth news), Beijing
ZW	<i>Zhanwang</i> (Prospects), Beijing



## *Romanizations*

This book romanizes Chinese in pinyin. The system is difficult for English readers, because it uses frequent *q*'s, *x*'s, *z*'s, and *zh*'s as initial consonants. It is nonetheless favored in the People's Republic of China, is now standard, and is scarcely more counterintuitive than the Wade-Giles system (the main alternative, developed by British missionaries and diplomats).

Chinese, like any other language, has a distinctive sound system. Exact equivalents with English are impossible to reproduce in a printed list, but the table below can convey approximate Chinese sounds. Here are the pinyin symbols whose values differ most from what English readers expect. The number of items is kept small so that they may be remembered: only five consonants that begin syllables, plus four endings. Readers who follow this table—and say other pinyin as if it were English—will not quite be speaking Chinese, but they will also not be far wrong.

### Pinyin = English

c-	= ts-
q-	= ch-
x-	= sh-
z-	= dz-
zh-	= j-
-i	= *
-ian	= -ien
-ong	= -ung
-ui	= -way

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\* The *-i* is variant and stands for English *-ee* after most initial consonants (that is, labials *b-*, *m-*, *p-*; dental stops and liquids *d-*, *l-*, *n-*, *t-*; and palitals *j-*, *q-*, and *x-*), *-r* after *ch-*, *r-*, *sh-*, *zh-* (retroflexes), and deep *-uh* after *c-*, *s-*, *z-* (dental sibilants). This *-i* (the main flaw in pinyin) may be confusing at first. The rest of the system is straightforward enough, and even the *-i* comes with practice.

## *Policies of Chaos*





## CHAPTER 1

# *What the Cultural Revolution Was, and Why It Happened*

Why is fire hot, or water deep?

—CHINESE PROVERB

Why did the Cultural Revolution occur? What made urban Chinese attack each other in the streets? How could a polity whose precepts of organization came from either Lenin or Confucius fall apart so completely? Why in 1966 did so many Chinese—as most of them now think—go politically berserk? This remains a question on China's agenda, even though there are reasons for many Chinese to forget about it. Such a searing experience shapes attitudes toward the future.

Because this mass movement wounded many patriotic Chinese deeply, they ask how it happened, who or what gave rise to it, whom or what to blame. Uncertainty about the Cultural Revolution's cause haunts current politics, even though many Chinese look back on their actions in that time with a sense of embarrassment. The major novelist Ba Jin, whose wife died during the turmoil, expresses a commonly held view: "I am sure it would be impossible that anyone who did not experience the Cultural Revolution directly, or has never been forced to dig deep into his soul and reveal all the ugliness that he found, could understand what actually happened."<sup>1</sup> Yet Ba Jin does not pretend to tell us why the Cultural Revolution occurred. It was, for many, a personal experience so traumatic that a rational or cause-seeking analysis of its origins, such as this book attempts, may seem too shallow an approach. Many people nonetheless want to know why the violence occurred, because they want to prevent anything like it from happening again.

## ALTERNATIVE DEFINITIONS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The CR, or Cultural Revolution, is often understood in narrow and official terms, as the peak of Party Chairman Mao Zedong's reign in China. Its

<sup>1</sup> Ba Jin, *Random Thoughts*, trans. Geremie Barmé (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1984), pp. xv–xvi.

beginning is ordinarily defined by events in high-level politics (even though most Chinese best remember its effects at street level). Some say it started with a speech that Mao's defense minister Lin Biao gave in September 1965; others refer to an editorial that Yao Wen yuan published in October of that year.<sup>2</sup> Some say the CR started with an inspirational statement by Mao himself on May 16, 1966.

The end of the CR is even harder to pinpoint, but it is also usually measured by the headlines of high politics. A Party Congress was held in 1969, after most of the random violence had subsided; and this meeting ended the Cultural Revolution, according to some. Lin Biao's power and life ended in September 1971; if the CR is conceived as a gradual military takeover, this reversed it. Mao finally died in 1976, so that year is most often (and officially) taken as the end of the Cultural Revolution. Such a view implies Mao should be credited or blamed for the whole episode.

Chinese memories of the Cultural Revolution make it a time of apparently senseless violence, a holocaust-like event that needs to be understood so it will never be allowed to recur. If this definition becomes primary, the most relevant years are 1966–68, when the ordinary lives of many Chinese urban people were most disrupted. This book defines the CR mainly in terms of its violence and chaos. But the origins of the movement may at first seem harder to think about when its definition becomes less superficial and less dependent on news stories about high-level politics and ideas from Beijing. One of the purposes of this book is to show that the Cultural Revolution's standard definition, in both scholarly and official literatures, has obscured a search for the roots of its violence. The Cultural Revolution is defined in this book on a scope appropriate for that search—even at the risk of using its name in a new way.

"Gang of Four" Maoist leadership is still the usual answer to questions about the cause of the Cultural Revolution: a few high-placed members of the Party elite inspired hundreds of millions of people to work for a more egalitarian China—and to throw out their rivals in Beijing who had different goals. Mao condoned the criticism even of Communist officials in order to realize his own visions. This kind of explanation is useful for an analysis of Mao and a few of his friends or rivals. They had remarkable passions, which had important effects.

But China is a big place. Its politics cover more than four or five people.

<sup>2</sup> Yao, the Chairman's main polemicist, was a Shanghai newspaperman later dubbed one of the "Gang of Four." The other three were Mao's wife Jiang Qing, Shanghai union organizer Wang Hongwen, and Shanghai politician-journalist Zhang Chunqiao.

The usual elite-oriented explanation of the Cultural Revolution throws light on some of the causes of the movement, but it begs too many important questions: Why were revolutionary ideas growing so luxuriantly in large urban groups by the mid-1960s? Why did individuals become so interested in them? If the radical seed germinated in the minds of a few national leaders, how could they scatter it with such signal success, so widely and quickly? What was in China's ground to make it flourish? Were the underlying reasons for the Cultural Revolution's violence explicit in statements of that time? Why were the victims of such diverse kinds, including previous officials as well as previous outcasts? To what extent were the motives of the city people who made this "revolution" all the same, irrespective of the groups from which they came? Why were the conspirators and the victims in this movement at various stages so often similar (or indeed, the very same people)? Is it most persuasive to place blame for this holocaust only on Mao, or on Chinese traditions that change very slowly, or on some inherent flaw of socialism, or on the means by which the state activated any such broad factors in the specific motives of millions?

Such questions cannot be answered if the CR is seen as comparable only to a natural disaster, such as an earthquake, whose causes may never be adequately known. Many presume that something in the psychology of mass behavior, some native human aggressiveness—but random, inexplicable, indelible, like a lightning bolt or wildfire, a deep fault in the earth or original sin—is the center of the problem. The causes of such disasters can seldom be sufficiently shown. "Herd instinct" was important at this time; people were afraid of being left outside the circle of the legitimate community. In a slogan of that period, people said they would "rush wherever Chairman Mao points." The application of physical and animalistic metaphors to the Cultural Revolution seems difficult to avoid, because they accurately describe the terror that many Chinese still recall. But such metaphors cannot be completely satisfactory. This book tries to go beyond them. Even if they are true to the underlying causes of the event, they do not show conditions whose absence would have precluded the Cultural Revolution. Even natural disasters have causes, and it is worthwhile to try and understand them. In any case, it will not do to begin with concepts implying that the explanatory task here is mostly impossible.

Even if there are frightening monsters in the caves of the human soul (or the Chinese soul), their existence would not explain why they emerged in 1966—and why they stay safely underground most of the time.<sup>3</sup> Compari-

<sup>3</sup> This is not the place for a disquisition about the un-Chinese quality of any explanations

sons of paranoia and conspiracy terrors under Mao with those under Hitler or Stalin show that social doctrines do not account for the intensity of activities such leaders foster.<sup>4</sup> But why do such fearsome options in politics become attractive to wide masses of people at some times and places and not at others? Why do people make these choices, rather than select alternatives equally available in their cultures and ideologies? If high leadership was the only cause, why were so many followers enthusiastic enough to obey orders for violence against their neighbors?

### EXPLANANDUM AND HYPOTHESES

The answers we find depend largely on the questions we ask. The main characteristic of the Cultural Revolution—the main thing to be explained about it—is in retrospect its violence. Yet many past writings have centered on other aspects of it. The best Chinese book on the Cultural Revolution, and most Western books about it, are play-by-play narrative accounts.<sup>5</sup> Interpretive studies have emerged in both Chinese and other languages, and it is clear that many possible questions about the Cultural Revolution are legitimate matters for study.

If this event is seen mainly as a psychological ordeal for millions who survived it, then a current practical issue is one of therapy.<sup>6</sup> Major national

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referring to inherent human sin. But for more about “great tradition” views of original goodness, see Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), esp. 1: 99–100 (a general and explicit rejection of Xun Zi’s views in favor of Mencius’s), and Donald J. Munro, “Man, State, and School,” in *China’s Developmental Experience*, ed. Michel Oksenberg (New York: Praeger, 1973), esp. pp. 121–33. More important, on the “little tradition” of folk-Buddhistic views of human nature, see Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and Sin in Traditional China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 18–23.

<sup>4</sup> This book’s emphasis on “monitors” is indebted to ongoing research by Andrew G. Walder, who nonetheless does not treat monitoring as a policy. His use of literature on comparative communism and of theory that sees violence as “deviance” confirming a system (as in Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* [New York: Wiley, 1966]) may be less appropriate to the subject of this book than reliance on theorists like Clifford Geertz or James Scott, who view cultures or systems as inconsistent. For a defense of the former position, see David Elkins and Richard Simeon, “A Cause in Search of Its Effect, or What Does Political Culture Explain?” *Comparative Politics* 11 (January 1979): 127–46; and see note 110 below and the concluding chapter.

<sup>5</sup> See Yan Jiaqi and Gao Gao, *Zhongguo “wenge” shinian shi* (A history of the decade of China’s “Cultural Revolution”) (Hong Kong: Dagongbao Press, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Anne F. Thurston’s *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of the Intellectuals in China’s Great Cultural Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1987) is a testimonial to human suffering in the CR. As Thurston could be first to point out, this topic can have no exhaustive treatment. An-

officials have said that about one hundred million people (one-tenth of the country's population) suffered in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>7</sup> Some were victimized directly; others, by association with close relatives. Some say that twenty million people died in the Cultural Revolution.<sup>8</sup> A much lower estimate of these fatalities (by a Western scholar who successfully debunks inflated casualty figures in Chinese campaigns) numbers the deaths at about one million. But as this same, more conservative estimator points out: "The Cultural Revolution, even aside from its deaths, was a tragedy of immense proportions, devastating in its impact on the Chinese people."<sup>9</sup> No one knows the exact number of deaths or victims in this event. The meaning of statistics in holocausts is difficult to comprehend. Not enough can be done to alleviate the sense of guilt among survivors, their fears that the movement might recur, and the wounds that many Chinese still feel.<sup>10</sup> An outsider may be in a position to offer clinical advice for the victims, but that is not the aim of this book. An attempt to understand the hurt in terms of its social causes is the main goal here.

If the Cultural Revolution is conceived as a set of policies handed down from Beijing—and this is the most common conception of it—then a careful look at very few top leaders should suffice to describe it. But in this book, the CR is defined as an act of violence by and against millions of people. So it is necessary to look for explanations broadly, among a great many actors. Studies of labeled social groups, of dyadic relations between monitors and clients, and of the results of institutionalized campaign violence will forward an understanding of why old authorities collapsed and new local leaders became so ambitious so unexpectedly.

This book aims at finding the reasons for massive political frustration among many urban Chinese by the mid-1960s. It is partly concerned with leaders—official local bosses, as well as informal leaders of self-conscious groups that were not necessarily official. But the main question concerns

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other contribution is Arthur Kleinman's *Social Origins of Stress and Disease: Depression, Neurasthenia, and Pain in Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>7</sup> See Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Any casualty estimate for the CR partly depends, of course, on the definition of its time period. For figures, see Alan P. L. Liu, *How China is Ruled* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 48. See also Lu Ken, "Hu Yaobang fangwen ji" (Interview with Hu Yaobang), *Baixing yuekan* (*Baixing Monthly*, Hong Kong), December 1985, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Rosskamm Shalom, *Deaths in China Due to Communism: Propaganda versus Reality* (Tempe: Center for Asian Studies, Arizona State University, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Anne F. Thurston, "Victims of China's Cultural Revolution: The Invisible Wounds," parts 1, 2, *Pacific Affairs*, 57, no. 4, 58, no. 1 (1984–85, 1985): 599–620 (esp. p. 605), 5–27. Thurston uses interviews to explain the depth of the scars. Concerning survivors' guilt and fears of recurrence, see pp. 7–17.

both leaders and their followers: Why did people ostracize each other? Why did they cut each other off, within their daily work units? Why did they go on the streets to attack many whom they did not even know? The isolation and humiliation were even harder for many victims of the CR to bear than was the torture.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps widespread frustrations would not have erupted so violently without encouragement from Mao and his well-known “gang.” But it is unclear how four or five people could have produced such extensive, thorough, highly motivated fury among millions, however much their policies justified violence.

This book argues that the specific causes of the Cultural Revolution as a mass movement lay in administrative policies used in the whole pre-1966 history of the PRC. Especially important were three institutionalized policies whose effectiveness cumulated only gradually. These implementing, administrative policies were means by which the Party tried to achieve ambitious goals with scarce resources.

1. Official good and bad *labels* for groups, such as “cadres” or “proletarians,” “rightists” or “capitalists,” made people acquire concrete interests in seeing these labels used in their favor and not to their harm. These labels created “status groups,” which became conscious of their shared interests in official allocations of jobs, housing, services, places in schools, and rights to live in cities. The labels created new kinds of collective group consciousness.

2. Official support for designated *bosses* and monitors raised individuals’ dependence on particular leaders in units where they worked or studied. This dependency also lessened individuals’ ability to find alternative livelihoods outside those units. Such policies forced people into clientage more surely than the feudal legacy of Confucian patriarchy ever did. State support for strong hierarchy in local units created a situation that made it “rational” for individual actors to behave as if maintaining links with their official bosses was the touchstone for all they did in public. These policies bred both adulation and resentment of patrons. By the mid-1960s, many urbanites were ready to follow orders for “struggle” against either the designated leaders or their local rivals, depending on how they had fared as individuals with the pre-CR local monitor.

3. Official *campaigns* frightened citizens into avid compliance with state policies. These movements reduced short-run administrative costs for an understaffed Party needing support for revolutionary social programs. But the campaigns also legitimated violence. “Killing chickens to scare monkeys”

<sup>11</sup> Thurston, “Victims,” p. 605.

(*sha ji jing hou*) had become normal workaday policy by August 1966, when a relaxation of previous police controls on urban politics allowed many new groups and individuals to conflict with each other—and to use similar violence for their own ends.

None of these policies was foreordained by Communist or Chinese traditions, both of which come in many possible forms. Unstable policy has usually been explained as the result of tensions among elites, though not on the local level. This may seem tenable, or at least interesting, when a central participant was that most engaging loose cannon, Mao Zedong. But a reason for the ever-changing policies from Beijing lies in the results, for gaining mass compliance, of vacillation itself. Constant unpredictability, when backed by state force, tends to scare people. It is an administrative policy that raises the chances of (and lessens the costs of) public compliance with any other policies.

An emphasis on tensions among the national elite obscures this link. *All* top leaders benefit from the effects of their unpredictability at lower levels. The habit of campaigns strengthens the government, no matter which faction wins in Beijing. The dependence of subordinates on monitors is also an interest of all members of the Party's highest ranks, whatever their policy differences on more substantive issues. The broad constituency that positive labels created for the Party also was a benefit for all of the most important leaders. For the whole period from 1949 to 1966, and for all top leaders, standard operating procedures involved labeling people, enmeshing them in hard-to-change patronage networks, and legitimating campaign violence. These were general habits that cut the expense of garnering mass compliance with revolutionary rule. Such patterns had long-term costs (the most important was the Cultural Revolution), but these were not easy to foresee. For a decade and a half, many immediate victories of good-label groups, tight hierarchy, and brief campaigns obscured the bigger, unintended consequences of these effective techniques of short-term manipulation.

The widespread habit of force arose not just from struggle among a few politicians, or just from patriarchal flaws in Chinese culture, or just from the allure of proletarian social ideals or contrastive, vivid political symbols. It stemmed mainly from the gap between the Party's shortage of capable revolutionaries and its need for mass compliance. The socialization of Chinese to follow the Party Chairman was important, especially in 1966 when the movement began. But groups' and individuals' accumulated reaction to administrative policies in the entire period after 1949 was the main cause of the Cultural Revolution's forcefulness.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF LABELED STATUS GROUPS

This chapter contains generalizations that later evidence will confirm; but first, the theses set forth above deserve to be made more explicit. The inherent confusion of the Cultural Revolution militates against any final analysis of it. The constituencies most relevant to this mass movement were not just elite factions in Beijing. Nor were they economically generated classes. They were status groups. The first topic concerns how they arose.

The “class” label of an urbanite was not hard to determine. All city people were categorized under one of several fixed titles, depending on the type of income source of the household head in 1949, namely,

worker (*gongren*)  
 peasant (*nongmin*) of various kinds  
 capitalist (*zichan jieji*)  
 landlord (*dizhu*)  
 petty bourgeois (*xiao zichan jieji*)  
 vagabond (*yumin*).

Urbanites were assigned to such “classes” in the early 1950s, as soon as the Party began personal dossiers or updated the old GMD files. The designations might be reviewed anytime, at the initiative of either the individual or the bureaucracy. A person could argue for a better label, and some designations were created to relieve servants of the state from worrying about personal liability in “class” struggle campaigns. These special titles were

revolutionary cadre (*geming ganbu*),  
 revolutionary soldier (*geming junren*); or  
 dependant of revolutionary martyr (*geming lieshi jiashu*).<sup>12</sup>

“Intellectual” (*zhishi fenzi*) was not a class designation, though “student” (*xuesheng*) became common as a quasi-class category, a bit like the three honor-laden labels for state functionaries. Household registration books (*huji bu*) contained only the most important labels, but the dossiers (*dang'an*) in police stations and work-unit security offices included more extensive records. Many kinds of application forms asked for self-reporting of

<sup>12</sup> See Richard Curt Kraus, *Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 24, 185.



class and other labels. These were usually accurate, since officials could easily check them against police files.

Communist Party cadres tended to discriminate, especially after the Antirightist Campaign of mid-1957, against people in cities who had “bad” labels (usually “bourgeois” but also often “intellectual” or “rightist”). The dossiers allowed bureaucrats to give people public advantages or stigmas. School admissions, good jobs, avoidance of rural work assignments, rights of association, housing, food, and much else became subject to official rationing on the basis of class labels (such as “capitalist” or “worker”) and other political labels (such as “rightist” or “model”). Because Chinese workplaces, schools, and residential areas were increasingly centralized, with a few leaders controlling ever more of the resources that people needed for leading contented lives, individuals had no choice except to confirm tight local authority structures by obeying the designated leaders, especially during “class” struggles. Labeling thus interacted with monitoring and campaigning to shape the incentive structures of both officials and ordinary urbanites.

This pattern was a syndrome, a self-confirming “loop,” a habit to save costs in preserving the new order. But the administrative policies that created it did not come into full force suddenly in 1949. Many members of the Chinese Communist Party were originally from rather-well-to-do social groups, which the syndrome finally oppressed most, though most of the cadres avoided harm to themselves on this basis before 1966. Party members’ intentions were often divided. The CCP took far more than a decade to garner resources even for partial realization of the totalist concepts idealized in the notion of “proletarian dictatorship.” The head of steam, built up to free the Party’s scarce personnel for revolutionary functions, eventually became a crucial cause of violent ostracism in the Cultural Revolution.

Individuals’ consciousness about class labels became more political than social. These designations were formally recorded, during the early 1950s, in the household registration books.<sup>13</sup> Such labels did not describe China’s actual classes, because they did not distinguish people according to current links with the forces and relations of economic production, which the revolutionary government had already begun to change.<sup>14</sup> But the labels gradu-

<sup>13</sup> For more, see Lynn White, “Deviance, Modernization, Rations, and Household Registration in Chinese Cities,” in *Deviance and Social Control in Chinese Society*, ed. R. W. Wilson, S. Greenblatt, and A. Wilson (New York: Praeger, 1977), pp. 151–72.

<sup>14</sup> This is not the book for a discourse on the evolution of the concept of class, but it is worth noting that most of the Marxist innovators since Marx and Engels (Bernstein, Kautsky, Lukács, Gramsci, Althusser, Poulantzas, and others) have spent much of their intellectual effort

ally created mass political groups, which acquired common interests and the potential for common consciousness.

Such groups were usually unorganized. Some Party cadres nonetheless increasingly encouraged proletarian-labeled people to form clubs, and these efforts reached a high level of activity by the mid-1960s. After August of 1966, many kinds of citizens could join political groups on practically any basis, and data presented below show that labels affected these decisions. Associate interviews give evidence of the importance of political labels for individuals' lives before the Cultural Revolution. So do recent Chinese novels, short stories, and autobiographical accounts.<sup>15</sup>

Class labels recorded in the household books could be important, but even more important were those in the secret files (*dang'an*) that each person's work unit kept. When applying for a job in a state organization, it was usual to fill out a form indicating one's class and other particulars—which the authorities might or might not check.<sup>16</sup> Labels such as “rightist” (*youpai fenzi*) or “bad element” (*huai fenzi*) that resulted from investigations would be noted. An individual often did not have any way of knowing on what evidence such “black materials” had been compiled. Political labels largely determined individuals' life chances in China throughout the third quarter of this century.

Youths with good group designations—“cadre” even more than “worker,” and especially the “five red type” (*hong wu lei*)—began the violence in 1966. Political resentment of negative labels was slower to be articulated, partly because these categories were crosscut by nationalistic identifications. The Communist government had previously laid claim to

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trying to capture the practical virtues of making economically generated classes almost synonymous with Weberian “status groups.” See Martin Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). The labeled classes that the PRC used were closer to status groups, despite some of their names; the simplest way to define them is to look at the registration books and security dossiers.

<sup>15</sup> “The Wounded” literature (*shanghen wenxue*), named for Lu Xinhua's 1977 story of that name, chronicles the harm done to people who had bad labels. See Lu Xinhua et al., *The Wounded: New Stories of the Cultural Revolution*, trans. Geremie Barmé and Bennet Lee (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing Co., 1979); see also Perry Link, ed., *Stubborn Weeds: Popular and Controversial Chinese Literature after the Cultural Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), and autobiographical accounts that make the same point: Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution* (New York: Random House, 1983); Yue Daiyun, with Carolyn Wakeman, *To the Storm: The Odyssey of a Revolutionary Chinese Woman* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). The finest novel in this genre is Dai Houying's *Ren a, ren*, translated as *Stones of the Wall* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> In the Cultural Revolution, Red Guards often went to rural areas where bureaucrats whom they wished to attack had grown up, to check the accuracy of urban records. This practice was called “outside investigation” (*wai diao*).

patriotism from the entire population. There was scant legitimate opportunity for the offspring of families labeled capitalist, or worse, to oppose affirmative action in the life chances for proletarians directly. When they finally did so, during the Cultural Revolution, their action came in the form of extreme violence against bureaucrats as a new class. Claiming rights to a place in the sun, many children of the bad-labeled groups were only in 1966 able to attack people whom they disliked, especially when some proletarians joined them. When police controls were relaxed in August 1966 (by Mao for his own reasons), youths of various backgrounds seized the opportunity to attack Party bureaucrats who had administered affirmative action in favor of labeled proletarians and cadres.

The ironies in this situation were poignant. Many bourgeois-labeled people joined some workers to create an ostensibly "Great Proletarian" Cultural Revolution. To live down their pasts, as well as to have revenge on the bureaucrats who repressed them, they often joined the most radical groups. These bands sometimes also attacked older intellectuals who had class labels similar to their own. The status quo found its most ardent defenders—whose methods often came to resemble police conservatism—among the supposedly revolutionary proletariat.

Could there have been such a sharp divergence between the rhetoric of the movement and the personal impulses behind it? Data presented below show there could be and was. Bourgeois intellectuals have been radical before, and worker-leaders have been conservative. Extreme radicalism has generally been a phenomenon of well-to-do groups at times of revolution (even in pre-industrial societies).<sup>17</sup> Much evidence, below, will show it remained so in China.<sup>18</sup>

These ironies should not, however, obscure the role of proletarian-labeled people, who often sensed the frustration—and the continuing informal social prestige—of bourgeois-labeled people. Thus cadre-related groups developed an interest in purging corruption (except favoritism to themselves) from the ranks of their own protectors. They hoped to assure the Party's revolutionary legitimacy for the future. These people, advantaged by the label system, might otherwise lose benefits that had become well established by the 1960s. They initiated and joined attacks against officials whose wrongdoing was so obvious, it became a threat to the whole system that

<sup>17</sup> See Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>18</sup> More is in Lynn White, "Bourgeois Radicalism in the 'New Class' of Shanghai," in *Class and Social Stratification in Post-Revolution China*, ed. James L. Watson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 142–74.

helped them.<sup>19</sup> And they usually led the battle against intellectuals and rightists, their potential rivals for local leadership.

In most cities, two loose coalitions of Red Guard factions therefore emerged—and made war on each other. One of them defended the previous regime and its policies, insofar as this was feasible for particular bureaucrats who had good reputations. This first coalition included many of the earliest-formed Red Guard groups (whose members claimed to be “red” because they had proletarian or cadre backgrounds, though critics called them “factions to protect emperors” [*baohuang pai*]). The other coalition was generally more radical, because its members wanted more changes of previous bureaucrats. It included groups that claimed the label “rebel faction” (*zaofan pai*) because of attacks on bureaucratic cadres. Some members had bourgeois class labels and had been excluded from the first-formed Red Guard groups because they did not come from worker or cadre families. A recent PRC appraisal uses the same distinction when it refers to “the two types of factional organization in the Cultural Revolution.” One of these “rebelled against leading cadres, and the other protected leading cadres.”<sup>20</sup>

At first, capitalist-labeled people could not participate in the Cultural Revolution because of their class stigma. Intellectuals among them were far more active than businessmen or other nonproletarians, and students became the core of many “rebel factions.” People labeled bourgeois had mostly developed habits of political quietude after the fearsome campaigns against them in the 1950s; but as the Cultural Revolution developed, the local political opportunities available to these people became more important than their labels.

The sequence of ostracism and violence has been a common theme of many similar movements in the past. Since the first modern revolution, the Puritan one in England, there has been a record of attacking traditions,

<sup>19</sup> Another Chinese literary genre, called “reportage” (*baogao wenxue*), provides vivid exposés of such corruption. See especially the famous report that gives the main title to Liu Binyan’s *People or Monsters? And Other Stories and Reportage from China after Mao*, ed. Perry Link (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983). See also the famous play “What If I Really Were,” by Sha Yexin et al., in *Stubborn Weeds*, pp. 198–250, in which major characters are corrupt cadres. Even the Central Committee’s *Resolution on CCP History (1949–81)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), p. 47, admitted that “it remains difficult to eliminate the evil ideological and political influence of centuries of feudal autocracy. . . . This meant that conditions were present for the overconcentration of Party power in individuals and for the development of arbitrary individual rule.”

<sup>20</sup> “Thirteen Questions on Repudiating the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution,” *Jiefangjun bao* (Liberation army news) (Beijing), July 14, 1984, esp. question 9. The terms *baohuang pai* and *zaofan pai* can be found in many articles and in the author’s interviews of Cultural Revolution participants, conducted from 1967 to 1984 in Hong Kong and Princeton.

smashing idols, renaming places, and killing “counterrevolutionaries” that makes for fearsome history wherever it has occurred. France had its guillotines. The early revolutionary United States had tar-and-featherings. In China, as in other countries, such violence winds down as leaders in many groups come to believe that the costs of acrimony between them outweigh the benefits of reconciliation for their own status groups. As local leaders who have various kinds of actual functions in society come to terms, China’s upheaval may develop more like the English and the French revolutions than the Russian one, with which it is almost always compared.

China’s CR engaged “masses”—large groups in cities—but not mainly the hopeless or the powerless. It mobilized local leaders and their families to preserve or restore privileges. It spurred capitalist-labeled (especially intellectual) families to correct injustices against themselves. It also motivated cadres’ families to defend their gains of previous years. Personal and material, not just collective and ideal, motives were essential on all sides of the Cultural Revolution.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BOSSES AND PATRONAGE

The CR was also a struggle for personal freedom, not just for group interests. A promising line of research stresses the importance of “clientelism” in China and other socialist states.<sup>21</sup> Tight, patriarchal authority relations are normal in many Chinese work units, and rebellion against them is a natural reaction for members who feel oppressed. The domain of a patron in China is the work “unit” (*danwei*). These come in many different sizes, mostly larger than families, with smaller units nested inside of larger ones—for instance, a ward within a hospital, within a medical college, within a health “system.”<sup>22</sup> The boss in a large unit is normally collective, rather than a single person.

In the years preceding the Cultural Revolution, usually one member of

<sup>21</sup> See Jean C. Oi, “Communism and Clientelism: Rural Politics in China,” *World Politics* 37, no. 2 (1985): 238–66. Andrew G. Walder is at work on a book that may explore the importance of clientelism in cities, notably among industrial workers, during the Cultural Revolution. The most relevant published work is his *Communist Neo-Traditionalism: Work and Authority in Chinese Industry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). See also John Wilson Lewis, *Political Networks and the Chinese Policy Process* (Stanford, Calif.: Northeast Asia–United States Forum, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> A “system” is a *xitong*. Gail E. Henderson and Myron S. Cohen’s *The Chinese Hospital: A Socialist Work Unit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) provides the fullest survey in English of such authority relations during a calm period.

the leadership was dominant and was seen by higher authorities as the person in charge of the unit. He was in most cases a male Party secretary, frankly called the “boss” (*daitou ren*). Subjugation to such a monitor, when he was hostile, was called “wearing small shoes” (*chuan xiaoxie*). For underlings, poor relations with the official patron meant difficult work assignments, slow promotions, and general unpleasantness.

Soviet-imported institutions strengthened and officialized Chinese traditions of patronage. These habits are more specifically Leninist than Communist. People in China have long been arranged according to strong “dyadic” bonds between leaders and followers. Families have naturally nurtured such relations, and many other social groups—not just in China, but especially there—have tried to replicate the warmth and order of family links. These old patterns were intensified by the norms of Communist discipline that underlay new laws and institutions for a “New China” built in the 1950s on models from the USSR.

Mass groups are usually too large, however, for the people in them to know each other well. They become less effective as face-to-face relations are divided into many levels of hierarchy. Members may still have a warm sense of the political effectiveness that sheer numbers give them in this kind of organization; but if they think that immediate patrons treat them unfairly, and if higher patrons in a bureaucratized network do not have time to judge all such cases, the viability of the clientelist system decreases. As an administrative device, the system is most effective when underlings in it cannot switch out of the unit to which they are assigned. They then have more incentive to obey the designated monitor.

Analysis of mass groups needs to be complemented by patron-client analysis, which can explain political changes in local communities and work units. The argument for the importance of clientelism is sometimes presented as if it were incompatible with label/“group” and campaign/“totalitarian” explanations of action. Analysts favoring the patronage model point out that relevant groups in China are only sometimes articulated and sometimes self-conscious. Also, totalitarian campaigns only sometimes give positive incentives to actors (for example, to activists).<sup>23</sup> But patron-client bonds are only some of the political links that affect urban Chinese. There is nothing wrong with casting diverse analytic nets, and it is practical to note that labeling and campaigning share a similarity with designating patrons:

<sup>23</sup> See Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism*, pp. 5–7. But a footnote (p. 7) puts Communist states’ “distinctive variety of ‘pluralism’ . . . beyond the scope of this book.” See more below, in the concluding chapter.

all three were policies. As later chapters will show, these forms of inquiry complement each other, despite the logical tensions between them. A full explanation of the CR will take the frequency of strong small-unit rule in China seriously, just as it will also take seriously the importance of mass social forces. What unifies these two types of analysis is not that they are based on the same logic for explaining action, but that they are both based on specifiable government policies, accumulating from 1949 to 1966.<sup>24</sup>

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CAMPAIGNS

Group consciousness created by labels, along with inflexible dyadic relations created by patronage policies, might not have influenced Chinese so deeply by 1966 if administrative violence had not become legitimate normal policy. In the West during the late 1960s there was some bias against discussing the Cultural Revolution's violence. This movement's antibureaucratic ideas were exciting. Western intellectuals had seldom experienced revolutions directly, and the CR's ideals seemed more salient in the late 1960s than its violence. Only in retrospect has attention focused on the ways the Cultural Revolution ate its children. Its idealism surely increased the ruthlessness of its actors.

A complete list of all China's campaigns before the Cultural Revolution is not necessary here, partly because Ezra Vogel has abstracted their general form:

The speed-ups [in a campaign] form a pattern found not only in collectivization, but also in land reform and later in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The pattern is one of careful planning and groundwork at all levels, then a sudden increase in the targets set by superiors in the hierarchy. After a sudden burst of all-out mobilization, the new targets are "achieved." Targets are raised several times until the final goal is reached. This is followed by readjustment to correct for "paper successes" and problems arising because of the hasty campaign. The leaders do not spell out in their writings the logic behind the waves of assault.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The accumulating effectiveness of the three administrative policies stressed in this book was an uneven, not a steady, phenomenon. For example, there was some lessening of pressure in the period before 1963, and the 1962–66 period was ambivalent, with political claims important in some spheres but weak in others. See later chapters below on this.

<sup>25</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 167–68.

This method of administration is designed more to achieve results than to plan them. It aims at effectiveness more than predictability. It seems to be most useful when the “organizational weapon” that is launching assaults has too few resources to achieve goals without keeping subordinates or non-members off balance. Not only do campaigns lower the need for administrative resources because they raise compliance through inspiring fears of repression. Just as important, they gather new administrative resources by raising hopes of career advancement among activists.

The Chinese government from 1949 to 1966 was effective at social reform in part because it combined progressive policies with implementation by scaring people, changing goals in movements often and unpredictably, and saddling established institutions with work teams of outsiders who impressed the power of the state on local leaders. Such procedures are not like those of “legal-rational” modern bureaucracies, but they bring change quickly. For an administration in a hurry, they seem (and are) temporarily cost-effective.

Campaign policies have achieved progressive goals in concentrated doses. But the chapters below will show that the Chinese state often lacked the personnel who might have allowed it to consolidate its gains from these movements. The campaign method, which requires even more implicit or explicit violence than other kinds of government policy, was more costly in the long run than was evident immediately. Sometimes campaigns were temporarily relaxed or restricted to limited sectors of society (as was the case for a while after 1961). By the mid-1960s, however, in an atmosphere of tension that labeling and patronage policies had brought and after campaigns had legitimated force in politics, a relaxation of police controls brought an explosion from people who could then use violence for their own purposes.

These three kinds of administrative policy are more important together than separately. Labeling policies and patronage policies both breed consciousness of interests—in groups and individuals, respectively. Labels make groups, and similarly favored or disfavored people can guess their allies on that basis, while they can also still act individually. Mandating official patrons gives each person a boss, and individuals can act together on that understanding to support or topple the patron. Campaigns provide a context in which these perceptions can spur violence that seems rightful. A conclusion of this book is that differences in the logic of causal explanation between these three factors are less important than their ability to account for events together, because they interact with each other.



INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS AND  
THE STAGES OF REVOLUTIONS

Many people think of revolutions as sudden. They are violent, and a blow is supposed to strike in an instant. But actually, revolutions take years. The English Revolution executed King Charles; but its origins can be traced at least a century before its high tide, and it was partly reversed in the Stuart Restoration.<sup>26</sup> Before 1789, France was home to many political ideas; afterward, chaos reigned for the better part of a decade until international war gave reasons for unity. The Mexican Revolution may be the most-long-drawn-out of all; it sputtered on for more than a century after 1810. In Russia, a separation of 1917 from 1905, or especially from Stalin's violence in the 1930s, would hide many important continuities. It should come as no surprise that China's case is similar; the Cultural Revolution is one event in a linked series.

Clear threads of nationalist and revolutionary sentiment tie together the gigantic and bloody Taiping Rebellion of 1850–64, the Republican Revolution of 1911, the anti-imperialist strikes in Chinese cities of the 1920s, the resistance against Japan from 1937 to 1945, the Civil War until 1949, and campaigns in the PRC after 1949. Among these surges of China's century-long turbulence, the Cultural Revolution could eventually prove to be the last major instance, because its violence divided rather than legitimated a social elite. In this, it differed from most earlier whirlpools in the current. Mass upheavals appear to come in bunches over long periods of time. They may be unexpected but are not instant. There is enough evidence from countries like England, France, and the United States to suggest that extended periods of relative calm may follow revolutions or their equivalents, after these storms pass. Revolutions take a while to mature, because they are made of resources, not just ideals. Eventually, they also seem to wind down.

China is not the first country whose revolution has seen alternating waves of emphasis on stability and change. The radical Robespierre killed the more moderate Danton; but a few years later, France had an emperor. Struggles between visionaries and realists dominated the first decade of Soviet politics—until Stalin's reforms created a kind of solid order. Choices made in periods of postrevolutionary tension, and lessons that people draw retrospectively, can shape a nation's politics for a long time. In Russia, the eval-

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Stone's *The Causes of the English Revolution, 1529–1642* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) deals with the prelude.

uation of Stalin is still a prime question of public life, though he died several decades ago. Many bureaucrats (in the KGB and other elites that Stalin established) still value his role in creating the modern Soviet state. But others look to rejection of Stalinism as the touchstone of progress. Maoism in many ways differed from Stalinism, but Mao and Stalin both endorsed sharp political intervention in citizens' lives. The Cultural Revolution bred a quietism and cynicism, a knowledge that political will can fail to bring intended results.<sup>27</sup> Reactions to Mao's Cultural Revolution will structure Chinese politics for many years. They show a pattern recognizable in other revolutions that wound down more quickly than the Russian one has done.

### PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE STAGES OF CHINA'S REVOLUTION

The Liberation of 1949 and the Great Leap Forward of 1958 are the events in the PRC that scholars have explained best, although several years passed before there was any academic consensus on what these occasions meant. More than a decade after the founding of the PRC, most American attention even in academic circles focused on how the United States had "lost" China. The scholarly questions of the 1950s derived more from ideologies than from less constrained efforts of interpretation. Anecdotes, play-by-play accounts of specific events, and narrative histories were dominant genres in the field. Were Mao and his colleagues merely agrarian reformers, or full-fledged Leninists? Had the USSR's role in China's revolution been crucial? Was Mao merely the newest and poorest of the totalitarians—just another version of Stalin or Hitler? These were the main perceived issues. Categories of thought among American China hands were inseparable from the categories of U.S. politics in the 1950s.

In 1962, when Chalmers A. Johnson's book *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* appeared, the questions of this debate shifted.<sup>28</sup> Because that analysis treated communism as a subtype of nationalism, and because the new approach related the growth of Communist groups in North China

<sup>27</sup> A vivid treatment of such cynicism is Liu Xinwu's story "Awake, My Brother!" in *The Wounded*, pp. 179–203.

<sup>28</sup> *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962). *The China Quarterly*, published in London, appeared in 1959; this journal's first articles included thoughtful statements of 1950s positions, and it soon became a medium for new research of many kinds.

to the context of war against Japan, academic interest moved from more abstract questions of ideology to functional questions, especially to the means by which the CCP gained a mass constituency. Johnson's thesis was contested by scholars who said the Party's social policies were crucial to Communist gains in politics, but the issues he raised are still the framework of serious debate on the PRC's beginning.<sup>29</sup> It took more than a dozen years after 1949 to set the parameters of this controversy, to focus on the resources that created the event of 1949, and to shape the question of what caused it.

Just one other event in CCP history has received a similarly thorough airing by academics. The Great Leap Forward of 1958 affected the lives of more Chinese more deeply than any campaign since then. Western scholars, looking at the gigantic upheaval of the Leap, initially had scant idea what to make of it. Anecdotes, summaries of CCP policy ideals, and critiques (sympathetic or unsympathetic, liberal or egalitarian) did not add up to any coherent sense of what had happened. In the mid-1960s, however, with the publication of works by Franz Schurmann, James Townsend, William Skinner, and Audrey Donnithorne, an implicit consensus arose from disparate researches: the Leap concerned organization.<sup>30</sup> It was an attempt to mobilize social energies by a Party that was interested in maximizing its impetus through "human organization," not just in allocating resources efficiently through "technical organization." One way to specify this trade-off between mobilization and efficiency was to look at China in terms of its many social cells, which could nest inside each other. Another was to look at the contrasts between different kinds of decentralization. The event was thus defined; it was a gigantic administrative experiment. It could be comprehended by theories of organization in economic infrastructure (for example, grain trade) and by attention to the sizes of management units. The controversy

<sup>29</sup> The best-known study along these lines is Mark Selden's *The Yanan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Lucian Bianco's *The Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915–1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1971) tends toward the same conclusions—but by emphasizing the concrete, harsh similitude between incursions of poverty and incursions of the Japanese army into peasants' lives, Bianco attempts some synthesis of the "peasant nationalism" and "social revolution" views. Like the French existentialist he is, Bianco writes beautifully about all this, without finalizing it absolutely.

<sup>30</sup> Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966); James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967); Audrey Donnithorne, *China's Economic System* (New York: Praeger, 1967); and G. William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," a three-part series in *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, nos. 1–3 (1964–65).

over the relative importance of different-sized units continues, especially in discussions of Chinese fiscal arrangements.<sup>31</sup> Like the debate about 1949, it has nurtured insights into problems that go far beyond the event on which it first focused.

The Cultural Revolution has spawned even more books than the Liberation or Leap. Many have praised or lambasted its policy ideals, provided accounts of politics among a very few top leaders, or explored the drama in particular institutions. Some of the liveliest books have come from Westerners who taught at Chinese universities in 1966–69.<sup>32</sup> Red Guards have also reported their experiences.<sup>33</sup> Interpretations of the Cultural Revolution, even by Chinese who suffered it, have often stayed fairly close to the categories that were already implicit in (or contrary to) statements of that time—although recent reports have stressed the random violence then, as some older accounts did not.<sup>34</sup>

These treatments are well informed, but only a few stand back from the passions of the CR to ask what caused it. A senior China hand, assessing his colleagues' overall work on the Cultural Revolution twenty years after that movement began, rightly gave them high marks in analyzing its immediate causes, but low marks for their attempts to find its fundamental causes.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> See Thomas Lyons, *Economic Integration and Planning in Maoist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), and aspects of Thomas G. Rawski's forthcoming *Chinese Management Capabilities: Industrial Technology*. For earlier work, see Audrey Donnithorne, "China's Cellular Economy: Some Economic Trends Since the Cultural Revolution," *China Quarterly* (hereafter CQ), 52 (October–December 1972): 605–12, and Donnithorne, "Comment: Centralization and Decentralization in China's Fiscal Management," CQ 66 (June 1976): 328–39; Nicholas R. Lardy's "Comment" immediately follows in the same issue. A major new contribution to this long-debated subject is Barry Naughton's, "The Economy of the Cultural Revolution," in *New Perspectives on the Cultural Revolution*, ed. William Joseph, Christine Wong, and David Zweig (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>32</sup> Victor Nee, *The Cultural Revolution at Peking University* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969); William Hinton, *Hundred Day War: The Cultural Revolution at Tsinghua University* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Colin Mackerras and Neale Hunter, *China Observed: 1964–1967* (London: Pall Mall, 1968); and Hunter, *Shanghai Journal: An Eyewitness Account of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Praeger, 1969)—to name just a few of the books.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon A. Bennett and Ronald N. Montaperto, *Red Guard: The Political Biography of Dai Hsiao-ai* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972); Ken Ling, *The Revenge of Heaven: Journal of a Young Chinese* (New York: Putnam, 1972); Gao Yuan, *Born Red* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987); and Liang and Shapiro, *Son of the Revolution*.

<sup>34</sup> See especially the autobiography by Nien Cheng, *Life and Death in Shanghai* (London: Collins, 1986).

<sup>35</sup> Lucian W. Pye, "Reassessing the Cultural Revolution," *China Quarterly* 108 (December 1986): 597–612.

Past answers to this question fall into several categories, which have been explored in other books that provide background for the more syncretic and policy-centered explanation adopted here.<sup>36</sup>

The next five subsections below deal with past approaches to the task of explaining the CR. The present project tries to organize them into a framework sufficient to explain the violence. It would be easy for a hasty reader of this book to get the impression that it arbitrarily rejects alternative views, tossing them away so as to get to the main hypothesis. But in fact, the effort here is aimed at showing what each of them can and cannot explain, so as to move toward a more comprehensive explanatory structure that includes them.

Common explanations of the CR emphasize social ideals, conflicts in Beijing, Mao's personality, the attractiveness of revolutionary symbols, or high-level impatience about national development. None of these approaches is wrong, even though the inadequacies of each will be discussed immediately below. The problem with most of them is that, even if they show whence ideas for action came in the CR, they do not demonstrate why so many people took up those ideas with such verve. They need to be supplemented—not supplanted—by an explanation of why high leaders and ideal notions were followed in such a singularly unusual, violent way by so many people. For that, it is not enough to talk about culture, ideology, top politicians, or symbols (all of which come in many types, of which only some were important by 1966). Why did particular options in these fields seem cogent to so many then? Labels, monitors, and campaigns—administrative policies arising from the CCP's lack of adequate resources to attain its ambitious goals quickly—put urban Chinese in a mood to act radically by 1966. The purpose here is not to reject previous explanations of the CR, but to show their scope. It is necessary to establish the mentalities of China's urban audience by the

<sup>36</sup> Despite some questioning here, I am in debt to previous works on the CR by many authors. Richard Baum, Marc Blecher, Anita Chan, Lowell Dittmer, John Gardner, Hong Yung Lee, John Wilson Lewis, Roderick MacFarquhar, Stanley Rosen, Susan Shirk, Tang Tsou, Andrew Walder, and Gordon White are certainly among them. This work on the CR may differ mostly in the attempts (1) to use local newspapers from the 1950s and early 1960s along with interviews and later 1960s sources; (2) to consider economic and cultural actors together—workers, not just students, and residents, not just cadres; (3) to admit both rational/individual and symbolic/group bases of action; and especially (4) to identify public reaction to previous *policies* as the spurs of mass violence in 1966, and concurrently to identify cultures as underlying factors that explain too much and Beijing leaders as precipitating factors that alone explain too little. This approach could not exist, however, without reference to earlier contributions by many others.

mid-1960s in order to see why diverse people affected and responded so forcefully to the ideals and leadership factors that many previous analyses have emphasized.

### THE CR AS AN EXPRESSION OF EGALITARIAN-COLLECTIVIST IDEALS

A commonsense approach in explaining human behavior is to ask the participants why they act as they do. The first answers to this question, for this stage of the Chinese revolution as for previous ones, were mostly ideological. The movement was seen as a class struggle against "capitalist roaders" who promoted material incentives in socialist China. The movement was not, in this view, mainly an adulation of Mao, or an elite power struggle, or a celebration of symbols devoid of social aims, or a clash of mass social groups. Instead, it was what people said it was: an effort to impose a more ideal revolutionary order on factories, communes, the army, and schools. Many of Mao's ideals were obviously praiseworthy.<sup>37</sup>

K. S. Karol spoke of the Communist purposes of the CR, not its causes.<sup>38</sup> Richard Pfeffer said the CR was an "authentic" revolution because Mao's intention was to create a new governing superstructure.<sup>39</sup> William Hinton wrote that such policies would change people, until finally no social classes would exist.<sup>40</sup> The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars decided that "[t]he Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was . . . the struggle to determine which line China would follow," especially in terms of goals such as equality, community, Chinese independence, and passing the torch of revolution across generation gaps.<sup>41</sup>

Yet Mao was less consistently anticapitalist than his most famous rivals. Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen were the main Communist leaders opposing non-

<sup>37</sup> Karl Polanyi's, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Rinehart, 1944) can be read for an argument that egalitarian and collectivist ideals are an essential ingredient of development, needed to regulate the effects of commoditization on modern efficient markets of human labor, environs, and earnings.

<sup>38</sup> K. S. Karol, *The Second Chinese Revolution*, trans. M. Jones (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Pfeffer, "The Pursuit of Purity: Mao's Cultural Revolution," *Problems of Communism* 18, no. 6 (November–December 1969): 12–25.

<sup>40</sup> William Hinton, *Turning Point in China: An Essay on the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> *China! Inside the People's Republic* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 72, 102–3. A careful book on idealism is Jean Daubier's *A History of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, trans. Richard Seaver (New York: Random House, 1974).

Party intellectuals' "blooming" during 1957. Mao favored criticism from non-CCP people, at least for a while, in order to improve the quality of the cadres' performance. Peng Zhen went so far as to compare the 1957 rightists with Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei (China's chief collaborator with Japan).<sup>42</sup> Separating the ideological disputes of these leaders from their factional conflicts may be difficult in relation to any short time period, but over the long haul none of them was entirely inflexible. The CCP's top leaders conferred often with each other. They largely agreed on methods for implementing administration in New China—especially on the three policies for labels, patrons, and campaigns that are stressed in this book. They might apply these ideas differently at various times; but they were neither so diverse among themselves nor so consistent over time as they are often depicted in efforts to explain the Cultural Revolution on grounds of their social ideals.

What the participants said was populist and egalitarian. They said it even as they fought each other; so their pronouncements hardly explain their fighting. They all stressed conspiracies of national and class betrayal, as well as loyalty to an emperor-like leader; but this hardly explains the variety of directions their violence took, since it was aimed at each other. Social idealism in the CR may be a corollary of the violence, but the former is not convincing as a causal explanation of the latter. Ideals and violence may have had common origins in many individuals' and groups' reactions to earlier manipulation.

Then too, Maoism is not such a unified philosophy that clear deductions can be made from it. In a trenchant review of many major—and diverse—scholarly interpretations of "Mao Zedong thought," Nick Knight shows that

[t]he Mao texts do not speak for themselves; they are activated anew by each fresh reading, activated in ways which produce different emphases, different and at times sharply conflicting interpretations. . . . These instances of critique and counter-critique have done little more than reveal that the scholars involved are in disagreement; appeals to mutually exclusive assumptions and different empirical realities do not constitute the basis for fruitful debate.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 1: 290, quoting RMRB, August 7, 1957.

<sup>43</sup> Nick Knight, "The Marxism of Mao Zedong: Empiricism and Discourse in the Field of Mao Studies," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 16 (July 1986): 18–19.