

Book Reviews

From Autonomy to Assimilation

A Review of *The Purge of the Inner Mongolian People's Party in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1967–1969: A Function of Language, Power and Violence*

Kerry Brown

Global Oriental, 2006

192 pages, £50.00

BY TEMTSEL HAO



The purge of Mongols during the years 1967 to 1969 was a defining moment in the Chinese-Mongolian relationship: on one hand, the purge expelled Mongolian

cadres who followed the Chinese Communists while at the same time representing Mongolian ethnic or nationalist sentiments; on the other hand, the purge revived declining Mongolian identity. Kerry Brown's book, *The Purge of the Inner Mongolian People's Party in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1967–1969*, gives a detailed description and analysis of the complex power relations during this period based on documents produced during the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia.

The history of the Cultural Revolution is particularly controversial because it is so recent and so relevant to current politics. This is even more true of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia because of the sensitive ethnic issue involved, and as a result, there are even more official restrictions on access to scarce research materials. Kerry Brown provides an analysis of both historical and linguistic research based on documentary evidence. Indeed, his analysis of language used in Cultural Revolution documents provides more reliable and objective historical evidence because, as the author points out, language is part of social reality and political power, especially during the Cultural Revolution.

Political legitimacy and orthodoxy are related to people's internal rationalizations, and language is the recorded and verifiable link between the authorities and those they rule. Brown's book enables readers to see through the political language of different parties to understand the power shifts at

various stages during the crucial two years of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia: how the change was initiated by Beijing; how political and ideological struggles in Inner Mongolia disguised ethnic conflicts; how Teng Haiqing, the military chief in charge of the purge, maintained his authority; and the end of Teng Haiqing's political career in Inner Mongolia.

Although Brown applies his linguistic model only to this two-year period in Inner Mongolia, the model has broader historical and geographical relevance. It would be very worthwhile, for example, to apply the same analytical model to how the authorities in the current post-Communist era have gained power and established a new economic orthodoxy by introducing fashionable business and economic language into politics (in the "marketplace," to use Pierre Bourdieu's term, economic language is more powerful because it is backed by top western academic institutions and carries scientific and non-ideological connotations).¹

The political language with class emphasis used in the documents studied in this book reflects a high level of ideological justification for political authority, with little argument or compromise based on ethnic considerations, even though the political authority of the pre-Cultural Revolution Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) was based on a compromise between Communism and the right to self-determination for Mongols. The documents reflect the circumstances of a period in which the Chinese authorities began to impose a common political identity to replace diverse ethnic identities, and culturally distinct groups were made to merge into a single ideologically-based political nation.

Kerry Brown's book shows how this process led to ethnic tensions and struggles that resulted in a huge number of Mongol victims, bankrupting the notion of the ideological nation through the imposition of naked force in Inner Mongolia. Beijing embarked on this process after abandoning the Soviet model of managing nationality, and with it, the notion of genuine autonomy for non-Chinese minorities, let alone national self-determination. The result was the purging of cadres who represented the interests of their own ethnic groups.

The book's linguistic analysis and documentation also demystify Zhou Enlai's role in the Inner Mongolian purge. All evidence

points to Zhou's deep involvement in Inner Mongolia's affairs from the outset right through to the end. This runs contrary to the prevailing myth promoted by the Chinese authorities, in which Zhou is innocent of involvement in the purges and victimization, and even ignorant of the Mongols' misery until learning of it by accident, and immediately taking action to correct the errors of others and save Mongol lives.

The book is more a sociological study than a historical study or a study of political thought, and as a result, it provides an objective and scientific account and analysis free of influence from any major historical interpretations of the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, this focus limits the historical and ideological scope of the book.

The Cultural Revolutionary purge in Inner Mongolia was simply the final blow against the Soviet model of nationality, copied by the Chinese Communists for decades. Before coming to power, the Chinese Communists copied the Soviet model and promised the right of self-determination to major non-Chinese minorities, but they retreated from this position after taking power. The right to autonomy in Inner Mongolia declined gradually throughout the Anti-Rightist movement and the Cultural Revolutionary purge. The result was an even harsher imposition of class struggle in Inner Mongolia because of the ethnic and international factors involved. In particular, Beijing suspected Russia and the independent "Outer" Mongolia as rivals for the loyalty of Mongols.

After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), Khrushchev denounced Stalin's dogmatism and cult of personality. The 22nd Congress of the CPSU went on to declare that with the disappearance of class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat was no longer needed in the USSR, and the Soviet Union was no longer a class state but a state of the people as a whole. The Russian brand of Communism began to humanize Marxism through slogans such as "Everything for people" (echoed by the current Chinese slogan of "people first").

In contrast, Mao Zedong believed that socialism was a long-term process that inevitably involved class struggle and the struggle between socialism and capitalism, with a real threat of resurgence of capital-

ism. After the Sino-Russian split in early 1960s, Mao Zedong had his ideas incorporated into the official party line. This was the thinking behind the Anti-Rightist purge that began in 1957, the ideological criticism from 1963 to 1965 that affected many Mongolian cadres and intellectuals, and eventually the launching of the Cultural Revolution.

NOTE

1. For a discussion of Bourdieu's application of "economic language," see Frédéric Lebaron, "Pierre Bourdieu: Economic Models against Economism," <http://olivier.godechot.free.fr/hopfchiers/lebaron-second-draft-edited.pdf>.

Epiphanies of Loss

A Review of *Stick Out Your Tongue*
Ma Jian, translated by Flora Drew
Chatto & Windus (UK), January 2006
Farrar, Straus and Giroux, May 2006
104 pages, \$16

BY LI MIAO LOVETT



When *Stick Out Your Tongue* was first published in China in 1987, one commentator denounced it as a "vulgar, obscene book that defames the image of our Tibetan compatri-

ots," and Ma Jian's works were banned forevermore. Needless to say, the remaining copies of the book were traded on the black market for exorbitant sums.

Its English translation, published almost 20 years later, brims with lurid details that might, at face value, shock Western sensibilities as well. The narrator, a divorced Chinese writer, witnesses the sky burial of a woman who died in childbirth. As her lovers carry her body up the mountain, vultures perched on the rocks await the ritual sacrifice. The bearers pass the remains of previous sky burials, "scraps of bone, clumps of hair, smashed rings, glass beads, and bird droppings dotted with human fingernails." The Chinese man stares at her naked, swollen belly in fascination, but as he tries to photograph her, the shutter of his camera freezes.

While the narrator of *Stick Out Your Tongue* sounds like a thin disguise for the

author, the tone of the work is not voyeuristic. As a young man in the 1980s, Ma Jian fled political persecution and journeyed through Tibet, sleeping under the stars and on dirt floors with his pastoral compatriots. He is spare in his language, and his portrayals provide a unique glimpse into the life of China's exotic and misunderstood stepchild. The novel, really a collection of short stories, attempts to reveal the psychic and cultural landscape of Tibet on her own terms.

In the subtlest of the vignettes, a young man educated in the city returns home to find his nomadic family. He misses the grasslands, but he has grown comfortable living in the world of books, films and multi-story buildings. When he tells his sister about the girls in Saga whose limbs are "as shiny as yak legs," she looks away. In deft strokes, Ma Jian portrays the chasm separating the old from the new, and the internal struggle that besieges a young man who lives in two distinct worlds.

Sexual themes reverberate throughout many of the stories. The narrator encounters a nomad making a journey to the sacred mountains to wash away his sin of double incest. The nomad had a child with his own mother, and subsequently, in a moment of drunkenness, he took the grown daughter to bed. He searches in vain for the girl, but it is the narrator who finds her begging in the city, disheveled and deranged.

What I found most provocative is the blending of mythology and realism; an old craftsman reveals how his lover became impaled on the pillar rising out of a stupa he constructed, and claims that the incident happened over four hundred years ago. When her body dries into a thin shell, he hangs it on the wall of the monastery. At times, the emotional truth behind these fantastical scenes becomes too much to bear. The death of the feminine echoes throughout—when the pregnant woman's corpse is cut into pieces, when a girl identified as a Living Buddha disassociates during a public sex ritual, when the dried parchment of the old lover's body flutters in the wind. These vignettes seem to evoke a greater tragedy: the Tibetans' loss of their motherland to the Chinese conquest and to modernization.

While each piece has its epiphanies and its moments of sorrow, the collection

leaves the reader wanting more. The stories are written with the urgency of a fugitive who has seen too much, yet they only scratch the surface of this ancient, complex culture. The narrative thread running through the stories is a thin one; Ma Jian does not provide a unifying arc, nor does he retrace his steps. *The Noodle Maker*, a novel that depicts Chinese lives after the tragedy of Tiananmen Square, is written in the same vein, as a series of vignettes recounted by a fictional narrator.

The tales in *Stick Out Your Tongue* are not unlike the hanging parchment of the old lover. They offer a preserved image of Tibet that titillates the senses, while challenging our romanticized notions about the culture. By depicting ordinary people whose feelings are familiar to us despite their unusual ordeals, these stories allow us to get outside our own skin, if only for fleeting moments.

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A View from the Tower

A Review of *Mao's Last Revolution*
Roderick MacFarquhar
and Michael Schoenhals
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
693 pages, \$35 (£25.00)

BY ROGER GARSIDE



In July 1981, the Chinese Communist Party published its official explanation of how it was that Mao had been able to launch and carry on the Cultural Revolution against the judgment of Party leaders at all levels, and to the widespread dismay of most of his subjects. It attributed this disaster to a lack of democracy within the Party and in the political and social life of the country.

In the quarter of a century since then, the Party has suppressed every initiative to democratize China's political system, in flat contradiction of its own verdict. The Party uses its dictatorial powers to impose its own version of history, above all its self-

serving judgment that Mao was 70 percent good and 30 percent bad. Chinese historians are not free to research and write the historical truth about Mao and the Cultural Revolution as they may see it, and foreign books that present a version radically different from that of the Party are banned.

This absence of democracy and the consequent denial of freedom are not a purely Chinese domestic matter. The Party does not only impose falsehood and block truth within its borders: it uses its growing economic and political power to curb freedom of expression in our own democratic societies. I will never forget the democracy activist Wei Jingsheng venting his anger and scorn to me after a day in which the British police, in deference to the wishes of the Chinese government, had suppressed peaceful protests by British supporters of a Free Tibet during the visit to London by President Jiang Zemin. I have never felt more ashamed of my own government. Since then, a publishing house that is part of the Murdoch empire has terminated a contract to publish memoirs of the last British governor of Hong Kong that would have displeased Beijing, and an East Asia editor of the London *Times* (also Murdoch-owned) who angered Beijing with his coverage of China's violations of human rights has ceased to be employed by that paper.

Given the size and growing economic power of China and its occupation of one of five permanent seats on the UN Security Council, the future of China's political system is a matter of concern for the international community. Indeed, it is the greatest unresolved issue in world politics, and its eventual resolution will influence for good or ill our prospects for war and peace, and the survival of our own democracies.

The history of modern China's greatest political catastrophe and its consequences need therefore to be understood by all who think seriously about the future of international relations. At a deeper level, the Cultural Revolution, as one of the darkest passages in recorded history, has much to tell us about human nature. Roderick MacFarquhar, a professor of government at Harvard University, has been studying it for almost 40 years, and has long been pre-eminent in this field. Michael Schoenhals is a younger scholar, a Swede, who for 10 years has worked with monastic dedication producing initial drafts for his abbot across

the Atlantic to peruse and improve. Now their work has been published. How well have they met the challenges posed by their subject?

The primary focus of this book is on Mao and his fellow members of the Communist Party elite. The authors have also given a powerful, if very brief, summary of the destruction wrought by the Red Guards, and the human toll inflicted by the Revolutionary Committees as they ruthlessly stamped their authority on society, but those are secondary *foci*. The book recounts in detail how Mao launched this cataclysm, how others tried to block him, how he persisted and overcame the opposition at first, but how the contradictions and flaws in his strategy, and the stubborn, wide-spread but disguised resistance to it condemned him to a Pyrrhic victory and the country to long years of anarchy, violence, brutal dictatorship and political deadlock. Through painstaking research, a wealth of detailed evidence has been assembled. If the editor had pruned it more ruthlessly, the clarity of the narrative would have been greater, but China scholars will relish it.

The authors accept Mao's own definition of his objectives in launching his *Last Revolution*: to breed revolutionary successors and block the emergence of Khrushchev-style revisionism in China. There is nothing wrong with this, although one might have wished for them at least to examine a more cynical interpretation. They do not contest the portrait of Mao as a tyrannical emperor, which has been increasingly accepted down the years. They document very well indeed his strategies and *modus operandi* for manipulating his colleagues in the elite and for leading the national political campaign. As one who observed at close quarters the respect and trust accorded to Zhou Enlai by many millions of Chinese, to say nothing of many illustrious foreign statesmen, I was impressed by the merciless way in which the authors show him to have been politically enslaved to Mao, and to have failed the Chinese people at that crucial moment in February 1967, when he was the one man in China who, in alliance with the Old Guard, could have stopped Mao in his tracks, but did not.

To understand how Mao managed to hold his closest comrades in thrall to the degree he did, one needs to read *Mao: the*

Untold Story by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, the other major recent book on Mao. Before Chang and Halliday showed us how Mao terrorized his colleagues for at least 30 years, his capacity to dominate Zhou and other members of the Old Guard, such as the brave, experienced and outspoken Marshal Chen Yi and Tan Zhenlin, was baffling. Now it is clear.

The authors are skillful at interweaving eyewitness accounts of public events with close-ups of the leadership behind closed doors. For instance, on April 5, 1976, I watched a furious crowd of thousands rough up policemen in Tiananmen Square and burn a police command post there while demanding the return of the thousands of wreaths (dedicated to Zhou Enlai) that had been removed from the Square overnight. Now I have the other half of the picture, because Mao's *Last Revolution* quotes from a letter from the leading radical Zhang Chunqiao's to his son, in which he wrote that Politburo members watched these events unfold from behind the window curtains of the Great Hall of the People, that it was like seeing the Hungarian uprising unfold, and that he cursed Deng Xiaoping to his face, calling him Imre Nagy.

The flaws and contradictions in Mao's strategy for the Cultural Revolution pointed out in the book are that on the one hand, he intended it to breed a new generation of revolutionary leaders who would understand and carry forward his vision for China and the world, but on the other, he relied principally on the armed forces to carry it out, contrary to the principle he had laid down long before that "the gun shall never be allowed to command the party." Compared to the PLA, the Red Guards were ancillaries in the seizure of power at regional and local levels, and eventually they were cast aside. As the authors observe, the long-term effect of this has been the destruction of the authority of the Party that Mao hoped to renew among the people; the Party's reliance on armed force to resist demands for democracy; its corruption, and an ever-rising groundswell of popular protest against its corrupt and arbitrary rule.

The authors rightly state that the Cultural Revolution was a watershed in the history of the People's Republic of China, freeing the minds of men like Deng Xiaop-

ing from Communist orthodoxies, and they do not fail to point out the irony that the movement led not only to the militarization of China's government for a decade, but also ended with China turning to its erstwhile "imperialist" enemy, the United States of America, to counterbalance the might of the Soviet Union, to which the Chinese Communist Party largely owed its victory in 1949.

Within its limits, this is a well-balanced, well-documented book that deserves to be read by all students of Chinese political history, and may well remain the most authoritative overview of the Cultural Revolution until scholars in China are free to write their own history.

But the reader will not find in this book a satisfactory assessment of what the Cultural Revolution did to the moral and spiritual life of the nation—to family life, social values, literature, art and religion. It draws no conclusions from the Revolution for the important debate on "Asian values" versus the universal relevance of the principles of democracy. And it contains no recognition of the courage, grace and political understanding that were born in the midst of anarchy and moral degradation. Consider, for instance, how the young Wei Jingsheng learned to think for himself, and gained the determination to live as a free man that led him to play a major role in the Democracy Movement of 1978–79 and retain his freedom of spirit throughout his years in prison camp. Consider, too, how in the darkest night of the Red Terror, the poet Huang Xiang wrote and recited to friends poems denouncing the totalitarian tyranny of the regime, and offering a powerful vision of man's liberation by the spirit of God.

Nor do the authors draw from the history of this astonishing period any general insights into the government of societies, the role of individuals in making history or the resilience of the human spirit under oppression. If there is one individual from the 20th century who, above all others, invites us to test Nietzsche's ideas of the superman, or Hegel's of "world-historical individuals," it is Mao. A comparison with a book such as Alan Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* shows what is missing.

The integration of China into the world community is deepening so rapidly that China studies need urgently to become better integrated with wider schools of govern-

ment and history, so as to foster greater intellectual cross-fertilization. Oh ye monks of Sinology, come out of your cells and join the wider community of learning!

A Half Life

A Review of *Being Here: Shaping a Preferred Future*

By Christine Loh
SCMP Books, 2006
384 pages, HK\$138

BY JONATHAN MIRSKY



Since 1979, there has not been a more determined and effective champion of a better life for Hong Kong people than Christine Loh. She is one of a number of the city's remarkable

female democrats, notably Anna Wu, Gladys Li, Margaret Ng, Jacqueline Leong and Emily Lau. Although Loh is still young (she was born in 1956), her career as a politician has been the widest in scope of any democrat, male or female, embracing voting rights, the status of women, the environment and corruption, not to mention her international career as a high-powered business woman and a speaker much in demand around the world.

I declare an interest. Ms. Loh and I have been friends since 1992. During my years working in Hong Kong I missed few opportunities to listen to her in the Legislative Council, where she was an outstanding orator, or to follow her during election campaigns that she never lost and during which she displayed her good temper and common touch.

Her book is divided, not neatly but surprisingly, into two parts. In the first she establishes her unusual identity. An ethnic Chinese, she knew neither Cantonese nor Mandarin until she learned them as an adult. One of her ancestors was a notable Qing Dynasty scholar-official whom she describes as caring about the fate of a rapidly weakening China. On the other side, her forebears were south Chinese traders who, also in the 19th century, cast in their lot with Butterfield and Swire, one of the most famous British Hongs, and became

very rich in Hong Kong. I used to admire a photograph in the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club of a huge mansion (now demolished) on Conduit road; Ms Loh's great-grandfather built it. Part of her roots lie also in Shanghai, her biological father's birthplace, which to her, growing up, seemed "a way of life not a place." Both sides of the family eventually settled in Hong Kong, where they concentrated on making money and getting on with the colonial rulers, although Ms. Loh barely mentions the Japanese, who co-opted most such tycoons and entrepreneurs.

Her mother, a beautiful local woman with a job, married and then daringly (for Hong Kong) divorced Christine's father, and married a Dane, Jens Munk, whom Loh regards as her real father, or at least father-figure. We learn, too, of Christine's amah, Ah Ching, a traditional south Chinese woman sworn never to marry, whom she describes more warmly than anyone but her stepfather.

Loh recalls herself as a lonely, asthmatic, rather silent child. In the years with her biological father and mother she sensed something wrong between them, but they said little to her until the moment of parting. She says of that moment, "I did not feel stressed about it because my parents did not appear to be disturbed." While her father remained her "friend," living out his life in California, her deepest family influence has been her Danish stepfather. Loh has resumed living with him and her mother in recent years.

This family story is interesting and often well told. But once Christine leaves her Hong Kong expatriate school for a British university, we learn nothing of her three years in the UK, and she tells us little of her emotional life. She observes in the Preface to her book, "There is no doubt that for Hong Kong people of my generation, our defining collective experience is the translation from British to Chinese rule." She becomes a commodities trader in China for many years and joins the Hong Kong Observers, a small group of Western-educated Chinese who criticised aspects of British rule in Kong Kong, and were kept under surveillance as possible subversives.

Still working as a China trader, her interest in politics deepens, and the new Governor, Chris Patten, appoints her to the Legislative Council, in which she learns to

wheel and deal in Hong Kong politics. She increasingly realises that Beijing has few good intentions for Hong Kong and that Britain will not, cannot, defend it. When she breaks a long taboo and publicly enquires how the Chinese Communist Party operates in Hong Kong, not only do the Chinese and their acolytes in the Legislative Council revile her, but even Patten dismisses the question as “exotic.” That is hardly the word: just before the 1997 hand-over, a very senior Special Branch officer showed me around an enormous room containing hundreds of files on the Hong Kong Communist Party, which were about to be shipped back to London.

The second half of Loh’s book is taken up with her legislative and civic interests, which are wide-ranging, heroic and often effective.

Much of this part of the book will be of interest only to those living in Hong Kong or very curious about it, but what shines out is how Loh and her allies fought for human rights in Hong Kong before and after 1997. The British, with a very few honorable exceptions, opposed and interfered in this struggle, she contends, while Beijing scorned the hopes and ambitions of the democrats who, Loh rightly says, represent the hopes and ambitions of most people in Hong Kong.

For me, the most engrossing of Loh’s crusades—a term I use with admiration—was to secure land ownership rights for women in traditional New Territories villages. This so enraged the men of those parts that some publicly threatened to rape Loh. It is characteristic of Loh that she laughed off this scandalous threat. Meanwhile, the British behaved badly. “They wanted to stay on good terms with the local elites in order to secure their authority and legitimise colonial rule. So, ironically, it was in modern Hong Kong that discriminatory patriarchal customary laws were recognised and preserved as normative Chinese tradition and exempted from legal intervention.”

Loh rarely speaks ill of others, but on this issue, she contends, fellow-legislator Emily Lau, usually a dependable defender of Hong Kong’s human rights, “stayed close” to the cause of the angry men. “Perhaps . . . because she had indigenous villagers among her constituents . . . She was plainly edging around the issue and not

being her usual forthright self. In all the time I have known her that was the only occasion I had been disappointed with her.”

During those years of intense political battle, was there another Christine Loh, the product of all those ancestors, her divorced parents and her amah? The product, too, of her foreign education and her English native language, despite the Chinese passport she acquired after giving up her British one? The burden relayed in the first half of her book is of her mixed identity. We learn of her devotion to her mother and stepfather, her amah and to a few half-relatives far away. But how is that she is the guardian and godparent of Leah Ehrlich, to whom this book is partially dedicated?

What of romance, marriage, deep friendships, even fun? She says nothing. Loh is entitled to her discretion and her privacy, which may arise from a childhood in which troubles were barely mentioned, but the book remains a half-self-portrait.

It is perhaps this that affects Loh’s writing. The book’s first half is relatively lively and stylistically unexceptional. The second is too much like a chronicle in style and is occasionally ungrammatical.

That said, in my judgement, Christine Loh, more than anyone in Hong Kong—and there are plenty of pro-democracy campaigners there—follows her own advice for “active citizens”: We must learn, she emphasises, “to ferret out the truth, ask questions, and demand answers and dissent if that is what it takes to force reconsideration.” All this and cheery, too. A remarkable public woman about whom we would like to know more.

Resource List: Ethnic Minorities in China

COMPILED BY JOVY CHAN
WITH SI-SI LIU AND CAROL WANG

This resource list provides a wide range of resources on ethnic minorities living in China and related human rights issues. “CSO and Academic Resources” includes information provided by governments-in-exile and civil society groups. The section also includes information on international legal standards relating to this issue, along with some recommended books and articles. At the end, “PRC Government Resources” are included for references to state mechanisms that affect ethnic groups, such as Chinese laws and white papers. Additionally, government-sponsored Web sites are also provided to demonstrate the PRC’s approach to the issue of ethnic groups.

ABBREVIATIONS:

GZAR Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region
IMAR Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region
NHAR Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region
TAR Tibet Autonomous Region
XUAR Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

CSO and ACADEMIC RESOURCES

MONGOLS

Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center

<http://www.smhric.org/>
English, Chinese, Japanese
SMHRIC, based in New York, promotes the protection of ethnic Mongolians’ rights and supports a grassroots movement with an ultimate goal of establishing a democratic political system in the IMAR. The Web site includes information on political prisoners and papers on human rights issues, aggregates relevant news, and recommends books relating to Mongolian history and issues.

Inner Mongolian People’s Party

<http://www.innermongolia.org/>
English, Mongolian, Chinese
Headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey, the IMPP is a group of activists inside and