

BARNOUIN, BARBARA [and] YU CHANGGEN. *Ten Years of Turbulence. The Chinese Cultural Revolution.* [Publication of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva.] Kegan Paul International, London [etc.] 1993. viii, 369 pp. £55.00.

Students of twentieth-century political movements will welcome this comprehensive study of the Cultural Revolution, a movement which, in the words of the authors "shook the very foundation of Party and state, and which persecuted millions of people from all strata of the Chinese society" (p. 1). With the notable exception of volume 15, pt. 2, of the *Cambridge History of China* (Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds, Cambridge University Press, 1991), a far hefty tome, there is no scholarly work in the English language comparable to it currently in print. It represents an important addition to the existing Western literature on the subject, as well as something of a "leap forward" as far as plain historical accuracy is concerned.

With respect to its form, *Ten Years of Turbulence* is a conventional narrative that takes the reader from the ideological and political origins of the Cultural Revolution in the 1950s and early 1960s to the "final power struggles" of the mid-1970s. The purge of the so-called Peng-Luo-Lu-Yang clique in the first half of 1966 leads to the fall of Liu Shaoqi; the Great Chaos (*daluàn*) of the winter of 1966–1967 witnesses the birth of mass organizations, the seizure of power from below, the "February Adverse Current", and finally the intervention of the military. In a central chapter on "fluctuations between order and disorder", the authors become the first to describe in English and in some detail "one of the darkest periods of the Cultural Revolution", i.e. the campaigns to purify the class ranks, to "drag out" the May 16th Group, and the "one smash and three antis". Western observers in the past clearly failed to appreciate the scope and brutality of these movements, of which the first resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands and the second in the arrest of 3.5 million members of an organization that now officially "never existed in the first place".

*Ten Years of Turbulence* undermines some of the myths nourished in the past by Western and Chinese writers alike, and adds complexity and thickness to the plot. There is little explanatory power left in the factional model espoused by political scientists when we get to the end of the book. Personal or group alignments never last, and in the end all convenient distinctions between "Maoists" and "Liuists" or between party establishment and "radicals" break down. The CCP's own "two-line struggle" paradigm (i.e. good guys versus bad guys, history versus reaction) is once more shown to be myth pure and simple. By the time we are half-way through the book, we can be positively certain that the senior political actors still alive are "bad guys" all of them. At this point, the authors succeed in conveying what one of them like millions of his fellow countrymen no doubt experienced in person, i.e. the realization that *the system itself* was rotten to the core. "The Cultural Revolution led to the liberation of people's minds, . . . [and] exposed the evils and drawbacks of a totalitarian society to the point [where] the superiority of a socialist system was called into question." (pp. 299–300). This, incidentally, is one of the few positive things the authors have to say about the Cultural Revolution.

The mass of data available on events between 1966 and 1976 can be interpreted in many ways, and it is hard to determine what a particular factoid

"really means". The authors should be complimented for their sensitivity in this respect, which is not to say that their interpretations are convincing throughout. There is one big myth in particular which they might have done better not to perpetuate, i.e. that of Lin Biao's alleged involvement in an attempt to assassinate Mao Zedong. The present reviewer would have been infinitely more impressed with their labors if they had set out to show (and the available data does make it possible) that the botched *coup d'état* for which the alienated marshal is given the blame was entirely the work of his son and his associates. As it is, where *Ten Years of Turbulence* tries to show the opposite the narrative falters repeatedly, especially where it attempts to highlight Lin's alleged readiness to "contemplate violent action . . . to assure his [own] political survival" (p. 233). To show that it is "conceivable that Lin planned to stage a coup d'état against Mao", the authors cite at length from Lin's famous speech of 18 May 1966. His speech, they claim, expresses "Lin's perception of the world and of history and . . . his concept of political power" (p. 232). In actual fact, the speech – with its focus on the prevention of a *coup d'état* – was much less a product of Lin's own "paranoic perception of history" (p. 233) than of Mao Zedong's latest obsession. Repeatedly in the winter of 1965–1966, Mao confided in his generals a fear of an imminent violent change in government. Lin was in this context merely the closest comrade-in-arms chosen to communicate Mao's fears to a larger audience. Zhang Chunqiao, who was instrumental in drafting Lin's speaking-notes, later maintained that "At the time that was the only form in which those things could have been presented." At the enlarged Politburo session at which Lin made his speech, Marshal He Long praised it for its intellectual content and Zhou Enlai expressed his "total agreement" with it, and added specifically that "As far as the danger of a coup d'état is concerned, I agree with what comrade Lin Biao said in his speech." To a reader familiar with a larger body of texts, Lin's speech proves nothing except possibly that the Marshal was indeed as rambling a speaker as he himself admitted more than once. The author's claim that Lin "entrusted his son, Lin Liguo, with the operational planning of the action" (p. 233) is made with no supporting evidence whatsoever, which is unforgivable.

To the specialist reader, one weakness of the present work is the large extent to which it is based on secondary sources. No more than a dozen of its 1,150 source notes refer to archive material or interviews with participants in the events concerned. For this reason it does not quite qualify as the product of proper historical research. What it really amounts to is a critical synthesis and much needed translation into English of the best writings on the Cultural Revolution to have been published in China since the beginning of the 1980s. (For an overview of some of these writings, see Michael Schoenhals, "Unofficial and Official Histories of the Cultural Revolution", *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3 (1989), pp. 563–572.) Readers already familiar with the works of historians Wang Nianyi, Jin Chunming, Ye Yonglie *et al.* will find little if any new information on its pages.

Still, in the final analysis, this is an excellent book that should be published in paperback as soon as possible. At present its prohibitive price-tag puts it firmly out of reach for all but tenured faculty and generously funded libraries. It deserves a far better fate.

*Michael Schoenhals*