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Book Reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Guo Jian, Yongyi Song and Yuan Zhou. *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*. Lanham, Maryland & Oxford UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2006, lvii, 433 pp. ISBN: 08108-5461-9, 978-0-8108-5461-1. Hardcover, US\$99.

It has often been said that the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) took place in China but the study of the Cultural Revolution flourished outside of China due to the Chinese government's restrictions on the study of this politically sensitive topic. However, the study of any major topic can always benefit from a quality subject dictionary or encyclopedia. The need for such a source is especially acute for the study of the Cultural Revolution not only because of the lack of such a source in English but also because of the strange and awkward Orwellian language of late Maoism, which was widely used during the Cultural Revolution and often defies comprehension and translation for those who did not live through that horrific era. A non-Chinese scholar studying the Cultural Revolution may find it frustrating to understand what "economism" (p.73) in the context of the Cultural Revolution is all about. On the other hand, a Chinese scholar already familiar with the Cultural Revolution parlance in its native language may be hard put to articulate many a Cultural Revolution expression in English. The task can just be too daunting for them for so many reasons.

This is where the *Historical Dictionary of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* comes in handy. The three authors are well-respected Cultural Revolution researchers who are collectively and individually responsible for a great many publications on the Cultural Revolution including the recently published monumental *Cultural Revolution Database Online*. As such, they saw the acute need for such a subject dictionary and undertook the effort to compile this much-needed reference tool. The fruit of their labor is the first Cultural Revolution dictionary in English. This expansive encyclopedic dictionary has over 500 entries encompassing many important aspects of the Cultural Revolution and featuring significant persons, events, military affairs, and education, among many other topics.

Especially noteworthy are the important features that set this English dictionary on the Cultural Revolution apart from its Chinese counterparts. Its first distinctive feature is its remarkable objectivity in that the authors use a "just-the-facts" approach. The entries are free from the influence of the Chinese government's official approach to the Cultural Revolution, e.g., blaming the "Gang of Four" for all the problems during the Cultural Revolution. In order to adhere to this fact-based approach and ensure objectivity, the authors chose to stay away from various controversial theoretical debates surrounding the Cultural Revolution, such as the cause and manner of the death of Lin Biao, Mao's handpicked successor who turned against him, and whether or not the Cultural Revolution lasted three or ten years. Instead, they devoted their full attention to describing what actually transpired during the Cultural Revolution.

The second distinctive feature of the dictionary is its broad scope. The dictionary covers not only the familiar political figures and institutions, such as Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping, and Revolutionary Committees, but also people and events that played highly significant roles during Cultural Revolution but were ignored by the Chinese government and neglected by many Cultural Revolution researchers. Among them are skeptics and critics of the Cultural Revolution and Mao himself such as Zhang Zhixing, Yu Louke, and Li Jiulian, all of whom were brutally executed by the Chinese government for their political beliefs and their courage to express them. These critically important individuals have largely fallen into oblivion in the mainstream Chinese press but have been given their proper space in the Cultural Revolution in this dictionary. The broad scope of the dictionary is also reflected in the hitherto little mentioned yet highly significant phenomena of the Cultural Revolution, such as the underground reading clubs and popular but illicit music of the educated youth.

The third distinctive feature of this dictionary is the accuracy. The authors carefully studied each and every entry and traced the history of many expressions, such as the origins of "Model Operas" and "Four Olds" to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness. The authors have also taken pains to give accurate descriptions to significant players of the Cultural Revolution whose influence has been played down or simply omitted from official media. Famous among them are earlier followers of Mao, such as Wang Li,

who first fell out of favor with Mao after he outlived his usefulness for Mao and then fell into complete oblivion.

The appended section of the dictionary includes such valuable features as a chronology that covers Cultural Revolution related events that occurred between 1965 and 1976, an introduction that fleshes out the chronology, a very practical pinyin-based Chinese-English glossary, and a comprehensive bibliography divided into fourteen categories, arguably the most updated English bibliography on the Cultural Revolution by far.

Its obvious strengths notwithstanding, the dictionary, being the first of its kind, could benefit from a few additions or changes. An index would facilitate use of this source by those who are not familiar with pinyin, among many other conveniences an index provides. The dictionary mentions Mao's wife Jiang Qing, but it would be great if an entry for Xiaojinzhuang, the "model village" set up by Jiang, could be added too considering how closely associated it is with Jiang and its overall role in the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the glossary would be more helpful if a page number were attached to every listed item.

None of above minor issues diminishes the enormous value of this dictionary to the study of the Cultural Revolution. The late Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping sternly warned against examining the Cultural Revolution with a fine-tooth comb, as he knew that any close scrutiny of this "Chinese Holocaust" would necessarily reveal the skeletons in the closet, namely, one-party rule, lack of true freedoms, and ultimately the culpability of the CCP and its political system. The efforts undertaken by the three authors represent one of the first steps towards deconstructing the Cultural Revolution, destabilizing the official theory of this catastrophe, clarifying all important issues, and restoring and preserving historical truth about the Cultural Revolution. Highly recommended for both research libraries and individual researchers alike.

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