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## BOOK REVIEWS

Rowena Xiaoqing He. *Tiananmen Exiles: Voices of the Struggle for Democracy in China*  
New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Published on the eve of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, *Tiananmen Exiles* addresses a difficult yet important subject in Chinese history. Through the personal narratives and group discussions of three student leaders of the Tiananmen movement, *Tiananmen Exiles* traces the life trajectories of these participants from their formative years during the Cultural Revolution, through the early years of the reform era, to their respective roles during the Tiananmen movement and their subsequent incarcerations in China and exile years in the United States.

As such, *Tiananmen Exiles* serves as an invaluable cache of primary sources on the Tiananmen movement. But *Tiananmen Exiles* encompasses far more than just oral history as it has also introduced several new avenues of historical inquiry in the study of this watershed movement in Chinese history, such as combining autobiographical approaches with psycho-cultural analysis. Noteworthy features of the book include:

An authentic voice to the Tiananmen movement. The participants of the movement have often been interpreted through black or white “hero or villain narratives.” Instead of this, the author allows these former student leaders to reclaim the discourse, presenting them as complete human beings with their share of struggles, self-doubt, despair, and cynicism during their days of incarceration and exile.

Detailed, factual accounts of the student leaders' trying, traumatic experiences during their incarcerations in Chinese jails and their fight with apparent post-traumatic stress disorder after being released. There is a notable absence of cherry-picking of any facts to support a particular argument.

Candid, personal reflections and soul-searching of the three participants in the Tiananmen movement and their difficult exile years in the United States as well as a depiction of their daily struggles with language, work, education, and livelihood while in exile in the U.S.

The evolution of these student leaders' political philosophies from being critics of the Chinese government to critics of U.S. domestic and foreign policy (one of them even participated in the Occupy Wall Street Movement.)

The insuppressible yearning of the student exiles to return to China as reflected in their refusal to be naturalized as U.S. citizens. Denied Chinese passports and refusing to get U.S. passports, some of the students became stateless. The author recounts and analyzes their search for identity in the post-Tiananmen era.

A special introduction to the Tiananmen Mothers—the “Gold Star Mothers” of the Tiananmen Movement, whom the author has studied for well over a decade.

Meticulously researched and richly documented, *Tiananmen Exiles* is the latest addition to Palgrave's prominent *Studies in Oral History* series. The book comes with a compelling

foreword by Professor Perry Link that cogently highlights the significance of the Tiananmen movement and puts it in broad historical context.

*New York Review of Books* describes *Tiananmen Exiles* as “a convincing and powerful account of a central experience in contemporary Chinese life.” Professor Yu Ying-shih, Emeritus Professor of East Asian Studies and History, Princeton University, says of the book, “Rowena Xiaoqing He has ingeniously reconstructed the entire movement in historical perspective not only to unlock the past and explain the present but also to peer into the future. . .”

*Tiananmen Exiles* is appropriate for both academic and public libraries. It will be a good addition to collections in several academic areas and disciplines, including history, political science, sociology, psychology, oral history, student movements, social movements, political refugees, exiles, and the Tiananmen movement.

Additionally, as the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cultural Revolution in 2016 fast approaches, *Tiananmen Exiles* is an appropriate title for any collection on China’s Cultural Revolution. It describes a generation of youth, born with the birthmarks of the Cultural Revolution, that departed from the Red Guards’ blind devotion to the Mao cult and searched instead for a better roadmap of China at the expense of their education, freedom, and even young lives. *Tiananmen Exiles* has organically tied the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen movement together through the lives and agonies of three former student leaders, and through them, the lives and struggles of their generation.

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