

Andrew G. Walder. *China Under Mao: A Revolution Derailed*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015. i-iv + 413 pp. ISBN 9780674058156.

There is no lack of textbooks on the political and economic history of the People's Republic of China. Some of the more commonly used texts among students and scholars include Kenneth Lieberthal's *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform*; Tony Saich's *Governance and Politics of China*; and June Teufel Dreyer's *China's Political System: Modernization and Tradition*. Ezra Vogel's monumental *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, although written as a biography of Deng Xiaoping, is in fact also a detailed historical account of the PRC's economic and political development. Walder's new book explicitly covers the Mao period and leaves out the Deng era. This is done deliberately in order to focus the book in terms of time period and a specific series of social and political events.

The book contains a preface and 14 chapters, dealing with issues and themes such as from movement to regime, rural and urban revolution, the Socialist economy, the evolving Party system, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and so forth. The strength of the book is its comparative perspective, it views developments in China in the light of Soviet attempts to establish a socialist society. For example, Chapter 5, which deals with the socialist economy, shows that in many areas the Chinese implemented the Soviet blueprint so thoroughly that their policies and practices came to reflect textbook socialist ideals more fully than in the Soviet Union itself.

Walder argues that Mao's China was defined by two distinct institutions that both were established during the 1950s: a Party system exercising strict discipline and a socialist economy modelled after that of the Soviet Union. He discusses state socialism as a growth machine and shows how the drivers of the economy in this system are not market demand and financial markets, but rather mandatory planning and high investment rates. He also describes China's industrial system and industrial management by comparing them with the Soviet model.

Chapter 6, 'The Evolving Party System', is also useful. Walder, based on his training as a historical sociologist, once again frames developments in the context of the basic elements of the state socialist system as it evolved in the Soviet Union. The chapter contains informed discussions of political surveillance, Party recruitment, Party reach, class categories and family origin, political loyalty and career advancement, power and privilege, etc. Here Walder draws not only on extant lit-

erature on Party history and building, but also on his own extensive sociological research.

Chapters on major political and social campaigns such as the antirightist movement of 1957, the Great Leap Forward of 1958-60 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966-69 form the core of the book. In the three chapters about the Cultural Revolution (chapters 10-12), Walder is able to draw on his own research on the Cultural Revolution and the red guard movements. Walder presents a story of constant battle between various student factions and worker rebel groups encouraged by Mao and the Cultural Revolutionary Group to smash the existing power structures. The result is widespread chaos in Chinese cities and the breakdown of social order. In the end Mao decides to bring in the army in order to bring the red guards and worker rebels under control. Thus what started as a rebellion against the authorities, ends as military rule. However, the military becomes too strong, even for Mao, and after defence minister and heir apparent Lin Biao's alleged coup against Mao in September 1979, the old chairman decides to bring back many of the senior Party leaders whom he purged during the Cultural Revolution. Chief among these rehabilitated cadres is Deng Xiaoping.

Scholars have often debated what the Cultural Revolution was all about and why it was launched. To Walder the answer is clear. The Cultural Revolution was carefully planned by Mao, who wanted to shake up, if not smash, existing power structures, purging former colleagues and comrades-in-arms in the process. Once he had moved loyalists into control of the levers of national power, Mao was ready to make his move in the spring of 1966. Even though Mao might have been motivated by ideological goals and a desire to save the purity of his revolution, the result was political power struggle and intense factional infighting.

Walder is extremely critical of Mao's revolutionary theories and political practice. He describes the chairman as a dogmatic thinker who clung to orthodox ideas that even Stalin had long abandoned. He calls him 'a rigidly dogmatic leader with extremely narrow and outdated ideas' (p. 341). Walder does not deny that some modest economic accomplishments were achieved during the Mao era, but he argues that these accomplishments 'were offset by enormous human costs' (p. 333). The largest of these costs was the death through starvation of 30 million people during the famine caused by the Great Leap Forward. Millions more died as a result of violent campaigns against 'reactionaries' and other bad elements, culminating in the Cultural Revolution.

In Walder's opinion, Mao's role and impact is summed up as 'a revolu-

tion derailed', which is in fact the subtitle of the book. The only credit he is willing to offer Mao is that his reluctance to compromise with Chiang Kai-shek, and to press relentlessly for victory in the civil war instead, paid off. Stalin and many of Mao's close associates advised negotiation, whereas Mao was convinced that he would be able to win ultimate victory on the battlefield. This proved to be correct and was instrumental in giving Mao tremendous prestige and an aura of infallibility, which he would subsequently (mis)use.

It is not my intention to defend Mao and his role in the Chinese revolution. However, totally discrediting him causes problems. If Mao was totally wrong, why was he never subject to the kind of criticism Stalin was subject to in the Soviet Union? During the Third Plenary Session in December 1978 and authoritatively in the 1981 'Resolution on Party History' document, Mao was criticized for his mistakes in his later years and especially for his role in the Cultural Revolution. But even though the door was open, the criticism never developed into a sustained campaign against the chairman. One reason is of course that many of the leaders who took over after Mao, including Deng Xiaoping, shared some of the responsibility for the Great Leap Forward and other events leading to the Cultural Revolution. In 1989, they showed the world that they also would not hesitate to use force when power over the country was at stake.

Mao is still revered in China today. One might argue that this reverence is necessary in order to uphold the Party's legitimacy. However, I am not sure this is the only reason. Mao's great accomplishment in the eyes of many Chinese is that he freed China from foreign oppression and made China stand up. This contribution will continue to be acknowledged independently of the continued existence or withering away of the Chinese Communist Party.

*Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard
Professor and Director
Asia Research Centre
Copenhagen Business School*