

A Continuous Revolution: Making Sense of Cultural Revolution Culture. By Barbara Mittler. Harvard East Asian Monographs 343. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012. Pp. xvi + 486. \$59.95/£44.95.

This book demands attention, and not just because it is huge by academic monograph standards. At 500 pages and in large format (18 x 26 cm), profusely illustrated and with an associated website to accommodate more pictures and materials, the book is a tribute to the industriousness of the author and to the publisher in taking on such a massive project. Mittler, a Sinologist at the University of Heidelberg, has previously published monographs on modern Chinese music and on newspapers and popular culture. Here she presents six wide-ranging chapters on cultural phenomena that were central to the Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976). Her particular contribution comes from not confining herself to those years but in exploring some of the ways in which the cultural products of that era continue to fascinate and influence artists and consumers in China to the present day. Her subtitle is an indication of this broader interest in contemporary popular culture. The result, however, is perhaps less than promised by the ambitious size and scope of the project. This is not the comprehensive cultural history of the Cultural Revolution that readers might be led to expect. The book offers a somewhat uneven exploration with a great many wonderful observations and a wide-ranging display of knowledge. Given its bulk, it may be doomed to be constantly cited but never actually read through completely. That would be a pity, as this work has a great deal to offer.

The 30-plus page Introduction lays out the ambition for the project: an examination of the Cultural Revolution as lived experience, then and since. Mittler, born in 1968, has no direct experience of the decade. Apart from a range of contemporary published sources (Red Guard newspapers are frequently mentioned but hardly examined much at all), she has relied to a degree on interviews with forty Chinese informants of various ages who lived through the decade (a few as young children) and who could be questioned in this century. The list of anonymous interviewees in Appendix 1 (pp. 389–90) provides details on age, occupation, family background, and (in brief note form) their Cultural Revolution (CR) experience. The limitations of the interviews are at once apparent from this list: the majority are people of highly privileged backgrounds—artists, musicians, professors, and other intellectuals. Elsewhere we learn that most of them have good relations with other foreign researchers, who helped Mittler to approach them. While the author does acknowledge that her sample may be untypical, she seems little troubled by questions of how their backgrounds may shape the CR experience and memories of these people. Interviewees numbered 32 to 40 are lumped together at the end of the list. They were all male taxi drivers in Beijing and Shanghai in 2004 and 2010. I found

only two places in the book where the words of these drivers are quoted, which raises questions about how sustained interviews number 32 to 40 in fact were. Most of the quotes from interviews are from the rest of the informants and form a small but often highly strategic documentation for many of the points made in the text. Appendix 2 presents over two pages of interview questions, though the nine taxi drivers may not have been subjected to this wide-ranging, lengthy quizzing.

Most of the book is the result of Mittler's engagement with the CR texts she has chosen for close scrutiny: the model performances (*yangbanxi* 樣板戲), songs, three-character primers, the story of the Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains, Mao in art, and picture story-books (*lianhuanhua* 連環畫). Chapter One, nicely titled "From Mozart to Mao to Mozart," is a discussion of the *yangbanxi* and their lasting impact. As the title suggests, it is also a history of the rise, apparent fall, and restoration of Western classical music in China. Mittler's specialist knowledge of music informs the chapter, with some excellent analysis of several operas and their musical innovation. While throughout the book she makes much of her rejection of Chinese official assessments of the CR, Mittler seems to accept the standard claims about the crucial role of Jiang Qing in the making of the *yangbanxi*. My 2008 work on CR cultural history, cited a few times in early chapters here, suggested that Jiang Qing's contributions have been much exaggerated.¹ The chapter includes what she terms an "excursion" or sidebar on Chinese opera reform in the twentieth century.

The book is peppered with these diversions over several pages, often called preludes or codas, which reflect the wide range of the author's interests and knowledge. Sometimes there is a magpie-like tendency to accumulate all sorts of interesting information. The decision to give dates for all figures mentioned, including even Mozart, Beethoven, and Mao Zedong, epitomizes the encyclopaedic urge behind this project. In the vast bulk of this material, it seems an unnecessary addition in most cases. Moreover, in the useful index of names, titles, and slogans, these same dates reappear. Would any reader be looking for a citation of some other Beethoven with different dates? Similarly, the referencing style in the list of Works Cited repeats the date of publication, after the author's name at the start and at the end of each entry. Firmer editing would have been useful.

Chapter Two continues the musical vein, with a discussion of revolutionary songs, including "The East is Red" (*Dongfang hong* 東方紅, a more clumsy "Red

¹ Paul Clark, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapters One and Two show how the creators of these model works were largely left to their own, often generously resourced, devices, with occasional instruction or comment from Jiang Qing or her allies, much of which was ignored or worked around.

Is the East” in Mittler’s rendition). As with all the chapters, the account extends to the period beyond 1976 until the present. At times this post-CR period predominates in the chapter. Rock music pioneer Cui Jian 崔健 and his anthem “Nothing to My Name” (*Yiwu suoyou* 一無所有) makes appearances at the start and later throughout the chapter. This wide-ranging, somewhat discursive style of presentation can become cumbersome. English-speakers may wonder what a Chinese *Glockenspiel* is, as the Chinese name does not seem to be provided, unless I missed it.

Part II (Mouth: Words) shifts gears and starts with a Prologue that, among other things, makes the somewhat unsurprising observation that “How much an individual would have read during the Cultural Revolution depends on his or her class background . . . and the locale” (p. 133). Chapter Three is a marvellous examination of the ways in which Confucian writings, including historical three-character primers, were recycled after the 1940s, including during the CR era. Mittler confirms for us that understanding of Confucian writings expanded during these years, as a by-product of the campaigns against the sage’s heritage. Chapter Four takes on the legend of the Foolish Old Man Who Moved the Mountains, a topic of one of Mao’s three most read essays during the Cultural Revolution. The original Mao essay and briefer quotations from it that appeared in Quotations from Chairman Mao (*Mao zhuxi yulu* 毛主席語錄) seem to be elided here as if they were the same thing. Indeed Mittler’s insistence on referring to the latter throughout this chapter as the *Little Red Book* misleadingly suggests that this was the official title of the ubiquitous small, plastic-covered volume.

The insightful observation that the CR “was a comprehensive attempt at ideologically monolithic programming of a mass culture” (p. 207) is not elaborated here. This is typical of the book, where revealing remarks are often made apparently in passing, without being comprehensively discussed. The ambition of the book, in covering both the ten years of the Cultural Revolution itself, the aftermath and continuing legacy of that decade, and the twentieth-century contextualization of developments, means that a good many insights are lost in the rush to deal with so much. Analysis of Jiang Tao’s 江濤 1997 pop song “Song of the Foolish Old Man” claims a CR aesthetic in the video version (pp. 243–44). But the kinds of images—majestic landscapes, rivers, and the colour red—can be found in films from the seventeen years after 1949 as much as in the 1966–1976 period. The chapter and Part II end with a “Coda: Rethinking the Power of Words” in which the author observes that “Paradoxically, quotational density [of CR works] brings them rather close to the Classical canon” (p. 249). This nicely sums up the import of the two chapters on the three-character classics and on quotations from Mao.

Part III is titled “Eyes: Images” and consists of chapters on images of Mao then and now and on picture story-books (*lianhuanhua*). Translating the latter Chinese term as “chained pictures” cleverly emphasizes the power of these so-called comic books in conveying officially endorsed messages to eager, mostly young Chinese minds. The

Prologue to the part provides an overview of the impact of visual imagery in the CR decade. One interviewee likens common poster images to today's advertisements, an observation I also made in the concluding chapter of my cultural history of the decade. Mittler seems to claim that taxi drivers hung Mao images as a talisman in Mao's time (p. 263), which is incorrect. Such laminated, rear-view mirror adornments only appeared in the early 1990s, as the centenary of Mao's birth approached.

Chapter Five on Mao images is another display of wide knowledge and a mind that cannot resist leaping all over a topic, back and forth in history. Liu Chunhua's 劉春華 mythical portrait of a young Mao on his way to see the miners at Anyuan 安源 is of course here at the start. In emphasizing the "political aesthetics of repetition" in Mao images, Mittler seems to ignore or conflate the phenomenon of post-1976, particularly post-1990 inventions of fake Mao and CR memorabilia. These look like authentic products of the late 1960s and early 1970s, but are fantasies based on popular perceptions of a CR aesthetic. Mao on cushions (p. 280), for example, seems unlikely to have come from the CR decade itself. People lean and sit on cushions. The sacredness of Mao's image before the 1980s would not have allowed a bottom, however devoted, to rest on him. Much of Chapter Five is an extended exploration of the post-1976, largely playful re-invention of Mao's portrayal by Chinese artists at home and especially abroad, mostly by expatriate Chinese artists.

Here as elsewhere, Mittler recognizes the widely accepted periodization of the Cultural Revolution, with two halves divided around the time of the fall of Lin Biao, Mao's chosen successor. The wide scope of the book, embracing that decade and decades afterwards to the present, perhaps explains the author's tendency to not elaborate or to even downplay the changes between the different periods in the revolutionary decade itself. The interviewees quoted on the question of the presence of Mao portraits tend to confirm their somewhat elite social status, then as now. One speaks of his father bringing a porcelain statue of Mao back from a visit to Jingdezhen 景德鎮, the famous porcelain production centre (p. 310). Travel, even on government business, was a rare event for most ordinary Chinese in this period, after the exceptional early years when young Red Guards seized the opportunity to travel free around the country "building revolutionary ties" (*chuanlian* 串聯). The author cannot resist cute plays on words: "popular, superstitious beliefs in the image of the go(o)d Mao" (p. 329) may be a succinct way of putting things at the end of Chapter Five, but the expression jars in a book that seems far from committed to succinctness.

The study of picture books (Chapter Six), like most other chapters, seems largely to stand alone. For many readers, this may indeed be a solution to the intimidating nature of the size of the book and the length of the discussion it contains: treat each chapter as an independent journal article and dip in accordingly. But, on the contrary, the author argues two-thirds into the chapter that "Comics link all the important facets of Cultural Revolution Culture [note the Germanic capital on culture here] touched

upon in this book—MaoMusic, MaoSpeak, and MaoArt—and thus repeat the same message in a new medium” (p. 365). Oddly there is no mention that the “comic” *Chunmiao* 春苗 (here called *Spring Sprouts*) reproduces stills from the 1976 film of the same name (pp. 343, 345–47). The positioning and lighting of the heroes in the stills reproduced in these pages are analysed as if these images were made for the picture book alone. Given the appropriate emphasis elsewhere in the book on intertextuality, this is a surprising omission. It speaks to the virtual absence of films in the study (see below). The chapter ends with a statement that “chained pictures had been in decline since the 1980s” (p. 369). It would be more accurate to say that contemporary versions of these kinds of picture books have essentially vanished from Chinese bookstores. Their presence is sustained by a specialist magazine, occasional large-format editions, often based on major films, and nostalgic reissues.

Writing in, for her, a third language (English), the author sometimes produces an unfamiliar or awkward version of a Chinese term which has a more commonly accepted translation in English-language writings on China. She renders *zhuxuanli dianying* 主旋律電影, for example, as “main-melody mythical film” (p. 241) instead of the more usual “main-melody film.” This standard English translation is too direct and not very helpful anyway. “Mainstream political film” might capture the purpose of these films better than the somewhat empty “main melody.” In similar vein “public advertisement” (e.g. p. 243) should be “public service advertisement.” The poet Duoduo 多多 recalls that as a sent-down youth he “harvested corn-on-the-cob” (p. 264), which is startling as this expression in English refers to cooked corn cobs. Simply harvesting corn was what the future poet laboured at. “Small people’s books” (*xiaoren shu* 小人書) can surely be left as children’s books (p. 365), though it refers specifically to the picture books discussed in Chapter Six. “Quotation gymnastics” (p. 377) is a potentially misleading description of moving tableaux performed by Red Guards and others reciting or holding aloft copies of Mao quotations. These kinds of errors tend to confirm a sense that the editorial effort on such a lengthy manuscript was perhaps too light-handed.

The book comes with an associated website. Here readers can see all of the illustrations discussed in the chapters, which greatly enriches understanding and gets around publishers’ caution over the costs of illustrations. Also on the website are audio and video excerpts, which directly and powerfully illustrate the points made in the book.

The author begins her interesting Conclusion with the point that, given the scope of CR culture in time and space, her subject is “more aptly . . . called ‘revolutionary’ or ‘Socialist’ rather than just ‘Cultural Revolution’ culture” (p. 374). Note that the last word in this sentence does not start with a capital letter. This quote confirms the ambition of the book and perhaps also its shortcomings.

At least two major areas of CR culture are ignored in these pages: film and unofficial (so-called underground [*dixia* 地下]) cultural activities. Film, perhaps the most influential medium in this decade and the direct shaper of CR memories at home and abroad, is notably absent from these 500 pages. The celluloid adaptations of the stage works are central to most Chinese memories of the model performances, as they fixed perfected versions of the works for huge audiences to experience both on screen and elsewhere as stills. Passing reference is made to film versions of one or two yangbanxi and to film viewing by interviewees, but sometimes the reference is misleading. The model ballet *The Red Detachment of Women* (*Hongse niangzijun* 紅色娘子軍) is attributed to the Beijing opera version, with a sentence that “further predecessors are a 1960 film by Xie Jin 謝晉” (pp. 80–81). This hugely popular feature film, officially a 1961 film, was *the* origin of the ballet, which incorporated music and even whole scenes directly from Xie’s classic. Film even had a role in musical culture before, during and after the Cultural Revolution. Chinese audiences learned to listen to and understand Western-style symphonic music thanks to its use on the soundtracks of many popular films. The appeal of the two major model ballets in those years, and the lasting popular memory of them, owes a great deal to the familiarity of their tunes from earlier versions (on stage and on film) and of their orchestration in dance-drama form. As regular feature film production resumed from 1973, new films were of immense importance for Chinese audiences. One has only to mention *Sparkling Red Star* (*Shanshan de hongxing* 閃閃的紅星, 1974) to Chinese of a certain age to evince a powerful emotional response. Foreign films, particularly Korean, also had a big impact in these years and on CR memories.

Sustained coverage of the unofficial or unsanctioned cultural activities in the CR decade might have enhanced Mittler’s sound argument for “multiple Cultural Revolutions that took place in multiple spaces . . . [and for] multiple voices” to be heard (p. 378). These “underground” efforts to create personal and collective, even resistant spaces have been written about by several notable Chinese researchers, among them Yang Jian 楊健 of the Central Theatre Academy. Yang’s 1993 history of underground literature (now banned in China) is readily available abroad, among his other books and articles.² Yang’s name is missing from the References here. There is little reference here to the multi-faceted cultural production, unofficial or otherwise, associated with sent-down youth (*zhishi qingnian* 知識青年). Largely missing also is mention of the CR emphasis on non-professional involvement in cultural production.

² Yang Jian, *Wenhua dageming zhong de dixia wenxue* 文化大革命中的地下文學 (Beijing: Zhaohua chubanshe, 1993). See also his *Zhongguo zhiqing wenxue shi* 中國知青文學史 (Beijing: Zhongguo gongren chubanshe, 2002).

This cult of the amateur helped provide training and confidence for post-CR cultural innovation. My own brief accounts (2008 and 2012) of these activities, mostly by sent-down youth, tried to make the point that they laid much of the groundwork for the flourishing of officially approved, new culture “above ground” after 1976.³ This role helps explain the continuities and disjunctures that Mittler refers to that span the 1976 divide. The multi-vocal, unapproved experiences of creativity throughout the period from the late 1960s through to 1976 are an essential part of any explanation of changes in Chinese cultural life after the death of Mao.

In her Conclusion, the author expresses a hope that “future histories” of CR culture “ought to engage with this [alternative or semi-alternative] legacy” (p. 379). This hope seems to overlook many existing studies that have done just that.⁴ This apparent short-sightedness may be an unintended consequence of a somewhat irritating habit throughout this lengthy book to keep claiming novelty for itself. The author regularly reminds her readers that she is intent on questioning or demolishing powerful myths about the Cultural Revolution: that it was a cultural desert; that one man’s voice was the only one heard; that all cultural activities were tightly controlled and centralized; and so on. This is a false argument. These so-called myths reflect official, Chinese Communist Party verdicts on cultural activity in those years, as the author acknowledges. They also are regaled by many Chinese authors writing for foreign readerships, such as Jung Chang [Zhang Rong 張戎], the author of a maddening biography of Mao and a family chronicle. Many educated, elite Chinese are aware of these myths about CR cultural life and may even believe them, as many of her thirty-some, highly educated interviewees attest. But Western scholars, for whom this book is intended, and many published China-based scholars have long since exposed or accepted the inadequacies of such claims about CR culture.⁵

³ See note 1 above and Paul Clark, *Youth Culture in China: From Red Guards to Netizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), Chapter Two.

⁴ See, for example, Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder, eds, *The Chinese Cultural Revolution as History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, eds, *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), cited in this book; and Richard King, ed., *Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–76* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

⁵ In addition to Yang Jian in Beijing, Jin Dalu 金大陸, a researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, has published a great deal of new material on the CR decade. See his extraordinary, two-volume study of aspects of everyday life in CR Shanghai: *Feichang yu zhengchang: Shanghai “Wen’ge” shiqi de shehui shenghuo* 非常與正常：上海「文革」時期的社會生活 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2011).

The author does not need to create straw men in order to demolish them as part of her claim to novelty and innovation. This is a book full of novelty and remarkable insight into the connections between the Cultural Revolution and the rest of twentieth-century Chinese cultural history. These insights do not need artificial enhancement by reference to myths: they stand as achievements in themselves.

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何成邦：《陸機詩歌的語言風格研究》，香港：中文大學出版社，2012年。xii + 478頁。\$20.00。

陸機是西晉太康八子中最受矚目的作家，近代學者研究他的論著不可勝數。當今學者想要超越前輩的論點與成就，必須如鄧仕樑在此書的序言裏所提到的，要設法不斷地嘗試新方法與新理論方能有新的論述與貢獻（頁ix）。何成邦的《陸機詩歌的語言風格研究》正是一本「嘗試運用現代語言學中『文體學』的理論和方法」來探討陸機詩歌的語言風格（見本書作者〈前言〉）。根據作者的看法，這種從語言科學數據統籌分析的方法能客觀地、精細地表現陸機的語言風格，從而深刻地進入詩歌的美學世界。本書作者在其結論進一步宣稱，中國傳統詩歌的評論加上西方現代文體學的理論能提高我們論證的能力與開創新視野。他認為中西方的研究方法應該是互補的，不是互相排斥的。藉由西方的文體學理論（注重科學數據驗證分析）能幫助我們知其然，也知其所以然。作者在結論一章對此中西結合的方法對將來中國傳統文學研究方向滿懷希望地說，「一：對古典詩歌語言特徵與規律的新探索，找出以前評論者較為忽略的問題」，並以此書第四章的音素分析為例。又說，「二：對古典詩歌語言的『定評』進行驗證分析，提出支持或反對的證據」，並以傳統評論對陸機的詩歌總是以「繁密」稱之，可是並沒有提出具體的證據為說明，並強調文體學的應用證明了陸機詩歌「繁密」的特性（頁427）。此書收集的資料豐富，羅列排比例句，分析條理清楚，是一本非常有參考價值的書籍，對現在及將來陸機詩歌的「賞析」貢獻極大。¹

鄧仕樑在此書的序言中提出第四章與第五章佔全書的大半篇幅，乃本書研究的核心（頁xi）。第四章是〈陸機詩歌語言風格的專題研究〉，作者以陸機的行旅詩、樂

¹ 何謂賞？何謂析？一個屬於主觀情感上的感動，一個屬於客觀理性上的分析。兩者正符合本書作者對中西評論方法的依據。鄧仕樑在此書序言裏給了詳細的解釋，見頁vii-ix。