

who interpolated specific prophecies into translated Buddhist texts, or composed commentaries, but what were the possible motivations of the (unknown) authors of the apocalyptic scriptures? I would have appreciated a closer attention to the actual rhetoric employed in the scriptures themselves—overall, the Buddhist sources are treated somewhat unproblematically, whereas I think they might yield to a closer examination of their language, style, syntax, and so on. These are some of the most interesting sources in the book, and I think they merit a more extended analysis.

I enjoyed reading the book and found much in it to reflect upon. It is a very solid first monograph. I expect that scholars of Chinese history and East Asian religions will be delighted to have it and that it will prove particularly helpful for graduate students looking for an orientation to the political manifestations of Buddhist apocalyptic thought. Although this is a well-executed survey, there is surely still more to say about the rise and fall of the Buddhist saviour figure in medieval China.

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A Decade of Upheaval: The Cultural Revolution in Rural China. By Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, England: Princeton University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 225. \$95.00/£74.00 hardcover, \$29.95/£25.00 paperback.

In the forty-five years since the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)¹ officially ended, it has been commonplace wisdom that the political, activist, and ultimately violent phase of this movement was primarily an urban one. True, as students-turned-Red Guards criss-crossed China by train and on foot, they often traversed rural territory and saw for the first time the enormous gap between urban and rural life. True, millions of those same students, and their younger siblings, were later sent to the countryside to learn from (and potentially reside permanently with) the poor and

¹ The end of the Cultural Revolution is itself a contested topic. Officially declared over in 1969, after Mao Zedong's death it was renamed "the ten years of chaos" and the temporal reach of its policies was extended until after the arrest of the Gang of Four in 1976.

lower-middle peasants.² True, government policies in the early 1970s improved rural education, health care, and infrastructure to a degree unprecedented in previous decades.³ Yet, although each of these situations involved the countryside, the political impetus and the main actors originated outside the rural areas. Villages appear largely as passive (if sometimes dissatisfied) recipients of dynamics and policies generated from afar.

This does not mean that rural areas were placid and free of tensions. Scholarly research suggests that rural communities were fractured both by conflicts rooted in pre-1949 loyalties and by tensions generated in the course of collectivization and the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s. Still, in spite of the efflorescence (lately curtailed) of research on the Cultural Revolution, and the appearance of memoirs, films, and websites devoted to the experiences of sent-down youth, we understand very little about how the events of those years unfolded in rural areas, how they were related to regional or local dynamics, and what sort of aftermath they created.

A Decade of Upheaval, the provocative and elegantly researched new study by Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, suggests that our commonplace wisdom about an urban-centric Cultural Revolution is just plain wrong. Drawing on an unusually rich set of sources, they show that the early years of the Cultural Revolution in one rural place, Feng County 豐縣 in the northwest corner of Jiangsu, saw conflicts as complex and intractable as those in any urban centre. These conflicts were undoubtedly stimulated and shaped by national political events, but they were not brought from distant cities by travelling Red Guards or sent-down youth with no prior connection to the county. Conflicts took root in the particular institutional arrangements of the countryside, and ultimately they proved particularly difficult for higher authorities outside the county to bring under control. This review discusses what Dong and Walder found, and how they were able to reconstruct a chain of events in Feng County that remains unrecoverable for most rural areas. The review concludes with some unresolved questions about Cultural Revolution dynamics in the countryside, questions that are unlikely to yield even to the most perceptive and energetic researchers.

² See, *inter alia*, Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977); Michel Bonnin, *The Lost Generation: The Rustication of China's Educated Youth (1968–1980)*, translated by Krystyna Horko (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013); Emily Honig and Xiaojian Zhao, *Across the Great Divide: The Sent-down Youth Movement in Mao's China, 1968–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

³ Mobo C. F. Gao, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999).

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As Dong and Walder recount in their preface, they had access to an unusually rich set of sources about Feng County. These included national, provincial, and county documents, generated by civilian and military authorities; interviews with former Cultural Revolution activists; and contemporaneous notes and diaries long preserved by many of the participants. One such activist, Zhang Liansheng 張連生, began the decade as a middle school student and ended it as a disgraced leader of one of the county's major factions, Paolian (Bombardment Alliance). His notebooks and subsequent interviews with the authors provide key components of the story. Dong and Walder are scrupulous in noting that they cannot provide an equally detailed account of the inner workings of the opposing faction, Liansi (Allied Headquarters), but they are confident that the account they have assembled from the full array of sources does justice to the conflict that unfolded.

What was that conflict? In contrast to the cities, Dong and Walder observe, the earliest cleavage in Feng County was not between rebels and defenders of those in power, but rather between county civilian authorities, later supported by the PLA, and a small group in the Public Security Bureau supported by local militia forces directed by the People's Armed Departments (PAD). The PAD were formally subordinate to the PLA but reported to a different military subdistrict from the regular PLA troops. Allying themselves with opposing factions, armed forces on both sides prolonged and intensified the local conflict between Liansi and Paolian. Student and worker rebels, so prominent in the early urban Cultural Revolution, were few in number in Feng County, and they depended, from the beginning, on one or another military faction. In effect, the authors argue, this was not a struggle between rebels and power-holders; in this county the most developed institution, the Party-state, was at war with itself.

After introducing Feng County in Chapter 1, the book proceeds chronologically. Chapter 2 explains that the county bureaucracy responded to the national inauguration of the Cultural Revolution as though it were a political study campaign, albeit one with high stakes. By the autumn of 1966, 139 of 530 teachers and cultural workers who participated in training classes (more than a quarter of the total) had been denounced as counter-revolutionaries. This raises questions, at minimum, about the habitual protocols of campaigns at the county level. Was it normal for such a high number to be denounced and physically abused in the course of study campaigns? What sorts of ongoing tensions were being expressed, or perhaps newly generated, by this practice?

Meanwhile, middle school students including Zhang Liansheng had begun to post big-character denunciations of school administrators. A familiar national pattern of suppressive work teams, student visits to Beijing, formation of Red

Guard organizations, and the spread of rebel activity to workers and county cadres followed. Unlike the pattern in many other locations, in Feng County no one attempted to overthrow the county leadership until the PAD supplanted civilian leaders in early 1967. Factions emerged relatively late compared to national patterns, centred around disagreements about how the erstwhile suppressive work teams and county leaders should be dealt with. Tensions were further inflamed by the arrival of university students native to Feng County but newly returned from universities in Beijing, Shanghai, and elsewhere, with the express purpose of helping to topple power-holders. Paolian, the faction in which Zhang Liansheng played a prominent role, was formed in January 1967 and decided to work with, rather than overthrow, county authorities. The faction that became known as Liansi emerged in opposition shortly thereafter.

Chapter 3 shows that the entrance of military forces into county administration and politics made factional conflict worse. The PAD, already resident in the county, was ordered by the Xuzhou Military Subdistrict 徐州軍分區 to make sure that the county bureaucracy and the planned economy kept operating. This was not a rebel power seizure of the kind common elsewhere in China, but it was a shift in power nonetheless. Eventually it helped to crystallize the emergence of Liansi. Shortly thereafter, several hundred members of a regular PLA combat division arrived in response to a national order to “support the left,” and their arrival generated tensions between the PLA and the PAD, especially after the PLA began to align with Paolian. This was an intramilitary conflict that nonetheless hardened factional lines among Feng County civilians, as both Liansi and Paolian, as well as the leaders they sought to constrain, sought backing from one military group or another. Ostensibly sent to bring an end to local conflict, the military ended up prolonging it.

Chapter 4 tells how these county factional conflicts were prolonged because the split between regular PLA troops and the county-level PADs extended beyond the county into Xuzhou, the prefectural capital about eighty miles away, emboldening rebels to defy one or another of the rival military organizations. Factional encounters within Feng County grew more violent in 1967–1968, with both Paolian and Liansi sending petition delegations as far as Beijing to try to consolidate official endorsements of their activities. They also armed themselves, in at least one case by seizing weapons from a commune and various county work units (p. 67). Paolian’s power was concentrated in the county seat and its environs. Liansi, with its ties to rural militia, “had dug itself into defensive positions in rural communes that resembled revolutionary base areas” (p. 70). By this time, the conflict had taken on its own momentum, with armed confrontations by Paolian and Liansi fighters in a number of rural communes. Efforts by both the PLA and

the military subdistrict that supervised the PAD, including a mandatory study class for factional leaders held in Xuzhou, failed to effect an end to hostilities. Raids, vandalism, armed attacks, and at least one fatal beating of a tax officer roiled the county (p. 79). Dong and Walder characterize the situation in mid-1968 as “a state of low-grade civil war” (p. 80).

Chapter 5 explains how the central authorities in Beijing resolved to end the conflict in Feng County and the rest of Xuzhou Prefecture by requiring faction leaders and military leaders to attend a study class in the capital. The two factions came to Beijing hopeful that central authorities would adjudicate their differences. The central authorities, however, were determined to push the factions to move beyond rather than work through their grievances. As factional leaders studied together in Beijing, their minions in Feng County continued to jockey for political and military advantage. Rallies, looting, beatings, kidnappings, armed conflict, and deaths continued at various commune sites through the end of 1968. Increasingly, Paolian militants in Feng County made their own decisions about continuing to fight, ignoring the viewpoints of their own leaders who were sequestered in Beijing. Tensions between the PLA and the PAD proved equally difficult to dispel. Even a study class aimed at reconciliation that went on for almost a year failed to calm the situation in Feng County.

Chapter 6 reconstructs the painstaking process by which prefectural authorities slowly imposed order on Feng County beginning in late 1969, partly by installing new PLA and PAD leadership, and partly by directly pressuring the leaders of both intransigent factions. Feng County became one of the last counties in China to establish a governing revolutionary committee, with both civilian and military participants. Creating revolutionary committees at enterprise, office, and commune levels proved more difficult, as the PAD and Liansi in particular dominated rural leadership positions and continued to retaliate against Paolian members. Increasingly, former faction members directed their efforts toward escaping punishment or retribution for earlier activities. In these efforts, Paolian members remained at a disadvantage in 1970 and 1971, with torture, suicide, and job loss all featuring in the campaigns allegedly aimed at restoring stability. Among the victims was Zhang Liansheng, who eventually escaped from his investigators in late 1973 to go petition for redress in Beijing.

Chapter 7 tells the story of his efforts, and of the broader petition campaign that developed when similarly aggrieved people joined him to petition in Beijing, Xuzhou, and Nanjing. By 1974, the national campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius had become, in part, a “nationwide movement of petitioners who had suffered in the campaigns of recent years” (p. 144). Back in Feng County, even as

the national political environment began to shift, clashes between residual Paolian and Liansi activists continued to punctuate political life.

Chapter 8 recounts the slow unravelling of this knotted skein of antagonisms. In 1975, some high-ranking county leaders were transferred elsewhere as part of a national effort led by Deng Xiaoping to end factionalism. One last round of study classes, a leadership shuffle, and redress for some of the victims of previous investigations followed, as did one last round of protests from Liansi members. Only in the aftermath of the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, which made Liansi members cautious about taking actions that might associate them with the discredited central faction, did the conflicts stop erupting regularly.

The book's final chapter reflects on the forces that sustained this factionalism and all the human misery it produced in Feng County. Dong and Walder observe that the factions could not be distinguished from one another on the basis of conservative or radical approaches to county power-holders, and factional differences in ideology, if they existed, cannot be discerned. The fact that one faction was backed by the PLA and the other by the PAD prolonged the factional fighting. But Dong and Walder's central argument is that the factionalism at the county level was self-protective and self-perpetuating: after the first few rounds of hostilities and power shifts, people worked to strengthen their own faction so that the opposing one would not harm them. And as soon as state authorities moved in to try to end local hostilities, people dug in with their own factions and military backers to avoid being politically scapegoated and punished for creating disorder.

This understanding of factionalism can be seen as a corollary to the argument eloquently developed by Walder in his 2019 book *Agents of Disorder: Inside China's Cultural Revolution*.⁴ The present book differs from that discussion primarily in being thoroughly rooted in the specific conditions of rural governance, especially the importance of the rural militia, which became a source of support for Liansi in conjunction with the local military powers of the PAD.

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A Decade of Upheaval makes a powerful and devastating case that factional conflict in Feng County was closely linked to national political trends: each national shift altered the factional balance of power in the county, prolonging instability. Conversely, events in the county had regional and even national effects, in spite of

⁴ Andrew G. Walder, *Agents of Disorder: Inside China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

its poverty and remote location. Faction leaders were summoned to the prefectural capital of Xuzhou and to Beijing for classes designed to quell factional conflict, an effort whose failure fuelled periodic disorder until after Mao's death. Feng County, the authors say, "was barely governable for significant parts of the decade and completely ungovernable for brief periods of intense conflict" (p. 6). Local hostilities fuelled that situation, but national political instability surely prolonged it.

As the authors note, documentary evidence from the village level about Cultural Revolution dynamics is generally not available (p. 3, n. 7), and this book does not fill that gap, even for Feng County. What we have here is an account of "The Cultural Revolution in Rural China," as the subtitle has it, but the "rural China" under examination is primarily the institutions and people engaged in struggle at the county level, not below it. How conflicts inflected the villages—or whether, in fact, villages were engaged in conflicts unconnected to those at the county level—remains generally opaque, in Feng County as in elsewhere across China.

Here *A Decade of Upheaval* offers some tantalizing glimpses of how the county seat was systematically linked to its constituent communities. Every rural settlement had a militia, organized by People's Armed Departments, and militia members tended to be aligned with Liansi, the faction that was favoured by the PAD. It is plausible to imagine that Zhang Liansheng's faction, Paolian, in spite of its considerable political muscle, had no direct presence in the villages of Feng County. But what difference did the presence of Liansi loyalists make at the village level? Did rural militia participation in the violence of 1968, extending downward from the county into communes and production teams, forge new lines of identification or involvement between village power-holders and county authorities, insurgents, or both? Or did village life remain largely unaffected by the incessant instability one or two levels up? Given the militarization of the conflict in 1967, and the formation of "liberated zones" controlled by one faction or other in 1968 and 1969, it seems that daily life must have been at least intermittently disrupted.

And what about the participation of farmers who were not necessarily militia members? In early 1967, Dong and Walder tell us, what eventually became the Liansi faction disrupted a Paolian mass rally "by summoning several hundred farmers from communes near the county seat" (p. 37). Why did they come? How far outside the county seat did such mobilization extend? By 1967, rural cadres aligned with the PAD were trying to keep regular PLA work teams out of rural communes, and their alliance with Liansi deepened. How might this have been regarded by farmers who were not also cadres? Occasionally the authors' phrasing contributes to confusion on this issue: in Chapter 5, for instance, what are referred to as "subgroups in both factions, especially in rural villages" turn out to be

factional activists attacking the government headquarters of several communes, not engaging in village-level combat (p. 99). At the height of armed factional conflict in spring 1968, it became clear that “Liansi in particular appeared unable to control its rural affiliates” (p. 76), and a year later several hundred farmers affiliated with Liansi broke up what were supposed to be peace talks between the factions (p. 101). Why? What were the grievances that kept hostilities going at and below the commune level, even in the face of considerable pressure from above and a tentative truce between factional leaders?

We know that the villages of Feng County were poor, that grain procurement kept them that way across the 1950s, that the county had not completely recovered from the Great Leap famine by the time the Cultural Revolution began. Chapter 6 mentions a county report lamenting the fact that extended factional warfare in the county had entailed “the repeated theft of grain and grain coupons, cotton cloth for clothing, and coal for heating and cooking” (p. 118). Was this factional stockpiling, or an expression of underlying material distress among ordinary peasants? Chapter 7 describes the flight of more than one hundred farmers from their home communities to escape persecution. By whom, for what, and by what means?

Dong and Walder have given these questions much thought. Their conclusion is sobering: whereas many conflicts at the village level might have derived from clan or personal animosities, or from pre-1949 tensions about collaboration with the Japanese or the Nationalists, these conflicts are “impossible to document with evidence about county-level factions, and they make it hard to characterize factional struggle at the village level in terms of political categories that make sense at the county level” (p. 124). In other words, the painstaking account of factional conflict in Feng County does not extend below the county level. We can see that there was conflict—a lot of it, some quite violent—but the explanations about who supported Liansi and Paolian, or how factional loyalty became a self-perpetuating strategy for political survival, may or may not apply to communes or villages. We do not know, and as this exemplary piece of scholarship shows us, the available sources cannot tell us. Dong and Walder have given us an impressive and groundbreaking account of a decade of upheaval in Feng County. In spite of their heroic efforts, however, the Cultural Revolution in rural China remains elusive.

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