

Stimulating and provocative, Chin's study is in some respects a collection of separate chapters rather than a fully developed and fully focused study of the issues she raises. Even so, it is a valuable contribution to existing work on modern Hong Kong, placing the current situation in a much broader long-term perspective dating back to the establishment of the PRC.

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## Civil War in Guangxi: The Cultural Revolution on China's Southern Periphery

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This work is yet another vital contribution to the study of the Cultural Revolution by the sociologist Andrew Walder. Examining a provincial unit that saw extraordinary violence, he makes exhaustive use of a comprehensive investigation in 18 volumes conducted by the Chinese Communist Party in the 1980s. The book starts by setting out key hypotheses as puzzles, then presents five chronological chapters, followed by narrative vignettes, statistical analyses to resolve the puzzles, and an appendix to explain the coding. This arrangement, uncluttered with sociological theory, conveys rich detail on Guangxi's counties and the flow of local events without losing the line of argument. No fewer than 35 informative maps, figures and tables support the text.

The term "civil war," not usually applied to the Cultural Revolution, can be readily justified in the case of the Guangxi autonomous region. By the time factional conflict ended, almost 90,000 people had been killed, with about 10,000 missing and presumed dead. Four violent deaths per thousand was twice the national average and the highest in the nation. The killings were public, often involving gruesome violence, and for the first time in Maoist campaigns even the children of victim categories were killed. What made Guangxi prone to such intense violence?

Two of Walder's earlier works on the Cultural Revolution, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Harvard University Press, 2009) and *Agents of Disorder: Inside China's Cultural Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 2019), used close chronological reconstruction to show that pre-existing political or social alignments explained little: factions emerged contingently in response to fluid political situations; party collapse was brought about by middle-level Party members, not external attacks by Red Guards; and the greatest violence occurred at the hands of the state during and after the restoration of order. This book convincingly makes a similar case at provincial level. As in many provinces, two main factions, Allied Command and April 22, eventually emerged in Guangxi. Their pitched battles in the cities did lead to deaths, but far more deadly was a veritable pogrom in the countryside in the summer of 1968.

Geopolitics played a big part in this outcome – namely, Guangxi's proximity to North Vietnam during the American bombing. Almost uniquely among provincial leaders in the Cultural Revolution, the Guangxi Party chief Wei Guoqing kept his position: his long-standing ties with Vietnamese leaders seemed to make him indispensable. But the Central Cultural Revolution Group in Beijing favoured the more revolutionary April 22 faction over the pro-Wei Allied



Command, prolonging the standoff, until the centre finally sided with Allied Command. In other provinces, local contenders had made peace by amalgamating under revolutionary committees. In Guangxi, the April 22 faction was excluded and became a target for extermination. Thus, as Walder says in an aside, Guangxi's victims were collateral damage of the Vietnam war (p. 27). But the prompt for the terrible violence was a geopolitical invention: the provincial leadership's report of an anti-Communist, Taiwan-based plot linked with April 22. The centre, unaware this was a fabrication, on 3 July 1968 authorized counterrevolutionary repression in Guangxi.

In accounting for the ensuing surge of deaths, mostly in August, Walder shows narrative and statistical analysis to be mutually supporting. (His coding of 5,000 events using as many as 27 variables is a remarkable effort.) With the help of local history material, he tests hypotheses about the causes of Guangxi's chaos (its isolation, its ethnic mix) by relating the (unnatural) death rates to the varying characteristics of its regions. Was the ethnic diversity of Guangxi a reason for the high level of violence? If this was the case, death rates would be higher in counties with a larger proportion of Zhuang (or Hakka) population within Guangxi. But areas with more Hakka (where groups habitually feuded) unexpectedly had fewer deaths, and heavily Zhuang counties showed no extra deaths. Walder's fine-grained evidence refutes the contrary thesis of Yang Su (*Collective Killings in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge University Press, 2011) on the Hakka, and several other claims derived from local history evidence, though he allows that research at subcounty level might find local ethnic antagonisms at work (p. 186).

Walder repeatedly insists that collective violence never "spun [or spiralled] out of control," with neighbours furiously settling old scores, but that the Party maintained a "clear chain of command" reaching right down into the villages (pp. 103, 191). He shows that the presence of party-state structures correlated with more killing, that the People's Armed Detachments (PAD) were everywhere in charge, and that instructions tended to move down from the province to the PADs. But not all his evidence supports a binary view of Party command and local passivity at the height of the Cultural Revolution. Villagers participated, often avidly, in meting out justice to the stigmatized Four Types and others they knew personally, and it is hard to know whether those who were members of the PADs (or local militias) were acting as instruments of the state or as vengeful neighbours (pp. 128–130). It is also possible that the investigators' bias significantly reduced the number of stigmatized households that were victims: Walder reports they overcorrected the self-serving pro-Wei narrative of spontaneous massacres by arbitrarily attaching to such households the label "April 22" if no April 22 faction existed locally (p. 127). Some readers may take a fuzzier view than Walder's clear-cut interpretation, by noting the frequent paralysis of superior officials, the tendency of PADs to go further than superiors intended, and the fact that some PADs and junior officials acted not at bureaucratic direction but in emulation of nearby units, most notably those across the Hunan border where the killings in Guangxi started out. The model of a "killing community" proposed by Yang Su is a kind of middle position that avoids the term "spun out of control" (as he did) but recognizes the centre's pre-eminence even in a time of chaos. In this view, the party-state mobilized for action top-down, specifically under Mao Zedong's inspiration, but in a time of structural breakdown. Acting in a wartime situation, local communities (including both PADs/local militias and villagers) dropped moral and legal restraints and made killing legitimate. In this reading, relying on Walder's carefully rendered detail, we can loosen his either/or model and see the killings as both responding to the centre and incorporating the agency of locals.

Walder's side observations are not always persuasive. He describes rape and cannibalism as opportunistic, satisfying what people wanted and could rarely enjoy – an interpretation that seems perfunctory in the absence of village-level psychological or cultural data. But he writes in the spirit of Emile Durkheim, who was uninterested in the circumstances of individual suicides,

and prefers to leave aside the hard-to-generalize grassroots particularities that evidence from interviewing and published accounts might illuminate. His work is more purely sociological – a systematic statistical exploration of county-level correlations in time and space that is unprecedented in the China field. It will be essential reading for scholars of the People’s Republic and an accessible source, for informed lay readers and students, on the horrors of the Cultural Revolution.

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## The Collapse of Nationalist China: How Chiang Kai-shek Lost China’s Civil War

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In *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford University Press, 1984), Lloyd Eastman argued that the Kuomintang lost China’s civil war because Chiang Kai-shek, who had concentrated power in his own hands, had constructed a fragile state, unable to withstand the windstorm of the Communist Party’s revolution. In his view, Chiang’s fiscal policies during the anti-Japanese war and on into the civil war era led to hyperinflation and corruption, which in turn alienated the urban population and fatally compromised the morale and combat effectiveness of the KMT’s armies.

*The Collapse of Nationalist China* revisits the issues of inflation, corruption and Chiang’s personal responsibility for the KMT’s defeat. As Coble observes, most historians agree that Chiang’s fiscal policies led to “relentless government deficits and inflation” and the collapse of China’s currency, the *fabi*. The questions that he seeks to answer are: “what was the impact of the inflationary policy on the political and military situation of Guomindang China in the Civil War era” and “why did this policy persist?” (pp. 8–9). Coble draws on Chiang’s diaries, the papers of KMT leaders T.V. Soong and H.H. Kung, and on other newly available primary and recently published secondary sources. This concise and engaging reassessment of Eastman’s argument will be of interest to professional historians and accessible to graduate and undergraduate students.

In the introduction Coble places his research in historiographic context, identifies the major questions to be addressed, explains the origins and characteristics of the *fabi*, and identifies its fatal weaknesses in the context of the anti-Japanese war: 1) “[t]he money supply was subject to the whims of ... Chiang Kai-shek”; 2) “military losses by the Nationalist government went hand in hand with the loss of value of the currency used to pay China’s soldiers”; and 3) hyperinflation had a direct negative effect on the morale and combat effectiveness of the troops (pp. 16–17).

Chapter one points out that war drives a “self-perpetuating cycle” (p. 18) of inflation: the supply of commodities falls, demand rises and hoarding increases. Operation Ichigo (Japan’s last-ditch offensive in 1944) intensified this cycle by reducing the Chongqing government’s economic base. The government printed more paper currency to cover rising budget deficits. Corruption was the only way for ambitious people to get rich, for military and civilian bureaucrats to perform their assigned functions, or for ordinary people on fixed salaries to survive. The huge gap between the