

seeking formal representation? Struggles over working conditions and the labor process are discussed but given less attention than the formal politics of production. Another subject that is not fully explored is workers' lives outside the workplace. Cliver mentions, but does not discuss, that women workers in the Wuxi filatures lived in dormitories – which is important because dormitory regimes (familiar to scholars of contemporary China) allow factories to suppress wages and give them far-reaching control over workers' time and labor power. If socialist filatures continued to employ young women housed in dormitories, this would go a long way to explain the greater despotism of the Wuxi factory regime. If, on the other hand, dormitory housing was phased out over the years as workers married, one would expect a gradual softening of the despotic factory regime and a convergence towards a standard form of “industrial citizenship”, as described by Joel Andreas.³ I mention this not as a criticism but as an indication of the new questions that future scholars might explore on the basis of Cliver's pioneering work. Overall, *Red Silk* offers perhaps the richest, most detailed account of labor politics in the early PRC available in any language, and moves the field forward by insisting that labor history, in China as elsewhere, needs to take gender as seriously as an analytical category as class.

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FANXI, WANG. *Mao Zedong Thought*. Ed., Transl. and with an introduction by Gregor Benton. [Historical Materialism Book Series, Vol. 210.] Brill, Leiden [etc.] 2020. ix, 326 pp. € 150.00; \$180.00. (E-book: € 150.00; \$180.00.)

Wang Fanxi (1907–2002) was a Chinese Trotskyist leader of the 1930s. He was imprisoned by the nationalists for several years for his revolutionary ideas. After the victory of Mao's revolution in 1949, he escaped to Hong Kong before going into exile in the Portuguese colony of Macao, where he continued his political activities. In the early 1960s, Wang wrote a manuscript “Mao Zedong Thought”, which was finally published in 1973. In the face of pressure from the Chinese authorities, Wang lost his teaching job in 1975 and faced certain dangers. Gregor Benton, a well-known expert on Chinese Trotskyism, and Tariq Ali were instrumental in bringing Wang to Leeds, in the UK. There, over the course of the next two decades, Benton and Wang collaborated on several publications about the Chinese revolution. Now, as Emeritus Professor at Cardiff University, Benton has edited Wang's *Mao Zedong Thought* and translated it into English.

When *Mao Zedong Thought* was first published, little was known about Mao outside China beyond what could be gleaned from official Chinese publications and some writings

3. Joel Andreas, *Disenfranchised: The Rise and Fall of Industrial Citizenship in China* (Oxford, 2019).

by Western journalists and scholars. Now, one might wonder why a book on Mao Zedong thought published almost fifty years ago might be relevant for scholars today.

In his introduction, Benton provides an overview of Wang's life, his writings, and his relationship with the Trotskyist movement in China and abroad. As a student at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in Moscow in 1928, Wang became a supporter of the Trotskyist opposition first in the Soviet Union and then, after his return in 1929, in China. In the factional battles inside the Comintern, Leo Trotsky had criticized the United Front of the Chinese Communists (CCP) with the Nationalist Party (Guomindang). This strategy was supported by Bukharin and Stalin. In 1927, the new leader of the Guomindang, Chiang Kai-shek, turned against the CCP and massacred the urban labour movement in Shanghai. The Trotskyists saw this disaster in China as proof that their rejection of the United Front and promotion of a "permanent revolution" of the urban proletariat was the correct strategy to follow. The leader of the CCP, Chen Duxiu, was made the scapegoat for the failure of the United Front by the Comintern leadership. Like Wang, he subsequently turned towards Trotskyism. However, the Trotskyists remained a marginal group in China, not only as a result of Nationalist and Maoist repressions. Many Trotskyists saw in Mao little more than a Chinese Stalin and had difficulties explaining how he could have led the Chinese revolution to victory in 1949. Benton considers *Mao Zedong Thought* as a self-critical attempt by an unorthodox Trotskyist to understand the failure of his own movement.

Wang's book is not focused on the life of Mao. Instead, it analyses Mao's writings and ideas in great detail. Wang considers Mao a creative mind and brilliant tactician. Mao would have been able to integrate ancient Chinese wisdom of warfare and dialectics into his modern revolutionary politics. However, according to Wang, Mao began to study Marxist writings seriously only in the mid-1930s, and he would never have been able to develop a coherent Marxist theory to explain the successes and failures of the Chinese revolution. For example, as a "middling strategist" Mao adopted the "Stalinist" concept of New Democracy, a government based on a multi-class alliance, which was unsurprisingly rejected by Trotskyists. Wang believes that with the socialist transformation in the early 1950s, Mao came closer to a strategy of "permanent revolution", but was unable to express this at a theoretical level. Wang is also very critical about the Great Leap Forward in 1958, because he sees it as a nationalist strategy of self-reliance, echoing Stalin's theory of "socialism in one country". For Wang, Mao's internationalism was always subordinated to his Chinese nationalism.

The appendix provides translations of two articles by Wang written during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Wang regarded the movement as both a power struggle within the ruling bureaucracy and a popular unrest. Mao would have been part of the left wing of the Stalinist bureaucracy, but Wang still hoped in 1967 that the movement could be the starting point for a genuine revolution of workers to create a socialist democracy. His hopes resulted in conflicts with Trotskyist mainstream organizations and ultimately failed to materialize, as we know today.

The translation and publication of *Mao Zedong Thought* is timely because many of the more recent publications on Mao do not take him seriously as a revolutionary thinker, and instead portray him only as a politician hungry for power. Furthermore, the opening up of the Soviet archives in the 1990s has shown that Stalin and the leadership in Moscow had a tremendous influence on Mao and his comrades until the 1950s. However, Wang's book is also a child of its time, and of the Marxist strategic debates of the 1960s and 1970s. *Mao Zedong Thought* can be recommended for everyone interested in the intellectual

history of Chinese and global Trotskyism in relation to the Maoist revolution. Benton provides footnotes and short introductions to each chapter, so that non-China experts can also follow the arguments of his hero.

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GERTH, KARL. *Unending Capitalism. How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2020. xi, 384 pp. Ill. £59.99. (Paper: £18.99; E-book: \$20.00.)

The world's Marxist-Leninist countries, including Mao's China, are generally known for their monopolistic exercise of political control, ideologization of virtually all aspects of life, nationalization of industry and commerce, collectivization of rural labor, and central planning of the economy. In short, such countries leave little room for market-driven consumerism. After all, the goal of socialism and communism is to end capitalism. Karl Gerth's book, *Unending Capitalism: How Consumerism Negated China's Communist Revolution*, reaches a different, if not entirely opposite, conclusion. Gerth's portrait of Mao's China reveals a vibrant consumerism combined with state capitalism. Thus, in the most radical years of Chinese socialism, "capitalism" was "unending".

Gerth starts his book with what he calls the "self-expanding and compulsory consumerism" in Chinese society under Mao. He argues that there was a craving for material comfort despite decades of shortages of consumer goods and the call of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for a sedulous devotion to hard work and thrift. Gerth takes the production and consumption of the so-called Three Great Things (the wristwatch, bicycle, and sewing machine), which were coveted in the Mao era, as examples to illustrate how consumerism fed on itself and how the Communist Party's inability to constrain consumerism led to gray-market activities and growing social inequality. Both of these ran counter to the socialist values of central planning and social justice among working people. Gerth argues that instead of constraining consumerism, the Chinese state played a critically important role in promoting the continuity of consumerism. In the first decade of the People's Republic, instead of totally suppressing consumerism the CCP used state power to control industries and commerce and created "state consumerism" under the banner of "building socialism". While state consumerism was driven by state expenditure on heavy industry and the military, it also led to social inequality and a monumental gulf between rural and urban society.

Gerth highlights the influence of the Soviet endorsement of consumerism in the early years of the People's Republic, the most prominent case being the Chinese imitation of Soviet fashions or, more generally, lifestyle. This included the nationwide promotion of the *bulaji*, the Soviet one-piece dress worn by young women in the 1950s. And nearly half of all films shown in Mao's China before 1966 were from the Soviet Union (p. 84). However, with the emergence of the Sino-Soviet split, Chinese "from Chairman Mao to ordinary individuals on city streets" increasingly questioned the Soviet model (p. 92).