*China's Cultural Revolution, 1966–1969: **Not** a Dinner Party.* Edited by MICHAEL SCHOENHALS. [Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996. xix + 400 pp. Hard cover $62.95, ISBN 1-56324-736-4; paperback $24.95, ISBN 1-56324-737-2.]

Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution. By ELIZABETH J. PERRY and LI XUN. [Boulder: Westview, 1997. xiii + 249 pp. £12.95. ISBN 0-8133-2165-4.]

To Rebel is Justified: A Rhetorical Study of China's Cultural Revolution Movement 1966–1969. By SHAORONG HUANG. [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996. xv + 221 pp. $39.50. ISBN 0-7618-0418-8.]

What was the Cultural Revolution really about? Contrary to the general impression, it was not a complete mystery at the time. Though the country was tightly sealed to visitors, the abundant outflowing of Red Guard material and the accounts of a small number of eye-witnesses gave a vivid picture from top to bottom. Almost everything was on display, in its bizarrely contradictory forms: Mao Zedong's ideological goals coupled with his determination to settle scores; the loyalty of his close supporters and their scheming opportunism; the spontaneity of the Red Guards and the ease with which they were manipulated; the high-minded vision of new social relationships and the brutal reality of torture and oppression. The verbatim transcripts of the leadership's inner councils revealed a sycophantic Lin Biao, a vengful Jiang Qing, a defensive Zhou Enlai and Mao himself as mixture of senior sage and irresponsible child. A host of other characters flit across the stage (who remembers now Chen Lining, the ultra-left "madman" who briefly became a "hero"?). The conflicts on the ground – even from far-off Tibet – could also be traced with due allowance made for Red Guard hyperbole. What was lacking then was the perspective of time which, with even more abundant material available, can now be brought to bear upon this fascinating, terrible period.

Yet, as Michael Schoenhals says in his important collection of documents, studies of the Cultural Revolution are now "in limbo." The period is shunned by political scientists and regarded as too recent by historians. One problem lies in the way that the early clear perception of it became polarized so quickly, at first into an excessively rosy view of its "newborn achievements" and then, after Mao's death, to a wholesale denial that it was anything more than "ten years of chaos." Serious efforts by reform-minded scholars within China to conduct a proper critique were stifled by the late 1980s' rightist reaction, leaving the subject to be dealt with by self-serving memoirs and sensational biographies. Abroad it has become a "forlorn subject," says Schoenhals. Post-Mao China offers more fertile ground for critical (and sometimes uncritical) scrutiny.

The books under review make a very helpful start to filling this gap. All three return to the original more limited definition of the Cultural Revolution as lasting from 1966, when Mao emerged from brooding meditation above his home village to launch the mass movement, to 1969, when the Red Guards had been sent down and political order of a

sort re-established at the Ninth Party Congress. What follows thereafter till Mao's death – the flawed efforts to build a new socialism, the factional infighting for the succession and the re-opening of China to the West – is a separate story with its own new contradictions awaiting analysis.

The birth of the Red Guard movement, Michael Schoenhals asserts, "cannot be traced to a decree or the Party Centre – it was a spontaneous event." The first statement is true enough, the second more debatable: the interplay between Maoist manipulation and Red Guard initiative still needs research. But Schoenhals' documents illustrate better than any previous collection the variety of Red Guard thought and initiative. He includes the set-pieces such as the interrogation of Wang Guangmei. But we also find a Red Guard who asks Chairman Mao what on earth he is up to, a couple more who accuse Lin Biao of "erroneous" thought, a satirist making fun of the factions, and a defiant manifesto from a group of "sons of cadres." Schoenhals also grapples with the diverse forms of new revolutionary culture. Jiang Qing's famous tirade against the "ugly eagles" of Pan Tianshou and the need to reform oil painting is reproduced in full. So is an editorial from "Gardening Revolution" about Chairman Mao's instructions on how to lay out flower gardens. There are proposals for free entry into parks, for doctors to write prescriptions more clearly, and for a ban on dirty jokes.

This volume is a reader expressly intended to encourage undergraduate students to study and intepret for themselves. It is by no means comprehensive. The sequence of documents which began with "Whither China" in 1968 and continued via the Li Yizhe manifesto of 1974 to lay the foundation for the post-Mao democracy movement is not described. But like all good collections, it peers into odd corners as well as plotting the main highways and should amply fulfil its purpose.

The work by Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun performs a different service, throwing detailed light on the struggle in Shanghai which so powerfully influenced Cultural Revolutionary politics in the capital. The authors stress "the remarkable political activism" displayed by students, workers and even the beleaguered cadres. They disentangle the different strands of activism and demonstrate the strength of economistic demands. The central tale is of how the worker rebels supplanted the students and the rise of Wang Hongwen with them. Yet the narrative makes it clear that this was not pre-ordained. Those who succeeded, including Wang himself, took real risks to do so.

The analysis of the social forces behind what became known as "economism" – the demand for socio-economic justice by deprived interest groups such as workers sent to the countryside and "contract workers" brought into the metropolis – is particularly useful. (Here too the main outline of these social contradictions was perceived at the time from Hong Kong.) The movement was initially encouraged by Jiang Qing, and Wang Hongwen's wife was herself a temporary worker. It is clear from this account that "economism" was by no means a plot launched by conservative cadres to discredit the mass movement. Some of the

workers' demands, such as giving temporary workers permanent status and abolishing differences in welfare benefits, were acted on even after "economism" had been denounced.

Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun conclude that it is wrong to regard Chinese social forces under Communism as "singularly homogeneous." Shaorong Huang's study of the rhetorical dimension of the Cultural Revolution reaches a similar conclusion about the imperatives driving its leadership. If it had simply been a political drive with specific targets, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping could have been purged at the start. "It is inappropriate," writes Huang, "to view it [the Cultural Revolution] as an event of conspiracy, a pure political purge, or an out-and-out power struggle." Parts of Huang's book are densely written and will not be easily accessible to those unfamiliar with recent work in the disciplines of communication and rhetoric. But it contains many insights into the Cultural Revolution's remarkable political culture. Huang is even prepared to acknowledge that in a certain sense this was a revolution that touched people to their very souls. For "everybody participated in the movement to a certain degree, and everybody held a share in the reversible role of power-holder and power subject."

The findings of both these works are underpinned by the diverse documents of the Schoenhals collection and point in the same direction: it is time for a new era of Cultural Revolutionary studies. It was neither a beacon to the world nor ten years of madness, but a much more complex phenomenon which we should now begin to view more objectively.

JOHN GITTINGS

El otro sexo del dragón: Mujeres, literatura y sociedad en China. By TACIANA FISAC BADELL. [Madrid: Narcea, 1997. 158 pp. ISBN 84-277-1178-6.]

Considering the recent literature on China, the situation of women is a recurring subject, inasmuch as it is inexhaustible. Fisac's book is a quick and brief journey through well-known texts of diverse nature, which express the characteristics of the situation of women in China from ancient to current times. To cover such a long period of Chinese written history turns out to be a particularly difficult enterprise which, by its nature, leads to important generalizations and omissions.

Among the works on China, this book succeeds in presenting in a few pages a general view of the ideological constructions on Chinese women, making it an excellent introduction for the lay reader. Subjects such as Chinese women's subordination, chastity, marriage customs, rebelliousness and objectification are approached through their expression from different kinds of sources: from Confucian tradition, to behaviour manuals, to literature itself, written by both men and women. The author digests for non-specialist readers a collection of texts to which they would otherwise not have access. She also takes care in presenting and