

The Cultural Revolution's Success. (Part 2)

<https://www.greenvillepost.com/2023/12/03/the-cultural-revolutions-success-part-2/>

December 3, 2023 0 comment 20 Mins read

Please make sure these dispatches reach as many readers as possible. Share with kin, friends and workmates and ask them to do likewise.



Godfree Roberts

[Godfree's Newsletter](#)



Deng Xiaoping—the capitalist "pragmatist" roader

Mao's and Xi's opinions of the CR

With his educational reforms underway, Mao next addressed peasants' health:

Tell the Ministry of Public Health that it only works for fifteen percent of the population and that this fifteen percent is mainly composed of urban gentlemen, while the broad masses of the peasants get no medical treatment: they have no doctors and they have no medicine. The Ministry is not a Ministry of Public Health for the people, so why not change its name to the Ministry of Urban Health, of Gentlemen's Health, or even to the Ministry of Urban Gentlemen's Health? The methods of medical examination and treatment currently used by hospitals are not at all appropriate for the countryside and the way doctors are trained only benefits the cities. Yet in China over five hundred million of our people are peasants. Medical education must be reformed. It will be enough to give three years' training to graduates from higher primary schools. They can then study and raise their standards, mainly through practice. If this kind of doctor is sent down to the countryside—even if they haven't much talent—they will be better than the current quacks and witch doctors, and the villagers can afford to keep them”.

His Rural Cooperative Medical System trained Barefoot Doctors – who lived in their villages all their lives and were available day and night – to administer vaccinations, demonstrate correct handling of pesticides, introduce new sanitation methods and, by teaching nutrition and child care, cut infant and maternal mortality in half. Urban doctors, now required to tour the countryside, provided free treatment and trained promising barefoot doctors at urban hospitals. By the end of 1976, every village in China had a clinic and the death rate had fallen by 18%. Thanks to the US National Institutes of Health, *A Barefoot Doctor's Manual* is still in print.

The Little Red Book

Finally, Mao turned to politics, insisting that true democracy requires financial equality, “For democracy to work for the betterment of all, all must be empowered and there can be no privileged class”. In the manual of his advice on democratic activism, *The Little Red Book*, he told them how to go about it:

- Pay attention to uniting and working with comrades who differ with you. This should be borne in mind both in the localities and in the army and applies to relations with people outside the Party. We have come together from every corner of the country and should be good at uniting in our work not only with comrades who hold the same views as we but also with those who hold different views.
- Guard against arrogance. For anyone in a leading position, this is a matter of principle and an important condition for maintaining unity. Even those who have made no serious mistakes and have achieved very great success in their work should not be arrogant. In the political life of our people, how should right be distinguished from wrong in one's words and actions?
- On the basis of the principles of our Constitution, the will of the overwhelming majority of our people and the common political positions which have been proclaimed on various occasions by our political parties and groups, we consider that, broadly speaking, the criteria should be as follows:
 - Words and actions should help to unite, and not divide, the people of our various nationalities.
 - They should be beneficial, and not harmful, to socialist transformation and socialist construction.
 - They should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, the people's democratic dictatorship.
 - They should help to consolidate, and not undermine or weaken, democratic centralism.
 - They should help to strengthen, and not discard or weaken, the leadership of the Communist Party.
 - They should be beneficial, not harmful, to international socialist unity and the unity of the peace-loving people of the world. It is necessary to criticize people's shortcomings but, in doing so, we must truly take the stand of the people and speak out of wholehearted eagerness to protect and educate them.
- To treat comrades like enemies is to take the stance of the enemy.
-

New rules for the ruling class

Officials who remained at their post spent the next ten years living in ordinary houses, sending their children to local schools and bicycling to work. Peasants elected village leaders who worked in the fields for three hundred days a year and county officials who spent two hundred days working beside them.

To dramatize their empowerment, Mao promoted peasant 'Red expert,' Chen Yonggu, to Minister of Agriculture. Chen spread best practices through cooperative networks and *The New York Times*, reported the 1974 visit of American agronomists, quoting Nobelist Norman Borlaug, “You had to look hard to find a bad field. Everything was green and nice everywhere we traveled. I felt the progress had been much more remarkable than I expected”.

Plant geneticist and father of the Green Revolution, Sterling Wortman, the delegation's leader, described the rice crop, “Really first rate. There was just field after field that was as good as anything you can see. They're all being brought up to the level of skills of the best people. They all share the available inputs”. Wortman's Green Revolution was just then lowering world grain prices, destroying millions of small farms, ruining farmers and communities throughout the developing world, causing millions of suicides and creating vast shanty towns that persist in to this day.

Mao compared this misguided development to the USSR's centralized model of industrialization which, during its development dash, had located gigantic cement and fertilizer plants in cities and built expensive highways to deliver their products to the countryside. China, Mao insisted, would build small plants locally, save money and create local jobs. The peasants would exploit use the surplus labor created by Wortman's technology to man local industrial enterprises and learn skills without leaving their communities.

Teams constructed 1,500 chemical fertilizer plants and thousands of farm machinery factories and the economy grew 58% during the decade, faster than Germany's and Japan's development phases.

Journalist Sidney Rittenberg recalled the transformation in their collective consciousness, “Nobody locked their doors. The banks—there was a local bank branch on many, many corners—the door was wide open, the currency was stacked up on the table in plain sight of the door, there were no guards and they never had a bank robbery. Never”.

The Arts

Rural participation in the arts rose. Short stories, poetry, paintings and sculpture, music and dance flowered and, in place of old court dramas, revolutionary works in opera and ballet—some of which have entered the international canon—emphasized workers' and peasants' resistance to oppression. In a play from the time, *If I Were Genuine*, a peasant youth disguises himself as a general's son to get privileged treatment, free theatre tickets and an apartment from officials hoping to win the general's favor. Arrested, he refused to admit guilt, saying that his only fault was not having a real general for a father because, if his father were a general, everything he did would have been legitimate. The play was produced uncensored on TV and became a national favorite.

Mobo Gao describes the impact on peasant culture, "The rural villagers, for the first time, organized theater troupes and put on performances that incorporated the contents and structure of the eight model Peking operas with local language and music. The villagers not only entertained themselves but also learned how to read and write by getting into the texts and plays. And they organized sports meets and held matches with other villages. All these activities gave the villagers an opportunity to meet, communicate, fall in love, and gave them a sense of discipline and organization and created a public sphere where meetings and communications went beyond the traditional household and village clans. This had never happened before and has never happened since".

In response to peasants' demands, Mao suspended college entrance examinations and called for high school graduates to work at least two years in a factory, the countryside or the army to become eligible for college entrance. In 1973 the academic test was dropped and students were selected by fellow workers and peasants based on their work performance and, later, graduates were required to return to serve the communities that had sent them.

Revolution's end

China did not have the luxury of endless social experimentation, and government officials did not have superhuman endurance. The grievances and antagonisms Mao's reforms unleashed often took on lives of their own and many eruptions were local, with groups making demands in apparently unrelated contexts, including millennial clan quarrels. Some rebels began questioning the existing political order and the combination of disorder caused by mass activism below and leadership power conflicts above created a genuine political crisis that Mao decided to tactfully neutralize and resolutely resolve.

Counterrevolution

Upon Mao's death Deng Xiaoping, scion of an elite family, dissolved the communes, clinics, and schools and, despite fierce resistance, forced peasants back to small producers' status.

His Reform and Opening, says Orville Schell, "Rammed Chinese society into reverse gear, stampeding the country into a form of unregulated capitalism that made the US and Europe seem almost socialist by comparison". A new generation of illiterate peasants, particularly women, emerged. Life expectancy fell as poverty, prostitution, drug trafficking and addiction, the sale of women and children, petty crime, organized crime, official corruption, pollution, racketeering, and profiteering returned. Mao's frazzled successors set about destroying most of the Cultural Revolution's gains, says Dongping Han:...

In 1966, when the Cultural Revolution started, there were many illiterate people in my village. My mother never went to school and my father had learned how to read and write simple words by attending night school in his factory. My elder sister had only three years of primary school education. In my neighborhood, many children who were a few years older than I either never went to school or dropped out after one or two years of primary school. Not many people finished primary school, and only a few went as far as junior high school in my village. During the educational reforms of the Cultural Revolution, my village set up its own primary school and hired its own teachers. Every child in the village could go to the village school free of charge. My village also set up a junior middle school with six other villages. Every child could go to this joint village middle school free of charge and without passing any examinations. The commune that included my village set up two high schools. About 70 percent of school-age children in the commune went to these high schools free of charge and without passing any screening tests. All my siblings except my elder sister, who was four years older than I, were able to finish high school. At the time we did not feel this was extraordinary at all. Most people took going to high school for granted. Upon graduation from high school, I went back to my village like everybody else, and worked on the collective farm for one year and then worked in the village factory for three more years before going to college in the spring of 1978.

While I was in college the Cultural Revolution, together with its educational reform, was denounced by the government. Deng Xiaoping, the paramount Chinese leader then, said that schools should be like schools. The implication was: the rural schools set up during the Cultural Revolution educational reforms were not like real schools..

Ten years later, in 1986, while teaching at Zhengzhou University, I was involved in a research project in rural Henan with a group of American historians and political scientists. The presence of foreigners in a rural village attracted a big crowd of children of different ages. Out of curiosity I asked some children to read some newspaper headlines. One after another they shook their heads. I thought they were simply shy, but other children explained that they were not in school. To my dismay, it was the same story everywhere that we went. I asked people why this happened. They told me that since the collectives were broken up and land was divided among individual households village schools were no longer free. Some families could not afford to send their children to school. Others needed their children to help in the fields. Girls were among the first to be sacrificed, as they were assigned to household chores and to take care of younger siblings: their parents were more reluctant to invest in their futures than in those of their brothers. Rural children's loss of educational opportunities shocked me and forced me to think. The government attributed the lack of educational opportunities to the poverty of Chinese rural areas. However, I reached a different conclusion. It was not poverty that deprived the rural children of educational opportunities. Poverty is only a relative term. Why were the children of villagers able to finish high school during the Cultural Revolution? China's rural areas were poorer then than now.

Cautiously, and skeptically, I began to appreciate the significance of rural educational reforms during the Cultural Revolution. I myself am a product of these reforms. As an educator I found it hard to remain indifferent to the sad consequences of the condemnation of the rural educational reform of the Cultural Revolution years. I asked myself many questions and decided to study the issue. However, I could not do the research in China then because the Chinese government did not allow research related to the Cultural Revolution.

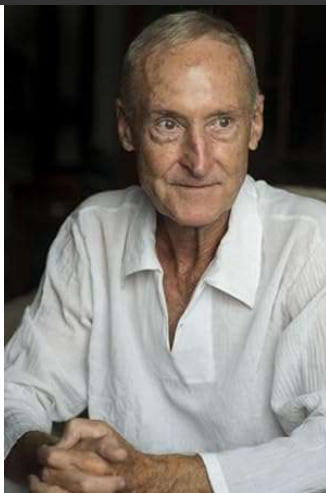
In 1990, I came to study in the History Department at the University of Vermont for my master's degree. I decided to write my thesis on the Cultural Revolution. I felt that there was a need to go beneath the surface structure of the events that occurred at that time. After I entered the doctoral program in political science at Brandeis University I was able to return to China a number of times to research in depth the evolution and consequences of educational policy in the country where I grew up. As I began to investigate the education reforms of the Cultural Revolution, I came to understand that they were integrally linked with a comprehensive program of rural development. I broadened the scope of my study to include the changes in rural political culture and efforts to advance agriculture and develop rural industry that were initiated during the Cultural Revolution decade. I conclude, based on the evidence I present in this book, that educational reform, changes in political culture and rural economic development were closely linked. – *The Unknown Cultural Revolution: Life and Change in a Chinese Village*.

Years later, at the height of a government campaign to delegitimize the Cultural Revolution, 75% of survey respondents confessed to feeling nostalgia for those heady days. Even President Xi, whose family suffered more than most, would only say, "It was emotional. It was a mood. When the ideals of the Cultural Revolution couldn't be realized, it proved an illusion". Asked later about which accomplishments he was proudest of, Mao answered, "The war, of course, and the Cultural Revolution".

Postscript

The CIA's operational analysis of its Tiananmen Square campaign attributed its failure to spark violence to 'the difficulty of mobilizing young activists in the desired direction *due to lack of strong polarizations* in Chinese society'. Chinese analysts attributed the lack of strong polarizations in Chinese society to Mao's ten-year Cultural Revolution, because it taught everyone how to deal with strong polarizations in Chinese society.

ABOUT GODFREE ROBERTS



I've been visiting China since 1967 and following its rising fortunes ever since. After receiving my doctorate from UMass, Amherst, I moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand, an hour from the Chinese border, and began trying to understand the country's phenomenal success. The result is a book, "Why China Leads the World: Talent at the Top, Data in the Middle, Democracy at the Bottom," the only book in English that explains why China works so well, and why 95% of Chinese think it's heading in the right direction. 'Talent at the Top' means that only the brightest, most honest and idealistic people are admitted to politics—a policy they have not changed in 2200 years. 'Data in the Middle' means that every policy is tested, implemented, tracked, and optimized based on terabytes of data. The PRC is the world's largest consumer of public surveys. 'Democracy at the Bottom' means that ordinary people have the last say on everything. 3,000 honest amateurs from across the country assemble twice a year to check the stats and sign off on new legislation. Policies need a minimum of 66% popular support to become law. That's why 95% of Chinese say the country is on the right track.
