Foreword: The Maoism of PRC History

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Good PRC history is left history. But hear me out. I do not mean that all good PRC historians are leftist in their thinking, their politics, or their methods; they are not. Nor do I mean that all good PRC history advocates for left positions; it does not. But rather, good PRC history is left history because it takes seriously and elucidates the leftist logics that framed discourses and experiences in socialist China. It grants that Maoist (Maovian?) projects had logics and evaluates them on their own terms, rather than dismissing them as obviously illogical. As Kristin Stapleton and Michael Schoenhals have pointed out, Mao Zedong Thought is perhaps the most important of the theories that inform the study of PRC history (H-PRC 2016). Knowing what Mao and Maoists actually thought, as well as what they tried to do, is all the more important when today's dominant political and economic systems rely, for their very existence, on the falsification of

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the ideologies, Marxian and otherwise, that attempt to contest them and hold them accountable. Bad PRC history abets conservative and regressive politics by attempting to erase any positive aspects of the socialist project, by pretending it was irrational, and by demonizing, *reductio ad Maoum*, anyone who disagrees.

Good PRC history resists teleological interpretations of the past by recovering the "infinite possibilities" that Maoism once offered, and that many people pursued, often using Mao's ideas to take them places that even Mao did not want them to go (Badiou 2014; Karl 2010; Wu 2014). When good PRC historians dive into archives and oral histories, they attempt to recapture this history of possibility by moving within the mindscapes of Chinese Communism. They learn to think like Maoists, even as they question Maoist thought. Good PRC history, like Maoism, should make us question what and how we *know*.

Reading sources from the PRC past can challenge our assumptions about how the world is and how it could be. When we are mindful of our own presentist thought categories and work to ensure that we read the sources on their own terms, they can destabilize the naturalized narratives of capitalism, neoliberalism, and imperialism as well as the entities that benefit from some or all of those, including US-style liberal democracies and, importantly, today's proudly illiberal PRC state. As this issue discusses, however, despite important interventions over the past decades, reactionary, red-baiting visions of the socialist past still play an outsized role in PRC history, both in its academic and popular forms. The only way to balance the scales is to unearth and resuscitate the disruptive elements that the dominant emplotments of history necessarily conceal, cast aside, or name as imaginary.

The First Rule of PRC History: Social Science and Anti-Marxist Positivism

There is an ongoing battle over what PRC history is and should be, complete with camps and several casualties so far. One of the most widely cited visions for the field was articulated in 2016 by political scientist Elizabeth Perry. Her article included a swipe at "Sinological garbology" (buying or otherwise salvaging documents that have been thrown out by archives, insti-

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tutions, and individuals), a method that counts among its practitioners such field-shaping senior scholars as Michael Schoenhals and Zhang Letian. But Perry suggests that garbology has led younger researchers astray, luring us into a "janitorial role." We seem content, she muses, to "grub for diversity in the dustbins of grassroots society" to tell interesting but ultimately unimportant stories of difference. Meanwhile, according to Perry, "social scientists" continue to do the far more significant work of exploring "the 'commanding heights' of the Chinese state and its policies" (2016: 116). Despite the janitorial metaphor, it is important to note that this critique could also apply to historians who do not do garbology but use similar kinds of grassroots sources from local PRC archives. Perry's concern is that historians, in general, seem to be focusing on minutiae rather than "overarching historical arguments." She notes that this might be "understandable and excusable" among *historians* working in China, "in light of political constraints," but that "the reluctance of many Western historians to tackle the question of the long-term significance of early PRC experiences, notwithstanding their diversity, seems less justifiable" (2016: 114). This distinction, between Chinese historians and non-Chinese "Western" historians is important, as both Perry's critique and ours in this issue are concerned primarily with the latter group.

Perry and others, including Neil Diamant, argue that this problem, in the non-Chinese anglophone field, results from the fact that historians (by which they generally mean scholars trained in history departments) overstate the novelty of our work and disregard (read: fail to cite) all of the social scientists who have already asked key questions of the PRC past (Diamant 2018: 189). I was a bit surprised that some of the most high-profile criticisms of PRC history came from Perry and Diamant, two of the political scientists who work most historically and with whom PRC historians have always engaged. As a graduate student, I initially assumed that Perry and Diamant, as well as Michael Dutton, Patricia Thornton, Joel Andreas, and others were all historians, precisely because they were attuned to change over time, contingency, and most of all to crafting deep, immersive past-scapes.

But those kinds of historically minded scholars are anomalies in social scientific fields that are largely concerned with contemporary questions and which often (mis)use facile descriptions of the past toward that end. Must historians really engage seriously with the work of nonhistorically minded

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social scientists (read: the bulk of social scientific scholarship) simply because it periodically hijacks a Maoist practice to build models that flatten the past? I would actually caution against engaging with such work because what is there referenced as "history" is most often a teleological preface to a series of assertions about the present. Spending too much time in those thought worlds will introduce into our own work precisely the presentist logics that derail good PRC history and render it fundamentally ahistorical. This will produce bad PRC history, perfectly suited to bolster those End-of-History arguments that laud the inherent superiority of liberal capitalism and the purported implausibility of change.

Perry's scholarship does not fit into this latter category, and the sensitively historical nature of her own work actually undercuts the substance of her critique. But her programmatic statement nonetheless highlights many of the reasons some historians, including those in this issue, have long been dissatisfied with trends in English-language scholarship on the PRC. Perry's concerns offer a useful starting point because they are consistent with the increasing certainty on the part of many social scientists, over the past century and a half, that their ways of knowing are superior to those of scholars in humanities disciplines. The recent disbanding of certain university departments, especially those focused on literary, philosophical, or cultural studies, signals the growing sense that questions and approaches associated with "scientific methods" produce more important knowledge than that arrived at via philosophical inquiries, discursive analyses, and thick descriptions of microsites.

The discipline of history provides a good lens for examining these kinds of claims. It sits uncomfortably between the social sciences and the humanities and reminds us that while there are important distinctions between disciplines, the process of assigning fields to larger institutional categories is also somewhat arbitrary. (History is one of several disciplines that are incorporated into colleges of social science at some universities and into colleges of arts or humanities at others). The false opposition between these ways of knowing also elides the fact that the current forms of all academic disciplines were produced in the same modern era, often quite explicitly to serve the political interests of bourgeois capitalist and imperialist powers. Despite those close connections, however, the fact that humanistic studies

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of language and culture were linked to the much older studies of classics, while social science was more closely attached to the natural sciences, reified the flawed perception that the latter relied on more “objective” methods of producing knowledge (Dutton 2002).

The allure of the ostensibly superior social sciences intensified during the middle of the twentieth century with the rise of what Vicente Rafael (1994: 91) has called “The North American Way of Knowing.” Academics and university administrators pushed for the development of area studies, which would take from the humanities that deemed valuable, especially linguistic competency and cultural understanding, and marry it to social scientific methods, to create a new institutionalized mode of knowledge production. As Rafael (1994: 92) argues, the resulting units and the research they conduct are “fundamentally dependent,” to this day, on “the conjunction of corporate funding, state support, and the flexible managerial systems of university governance characteristic of liberal pluralism.” Thus, unsurprisingly, social science, as an institution, produces a great deal of knowledge that serves those interests.

Many proponents of this new way of knowing believed that scientific methods in area studies would help to counter the influence of Marxism in the academy. Karl Popper (1957), perhaps the best-known proponent of “positivism” as superior to Marxism, argued that Marx had developed his theories through scientific methods but that over time Western social and natural sciences had proven to be more truly based on observable facts. Of course, as his own analysis of Marxism suggested, Popper and other self-identified positivists were not the only thinkers whose theories could be so labeled. Many twentieth-century epistemologies similarly contended that the only valid knowledge is that attained through the observation and rational interpretation of perceptible, natural phenomena.

For their part, many Marxist thinkers insisted that dialectical materialism was no less fact-based or testable and adaptable than other modern sciences and that so-called positivists were the ones who ignored facts in favor of political dogma. George Novack claimed that Popper was principally motivated by his own, very subjective views on the implausibility of revolution and thus used “arbitrary and essentially reactionary standards” to determine what was scientific. Novack (2002: 165) further suggested,

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playfully but insightfully, that Popper's brand of "positivism" was in fact "badly named and should be more precisely termed 'negativism,'" for its counterrevolutionary roots and impulses. But nevertheless, the connection between positivism and liberal, anti-Marxist thought lingered, as did the unsubstantiated assertion that positivism produced more reliable knowledge than Marxism (or other epistemologies).

Thusly styled positivists took over North American academia during the Cold War. Their rise was buoyed by a ferocious retrenchment of liberalism, emblematized by Margaret Thatcher's notorious claim that there was "no alternative" to so-called free market economics. A vibrant academic insurrection did erupt during the Vietnam War. Of special importance to the China field was the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS), who rejected the use of Asian studies to abet US liberal and imperialist interests. But by the early 1980s, most of those radicals had returned to the anticommunist fold (Barlow 1993; Lanza 2017). For historians, this was probably predictable. The discipline, as Hayden White (1987: 60) reminds us, was constituted "in the service of political values and regimes that were in general antirevolutionary and conservative," and, with a few notable exceptions, it has more often than not continued in that vein.

It was in this context that, during the Reagan-Thatcher years, many former CCAS members and other anglophone China scholars began to extol the importance of "positivism" and "empiricism" in research. They were, in part, participating in the larger academic reaction to "postmodernism," or what sinologist Geremie Barmé (1999: xvii) has called "the two-line struggle between theory and empiricism." In the China field, the appeal to "facts" was also part of a burgeoning argument against the PRC state, which many had once championed as a positive model, in contrast to the Vietnam War–era United States and its allies. From the mid-1970s onward, China scholars had increased opportunities to visit the PRC, and many there observed phenomena they perceived as flatly contradicting Communist Party rhetoric. It became a mission, for many of them, to evangelize these newfound truths.

It is unsurprising that China scholars became focused on countering Marxist narratives. After all, the loudest narrator of China's past and present is probably the Chinese Communist Party. But because so many members of

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the anglophone China studies field had once held high hopes for the revolution, when they became disillusioned with that project, they experienced it as a personal betrayal. In the fifty years since, their painful memories of being duped by CCP rhetoric, fused as those memories were to the growing epistemological dominance of the North American Way of Knowing, have shaped the questions, methodologies, and sensibilities of PRC studies, as much as any other disciplinary or theoretical framework. As I argue later in this issue, in a post-disillusionment era, under the tutelage of the betrayed, generations of students learned that the first rule of PRC studies is: never take the Chinese Communists at their word.

* * *

The contributors to this issue were trained in that post-disillusionment era. And although we were too young to have experienced the disenchantment firsthand, many of our more senior teachers shared memories of their awakening. They extolled the importance of looking for stories that did not appear in, and/or manifestly contradicted, official or mainstream narratives about PRC history. This is how we came into what Perry calls our "janitorial role." Our senior colleagues, Perry included, taught us to seek out marginalized voices and nonstandard histories.

When we went into the field, we followed that mandate, hunting for nonstate sources, such as oral histories or diaries. We dug up official documents that the state had hidden or discarded, such as the "garbage sources" that were abundant in flea markets and used bookstores and that often contained classified files, including firsthand reports from grassroots cadres that contested higher-level claims. As we embarked on our field research during the later 1990s and the early 2000s, PRC archives were also more open than they had ever been before or have been since. We were flush with locally produced primers for schoolchildren and for cadres, with work reports from village communes and directives sent by local governments, with personal letters, sketchbooks, and shopping lists. To try to make sense of the disparate and confusing splinters we encountered, we returned to the *People's Daily* and the works of Party theorists, but we also devoured the formulaic textbooks produced by central authorities for their mid-level and lower-level bureaucrats, many of which were also newly available.

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As we worked through our documents, we began to realize that many of our methods seemed to further obscure meaning because, of course, Marxism and then Maoism were forged in the same crucible as the modern humanities and social science disciplines. All of those intellectual traditions are interrelated critiques. Chinese Communist praxis attempted to mount a direct challenge to the epistemological frameworks that drove Western liberal and academic thought. Maoism explicitly operated according to an alternative set of logics, logics that were purposefully designed to falsify the "truths" of capitalism, imperialism, and liberalism, among others. It can thus be productive to read liberal positivism, Marxism, and other contemporaneous theories of knowledge in conversation with one another. But they cannot unlock one another's truths in any straightforward way.

Chicken Feathers and Garlic Skins: The Virtues of Dumpster Diving

In a reply to Perry's initial salvo, Michael Schoenhals (2016) pointed out that to see janitorial labor as less important than social scientific work unfortunately and unfairly disparages both PRC historians and the people who keep our workplaces clean and safe. Years earlier, in what now seems a prescient rebuke to the anti-garbology line, PRC policy makers of the time also remarked on the political significance of attitudes about trash. Educational materials, aimed at recalcitrant cadres, explained that proper CCP governance was constantly beset by lower-level agents who thought local stories and individual troubles were nothing more than "chicken feathers and garlic skins" (鸡毛蒜皮 *jimao suanpi*), or the useless detritus that is swept into the trash bin after making a meal. Rectification stressed that such thinking constituted a serious methodological error, which violated the mass line. "The people have many matters which don't seem to be major," cadres were to learn, "but national issues are just accumulations of the small affairs of ordinary people" (L. Liu 1952). When PRC historians begin with grassroots documents, from either flea markets or archives, they are following the first epistemological principle of the mass line: All truth comes from the masses. That principle is crucial to the proper contextualization of Mao-era sources.

Because of its social scientific bent, anglophone scholarship tends to

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emphasize a relatively functionalist understanding of the mass line, stressing the way policies were supposed to evolve through a back-and-forth exchange ("from the masses to the masses") between the people and the Party. This claim about PRC governance has been dismissed by some scholars as overly idealistic "window dressing," but recent studies in political science have taken the mass line more seriously as a secret to CCP success (Y. Liu 2006; Tang 2016). Social scientists rightly point out that the mass line was very useful to the Party because it enabled both tight control and surveillance as well as a measure of popular participation to ensure continued mass support.

However, the pressure to advance generalizable conclusions has led political scientists to focus on comparisons between, say, mass mobilization in China and Cold War theories of "mass society" (Tang 2016), or between, for example, the PRC's "democratic dictatorship" and "liberal democracy." We learn a great deal from this literature about how the CCP developed its central leadership technique, how that technique ranks against others, and how it has and continues to serve the state well. But this rather dry, social scientific analysis of a relatively specific yet also familiar-seeming set of policies in China leaves one to wonder how *that* mass line connects to the mass line at the heart of Maoism, the mass line that inspired people around the world, leaving its indelible impression on farmers, radical feminists, French philosophers, and Black Panthers, just to name a few. The mass line was far more than a leadership method; the mass line was, at its core, the Maoist theory of knowledge production. It was a guide to radical thinking. And recapturing that epistemological element is essential to understanding Maoism's global appeal, but it is also essential to making sense of Mao-era historical sources.

The basic premise of mass line epistemology is that all truth comes from the masses and any inquiry must therefore begin with close, empirical observations, conducted on the ground and from a "mass perspective" (or through the eyes of the ordinary people). The data thus gleaned is to be considered in the context of the Marxian theories that Mao believed offered the most reliable analyses of history and society. Because the mass line was a way of knowing, it informed nearly every aspect of everything the CCP did, at least in its early years. Whether leaders viewed it more or less cynically did not matter in the sense that the political culture of the Party meant superiors at all levels still had to order, inspire, and even entreat their subordinates to

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work in accordance with the mass line. As I argue later in this issue, nearly all government records that purport to describe CCP governance and the attitudes, conditions, or behaviors of the masses were created in that context. The reference materials officials used to produce city, provincial, and central-level documents were compiled in consultation with that local data.

The directives, decisions, models, and measures one must use to correctly analyze Chinese Communist governance, its institutions, or its methods, even at the central Party level, make less sense apart from the mass line praxis that informed them. Excavating the forgotten and discarded shards of local experience, which once mattered a great deal (at least discursively) to the PRC state, is crucial to the correct interpretation of that state's written traces and, to a certain extent, the traces of the people it sought to govern. Microhistories are thus central to the mapping of Chinese communism and must be central to any analysis of what went on at its "commanding heights."

To understand the PRC past, we need the chicken feathers and garlic skins of Maoism. Some of those tidbits remain in archives, others can be scavenged from postsocialist rubbish heaps. I agree wholeheartedly with Perry that presenting local anecdotes for their own sake is not the most valuable contribution historians can make. But Ginzburg (1980), Darnton (1984), and Davis (1983) have long since dismissed any sense that *microstorie* do not have macro implications. We *dundian* 蹲点, or "squat in a spot," to gain the deep knowledge of "single points," that early PRC political theorists taught would "illuminate the entire plane." Good PRC history makes a great number of claims about the nature of the "entire plane" of the past because it follows the dialectical logic of the mass line. Particularity is only enlightening when it is united with the universal, and the universal is only universal because of its relationship to many particulars.

In part because of the influence of Maoist thought around the world, including in academia, the past several decades of historical scholarship about China and elsewhere, has increasingly shown that microhistories of single points best illuminate *all* larger planes (Badiou 2014; Karl 2010; Elbaum 2018). In this sense, it is not simply a predilection for sinological minutiae that leads Jeremy Brown and Matthew Johnson (2015) to argue that there was no single "Maoist China" that can be characterized in broad

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strokes. In fact, social and cultural historians of many pasts around the world have come to similar conclusions. But such a position need not evade "big questions" unless only broad strokes and generalizations count as big answers. The North American social scientific way of knowing might posit just that, but Maoism was a critique of precisely those kinds of claims.

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Historical Rupture and Alternative Epistemologies

By taking Maoism seriously, good PRC history raises critiques that shake the smug epistemological certainty of a moment and reveal the unproven assumptions and subjective values hidden in a dominant worldview. Taking mass line epistemology seriously, as we approach our Mao-era sources, offers us the opportunity to reflect on how we *know* and to wonder whether we could know better. For example, one of the things I once found in the trash was a letter written by an actual janitor from a small northern city. "Dearest Chairman Mao," wrote Ms. Wu, who identified herself as a worker on a municipal sanitation team. "I would like to suggest," she began, "that many more people, including cadres and leaders, engage in sanitation work. This kind of work helps develop a mass perspective and offers a chance to participate in the important work of protecting the health of the people." Whenever I read Ms. Wu's letter, or the many more like it, in discussions of Mao-Era political culture, colleagues inevitably wonder how much Ms. Wu could really have understood about political concepts like "mass perspective." My interlocutors tend to question that these kinds of letters are political texts in which people are attempting to engage seriously with Maoist ideas. Does it not seem more likely, scholars ask, that Ms. Wu and her comrades were attempting to navigate an increasingly politicized "daily life," deploying the state's language because they had to do so or because it might be useful in getting what they wanted?

Obviously, historians can never know what Maoism did or did not mean to Ms. Wu. But it is significant that just as social scientific research reduces the mass line to a useful instrument of Party control, so too does post-disillusionment rationale reduce Ms. Wu's use of a mass line conceptual framework to a coping strategy. That otherwise accomplished and thoughtful scholars can confidently advance such undertheorized and undead

understandings of "daily life" is indicative of the strong impulse in post-disillusionment PRC history to render Maoist political ideas as disconnected from or in conflict with people's everyday realities. This impulse leads scholars to gloss the Maoist lexicon as inauthentic, even when, as in the case of Ms. Wu, there is no evidence in the source itself to suggest the letter was anything other than participation in Maoist politics.

Post-disillusionment methodology here reveals what Novack called the "congenital vice of positivist epistemology." Positivists, according to Novack, have an apparently powerful method for excising those ideas they do not like—they evaluate them in light of the liberal values that informed the development of the Western scientific method and declare all conclusions that do not support those values to be "unscientific" (or superficial in relation to the scientific). In so doing, however, positivists must violate the rules of their own empiricism; they must exclude certain evidence, or define it as anomalous, and/or they must give certain evidence an interpretation that is not supported by that evidence itself (Novack 2002: 166). Later in this issue, I demonstrate in detail the analytical mistakes produced by this practice. But we can also see the problem quite clearly in the scholarly evaluations of Ms. Wu's letter.

The only thing the source actually contains is a Maoist political and epistemological claim, but post-disillusionment methodology does not insist on the examination of that claim. And, indeed, no evidence is required to exclude the evidence provided in Ms. Wu's letter. This creates an analytical disparity: If, on the one hand, I make a textually supported argument and claim that Ms. Wu was genuinely attempting to think like a Maoist, many readers would remain unconvinced. If, on the other hand, I were to claim that Ms. Wu was deploying the language of the state tactically, many readers would accept that argument, even if I offered no evidence. This sort of analytical imbalance is not quite what David Bloor had in mind when he advocated "symmetry" in analyses of knowledge production (Bloor 1976). But we might invoke a kind of "symmetry principle" to insist that post-disillusionment "common-sense" interpretations offer direct evidence, preferably from the historical source in question, to refute something like the sincerity of Ms. Wu's expression. If they cannot do so, then we might probe their claims a bit more deeply. What kind of analytical work does their pro-

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found skepticism of Maoist political concepts *do* for those scholars who insist on it? One answer is that when the words of Maoist speakers are reduced to quaint local expressions of otherwise "universal" human concerns, such as navigating "daily life," this process reinscribes the supposed universality of the very claims about daily life that Maoism sought to denaturalize. Renaturalized, these "universals" make Maoist interventions seem illogical. What logic could there be, after all, in disputing the existence of the "natural" world?

Good PRC History Is Left History

Rafael and Dutton have both noted that the social scientific North American Way of Knowing asserts and maintains its superiority by excluding evidence and offering questionable interpretations to advance not fully substantiated claims about what is "natural," "universal," and "scientific." Distilling alien logic systems into data or sidelining them as epiphenomenal to the "facts," bolsters Thatcher-style no-alternative claims by rendering the alternatives as always already illogical and even imaginary. Discredited as beliefs not based on evidence or as lapses in logic, entire systems of meaning are reduced simply to fragments of data, deployed to give us a false sense of our own epistemological superiority.

Good PRC history attempts to reveal that lie. It seeks to recapture what has been lost, not solely because the contents of the dustbin of history are significant on their own (though we think they are). But, more importantly, because the things in that dustbin are bits of evidence that were excised or ignored by various iterations of the CCP state and the scholars who have sought to know it. To allow all of that purposely discarded evidence to stay in the trash is to abet the exclusion-based superiority claims of both liberal positivism and the illiberal PRC state, which cites an ahistorical version of the mass line as its justificatory epistemology. Indeed, by engaging in such exclusion to reduce the epistemology of the mass line to a mode of governance (which can then be touted by today's CCP or reviled by its critics) social scientific and post-disillusionment approaches have not only oversimplified PRC history but also reified the state and its elites as the arbiters of historical meaning.

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Social scientific macrohistories have left us with a view of the early PRC as a time when the CCP used its mass line tactics to establish tight, even totalitarian control and deep surveillance over society. That is certainly what many leaders wanted to do, and they might want us to believe they succeeded. But as local, micro, and "from the margins" cases have shown, there was so much that the PRC state could not control and so many things central leaders never came to know. The post-disillusionment falsification drive has similarly left us with a picture of Maoist political logics as inauthentic and dogmatic, suggesting promises that Mao and other elites either could not or would not fulfill. That vision is certainly key to the perpetuation of liberal capitalist ideology, but it is also contested by the profound and continuing resonance of Mao's ideas. Maybe the "commanding heights" are so high that all observers can see from there are what look to be the teleologies of failure and the capriciousness of individual leaders. But from way down in the weeds we see aspects of the socialist past that were much more radical and subversive.

If we begin, as the mass line instructs, with a sanitation worker in a small city who wrote a letter to Chairman Mao, we may get a glimpse at how ordinary people dared to reimagine their worlds, to contest things as they were, and to demand things be different. And when trash can after trash can and archive upon archive are full of such letters, all that once-forgotten evidence gets more and more difficult to ignore. Good PRC history lets us question the post-disillusionment claims that support the current ideological status quo: *Were* Maoist conceptual categories inauthentic or illogical? *Is* the socialist experiment best read as elite power plays and political lies? When we look more closely at those claims, it turns out that they have been stated loudly and repeatedly, but they are not as evidence based as they purport to be.

Good PRC history can render post-disillusionment emplotments less convincing, by gathering all the chicken feathers and garlic skins that had to be discarded to make those narratives appear true. That does not mean, however, that the counternarratives of their ideological opponents become more convincing, as defenders of the contemporary CCP might sometimes argue. Good PRC history also suggests that Maoism's radical potential never belonged to Mao or the PRC state, and it could not be contained by

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them or delegitimized by their mistakes. Indeed, as Rebecca Karl (2010: x) has argued, what Mao really offered was a challenge, and "recalling Mao's challenge is to recall a time when many things seemed possible; it is to remember possibility against the pressure to concede to the world as it now appears." We can only recall that time by reanimating its logics, beginning at the grassroots and following as many paths through the Mao era as we can. Good PRC history is thus left history because it can recapture what so many people found most meaningful about Maoism—its inquiry into how we know. *That* vision of the PRC past can still lead us to make genuine and powerful interventions into global conversations about how the world is and how it might be.

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