INTRODUCTION

OF ENDS AND BEGINNINGS; OR, WHEN CHINA EXISTED

La paura della speranza e l'amore per la disperazione. Non si tratta d'un medesimo sentimento, né si ritrovano nella stessa persona. Non necessariamente. Ma parliamone, perché la "Cina" scatena l'una e l'altra.
—Franco Fortini, "Ancora in Cina"

Ah ça, dit Truptin, mais voulez parler de Mao de la révolution culturelle, *tageming*? . . . Invention, madame mademoiselle, invention de journaliste, tout ça, moi en Chine, jamais rien vu tout ça. Chine, invention française, parisienne même, tous des ignorants, ignorant la langue, l'écriture et ça parle, ça parle puisque ça ne sait pas lire. . . . Permettez-moi de vous dire, madame, permettez mois de vous dire, la Chine n'existe pas.
—Natacha Michel, *La Chine européenne*

As the title of this book suggests, I start from the end. And I don't mean it as a rhetorical ploy or a narrative gimmick; this project originated—in personal, political, and intellectual terms—by taking stock of an ending, by registering an absence, by marking a disappearance. Personally, this happened many years ago, when I was a young undergraduate student at the University of Venice. Browsing through the then-not-particularly expansive collection of Asian studies journals, I encountered a publication that—just by virtue of its name—stood out among the *China Quarterly*, *Modern*

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China, and the *Journal of Asian Studies*: the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*. To a nineteen-year-old freshman in 1987 Italy, the title sounded curious and, frankly, quite puzzling. *What were these scholars concerned about*, I asked myself, *and what were they concerned about specifically as "Asian" scholars?* While, at that time, my puzzlement was due to my own ignorance, the gap that separated me—an otherwise politically aware young student—and the collective statement of a position of "concern" inscribed in the *Bulletin*'s title pointed to a larger set of issues. More than a geographical and generational distance, what was implied in the almost archival separation I felt in picking up the *Bulletin* was a political and intellectual break. This book is, in many ways, an investigation into that break.

A Double Disappearance

The Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS) was an organization of young professors and graduate students who were vociferously critical of U.S. policies in Vietnam (and in Asia in general), and of the complicity of the field of Asian studies with these policies. The organization questioned the very intellectual constitution of the field itself. Between 1968 and 1979, the Concerned Asian Scholars (CAS) mounted a sweeping attack on the academic, political, and financial structure of Asian studies in U.S. academia and engaged in some memorable debates with the founding figures of the field. The journal they published—still in existence (albeit under a different name)—the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* (BCAS), was radical, vibrant, at times excessive, and always politically minded.[1]

"Concerned" is quite a distinctive characteristic for a scholar to self-define, and even more so for a group of scholars: it implies a subjective, personal commitment, a direct involvement in the issue at stake—and it further implies that there exist scholars who are *not* concerned, but rather indifferent.[2] In the case of the *Bulletin* (and the Committee behind it), it also implied the possibility of a *collective* concern, of a positioning vis-à-vis politics and knowledge, in particular the politics of knowledge embedded in the profession and the field of Asian studies. It implied and even called for a political militancy in—and outside—the arena of intellectual production. This book interrogates how such a militancy could be articulated; how the emergence of a collective political subjectivity called CCAS was possible; and, perhaps more importantly, how it disappeared,

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how it became de facto impossible, to the point where by 1987 it looked so unusual and out of place to a budding Asia scholar.

The most obvious and obviously recognized factor behind that collective concern was, of course, the Vietnam War, and in that CCAS represented an interesting and distinctive part of the larger antiwar movement.[3] The parable of the organizational fortunes of the Committee coincided in large part with the evolution of the war itself: the end of the American involvement in the conflict and the consequent dissolution of the antiwar élan marked a crisis for the Concerned, who did not endure much longer as a collective. However—and here I admit my own bias as a historian of Modern China—in this book I want to highlight another factor behind the activism of CCAS, one less easily recognized and definitively much more controversial, both at the time and in today's memory: China.

While it included scholars of Japan, Korea, and South and Southeast Asia, CCAS was overwhelmingly a China group, in terms of both membership and readership.[4] But what made China an unmistakable point of reference for CCAS was not just the sheer numbers of China specialists in the ranks; it was also and more significantly how they approached China and what China meant for the organization in general. In Marilyn Young's recollection, "most China people [in CCAS] were attracted not because they had this great love for Chinese civilization but already because of politics." Unlike the Soviet historians of their generation, these young scholars loved the country they studied, and they wrote out of affection for China. And what drew them and motivated that affection was China's "revolutionary situation."[5] The Cultural Revolution, which had exploded in 1966, had captured the attention of the radical Left all over the world, and by 1968—the year of the founding of CCAS—the example of the Red Guards was being invoked globally. While these young scholars could not visit China (there would be no diplomatic relationship between the United States and the PRC until 1972), the political proximity was recognized across the physical distance.

China figured as the necessary "positive" side of the Committee's harsh attack on the Asian studies field and on U.S. imperialism in Asia. Viewed from afar, China offered the possibility of alternative development, a more humane economy, and peaceful policies. It was through their evaluation of the Maoist experiences that the Concerned Asian Scholars were

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able, for the first time in centuries, to consider "Asia" and "Asian people" as political subjects, capable of original thought and practices. While CCAS was by no means a Maoist organization, much of their intellectual and political endeavor was framed by their confrontation with the existence, the contradictions, the tensions, and the ultimate demise of Maoism.

This ended in 1976, when Mao Zedong died and the Cultural Revolution ended. Between 1976 and 1981, only three or four essays on China were published in the *Bulletin*, and none of them addressed directly the dramatic shift that was taking place in Chinese politics and its potential consequences. In 1972, Richard Nixon's trip to China had already shaken many activists' faith in the PRC, which was perceived as having abandoned Vietnam; by 1980, it was clear that the new regime of Deng Xiaoping was dismantling all the Maoist experiments CCAS had celebrated and moving the country toward some form of capitalist system. In this scenario, China basically disappeared from the journal's pages; it became a conspicuous absence, the veritable elephant in the room. When it reappeared, in a double issue in 1981, the contributors to the *Bulletin* struggled to cope with the new China and the very different image of Maoism it presented. Gone was the optimism toward the Chinese model, gone was the possibility of alternative policies, but also gone was much of the grounding that since 1968 had provided a foundation to the collective subject of the Concerned Asian Scholars.

But there was also another, more painful disappearance. While most of the Concerned Scholars who specialized in Japan or Korea went on to prestigious and well-deserved careers (John Dower, Herbert Bix, and Bruce Cumings, to name a few), the China side of the Concerned Scholars was more seriously affected. By the late 1970s, many of the China scholars dropped out of academia completely, did not get tenure, or suffered more personal losses.[6]

In the following pages I track the role of China in CCAS's political and intellectual enterprise, and I trace the patterns of that double disappearance. I follow in detail the founding and the evolution of the organization, but this is not simply an "institutional" history. Rather, I examine the case of the CCAS to shed some light on a larger moment of transition in Cold War international politics, the history of Asian studies in the United States, and the connections between scholarship and activism. In order to illustrate the larger—and potentially long-lasting—relevance of the

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issues at stake, throughout the book I deploy references to thinkers and political groups that were active, in the same years, on the other side of the globe, as part of the phenomenon usually labeled "French Maoism."

Distinctly philosophical in tone, French Maoists were drastically different in inspiration, goals, and locations from the Concerned Asian Scholars.[7] Yet "China" and "Maoism" identified themes and practices that were shared across these very diverse situations. First, in both cases, "China" did not name solely a cultural and geographical location, but rather a set of ideas and concerns that had potential worldwide relevance. Attention to and embrace of Maoism therefore represented the first major instance in which people around the world—in Europe, the Americas, Africa, and so forth—approached Asians in a potentially non-orientalist way, as subjects with the right to original thinking and independent political practice. Second, Maoism presented a fundamental alternative both to the capitalist and the Soviet models, precisely at a time when, both in France and in the United States, radical movements had laid bare the profound inequalities that persisted after the postwar economic boom. Third, the crisis of the 1960s invested directly the privileged locations of politics in France as in the United States—the political parties. The Cultural Revolution then appeared as the final attack on the validity of any privileged location for politics and as a declaration of the legitimacy for people to organize independently of the state.[8] Finally, Maoism interpellated intellectuals directly. The Cultural Revolution addressed issues that could not help but call into question the daily experiences of students and teachers everywhere: the division of manual and intellectual labor, the role of science and objectivity, the relationship between politics and knowledge, and the ideological structure of the transmission of learning. All of these were crucial problems for both CCAS and the French Maoists.

While these are two very limited and situated experiences, they provide a glimpse into how Maoism influenced groups and individual activists around the world, from South America to Africa, from U.S. inner cities to Iran. Maoism traversed the sixties not as mimicry, with people parroting the ill-digested stories of exotic Red Guards. Rather, it was the privileged name—resonating differently in different situations—that connected a series of crucial political issues and a set of practices forged specifically to deal with those issues. These were practices that were configured as alternatives to existing models (liberal and Communist),

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specifically in relation to the issue of equality. Maoism, then, provided U.S. scholars and French radicals—but also Tanzanian farmers and Iranian revolutionaries—with a vocabulary to identify equalitarian practices across the world, practices that were eccentric both to the nation-state and to the leftist parties. Maoism was the grounding to criticize the existent and propose alternatives.

The analysis of these specific cases within a larger context of scholarship and activism offers three distinct but interconnected contributions. First, it provides a new perspective into a unique moment in the fraught history of the idea of "China," inside and outside academia. Today, orientalist tropes of "Asian values" are being reified at the level of a global ideology to articulate differences within a triumphant capitalist modernity.[9] In the long sixties, I argue that Maoist China stood instead as the signifier of global equality in regard to issues of development, ideology, and political power.

Second, my analysis of these specific cases in the context of global Maoism addresses historically the relationship between politics and scholarship, activism, and academia. The comparison between these two cases provides a broader reflection on the politics inherent in the production of knowledge; in France, as in the United States, it was in part through Maoism that a thorough critique of the role of the intellectual, of science, and of ideological reproduction was formulated. Finally, although this is not a research project about Maoism in China, the question of why and how we should study that political experience shadows this entire book. I hope that by examining how the experiments of the Cultural Revolution were reinterpreted in the West, I can contribute to the scholarly effort to clarify the political meanings of this extremely complicated period.[10] While I look at the global sixties from the perspective of China, I also try to rethink the significance of Maoism in light of how it was understood and appropriated outside of China.

Global Maoism

This book moves from a premise that I should not leave unspoken, which is that the sixties took place as a global event—or a globally connected series of events—and that Maoism was a crucial element in that global happening. By that I mean that the existence of the sixties as a period was not just—as Fredric Jameson has argued—in "the sharing of a com-

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mon objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within the situation's structural limits."[11] Rather, the form, the language, and the significance of those responses and innovations were also shared and translated across borders. Maoism was an essential code for that translation. This is not to say that we can trace easy lines of comparison among different locations, people, and organizations that, in dissimilar ways, appropriated for themselves the term *Maoist* or showed a particular interest for China. I am not arguing that we should look at Indian Naxalites and the French PCML, Sendero Luminoso and the Black Panthers as necessarily and automatically belonging to a presumably interconnected global struggle. Nor do I want to discount how the leftists' fascination with Maoist China—especially in Europe—was marred by orientalist attitudes and fantasies.[12] But it seems to me undeniable—and very important—that the long sixties were the only moment in recent history when China, specifically because of its revolutionary situation, came to constitute a foundation for a transnational discourse of intellectual and political change. This particular discourse did not place at its center ethnic- or culturally based values, nor did it espouse the myth of a "rise of China/Asia" in terms of geopolitical power. Rather, Maoism here was the name of a shift in the political and intellectual frame of reference in the 1960s and 1970s, when what was happening in Asia acquired a new relevance for people all over the world within their own historical circumstances. Maoist China, then, was not the Oriental paradise of Communism realized in material deprivation, but the point of reference of a flawed, incomplete, failed, yet collective search for alternatives to existing developmental models. Understanding that search, in all its limitations, seems to me extremely important even (and especially) in our historical circumstances.[13]

When I presented different sections of this book in meetings, conferences, and roundtables, I often demurely introduced it as my book about "China"—as opposed to my more serious, archival work on China. Thankfully, on more than one occasion, attentive friends and colleagues pointed out the hollowness of that distinction and confronted me about the fact that this project had indeed something to say about China—without quotation marks. They pointed to the fact that I was talking of a China that was no less real—and no more constructed—than the one that I encountered in fragmented pieces of archival material. Because in the sixties,

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for self-labeled French Maoists, radical black activists, and Concerned Scholars, Maoist China, to paraphrase one of the epigraphic quotes above, *existed*. It existed as an example of what was possible, as the vocabulary to phrase diverse experiences, and yes, as a misunderstood point of reference; it existed differently in each of these cases, but it existed. As Franco Fortini, the author of the other epigraph, wrote after his second trip to the PRC, “now for me China is *true*, because it has its measurable reality. It is part of the world.”[14]

One of the goals of this book is precisely to examine the modes and the consequences of that existence, of that accepted reality. If “the perverse legacy of Said’s orientalism” has been that Western historians “pay attention to ‘the East’ primarily as a mirror with which to see the West more clearly,”[15] here I want to twist that mirror and start instead from the premise that Maoist inventions in China had a political reality and a political value per se. It was the recognition of that reality and that value that framed political and intellectual movement elsewhere, including in “the West,” and by looking at that recognition as a serious undertaking we might actually discover something about Maoist politics in China and globally. But, in order to do that, we need first to steer away from what seems to me has been the dominant mode of interpretation of the role of Maoism outside China in the long sixties, one that has been at least in part promoted by former Maoists, especially in Europe. Paraphrasing Lenin, we could call this view “Maoism as the infantile stage of liberalism.” In this particular pattern, the fascination with China by mostly (but not exclusively) young people is described, in terms borrowed from pop psychology, as an infantile enthrallment, an adolescent phase that, once overcome, led eventually—and thankfully—to a more mature awareness. In the French case, to make an example, the “daft seduction into unreason”[16] that pushed people to frame their activism following the image of faraway Red Guards supposedly evolved into an “acceptable” commitment for gender and LGBT equality, humanitarian enterprises (Doctors Without Borders), and full participation in liberal democracy, finally shed of its childish excesses.[17] According to this analysis, Maoism was “a political learning process via which French youth cured itself of its infantile revolutionary longings in order to focus on more circumscribed tasks pertaining to the transformation of everyday life and the regeneration of civil society.”[18]

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Then, if China existed, as a former French Maoist famously quipped, it did so only "in our heads,"[19] and as such it was an existence that was easy to overcome once reality (or adulthood, one could say) set in. Individually, some former Maoists, or "China lovers," have described this evolutionary process into and out of a relationship with "China" as a complete break, in which the sudden realization of the true nature of the Maoist experiments leads the former activist to a complete political reversal.[20] Others have instead framed their political evolution as a continuous path in which only the objects of desire and passion are shifting (then the complex political path subsumed under "Maoism," now liberalism, human rights, whatever), while the individual's moral center of gravity remains stable. Perry Link, former CCASer who went on to an illustrious career at Princeton and UC Riverside, provides perhaps the best example of the simplifying rhetorical power of the latter pattern: "In the late 1960s, I admired Mao because I felt strongly about things like peace, freedom, justice, truth, and a fair chance for the little guy. Today I detest Mao and his legacy. Why? Because I am drawn to things like peace, freedom, justice, truth, and a fair chance for the little guy."[21]

I have spent a large part of my intellectual life studying political movements of young people and questioning precisely the uses—and abuses—of categories such as "youth" or "children" in defining and describing politics.[22] I am therefore instinctively wary of any description that deploys metaphors of infantilism or youthful enthusiasm, as it is always a strategy to confine or deny the political meaning of that occurrence. We should seriously interrogate the role of "youth" as a category and a social classification in the long sixties, outside of simple metaphors of adolescent fascination, but this exceeds the scope of this book.[23] I would also agree with Quinn Slobodian that one of the main political effects of the denial of Maoism (often framed in terms of personal repentance) is to prophylactically discipline "any potential future inter-racial and transnational political identifications." If the only legacy of that experience is a conversion to humanitarianism and human rights, this means that "the First World relationship to the Third would now only begin—and usually end—with medication and missiles."[24]

My point here is relatively simple: I take seriously that there were people who, in different locations and within different historical contingencies, took Maoism and Maoist China seriously. And that political

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choice, no matter how misguided it was, had momentous political and intellectual consequences. Taking Maoism seriously produced real effects for those who did. It shaped practices and debates; it framed organizational structures and conflicts—it was, in a word, a political discovery.

Also, the recognition of the existence of Maoist China was not something we should confine to the imagination of radicals in different countries; it was not, that is, just a mental projection with localized practical effects, a love at first sight that nonetheless produced dramatic changes in the loving one. Rather, that recognition—with all its misjudgments, its contradictions, its massive gaps—was based on the acknowledgment that people in Maoist China were dealing with issues and experimenting with practices that were globally significant and potentially valuable. In that, an analysis of global Maoism writ large might indeed tell us something about China under Mao—if not about the details and the specifics of those practices, at least about their political meaning, about how we approached them then and how we can try to understand them anew now.

The encounter with the Maoist experience—as a global event—defined the intellectual and political path of thinkers as diverse as Louis Althusser, Alain Badiou, and Jacques Rancière: I deploy their work in this book specifically to highlight the significance of the issues that were conjured under the name "China" in the 1960s and, perhaps, more importantly, to highlight how we can still make sense of that project today.

The World, Asia, and China

In this book, I then approach "global Maoism" as a political phenomenon that is valuable in itself—and not just by virtue of the openings its disappearance allowed.[25] I take, as my central and limited case study, a group of activists and radicals who tried to be at the same time also scholars of Asia (often specifically of China). By looking at the tensions produced by that choice, I intend to highlight two other issues that were central in the long sixties but whose relevance extends way beyond that chronological frame.

First, at the very basic level, like many other groups in many different locations, CCAS confronted the dilemma of integrating—in theory and practice—scholarship and activism, academic life and political militancy. Was it enough to be at the same time a detached expert in the classroom and a committed radical outside? How could one challenge the existing state of knowledge without simultaneously destroying the very methods

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of production of that knowledge—that is, without altering the practices that constituted the functioning of education and research? What were the implications of the attacks on existing power relations for teachers, students, and scholars? These and others were questions at the very foundation of the political configuration we call "the global sixties," and they echoed from Mexico to France, from Turin to Berkeley;[26] the importance of these issues can be viewed as both the reason behind and the effect of the centrality of students in the 1960s. But, in the case of CCAS, these questions acquired an added resonance precisely because "China" was both the name of their chosen area of specialization—the object of their knowledge production—and the name of the politics that authorized a rethinking of the modes of that production. The Cultural Revolution was, if nothing else, perhaps the most sweeping—and yes, at times violent—critique of the school system, including its formalized educational methods, the bureaucratized relationships between teachers and students, the separation between practice and learning, the persistence of intellectual privileges, and so on.[27] It was a critique based on the acknowledgment of the intelligence of the people, of the authority to think and speak of those who, up to that point, had not been recognized for the ability to think, and in that it presented a fundamental challenge to the position of the teacher, the scholar, the educator. And it was a critique that led to interesting, if often failed, experiments. As Sigrid Schmalzer's work on agricultural science shows, the push to be at the same time "red and expert" went beyond the simple rhetorical ploy of indoctrination, but produced specific practices of learning and distribution of knowledge.[28] That is why many students across Europe felt a kinship with the Chinese experiments in alternative forms of education and in their search for egalitarian forms of knowledge production.[29]

For the Concerned Asian Scholars, by virtue of their chosen area of study, that kinship with China and the echoes of the Maoist experiments with their own academic/political conundrum could only be felt even more strongly; as such, their case highlights the crucial elements of the political criticism of academia in the sixties, the challenge presented to intellectuals and scholars by the Maoist experiments, and the tensions produced in the attempts to combine scholarship and activism. These were problems that resonated globally at the time but that should also be vital for intellectuals and activists today, as universities are progres-

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sively subsumed under the neoliberal model, with emphasis placed on the function of research and professionalization "to the detriment of the transversal civic and political functions."[30] The question of the separation between the classroom—where we can teach Mao, Marx, or Badiou—and the social practices that dominate our lives, our students' lives, and, ultimately, our very modes of production and transmission of knowledge should still be at the center of our theory and practice. I propose that looking at how other people, decades ago, tried to act on that separation might help us think about it today.

That separation remained, however, unbreachable, as the Concerned Asian Scholars could not fully adopt a model that accepted or celebrated the "intelligence of the people." One of the reasons was that for many within CCAS, it was Americans' lack of knowledge about Asia—promoted by the active misleading of the U.S. government with the assistance of "politically neutral" established Asia scholars—that led directly to the carnage in Vietnam and U.S. policies in the continent. In response to their understanding of the situation, the Concerned tasked themselves primarily with producing more accurate knowledge about Asia and spreading it to "the American people" (via fact sheets, public lectures, and textbook evaluations) with the hope that "the people" would become aware of their misconceptions and act to stop their government. Yet this, in the end, remained very much the project of a scholarly elite teaching "the masses"—rather than the other way around—one that maintained the respective roles of the teacher and the taught.[31] Even if some of the CCASers took the Maoist example to its more far-reaching conclusions and were interested in dismantling the structure of social relationships that shaped academia, the production of knowledge, and the patterns of global dominance, this political push often remained subordinated to the pedagogical need to enlighten the people. That contradiction marked the history and the very existence of the Committee.

Second, CCAS articulated the tension between scholarship and politics within the field of Asian studies, and at a specific moment in the history of that field, but also in U.S. academia in general. Asian studies was constituted, like all area studies, in the immediate postwar, largely through direct government intervention. Money was funneled through private foundations (Ford first and foremost), and centers for the study of Asia were developed in specific universities (Harvard, Columbia, Berkeley, and

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the University of Washington). For all the exceptional scholars who taught or were formed in those centers, the field itself remained partially defined by the Cold War imperative to "know thy enemy." But, and perhaps more importantly, Asian studies carried other, deeper scars; immediately after its establishment, the field had also been one of the main targets of the McCarthy persecution. One of the very first rounds of attack on academics by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was precisely centered on the issue of "the loss of China" and directed against the scholar Owen Lattimore and the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR).[32] The McCarthy purges had a huge effect on Asian studies, dividing loyalties (with eminent China scholar Karl Wittfogel accusing Lattimore),[33] impacting individual lives, but more than anything silencing—directly or indirectly—an entire generation of scholars, who got used to censoring their own work, especially as it related to contemporary issues. As Ellen Schrecker has argued, there is "considerable speculation that the devastating effects of the IPR hearings on the field of EAS [East Asian studies] made it hard for American policy-makers to get realistic advice about that part of the world."[34] In this, Asian studies is an example of a larger phenomenon, what David Price, in his study on the field of anthropology, calls "the specter of McCarthyism." That specter, Price shows, limited the questions scholars asked and answered; it led them to willfully ignore the connection between the theories they created and "American Cold War policies of dominance and dependency."[35] By the late 1950s, the decline of hearings and firing was due not so much to a calming down of persecution but to the self-imposed quieting down of academics.[36]

The CCAS generation was the first post-McCarthy generation and the one that witnessed—and lived—the effects of that silencing in the connection between academic acquiescence (or, in some cases, vocal support) and the disastrous U.S. policies in East Asia. Their criticism addressed precisely those effects in their complex institutional, political, and intellectual ramifications. Moreover, that criticism came also at a specific moment in the history of many of the disciplines (history, anthropology, literary criticism) that had been channeled into the awkward conglomerates of area studies. By the 1970s, for example in history, in large part as a function of the political critique of the 1960s, social history emerged as the new approach, legitimizing a view that incorporated the voices and stories of "ordinary people" and that often reverted to a language

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of class. Yet by the 1980s, we see the beginning of another shift, with the introduction of cultural history, gender studies, and eventually the reception of Said's *Orientalism* and the broader phenomenon of "French Theory."[37] The experience of CCAS is chronologically and intellectually framed within these two large shifts in the intellectual episteme; then, through an analysis of this experience, we can also trace how politics influenced the transformation of the academic discourse—as well as the limits of that transformation.

The arch of CCAS history also coincided with a very concrete change in U.S. academia, from the seeming abundance of employment and funding opportunities of the 1960s to the rapidly shrinking job market of the 1970s. As we live today in a period of acute crisis similar to (if not more profound than) that of the 1970s, this parable also hints at the practical conditions and limitations for activism in academia.

This book is not meant in any way to be an exhaustive history of Asian studies in the United States, nor do I dwell much on the construction of area studies other than as reflected in criticism of CCAS. Rather, I aim at discovering the opportunities for thought, interpretation, and action that the particular political situation of the 1960s opened—specifically under the name of "China." I describe how those possibilities were largely foreclosed by the 1980s, but I also question the connections—at a scholarly and political level—between the intellectual perspectives opened during the long sixties, as presented by CCAS, and those that developed with the introduction of new theoretical frameworks after the 1980s. And these connections are often unclear and always contested.

Finally, while I do not use Chinese sources nor really deal with Chinese actors directly, this book claims to say something about China. This is in part because even today, in a completely different political, intellectual, and practical situation, it seems to me that some of the questions that animated the experience of global Maoism and CCAS still stand. For example, can we really make sense of the Cultural Revolution without taking seriously the criticism of the party-state or the Maoist promises of radical equality? Can we think of the history of China and Asia within the framework of expanding imperialism? How do we know China? How is our knowledge shaped by the lingering understanding of China as a "field" to be visited and mined for resources? Why and how should we write about China, and specifically Maoist China? What are the connections between

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political understanding and scholarly knowledge? The scholars and activists that I describe in this book struggled endlessly with these questions. To even those who could visit China, and perhaps especially to them, it remained multiple and elusive. When the Maoist project was terminated, many among them wondered whether it made sense to keep writing about a China now subtracted from the shared understanding of the long sixties and reduced to another a political-territorial-cultural entity, fully inserted in the path of capitalist development. More recently, we have seen the development of a renewed, and often excellent, scholarly production on the PRC, at times grouped under the label "new PRC history."[38] This is a valuable enterprise, and one to which I contribute myself, but it is also largely based on the recent availability of archival material on the post-1949 years—an availability that, alas, seems now to be progressively diminishing due to government restrictions. This book then also asks what a generation with no access to archives—but with excellent questions—can teach a generation with a (temporary) abundance of sources.

Subjective Positions

All books, even scholarly books, are personal for their authors insofar that, behind the sometimes stiff and controlled academic prose, they carry the weight of days at a desk, dust of the archives, too-often neglected spouses and children, long periods of self-doubt, and the little joys of a sentence well crafted or a problem finally clarified. Yet this book is especially personal, and in more than one sense.

As a scholar, I have almost always written about people who were either long dead or far away in space and time. This project took me for the first time close to people who are not only alive, but also often still active in my own discipline; and, in one case, people who passed away during the time I was writing. With some of these people, I developed cordial, collegial relationships. With one of them, the retelling of the past led to mutual respect and a true friendship, and now to the mourning of a loss.

This is nothing new to anybody who has been even marginally involved in oral history, and if it were just a question of personal experience, it would probably not be worth mentioning. Even if, in the period I investigate, the personal was indeed claimed to be political, I feel confident that, following Michel Foucault, I too could "make of a personal question

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the absence of a problem" and leave my personal experience unspoken.[39] However, as I mentioned in the beginning, this book (like all historical works, in a sense) measures the distance—and the proximity—between intellectual and political subjectivities, then and now. And I think it is necessary to clarify the subjective positions involved.

There has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in the sixties in recent years. New monographic studies have refocused our attention on groups, organizations, phenomena, and specific figures, mainly in the United States and Europe, but often with an unprecedented attention for global connections.[40] A new journal, devoted explicitly to the history, politics, and culture of the sixties, has been published since 2008.[41] Why this renewed attention? While most of the new scholarship on the subject is indeed excellent and at times groundbreaking, there is always the nagging suspicion that, when one talks about that era, nostalgia lurks in the shadows: nostalgia for political postures now largely impossible, for organizational forms long gone, for global networks seemingly lost. And this applies even to people of my generation (I was born close to the end of the 1960s), who feel nostalgic for things never lived, but rather seen on TV or in movies, or narrated by an older cohort.[42] In this book, I programmatically look at that period with the opposite of nostalgia. I argue instead that we should approach the sixties, and specifically the global sixties, not out of regret for good things gone, but as a way to reflect on the possibilities—in the here and now—for alternative politics and new intellectual concerns. I search, in that moment of high organizational and creative intensity, for undeveloped opportunities, failed attempts, intellectual openings, and political inventions. Not to repeat or recycle the subjective positions of the past, but to think with them in the subjective and objective contingencies of the present.

The End of Concern is also—while not primarily—a history of a moment within Asian studies in the United States, a field with which I have some intellectual and political qualms, but within which I have worked for almost two decades. It traces the history behind some of the intellectual, scholarly, and academic conditions in which my colleagues and I operate today. As such, throughout this project, I have been wary of the danger of writing a "navel gazing" story, an insider's probe into debates that have little interest for people who do not share the same academic affiliations within the American university system. Yet, as I have argued

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in the rest of this introduction, and as the rest of this volume will hopefully prove, this analysis—while centered on a relatively restricted group of young scholars in a specific academic setting—relates to larger issues, including the global politics of the sixties, the meaning of "Maoism," and the connections between learning and activism. In the end, the details of organizational debates or of the academic confrontations between students and teachers in the 1960s and 1970s seem interesting to me not only and not so much if they speak to the evolution of a field of study, but if they address questions that still remain problematic today, within and without the classroom, within and without the confines of academia.

Finally, I have tried to respect the subjective positions of my actors—and my own—in the way I wrote the following pages. It has been my good fortune that the Concerned Asian Scholars were very prolific in their written production, both as part of organizational practice and in their correspondences as friends, colleagues, and fellow activists.[43] A large collection of documents is preserved at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. In addition, Saundra Sturdevant and Joe Moore were incredibly generous and handed me their personal archives (they are now with the rest of the CCAS documents in Wisconsin). All this material conveys, in a fragmentary but vibrant manner, the voices of many of these young scholars at the time. These are voices rarely subdued, especially in their internal correspondence: the fights were contentious, the arguments loud, the passion and the despair equally high, the intensity at times overwhelming. These are voices that I found difficult to tame within my own narrative and even more difficult to juxtapose—let alone reconcile—with the more cautious, wise, and pensive reflections that came out of the interviews I conducted with former CAS in recent years. In the end, I decided to let these voices speak for themselves as much as possible; if there was a statement that could be made by reporting a direct quote, I did so, even at the risk of producing unresolved cacophonies. Next to those voices I placed my own, with the goal of providing context, highlighting similarities, and, more importantly, inserting the details in a larger theoretical framework. As always, while I tried very hard to be fair to those actors, I have probably made them say things they would not have said at the time and that they would not definitively say now. Like all writers, I constructed a narrative and an argument with their voices, but it is my narrative, my argument.

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This is a narrative that might sound, at times, critical, but that comes from a position of sympathy—in the original Greek sense of "feeling together." It comes from the recognition of a common, if differently situated, search. I argue in this book that global Maoism was based on the acknowledgment of Asian people as subjects, geographically distant but politically close; likewise, this work started from the recognition of political and intellectual subjectivities in the not-so-distant past, from which there is both distance and closeness. As probing as it can be, my perspective into the history of CCAS and global Maoism is, as Roland Barthes wrote about his own gazing at China, a "sideways view."

Characters

Many of the names that crowd the pages of this book will be unfamiliar to any reader who does not have intimate knowledge of the field of Asian studies. And yet they include people who provided (and are still providing) crucial contributions to the knowledge of Asia in the United States—in terms of teaching, research, training, and public advocacy. Instead of breaking the narration every time a new character appears—or adding extensive footnotes—I thought I could provide here some minimal background notes for *some* of these figures.

First, the man who was identified by CCAS—not mistakenly—as the very embodiment of (Modern) Chinese studies in the United States, John King Fairbank. Fairbank, a Missouri native, had studied in England and at Harvard, sojourned in China before and during World War II, and then spent the following decades building what would soon become the largest program in Chinese studies in the country, at Harvard University. It is impossible to overestimate the influence Fairbank has had on our understanding of Modern China, an influence that was expressed not so much through his research, but through his teaching and organizational skills: his many textbooks are still printed and used in classrooms to this day, and his students have been prominent in at least two generations of Modern China specialists. The Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard proudly carries his name.

Unsurprisingly, many Harvard grad students were among the founding and early members of CCAS. Marilyn Young was pursuing a PhD in U.S. and Chinese history, and she would go on to teach at Michigan and then at NYU and to publish widely on the Vietnam War and U.S.-Asia relation-

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ships. James Peck did not finish his PhD at the time, leaving Harvard for a career in publishing at Pantheon, where he shepherded many notable books on Asia and China; he eventually got his doctorate at NYU and authored two excellent books on U.S. imperialism. John Dower got his degree at Harvard and became one of the leading historians of Modern Japan, teaching at MIT until his recent retirement. Herbert Bix, also a Japan specialist and a Harvard PhD, was a founding member of CCAS; his biography of Emperor Hirohito won the Pulitzer Prize in 2001.

Mark Selden, another one of the founders of CCAS, had received his PhD from Yale; he taught for years at SUNY Binghamton and published the seminal book on the Yan'an period, twice revising it in light of new evidence in the post-Mao period. Selden is also one of the few scholars who has constantly worked on both China and Japan, and he has devoted a large part of his career to helping younger colleagues in publishing. Moss Roberts and Bruce Cumings received their degrees from Columbia University, the former in Early Chinese literature, the latter in Modern Korean history. Roberts is a well-respected translator and literature scholar (at NYU), and Cumings is probably the leading historian of Korea in the United States, teaching at Chicago.

Joseph Esherick was studying at Berkeley at the time of CCAS's inception. He went on to shape, with Paul Pickowicz (a member of the first CCAS delegation to the PRC), one of the most successful programs for Modern Chinese history at the University of California–San Diego. John Berninghausen was a Berkeley graduate too, specializing in Chinese literature and language. He molded and led Middlebury College's famed Chinese language program for over thirty years. Orville Schell completed all but his PhD dissertation at Berkeley; he cofounded (with his teacher Franz Schurmann) Pacific News Service and later became a famous writer and journalist. He served as dean of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism and is now the Arthur Ross Director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations of the Asia Society.

Structure of the Book

The volume is not organized in a chronological fashion, in part because the period covered is relatively short but also because I found it more useful to devote chapters to specific themes.

Chapter 1, "America's Asia," describes the founding of CCAS in 1968

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in Philadelphia and follows the first few years of the organization, paying particular attention to the intellectual and scholarly debates that the committee waged with the main figures of the field at the time (John K. Fairbank above all). I trace the connection between political concern and scholarly production, and I illustrate how CCAS's understanding of the "new things" happening in Asia—and specifically in China—was crucial (but ultimately insufficient) in defining a novel theoretical and scholarly approach. Through a comparison with the role of "China" for some groups of French Maoists, I illustrate how "global Maoism" was the name given to a series of political practices and intellectual attitudes that, while similar and connected to the Chinese experience, were also specifically situated.

To take Maoist China seriously could not but imply a rethinking of the very position of the scholar as an intellectual and political being. The Cultural Revolution had shown that it was impossible to be an intellectual in one's office or classroom and an activist in the streets; politics had to permeate and alter the very fabric of daily life, the structure of the professions, the framing of one's intellectual activity. Chapter 2, "To Be, or Not to Be, a Scholar," examines how the Concerned Asian Scholars strove to integrate their intellectual and political lives, scholarship and activism. I analyze their struggle to be political within academia (in particular, their challenge to the funding of the field), but also their continuous wrangling over the different temporalities of cultural production and activism. It is not surprising that by the mid-1970s, many within CCAS had found this tension insolvable, and they left or were forced to leave academia; some did not get tenure, some did not find a university job, and others simply moved to other ventures. Once again, the French Maoists—who tried repeatedly to breach the separation between manual and intellectual labor—provide a comparative and theoretical perspective.

Chapter 3, "Seeing and Understanding: China as the Place of Desire," deals specifically with the issue of closeness and distance from China. In the summer of 1971, before the Nixon rapprochement, CCAS was the first scholarly organization to be admitted to visit the PRC. A second delegation was invited to China the following year, and both groups met with Zhou Enlai and members of the "Gang of Four." The China trips had very practical effects for the organization, as they shifted the priorities of CCAS toward an almost exclusive focus on the PRC, thus creating massive rifts in the group. But also, and perhaps more significantly, by going to China,

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CCAS delegates found themselves in the position of other "fellow travelers," caught in the tension between the desire to understand Chinese socialism politically and the need to explain Chinese realities academically, between friendship and investigation. This tension had huge consequences for the very unity of the Committee, and it is still reflected today in the conflicting memories of those first visits.

The last chapter, "Facing Thermidor: Global Maoism at Its End," follows the dissolution of the Committee in 1979, but also traces the intellectual and political debate within the editorial board of the *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* leading to the publication of two special issues on post-Mao China in 1981. Specifically I look at how two concepts, "class" and "culture," that had framed the understanding of the Cultural Revolution in the previous years became completely obscure or irrelevant in the early Deng era. The China scholars at the *Bulletin* found themselves in a difficult position as the new Chinese regime dismantled and denied much of the experiment CCAS had supported while simultaneously dismissing the concepts scholars could employ to analyze these shifts. The denial of the Cultural Revolution in the post-Mao era was reflected and refracted in the organizational crisis of CCAS but also in the starkly divergent paths that opened to (or were chosen by) the former Concerned Scholars. This divergence was framed, at the time and afterward, as one between career and commitment, but it was ultimately a crisis—and a choice—over the political confines of the militancy of intellectuals and scholars. Jacques Rancière's analysis of his own experience as a Maoist helps highlight these issues.

The epilogue offers an analysis of the major changes in the field of Asian studies in the 1980s and 1990s and of the role of CCAS in creating the conditions for those changes. In particular, I follow the emergence of more explicitly theoretical approaches and the recovery of a different legacy of the Maoist period. Some former concerned scholars positioned themselves against these shifts in the field, even when they seemed to be congruous with their own past enterprise.

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