The Chinese Cultural Revolution Revisited

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This paper intends to construct a framework of understanding the Cultural Revolution and the complexities of such an event on the basis of historically novel forms of political, social and ideological relations. It brings the Cultural Revolution back in a good light so as to show its immense, autonomous historical importance as well as its continuing relevance. It studies and establishes the relationship between Mao’s political and ideological discourse manifested and practised in the Cultural Revolution and the transformation of China’s political economy in the present era. It concludes that the theoretical and practical problematics which the Cultural Revolution struggled to resolve can transcend space and time and continue to yield to our reading in a new light.

Introduction

Never before in history has Chinese society been so radically transformed in so short a time. In the second half of the last century we have seen the development and transformation of “two contrasting Chinas”: firstly, a Maoist China that took a socialist development strategy characterized by cooperative and state (public) ownership, control of the means of production, and state planning of the economy. Secondly, a market-oriented China that has adopted a form of state capitalism and opened up to the international market. The Cultural Revolution was a reaction to this radical transformation of Chinese society. It was a response to the political, social and ideological changes that took place in China in the second half of the last century. It was a response to the challenges posed by the rapid transformation of Chinese society and the difficulties encountered in the process of socialist development.

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