

Editor's Introduction: Neoculturalist Perspectives on Communist Party Power and Legitimacy in Elizabeth J. Perry's *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*

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How have revolutionary culture and revolutionary tradition contributed to the longevity of Chinese Communist Party rule? How does Mao Zedong-centered official ideology, as political religion, continue to burnish the Communist Party's image as the creator of "New China," a strong and dynamic country now seemingly on the cusp of earth-shaking rejuvenation? Elizabeth J. Perry's *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition* addresses these questions, and many more, through a detailed exploration of China's revolutionary process from its beginning to the present, focusing on the relationship of Communist Party elites to the Anyuan mining area—initially a product of Qing dynasty industrialization and self-strengthening efforts, now a symbol of revolutionary leadership over China's early twentieth-century labor movement. This important book builds on previous scholarship concerning the relationship between cultural symbols and revolutionary mobilization, two subjects that in 1992 Perry notably joined and reimagined for the China field by introducing the concept of "neoculturalism," which defined political culture as an arena of state and social contestation rather than a static, determinative category existing outside of history.¹ *Anyuan* represents arguably the most fully realized articulation of the neoculturalist vision to date, by Perry or any scholar; as such, it represents a significant contribution to the history of China after 1949 and, therefore, a departure point for further discussion by those working in the PRC history field. For these reasons we have chosen *Anyuan* as the focus of this issue of *The PRC History Review*.

Reviews of *Anyuan* situate the book in a range of historiographic contexts, a testimony to the book's breadth of research and intellectual ambition. All concur that Perry has provided one of the more detailed accounts of the cultural dimensions of the Communist revolution yet written, while at the same time connecting this narrative to real events and personalities at the local and elite political levels. Henrietta Harrison praises Perry's ability to "[hold] the national construction of Anyuan's history in constant tensions with local events," calling the book's later discussion of post-1949 cultural positioning and patronage "a real model for historians of reading primary and other sources with careful attention to the politics of their production." Denise Y. Ho writes that Perry "shows how China's experience differed from the Russian model" by examining relationships between labor and

"revolution, history and political legitimacy, and the origins of today's nostalgia for the Mao years." Brian DeMare observes that the locally focused chapters of Perry's study, refreshingly free of "the traditional Mao-heavy narrative that dominates most histories of the Chinese Communist Party," succeed in completely overturning the long-held assumption that Party intellectuals sought to rusticate themselves in order to "become one with the peasant masses." In addition, all three reviews draw attention to the shift from cultural to martial (*wu*) mobilization that Perry argues defined Communist Party policy in rural settings following the 1927 anti-Communist "white terror" unleashed by Chiang Kai-shek amidst the Northern Expedition.

For Perry, Communist Party cultural strategies took two main forms: cultural positioning and cultural patronage. Through cultural positioning, Party intellectuals used their education and social status to buttress claims for leadership over what were previously proletarian-led movements. Using cultural patronage, members of the post-1949 elite sought to re-deploy memories of the Anyuan experience in the service of both personal and Party political legitimacy. The other reviews in this issue pay particular attention to the post-1949 dimensions of official memory concerning Anyuan, and the role played by historical consciousness in fostering a supportive environment for Communist Party rule. Marc Matten highlights how Anyuan, as a "symbolic center of CCP policies," provides a powerful and early example of contemporary Party efforts to create sites of "patriotic place" which revive "nostalgic memories of the past" for visitors. Fabio Lanza explores the implications of Perry's methodology for understanding more thoroughly how workers and labor movements have, through the "long transformation" of revolution, been incorporated both structurally and representationally into the Communist Party-led state. Klaus Mühlhahn provides a wide-ranging analysis of Perry's contributions to the scholarship of revolution and of how this "important, impressive, and stimulating study" connects China's revolutionary past to its post-revolutionary present, taking Anyuan as a case study for understanding the creation and legitimizing effects of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

As these reviewers note, *Anyuan* raises questions as well. Was the timing of the shift from *wen*/literary to *wu*/martial revolution-making uniform throughout China during the

1920s? What role did Mao Zedong play in directing cultural patronage within the Communist Party? What did people, and particularly Anyuan's miners, think about the cultural symbols which Mao, Liu Shaoqi, Li Lisan, and others devised in order to draw them into the Communist-led labor movement? How should we understand the role of intellectuals in the Party's history? What was labor's material role in legitimizing post-1949 Party rule through economic production, and how did conditions change for workers along with the construction of what it meant to be a "worker," or laborer, within Chinese society? How unique was China's revolution when placed in a global and comparative context? Finally, and most significantly, has there ever been a moment in China's revolutionary history when cultural approaches to mobilization have truly taken precedence over those characterized by force and repression of individual agendas and rights in the name of "revolution"?

Perry's response to the reviews, "Reflecting on Anyuan," addresses many of these questions head-on, and the essay itself will undoubtedly be of great value to those seeking to further think through the meaning of "revolutionary tradition" in *Anyuan* as well as the concept's broader historiographical implications. Concerning the field of PRC history (in its Chinese context, *dang shi* or *dangdai shi*), the response leaves readers with three important lessons concerning where future study of China's revolution might benefit from a more expanded sense of intellectual engagement. The first lesson concerns scholarly bridge-building: work on the history of the Chinese Communist Party and People's Republic of China is being produced around the world and in myriad national contexts, and facilitating exchange between researchers—particularly between those inside and outside of China—is of the utmost importance to advancement of this field. The second concerns appreciation for the origins of PRC history outside of China: while much of the earliest scholarly work on the PRC was produced by social scientists, historians can learn much from the empirical and analytic insights which these studies provide. (By extension, one might add: direct engagement with their ideas will represent a crucial step toward defining the contributions of historians within the wider context of Chinese and area studies). The final lesson, though perhaps less directly described as such, concerns the importance of concepts such as "revolutionary tradition," "cultural governance," and other contributions of neoculturalist scholarship to study of the Chinese Communist Party's revolution and rule. For, as Perry urges us to consider, while violence and violent strife have proven instrumental to Communist Party governance at critical moments, so has the casting of movements as "religious crusades" also proven effective in symbolically uniting leaders and led. *Anyuan*, like much of Perry's previous work, thus contributes to a growing literature on the rich repertoires of governance and of counter-governance—that is to say, of oppositional social movements as well as political mass movements of the Maoist type—which become evident in China's history only when we begin to explore areas beyond the well-traveled narrative pathway of state oppression and violence.

¹ Elizabeth J. Perry, "Introduction: Chinese Political Culture Revisited," *Popular Protest & Political Culture in Modern China*, ed. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom and Elizabeth J. Perry, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 1-14.