
Rebellion of the Cadres: The 1967 Implosion of the Chinese Party-State

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ABSTRACT

Accounts of the tumultuous initial phase of the Cultural Revolution portray party-state cadres primarily as targets of a popular insurgency. Cadres in Party and government organs in fact were themselves in widespread rebellion against their superiors after October 1966, and rebel cadres were a major force in the national wave of power seizures that destroyed the civilian state in early 1967. The rebellion was a form of bureaucratic politics in a setting characterized by rapidly shifting signals and high uncertainty, in which the rebels' motives were generated after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. Cadres played a central role in the destruction of the political institutions to which their vested interests were inextricably linked.

The Cultural Revolution initially impressed scholars as a window on inequality and group conflict in a type of society long characterized as totalitarian. Observers immediately noted evidence that a series of social constituencies mobilized to advance their claims.¹ Sent-down youth, contract and temporary workers, students from politically stigmatized households, demobilized soldiers, and other groups organized to press their interests and make demands against Party authorities.² Mass insurgencies that seemed to reflect underlying group tensions

* The author gratefully acknowledges the substantive and editorial suggestions of the editors, Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger, and the critical comments of two reviewers. National Science Foundation Grant SBS-1021134, "Political Movements in an Authoritarian Hierarchy," supported some of the research reported in this article.

1. Michel Oksenberg, "Occupational Groups in Chinese Society and the Cultural Revolution," and Ezra F. Vogel, "The Structure of Conflict: China in 1967," both in *The Cultural Revolution: 1967 in Review*, ed. Michel Oksenberg, Carl Riskin, Robert A. Scalapino, and Ezra F. Vogel (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1968), 1–44, and 97–125; and Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

2. A few of the early works in this vein are D. Gordon White, "The Politics of Hsia-hsiang Youth," *China Quarterly*, no. 59 (July–September 1974): 491–517; Hong Yung Lee, "The Radical Students in Kwangtung during the Cultural Revolution," *China Quarterly*, no. 64 (December 1975): 645–83; Lynn T. White III, "Workers' Politics in Shanghai," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (November 1976): 99–116; Gordon White, *The Politics of Class and Class Origin: The Case of the Cultural Revolution* (Canberra: Contemporary China Centre, Australian National University, 1976); Anita Chan, Stanley Rosen, and Jonathan Unger, "Students and Class Warfare: The Social Roots of the Red Guard Conflict in Guangzhou (Canton)," *China Quarterly*, no. 83

persisted for almost two years.³ Given the large scale of the popular insurgency, the collapse of the civilian party-state did not seem puzzling. Accounts of mass movements in major cities like Shanghai portrayed large and aggressive insurgencies, first by high school and university students, later by industrial workers, that paralyzed local power structures with invasions of government offices, struggle sessions, and finally a wave of “power seizures.”⁴ The student insurgency began in August 1966, but the mobilization of rebel workers in large cities in late November quickly threw them into disarray. The first overthrow of a province-level jurisdiction was in Shanghai on January 6, 1967, and within days it gained the clear approval of Mao.⁵ There followed a series of power seizures in provincial capitals. Over the next three weeks another 24 province-level governments were overthrown.⁶

These events fit well with models of contentious politics that became prevalent in the late 1970s. These models viewed political contention as attempts by subordinate groups to assert their place in a political order, challenge the state, and pursue interests in ways previously denied them. The crucial elements for effective challenges, according to this analysis, was the capacity of groups to organize, mobilize resources, take advantage of new political opportunities, and overcome government repression.⁷ China appeared to have all of these elements. Insurgents were encouraged by Mao, the country’s supreme leader, through the mass media. Student and worker insurgents were encouraged to establish independent organizations and their own publications. They were permitted to travel between cities free of charge, and they received financial and material support. Perhaps most importantly, the state’s formidable capacity for repression was immobilized by central directives in late August 1966 that forbade the army and public secu-

(September 1980): 397–446; and Gordon White, “The Politics of Demobilized Soldiers from Liberation to Cultural Revolution,” *China Quarterly*, no. 82 (June 1980): 187–213.

3. Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

4. Andrew G. Walder, *Chang Ch’un-ch’iao and Shanghai’s January Revolution* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, 1978); Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, “Nanjing’s Failed ‘January Revolution’ of 1967: The Inner Politics of a Provincial Power Seizure,” *China Quarterly*, no. 203 (September 2010): 675–92; Keith Forster, *Rebellion and Factionalism in a Chinese Province: Zhejiang, 1966–1976* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1980); Shaoguang Wang, *Failure of Charisma: The Cultural Revolution in Wuhan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

5. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 166–69; Elizabeth J. Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

6. Bu Weihua, *Zalan jiu shijie: Wenhua da geming de dongluan yu haojie, 1966–1968* [Smashing the old world: The catastrophic turmoil of the Cultural Revolution, 1966–1968] (Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 2008), 383–428.

7. John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212–41; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978); and Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

rity organs from interfering in rebel activities. One could hardly imagine a more obvious case of society versus the state, of a popular movement that overthrew a formidable party-state from below.

CONTRARY EVIDENCE

Recent research has repeatedly uncovered hints that something important is missing from this account. When university rebels attempted to seize power in the city of Beijing, they found that the staff of each government agency was already divided into competing rebel factions. The inability of student rebels to agree on which faction of rebel bureaucrats to support was a major reason why their attempt to seize power in Beijing ended in confusion.⁸ Narrative accounts of provincial and municipal power seizures commonly describe worker or student factions arriving at a government agency to declare a power seizure after forming an alliance with an internal rebel faction of cadres in that agency. Power seizures in provinces and cities commonly included a rebel faction made up of Party and government functionaries referred to as *jiguan zaofanpai* (机关造反派).⁹

Additional clues emerged in the course of my informal conversations about the local Cultural Revolution with retired cadres in a rural county. After interviewing half a dozen formerly prominent officials, all of whom were young cadres in the county seat in the 1960s, it was clear that county cadres were very active and deeply divided into factions. When I asked about the role of student rebels, they pointed out that there were no local universities, and there were only a few hundred high school students, who were largely absent on excursions elsewhere in the fall and early winter of 1966. The county had almost no industry and very few workers who might fuel an insurgency. Yet there was a power seizure in this county in early 1967, and cadres were divided into factions that persisted into the 1970s.

Other evidence is less impressionistic and brings these clues into sharp focus. A database of local events from 1966 to 1971 in a nearly complete sample of 2,213 city and county jurisdictions provides an overview of the nationwide spread of power seizures.¹⁰ It reveals a pattern very different from what we would expect

8. Andrew G. Walder, *Fractured Rebellion: The Beijing Red Guard Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 205–7.

9. Dong Guoqiang and Andrew G. Walder, “Local Politics in the Chinese Cultural Revolution: Nanjing under Military Control,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 2 (2011): 428–30.

10. The data set is described in Andrew G. Walder, “Rebellion and Repression in China, 1966–1971,” *Social Science History* 38, nos. 3–4 (2014): 513–39. It contains data on all provincial units except Tibet, all cities, and all but eight county-level jurisdictions (counties, autonomous counties, banners, forestry districts, etc.). A preliminary and incomplete version of this database was used for an earlier investigation of the impact of the Cultural Revolution in rural areas: Andrew G. Walder and Yang Su, “The Cultural Revolution in the Countryside: Scope, Timing, and Human Impact,” *China Quarterly*, no. 173 (March 2003): 82–107.

if they were a culmination of popular mobilization. Power seizures spread too far and too fast to be the outcome of close to two thousand local student and worker insurgencies. Local annals from 1,799 jurisdictions (81.3 percent) describe power seizures in early 1967, and half of these power seizures occurred by the end of January, only nine days after a January 22 *People's Daily* editorial that urged rebels across China to seize power.

Despite China's vast size, power seizures spread with lightning speed. The median date for power seizures in prefecture-level cities was January 23; for county-level cities, January 24; and for rural counties, January 27. They spread far and fast across rural regions despite the near absence of the student and worker populations that fueled insurgencies in the large cities. Almost half of the rural counties (47.7 percent) had power seizures by the end of January, and more than three-quarters (76.5 percent) had power seizures by the end of March. These occurred even though only 8.6 percent of county populations lived in urban areas (versus 62 and 70 percent in county- and district-level cities, respectively), and only 2.4 percent had salaried jobs outside of agriculture (versus 18 and 25 percent in county- and district-level cities).¹¹

This rapid spread of power seizures, even into remote rural counties, is consistent with accounts that describe cadres rebelling against their superiors. If the cadre rebels so often mentioned in accounts from large cities were also common in small cities and rural counties, this raises an intriguing possibility—namely, that China's party-state collapsed so quickly and thoroughly in early 1967 because of a widespread rebellion by cadres within the organs of the party-state. Party secretaries and heads of local governments were undoubtedly put on the defensive by street protests, but if their own staffs were in open rebellion against them, they were already effectively overthrown. The only question then would be who would lay claim to the mantle of power.

If true, this presents a new puzzle. How can we explain widespread rebellions by cadres occurring nearly simultaneously across such a vast nation? Why would party-state functionaries, presumably the most privileged group in China and with the strongest vested interests in the status quo, fuel a rebellion that destroyed their party and government? This is especially puzzling if we understand power seizures as an opportunity for disaffected subordinate groups to pursue grievances. We need to consider a new explanation for the rapid collapse of the civilian party-state in early 1967.

CADRES AND THE BUREAUCRATIC HIERARCHY

On the eve of the Cultural Revolution in 1965 there were 9.3 million government employees classified officially as “cadres” (*ganbu*) who worked in Party and gov-

11. These figures are calculated from the data set described in Walder, “Rebellion and Repression in China.”

ernment agencies, state enterprises, and public institutions (this number excludes elementary and secondary school teachers). We are interested in the activities of a subset of this group: 2.4 million functionaries in Party and government organs (党政机关). They worked in offices that administered political jurisdictions from the capital in Beijing down through 29 provinces, autonomous regions, and province-level cities; 252 prefectures; 172 prefecture- and county-level cities; and 2,040 rural counties. In this national hierarchy political power was concentrated in the Communist Party system. Party committees controlled each government jurisdiction, and they employed a total of 142,000 cadres nationwide and another 147,000 in offices under the Communist Youth League.¹² The remaining 2.1 million cadres staffed government agencies, and some 1.8 million of them were Party members who were organized into 4,400 Party committees, 6,969 general Party branches, and 117,230 basic-level Party branches. With the rate of Party membership among government cadres well over 80 percent, these cadres were far more tightly integrated into the Party system than any other group.¹³

Cadres were distributed widely across China. As the nerve center of the Chinese party-state, they were prominent in virtually every jurisdiction. In fact, the weight of salaried government personnel in the nonagricultural labor force was much higher in rural counties than in cities. Cadres made up on average only 11 percent of the salaried labor force in cities but 47 percent in counties.¹⁴ Unlike students, workers, and farmers, all of them were directly integrated into the national political hierarchy. No other group was more attentive to political impulses emanating from Beijing, and no other group was so rapidly and directly affected by shifts in Party policy.

Cadres worked in a closed bureaucratic system. More than any other group, their careers depended on paying close attention to signals of shifts in national politics, and this was intensified during political campaigns that exposed the cadres to higher levels of risk than other occupational groups. For them there was no alternative career path and no palatable exit option. Unlike in contemporary China, there was no opportunity for the cadres to leave a government job to enter into private business. There was no option to go abroad. There was no system of voluntary transfers between regions or offices. Living standards and privileges

12. The cadre statistics are from *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao* [Organizational history of the Communist Party of China], 19 vols. (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2000), 16:1331, 1335–40. The data on government jurisdictions are based on *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo xingzheng qufen (1949–1997)* [Administrative jurisdictions of the People's Republic of China (1949–1997)] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998), 2210.

13. *Zhongguo gongchandang zuzhishi ziliao*, vol. 12, app., tables 1–2. The estimate for Party membership among government staff assumes an average of 15 members per basic-level Party branch, a number derived by dividing the total number of Party members nationwide in 1965 (18.7 million) by the national total of Party branches (1.24 million).

14. Calculated from the data set employed in Walder, "Rebellion and Repression in China."

were allotted in accordance with one's official rank. These privileges were intact only so long as one remained in good standing in the organization.

The behavior of cadres was also monitored more closely than any other group. They attended more political meetings, and they studied newspapers, documents, and directives more frequently and attentively.¹⁵ Exit from such a career was almost always involuntary, due to the commission of a political error or punishment during a Party rectification campaign. The direct connection between one's political status and life chances meant that cadres, more than any other group, had to be very attentive to shifts in the Party line or changes in the political atmosphere. This also meant that political campaigns affected cadres more quickly and more immediately than others.

We commonly treat officials in centralized dictatorships as instruments used by rulers to repress ordinary citizens and consider these officials to be a group that enjoys certain privileges. To be sure, China's cadres had a vested interest in keeping their positions, but they were also highly vulnerable to punishment and purge. The dictatorship could be harsh toward the population, but the Party organization could also be very harsh in its effort to root out cadre deviance and enforce internal discipline. The ever-present prospect of punishment lent the Mao-era Party high levels of discipline, but under certain circumstances, paradoxically, it also made the cadres highly vulnerable to mutual recrimination and conflict. Our challenge is to explain why a group that benefited more from China's political status quo than any other group engaged in political behavior that accelerated its collapse.

SOURCES OF CADRE REBELLION

Before the Cultural Revolution, state organs contained personal rivalries and antagonisms common to bureaucratic organizations everywhere. Scholarship on China has long emphasized the divisions between old revolutionaries and post-1949 Party members, the differences between "reds" and "experts," and the tensions between local cadres (with guerilla and urban underground experience) and those who arrived with the People's Liberation Army in its campaign of military conquest.¹⁶ There were, in addition, significant minorities among serving cadres who had been attacked, demoted, or sanctioned in prior political campaigns and who had good reason to harbor resentments and to look for opportunities for

15. See Martin K. Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

16. For example, James Z. Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949–1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism*, Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

a comeback. It is tempting to think of these preexisting antagonisms as the primary source of internal rebellions within the party-state bureaucracy—the Cultural Revolution surely provided an opportunity for a disgruntled minority to act on these antagonisms.

The weight of the evidence, as we shall see, suggests that the rebellion by bureaucrats went far beyond disgruntled minorities and grew large through two different processes generated after the onset of the Cultural Revolution. The first is the small number of individuals who were attacked in the first months of the Cultural Revolution, when local officials directed the campaign. This gave the attacked cadres an urgent new motive to reverse the damaging verdicts passed upon them and to rebel against superiors who were responsible for them. Even more consequential, however, was the widespread defection of large groups of cadres who actively cooperated with their superiors and vigorously defended them for several months but then moved to the opposition in large numbers and joined in attacks on their superiors after October 1966. The motives for rebellion by these two groups emerged during the course of the Cultural Revolution itself, the cumulative effect of individual responses to shifting circumstances in an authoritarian hierarchy. In the end, as we shall see, it was the defection of the previously loyal that proved decisive.

Cadre rebels are mentioned frequently in provincial, city, and county annals—frequently enough that the phenomenon seems nearly ubiquitous. But published annals rarely contain enough detail for us to understand the origins of the cadre rebellion, the identities of rebel leaders, their activities, or their role in the wave of power seizures that swept across China in early 1967. To explore these issues I draw on an unusually detailed set of internal investigation reports commissioned by the Party Committee of Guangxi Province.¹⁷ During the mid-1980s, the Guangxi Party Committee conducted a rectification campaign to uncover the causes of severe factionalism and a wave of mass killings in August and September 1968 and to punish the perpetrators.¹⁸ Detailed reports on major episodes and lengthy chronicles of events, with accompanying statistics, were compiled for the provincial administration and for each of its cities, prefectures, and counties. The reports, classified as secret (机密), fill 18 book-length volumes, most in excess of 500 pages.¹⁹ They provide an unusual level of detail on cadre participa-

17. Guangxi was designated as a province until 1957, when its name was changed to Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

18. These events are analyzed at length in Yang Su, *Collective Killings in Rural China during the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

19. *Guangxi “wen’ge” dang’an ziliao* [Archival materials on the Guangxi “Cultural Revolution”], 18 vols. (Nanning: Zhonggong Guangxi Zhuangzu Zizhiqū wenyuanhui, zhengdang lingdao xiaozu bangongshi, 1987). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Guangxi “wen’ge”* by volume and page number. The accounts below draw primarily on the thematic accounts of selected “major incidents” in the first eight volumes of the collection.

tion in Cultural Revolution rebellions and power seizures, far surpassing the cryptic accounts in most published annals.

PHASE 1: PARTY COMMITTEES IN CHARGE

After the purges of the Beijing “anti-Party group” in May 1966, it was clear that the unfolding Cultural Revolution would target selected officials throughout China. But it was unclear who, or how many, would be purged in disgrace. Party secretaries in provinces, cities, and counties actively responded to directives from Beijing to unmask local revisionists and members of internal anti-Party cliques. If they did not identify targets in conformity with the new campaign, the secretaries could themselves be accused of dragging their feet or trying to protect miscreants. Throughout July, August, and September local officials initiated campaigns to identify cadres for investigation and punishment.

The first step in these local campaigns in Guangxi was the formation of Cultural Revolution committees, typically led by ranking members of the Party Committee and staffed by other leading cadres. These committees established Cultural Revolution Small Groups to carry out the campaign in subordinate administrative units. On September 12, 1966, Yulin Prefecture (榆林专区) ordered the establishment of 18 such groups in its Party and government organs to carry out loyalty investigations among leaders and staff in the prefecture (*Guangxi “wen’ge,”* 1:76–77). In rural regions, the Socialist Education Movement (SEM), also known as the Four Cleans campaign, had yet to be completed, and the committees in charge of it were converted into Cultural Revolution leading groups and continued their purge campaign as if the basic tasks had not changed.

In Lingui County (临桂县), a suburb of Guilin City (桂林市), the SEM was still in full swing in June 1966. The SEM work team was converted into a Cultural Revolution leading group, and it continued to investigate cadres. It organized work teams of officials to go into each Party and government organ, as well as into schools and communes, to carry out loyalty investigations. During July and August some 500 individuals were targeted as antisocialist elements, 20 of them county-level officials. Out of 726 Party members in the county, only 218 were found to be completely reliable; 460 were found to have committed minor errors; 71 were found to have severe problems; and 13 were judged to be anti-Party elements (*Guangxi “wen’ge,”* 6:319–22, 326–27).

In Wuming County (武鸣县) from September to November, all cadres were evaluated for loyalty, and of the 58 cadres who were placed under formal investigation, 29 were found to have committed errors severe enough to require turning them over to the masses for struggle sessions (*Guangxi “wen’ge,”* 13:209–10). In Lingshan County (灵山县) the authorities did not bother to change the name of the SEM work team. In November, it simply intensified the existing campaign, which had focused on the educational system and skilled personnel, resulting in

suicides in the grain bureau and agricultural science bureau. The campaign turned on cadres with poor work records and questionable class backgrounds. They were classified as “five black elements” and removed from their posts (*Guangxi wen'ge*, 13:508). In their effort to display revolutionary zeal in carrying out the Cultural Revolution, county authorities brought serious charges against small numbers of their Party and government subordinates.

Party authorities at all levels also encouraged the formation of “mass organizations” of politically reliable supporters in Party and government offices. Their explicit purpose was to defend office buildings and the confidential files these contained from raids by student Red Guards and other outside rebel groups. They were established on a wide scale in September 1966. In Guangxi these groups were commonly labeled “Scarlet Guards” (赤卫队). They claimed to be rebel groups within Party and government offices, and they occasionally confronted student Red Guards who tried to invade Party and government offices.²⁰ In Qinzhou Prefecture the Party Committee announced on August 29, in compliance with Beijing’s directives, that it would withdraw all work teams sent to conduct loyalty investigations, but it also called for the establishment of Scarlet Guard organizations in administrative units to protect offices and the documents they contained. The head of the prefecture’s Public Security Bureau was put in charge of the effort (*Guangxi wen'ge*, 13:248–49).

In Wuming County, Scarlet Guards were established in early September, immediately after local student Red Guards put up a wall poster declaring their intention to “burn alive” the county’s Party secretary. Leading cadres in the county’s organization and propaganda departments were put in charge of Scarlet Guard units, whose task was summarized as the “four protects” (四保): “protect Chairman Mao, protect the Party Center, protect the Cultural Revolution, and protect Party and government organs.” Their actual purpose was to keep Red Guards out of the county’s administrative offices and to protect leading cadres who were potential targets of insurgents (*Guangxi wen'ge*, 13:209).

The Scarlet Guards were part of the authorities’ efforts to maintain control over the campaign. Lingui County bordered Guilin City, which had a large student insurgency influenced by Beijing student rebels. County cadres took measures to prevent its spread to the county seat. The head of the county’s SEM work team, one of the county’s Party secretaries, declared that the SEM had already cleansed the county of political suspects, and the county needed no help from

20. The activities of Scarlet Guards in Party and government administrative offices in the province-level organs in Nanning (南宁) are described in *Guangxi wen'ge*, vol. 18; in the prefectural administrations of Yulin and Qinzhou (钦州专区) in *Guangxi wen'ge*, 1:76–77, 13:248–49; in the municipal administrations of Guilin and Nanning in *Guangxi wen'ge*, 6:241–42, 13:68–69; and in Guiping (桂平), Lingshan, Lingui, Mengshan (蒙山), Pubei (浦北), and Wuming counties in *Guangxi wen'ge*, 1:454–57, 3:117–18, 6:325–26, 13:209, 370–71, 506–7, respectively.

outsiders. On August 24, after rumors that a rebel group was preparing to invade Guilin's Party offices, he convened an urgent late night meeting of cadres to have them stand watch around the clock. Scarlet Guards would meet with students if they arrived. They were to be treated politely but told firmly that Lingui had already completed its revolution and that there was no need for them to meet the county's leaders. There is no hint in the record that the feared student invasion from Guilin ever occurred (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 6:325–26).

PHASE 2: THE RISE OF REBEL CADRES

The October Party Work Conference marked a crucial turning point in Cultural Revolution politics and signaled the imminent end of Party Committee strategies to contain student and worker insurgencies. Held in Beijing in mid-October and attended by thousands of cadres from throughout the country, the meeting's purpose was to "clarify thinking" about the Cultural Revolution. The cornerstone of the meeting was Chen Boda's speech of October 16, in which he denounced Party Committee efforts to restrict the scope of the rebellion and specifically denounced mass organizations whose purpose was to protect power holders and obstruct rebellion. Chen declared that these and other efforts represented a "bourgeois reactionary line" (资产阶级反动路线) that was anti-Party, antisocialist, and anti-Mao Zedong Thought. He called for all such actions by local Party officials to cease and called on student rebels to target those leaders who had followed this reactionary line in previous weeks. Chen's speech was reportedly revised several times by Mao himself before it was issued nationwide as the key document to come out of the October meetings.²¹

Many local accounts in Guangxi Province mention the October Party Work Conference as causing a major shift in local politics, and some specifically mention Chen's speech.²² When the meeting's decisions were relayed to lower levels, they signaled to all who had been targeted in local campaigns that their punishments might be overturned. More importantly, they signaled to all those who had cooperated loyally with their Party leaders that they had to reconsider their relationships with their superiors, who now were exposed as potential perpetrators of an erroneous political line. Should those officials fall from power, their loyal subordinates could fall along with them. They did not need to have preexisting grievances or to be recent victims of the early stage of the campaign to now have motives for distancing themselves from their superiors. As the implications of the October Party Work Conference sank in, cadres throughout China rapidly reevaluated their positions.

21. MacFarquhar and Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution*, 137.

22. For example, in Lingui County (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 6:328).

The rebellion began in the Party and government offices of Guangxi Province shortly afterward. Accounts from various departments mention rebel groups as early as October, and they are mentioned with increasing frequency in November and December. By the end of 1966 virtually all of the departments under the Guangxi Party and government in Nanning harbored rebel cadre organizations with names that imitated the ones commonly adopted by student and worker groups, and by January 1967 these internal rebellions appear to have been nearly universal.²³

After the Beijing authorities issued a directive authorizing the formation of rebel groups among workers in late November, Nanning's municipal Party secretary issued instructions to organs under the city's Party and government that extended this authorization to their cadres and staff. Rebel organizations and small so-called fighting groups (战斗队) mobilized within the city's bureaucracy to criticize the Nanning Party Committee for its complicity with the bourgeois reactionary line. In mid-December the cadre rebels convened a large meeting of all cadres in the city's administration to hear the Party secretary's self-criticism, and the following week they joined with student and worker rebels in staging a mass struggle session against the city's top officials (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:69–73).

By mid-November there were widespread signs that the authority of Party committees was quickly ebbing. Rebel groups had formed within the offices of prefectures, cities, and counties. In Qinzhou Prefecture, the mounting criticisms of the bourgeois reactionary line created pressures on SEM work teams that caused their members to turn on their superiors. In mid-October prefectural cadres who had been assigned to duties on rural SEM work teams returned to their original units to take part in meetings about the Cultural Revolution, and some of them put up wall posters denouncing the SEM as a part of a bourgeois reactionary line. Cadres in Qinzhou County (钦州县) and Shangsi County (上思县) who had been punished or who had lost jobs during the SEM formed rebel organizations that traveled to Qinzhou Prefecture to "drag out" and criticize members of SEM cadre work teams. In November the prefecture, responding to these charges, ordered work team members to go back down to the villages and submit to criticism by the masses. Some were detained and abused. In late December many of these same cadre work team members, in turn, formed groups that traveled back to Qinzhou Prefecture to attack their superiors for having ordered them to carry out a bourgeois reactionary line and for then abandoning them to suffer the anger of the victims (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:250–51).

Some local officials tried to minimize the impact of Chen Boda's speech by arguing that it meant only that existing Scarlet Guard units should not be ex-

23. The rebel organizations in sixteen different province-level agencies, including the provincial Party Committee office itself, are summarized in *Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 18:802.

panded and no new ones should be formed.²⁴ These efforts had little impact. Scarlet Guards became inactive and rapidly fell apart. By late November cadres in Party and government organs formed dozens of their own fighting groups, whose purpose was to criticize the bourgeois reactionary line, and this implied repudiation of their own superiors. In Qinzhou Prefecture the Scarlet Guards were disbanded shortly after October and cadres and staff began to form their own independent rebel organizations (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:249). In Lingui County the Scarlet Guards had disappeared by late November after cadres and staff rushed to establish rebel groups. By the end of November, in the 29 offices and departments in the county administration there were more than 50 small fighting groups, with a membership of 520 out of the county's 883 cadres and staff (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 6:328). Fusui County (扶绥县) now had more than 80 rebel organizations, 22 of them in various county Party and government offices, including the Party's organization department, the Party Committee's staff office, and the propaganda department. The rebel leaders were described as "ordinary cadres" (普通干部), political instructors, press correspondents, and even a typist (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 2:234). In Tiandong County (田东县) cadres and staff in the Party and government offices organized a number of small fighting groups and one cross-department alliance, the "Rebel Headquarters," which had more than 100 members. Led by cadres from the public security bureau, discipline inspection commission, and the court system, it eventually took the lead in coordinating the cadres' rebellion against their superiors (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:514). In Pubei County, instead of disbanding, the Scarlet Guards turned on their masters, changing their name and re-orienting themselves as rebel organizations devoted to repudiating the bourgeois reactionary line (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:370–71).

In several counties rebel cadres are portrayed as mobilizing rebellion outside their government agencies. In Qinzhou County rebel cadres organized a movement of recent victims of the SEM, set up branches in communes to agitate for a reversal of verdicts, and organized struggle sessions against county cadres who had organized the campaign (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:307–8). In Lingchuan County (灵川县) cadre fighting groups spread across Party and government departments. They organized struggle sessions against the county's top leaders and even sent a delegation to Hechi Prefecture (河池专区) to seize the county's former Party secretary, subjecting him to several struggle sessions. Rebel cadres in the court system attacked the Party secretary and chief judge as "historical counterrevolutionaries," resulting eventually in the judge's suicide in January 1967 (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 4:197–98).

By late December rebel cadres began to claim authority over the conduct of the Cultural Revolution. Rebels in the offices of Yulin Prefecture pushed the Cul-

24. This was the initial response of the Guiping County authorities: *Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 1:454–57.

tural Revolution committees aside and created new ones. The old committees were made up of the prefecture's leading cadres, but their subordinates staffed the new ones (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 1:76–77). In Lingshan County, the new Cultural Revolution committees proceeded to bombard the county's Party secretary and other leading cadres. They put up wall posters, held struggle sessions, and formed a rebel alliance out of the many small fighting groups in the county's offices (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:508–9).

By this point Party leaders were finding it difficult to control regular Party and government meetings. Near the end of December the provincial authorities, in an apparent effort to halt the spiraling loss of authority, ordered Party secretaries to apologize to the masses for their conduct of the bourgeois reactionary line. In Mengshan County, Party leaders convened such a meeting on December 26, speaking to some two thousand cadres at four levels in the county government. The day after the Party secretary gave a lengthy self-criticism, the head of the county's rural department stood up to denounce him, exposed incriminating information about actions for which he had failed to confess, and called for the Party secretary's overthrow. The meeting abruptly broke up. On January 6 the beleaguered Party secretary convened an even larger meeting to offer a revised self-criticism. Shortly after the meeting began he and the acting county head were kicked off the stage and lost control of the meeting, signaling the effective end of their authority. From that point leaders throughout the county were attacked. A total of 132 leading Party and government officials were subjected to struggle sessions, including the Party secretary and vice secretary, the county head and vice heads, two-thirds of all officials who worked in the county offices, and close to half of the leading officials at the district and commune level. Cadre rebels in the county organs organized struggle sessions against the members of the county Party Committee and the heads of 27 county departments, who were also paraded through the streets and whose homes were searched (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:114–20).²⁵

In Hepu County (合浦县), in Qinzhou Prefecture, the Party's Sixth Congress was convened to select a new county head near the end of December. Shortly after the session began, a group of rebels from the personnel department disrupted the proceedings and demanded that the Party secretary convene a mass meeting of rebels to select new county leaders. The same group disrupted a parallel meeting held shortly afterward at Qinzhou Prefecture's government headquarters and made similar demands. They later convened a mass meeting in Hepu County that turned into a mass criticism session against the county's top officials (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:8–9, 251).²⁶

25. A similar sequence of events occurred in Lingshan County during this period: *Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 6:328–29.

26. Similar events are described in Wuming, Qinzhou, and Pubei counties during this period: *Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:210, 308, 374.

ENDPOINT: POWER SEIZURES

The final act of rebellion was the declaration of a “power seizure” by rebel groups in imitation of the January 6 event in Shanghai. These power seizures rarely created stable new forms of political authority. In most cases, they simply set the stage for a new round of factional conflicts. These continued with increasingly violent intensity well into the summer of 1967, achieving a final resolution under martial law during 1968. However ambiguous and uncertain their prospects, power seizures did have several unambiguous consequences: the structure of civilian authority collapsed, Party committees and their leading cadres were deposed, and the Party organization, already severely disrupted in prior weeks, ceased to function. The structure of civilian Party committees in China would not be rebuilt until the 1970s.

The question is what role rebel cadres played in these power seizures. The narratives contained in investigation reports make clear that cadre rebels played an active role at all levels of government, but their actions were much more influential in rural prefectures and counties than in the large cities. In the provincial capital of Nanning and in the prefecture-level cities of Guilin, Liuzhou, and Wuzhou, cadre rebels formed alliances with the student and worker rebels that had created havoc in late 1966. In rural prefectures with headquarters in small towns and especially in rural counties, cadre rebels played a much more dominant role, and in most counties they seized power unilaterally, paying little attention to student and worker rebel groups, who, if they played any significant role in county seats, were much less formidable than in the large cities.

In the provincial capital Nanning, there were separate power seizures in each of the three administrative headquarters located in the city: Guangxi Province, Nanning Municipality, and Nanning Prefecture (南宁专区), which administered 13 surrounding rural counties and a county-level city. Within the Guangxi provincial offices there were a series of separate power seizures during the third week of January. The cadres who seized power were not the heads of bureaus. The highest ranking of the rebel leaders in roughly half of the offices were section chiefs or bureau vice heads (科长, 副科长, 副处长). The remaining rebel leaders were primarily ordinary cadres, personal aides, and secretarial or departmental staff (一股干部, 厅长秘书, 科员, 机关干部, 办公室秘书, 书记员). The cadre rebels aligned themselves with alliances of workers and students and participated in the power seizure of Guangxi’s provincial organs on January 23.²⁷

In the Nanning Municipal offices, a large cadre rebel alliance joined a simultaneous power seizure over the provincial and municipal authorities as part of an

27. *Guangxi “wen’ge,”* 18:802, contains a table with the identities of the leaders of the rebel groups; more detail on the activities in individual offices and bureaus are on pages 452–53, 539–46, 623–24, 667–68, 750, 797–98.

a larger alliance known as the Grand Rebel Army (造反大军), whose main force was a large group of rebel workers. On the day of the power seizure, the cadre rebels selected new leaders for their departments in the municipal administration (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:73–75).

In the Nanning Prefecture offices rebel organizations were very active in mid-January, and they began to agitate for a power seizure. At a meeting on January 24, cadre delegates from the prefecture argued for immediate action, noting that prefectural cadres had rebelled earlier than other groups, but workers and staff in enterprises and public institutions were already preparing to seize power, and they should not fall behind. They also argued that if they did not seize power immediately, worker and student rebels might seize power over their offices, making things “difficult to handle” (不好办). This argument ultimately prevailed, despite strong disagreements expressed by those who argued that a broad alliance should be formed with students and workers. The cadres formed a power seizure committee and sought support from the local military district. The prefecture’s Party secretary, vice secretaries, and standing committee members were denounced at a mass meeting of more than a thousand cadres on January 25 and were expelled from their offices (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 1:514–18). Unlike their colleagues in Guangxi Province and Nanning Municipality, rebel cadres in Nanning Prefecture seized power unilaterally, without the participation of students or workers.

Guilin was another large city that had militant student and worker insurgencies in the fall of 1966. Guilin was the center of Guilin Prefecture (桂林专区), which administered 12 counties, but it also had a separate municipal administration. The cadre rebels in the municipal administration acted as partners in power seizures carried out with large student and worker alliances on January 24. In the offices of the separate Guilin Prefecture, however, cadre rebels played a much more central role—similar to the situation in Nanning Prefecture. On January 24 they formed an alliance across departments and aligned themselves with other rebel groups. Late that evening they called together the leaders of their alliance and decided to move forward immediately with a power seizure before other rebel groups could do so. Shortly after midnight they placed the entire leadership of the prefecture under house arrest and issued a proclamation that they were now in charge (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:639–42). The power seizures in Liuzhou—both the city and the prefecture—occurred without the participation of worker or student groups. Cadre rebels in the city and prefecture administrations moved forward without coordinating their actions with one another and seized power almost simultaneously (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 4:214–16).

In Yulin Prefecture a group of worker rebels based in the prefecture’s trade union formed their own power seizure committee on January 18 and declared their intention to seize power. Rebel cadres in the prefecture’s Party and government offices hurriedly carried out their own power seizure in order to prevent

this outside group from doing so. On January 24 they issued a proclamation and informed cadres in various departments, and rebels in each of the departments seized power. The Party secretary and prefecture chief were summoned to a mass meeting of all prefecture cadres, at which they were forced to formally hand over power (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 1:77–78).

Cadres in Bose Prefecture (百色专区) chose to include local student and worker leaders in their alliance. There were two large rebel alliances in the prefecture's Party and government organs, and they formed a power seizure committee composed of leaders of 16 rebel groups. On January 25 they called together 69 rebel groups for a power seizure rally at the premises of the prefecture headquarters, taking control of the building. The head of the power seizure committee was the leader of one of the two alliances of cadre rebels, a staff member (科员) in the prefecture's Party archives (档案科). The other leaders included an investigator from the discipline inspection office, a section chief in the Party's organization department, a staff member from the Party research office, a cadre in the propaganda department, a staff member from the village department, and an office worker (公务员) in the Party Committee office. Representatives from other groups included a driver for the prefecture Party Committee, a Red Guard who was enrolled in the Central Nationalities Institute in Beijing, two Red Guards from local high schools, a medical student, and two doctors (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:177–80).

These accounts of the province, cities, and prefectures suggest that it was primarily in large cities that student and worker rebels played an important role in alliances with cadre rebels. Cadres at the county level, however, played a more central role in power seizures than they did in cities and prefectures, and most of them acted unilaterally, without including outside rebel groups. There are three basic variations on this theme. In the first, cadre rebels seized power without participation by any outside mass organizations. In Bose County (百色县), Beiliu County (北流县), Wuming County, Dongxing County (东兴族自治县), and Lingshan County, cadre rebels took the initiative to overthrow the county leadership—forming new leadership committees from among rebel “fighting groups” within the county offices—and did so without coordinating with others (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 2:235–36, 3:221–23, 5:172–74, 13:211, 377, 508–9). In a second pattern, cadre rebels cooperated with outside rebel groups and included them in power seizures. This occurred in Fusui County, where cadres from the organization and discipline inspection departments formed a power seizure committee that included workers, teachers, and students, along with a large number of county-level cadres (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 2:235–36). In Pubei County, the leader of a rebel alliance in the county administration, who was on the staff of the county Party office, orchestrated a power seizure through meetings with more than 90 rebel leaders from across the county and rebels within the county administration (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 5:108–9; 13:377).

A third pattern was much more common than the first two: cadres seized power unilaterally in response to the imminent threat or even the mere possibility of an attempted power seizure by an outside group or by rival cadre rebels. In Guiping County, cadre rebels, worried that student Red Guards would move in to seize power, preempted this by seizing power themselves (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 1:456–57). In Chongzuo County (崇左), cadre rebels hastened to seize power two days after several power seizures of individual county offices by rebel groups made up of workers and high school students (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 2:193–94). In Qinzhou County, cadre rebels rushed to seize power ahead of a rebel alliance led by a high school Red Guard. They failed to do so before the students acted on February 7 but went ahead with a power seizure of their own, setting off controversy between the two sides (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 13:309). In Gongcheng County (恭城) two rival groups of cadre rebels planned separately to seize power, prompting one of them to act preemptively. The same dynamic occurred in Lingui County, sparking strong protests by the excluded cadre rebels (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 4:169–71; 6:330–33). In Laibin County (来宾) rebel cadres were spurred to immediate action by a proclamation by a local student Red Guard alliance that it intended to seize power (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 4:333–35). The mere possibility that outside groups might eventually attempt to seize power appears to have been enough to spur cadre rebels to seize power in Tiandong County and Luzhai County (鹿寨; *Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:514–16, 4:492–96). In Lingyun County (凌云) rebel cadres delayed their power seizure for several days, disagreeing over how to treat the county Party secretary. The head of the county's People's Armed Department then stepped in and personally convened a separate power seizure, arguing that if cadres did not act immediately, outside groups would invade the county offices and take over (*Guangxi "wen'ge,"* 3:339–40).

In many of these narratives, cadres' decisions to seize power were spurred by a power seizure at a higher level of government. The overall pattern of power seizures bears this out. Within three days of the provincial power seizure on January 23, all twelve prefecture-level jurisdictions had experienced their own power seizures. Of the 82 counties and county-level cities in Guangxi, 77 reported a subsequent power seizure, and not one of them preceded the power seizure over their own prefecture government. The vast majority, 59, took place before the end of January, with 16 during February. This pattern of power seizures in lower-level jurisdictions following in the wake of power seizures at higher levels reflects the active role of cadres in consummating power seizures. They had by far the most to lose if other groups seized power first, without their participation.

CONCLUSION

The nationwide rebellion of cadres against their superiors has barely registered in past accounts of the tumultuous early months of the Cultural Revolution. In the

vast majority of China's government jurisdictions, power seizures were rarely the work of student and worker rebels. With sources that permit us to look inside the party-state bureaucracy, treated in past accounts essentially as a black box, we find that the pillars of the status quo—Party and government cadres—were in rebellion against their own superiors. In provincial capitals and other large cities, dramatic street protests, which were the primary preoccupation of past accounts, were paralleled by less visible rebellions within the halls of Party and government. Past work has noted that street clashes and work stoppages rendered many large cities ungovernable, necessitating power seizures that were the first step in restoring some semblance of order. This crisis of authority, however, had a deeper source that was in many ways more immediate in its consequences: Party secretaries and mayors were unable even to exercise authority over their own staff. As we have observed, this trend was already well advanced by December 1966.

The cadre rebellion was not an expression of widespread grievances that existed within the bureaucracy before the onset of the Cultural Revolution. While such grievances certainly existed, especially among victims of the recent SEM, they were not widespread enough to spark the massive escalation of rebellions during November and December 1966. The cadre rebellion certainly drew on the new grievances among cadres attacked in the first stages of the Cultural Revolution when Party officials were still in charge, yet this was still a relatively small minority. The cadres' rebellion accelerated only after large numbers of loyal cadres—even former Scarlet Guards—defected to the opposition after the October Party Work Conference. For them, defection was especially urgent because they were open to the accusation that they had collaborated with their leaders' bourgeois reactionary line. These defections were a reaction to new signals from above and to increasing signs that their superiors were likely to fall in the next phase of the campaign. The defections of the loyal cadres were attempts to draw a clear line between themselves and their superiors and to establish rebel identities that might permit them to survive. This was even more urgent for cadres who had actively collaborated with their superiors earlier in the campaign. These were calculations by bureaucrats well attuned to the harsh realities of campaign politics, seeking to navigate uncertainty and to respond to shifting signals from above.

The same political calculations are evident in the rapid wave of power seizures that started in late January—they were explicitly defensive maneuvers by rebel cadres. At the level of the province and large cities, rebel cadres made sure to align themselves with large worker and student insurgencies, taking part in power seizures that would prevent them from suffering the same fate as their widely maligned superiors. In rural prefectures and counties, cadre rebels either took the initiative to coordinate power seizures with outside student and worker groups or, more commonly, seized power without the participation of outside groups. The rapid spread of power seizures even in remote rural counties was due to the openly

expressed motives of many of these cadre groups—to prevent outsiders or rival cadre groups from seizing power before them, thus potentially losing control over their own fate. This motive is evident at the macro level in the tight top-down sequence of power seizures that spread well into regions with weak or nonexistent student and worker insurgencies. Cadres were highly attentive to signals from higher levels of administration and tightly integrated into the national structure of power. Students and workers had no reason to be so closely attentive to these signals, and if they had been the driving force behind the overthrow of local governments, power seizures would have diffused more slowly and less deeply into rural regions.

If power seizures by cadres were a form of bureaucratic politics in circumstances of high uncertainty and considerable personal risk, should they really be considered a rebellion at all? Were cadre rebellions essentially little more than collective efforts to defend relatively privileged positions in the status quo? Whatever the cadres' motives, the rebellions were very real in their consequences. The top leaders at every level of government and often the top leaders in individual departments and bureaus were deposed by lower-ranking subordinates, in many cases even their own personal aides. They were subjected to violent struggle sessions, had their homes searched, were forced to perform manual labor, and sometimes died at the hands of their tormentors or by their own hand. The national structure of Party committees was destroyed, and civilian administration was disrupted. Few of these power seizures resulted in stable new structures of authority. At every level rival rebels from both outside and inside the power structure challenged those who now claimed to hold power. This led quickly to the imposition of military control, at higher levels by regular army units, and in rural regions by people's armed departments and the militia forces they commanded. But the task of destruction was very effectively accomplished—perhaps to an extent that Maoists in Beijing had not anticipated—and it would take years to rebuild China's national structure of civilian government. It is surprising and ironic, so many years after these events, to discover that the destruction of China's civilian state in 1967 was accelerated by an internal rebellion by the party-state's own bureaucrats.