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Mass Killings in the Cultural Revolution: A Study of Three Provinces

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Students of the Cultural Revolution are familiar with its violence, including the ubiquitous beating and torture of teachers, intellectuals, and government officials,¹ and the casualties during street battles among warring mass factions.² Less familiar are scattered reports of mass killings, a qualitatively different phenomenon in which a large number of unarmed civilians were massacred in a systematic fashion. These reports include a memoir by a former cadre on perhaps the earliest event of this sort, in Daxing, a suburban county of Beijing. In the five days between August 27 and September 1, 1966, 325 members of “class enemy” households, whose ages ranged from thirty-eight days to eighty years, were executed.³ The best-known case, and perhaps the most tragic, was in Daoxian County, Hunan Province. An article published in a Hong Kong magazine reports that a series of pogroms spread across the county in late 1967; within two months, 4,950 were killed.⁴ Zheng Yi’s controversial book on massacres in Guangxi Province may be the best known to the western world thanks to its English translation and its tales about cannibalism.⁵ A recent volume edited by Song Yongyi adds cases from Yunnan, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, and Beijing to this list of atrocities.⁶

Such reports are troubling, but how widespread were such incidents? I had this question in mind when I embarked on my research project on the Chinese Cultural Revolution, using published county gazetteers (*xian zhi*). I found that while the cases cited above may be particularly severe, similar mass killings were relatively common in some rural regions from late 1967 to 1969. As I will show, the evidence is overwhelming. Bear in mind

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that these gazetteers are publications compiled by local governments. There is little reason to believe such county gazetteers would exaggerate political violence. If anything, we should suspect underreporting.⁷ This chapter will document mass killings based on the county gazetteers of three provinces, two of which (Guangxi and Guangdong) report widespread mass killings, and one of which (Hubei) reports relatively few.

In order to understand the extensive violence reported here, I will also discuss the political context of the time. Most mass killings took place when the party-state began to form new local governments and to demobilize mass organizations. By the time Mao and the party center called for a “revolutionary great alliance” in late 1967, the mass movements of the Cultural Revolution had been underway for more than one year. Local governments had been dismantled; the masses had been let loose to form organizations and alliances to contest for power. Mass organizations fought armed street battles. It was an all-but-impossible task to form revolutionary committees (the new organs of power), to have them command obedience, and most of all, to disband and disarm mass organizations. Social and administrative problems were attacked through a time-honored method, “class struggle”—a shorthand term for destroying overt defiance and searching for hidden “enemies.” An important difference was that this time local representatives of the state turned “class struggle” into a reign of terror. Mass killings ensued.

Documenting Mass Killings with County Gazetteers

In 1978, the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee called for rehabilitation of victims in “false,” “innocent,” and “wrongful” cases in the Cultural Revolution.⁸ The policy generated valuable information regarding the scope and severity of tragic events during the Cultural Revolution at the local level, most of which were later documented and published in county gazetteers (*xian zhi*). The new *xian zhi*, with few exceptions, have a “Major Events” section that records, among other historic events in the county, key events during the Cultural Revolution. These records also include death and injury statistics for the Cultural Revolution as well as population, party membership, and county leaders’ background.

There were about 2,250 such jurisdictions in 1966.⁹ For this study, I chose the three provinces of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hubei, which contain

TABLE 4.1
The Sample Counties, by Province

	Guangxi	Guangdong	Hubei
Counties in sample	65	57	65
Total counties in province, 1966	83	80	72
Percent of counties in sample	78.3	71.3	90.2

some 235 counties, for in-depth examination.¹⁰ Table 4.1 shows the percentage of counties for which I was able to collect county gazetteer information about the Cultural Revolution.

The extent of published detail in accounts of the Cultural Revolution varies greatly due to possible self-censorship or inadequate information gathering. I will report numbers of deaths *as reported* in the county gazetteers. The statistics based on this approach hence should be considered as minimum figures.¹¹ This conservative coding is a deliberate strategy I have adopted to unambiguously establish the fact of mass killings.

Following Benjamin Valentino, I define mass killing as “the intentional killing of a significant number of the members of any group (as a group and its membership is defined by the perpetrator) of non-combatants.”¹² A few elements of this definition are worth further discussion. First, identification of the victim is based on “membership” in some group, as opposed to one that is based on immediate threat to the perpetrator. In the case of the Cultural Revolution, the membership was based on alleged political crimes or unfavorable family background. Second, the intent to kill can be imputed in the perpetrator’s action. This separates mass killing from other causes of death in the Cultural Revolution, such as beating during a public struggle session (when the initial intent is more symbolic humiliation than physical killing), or torture during the course of interrogation (when obtaining a confession is the main purpose). Third, the event must not occur during armed combat between mass factions. However, if the victims were disarmed captives taken prisoner after armed combat, I consider them as noncombatants since they no longer posed a threat to the perpetrators. Hence mass killing differs from casualties in armed battles, a widespread phenomenon in the earlier stages of the Cultural Revolution. Finally, the

criterion of “a significant number” indicates some concentration in terms of time and space. To decide whether an event constituted a *mass killing*, I use ten deaths as a cut-off point.

A record from Quanzhou County, Guangxi, is typical among the gazetteers that use unequivocal language to describe mass killings:

October 3, [1967]. In Sanjiang Brigade, Dongshan Commune, the militia commander Huang Tianhui led [the brigade militia] to engage in a massacre. They pushed off a cliff and killed seventy-six individuals of the brigade—former landlords, rich peasants, and their children—in snake-shaped Huangguān canyon. . . . From July to October, [another] 850 individuals [in the county]—the four-type elements (landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, and bad elements) and their children—were executed with firearms.¹³

This presents one of most devastating cases of mass killings. Quanzhou was otherwise a typical county in terms of demography, governing structure, and recent history. In 1966, about 93 percent of its population of 485,000 was rural, organized into three levels of government: county, commune (township), and brigade (village). In the land reform of the early 1950s, 10,110 families were classified as landlords, and 3,279 as rich peasants.¹⁴ In subsequent political campaigns the ranks of these “class enemies” were enlarged by others who were labeled “counterrevolutionaries” or “bad elements.” Together, this segment of the population, including their family members, was known as “four-types” (*silei fenzi*). Whenever “class struggle” rhetoric was whipped up, they were an instant target for harassment and persecution. Their tragedy reached a climax in the Cultural Revolution. By 1971, when the most violent period of the Cultural Revolution had ended, 2,156 men, women, and children of Quanzhou County had died “unnatural deaths,” like those in the example quoted above.¹⁵

An account like this provides information on the timing, location, identities of the victims and the perpetrators, and the way in which the deaths occurred. These accounts represent one of the major types of mass killings, which I call *pogrom against the “four-types”*. Other county gazetteers provide less explicit information about the manner of killing. But based on the time period specified in the record and the large number of deaths, mass killings clearly occurred. In the following example from another county, Lingui, Guangxi, the “four-types” comprised the majority of victims, indicating a possible pogrom like that in Quanzhou County, but the victims also in-

clude those who were newly labeled as members of an alleged conspiracy. This suggests a second type, which I call *killings in a political witch-hunt*.

In the name of “cleansing the class ranks” and “mass dictatorship,” indiscriminate killings took place across the county. Between mid-June and August [of 1968], 1,991 people were killed as members of “Assassination Squads,” “Anti-communist Army of Patriots,” and other “black groups.” Among them were 326 cadres, 79 workers, 53 students, 68 ordinary urban residents, 547 peasants, and 918 four-type elements and their children. Among the 161 brigades [of the county], only Wenquan in Huixian and Dongjiang in Wantian did not indiscriminately detain and kill.¹⁶

Unlike in a pogrom against the “four-types,” the identity of victims in a political witch-hunt was constructed more recently, based on the accused’s association with alleged conspiratorial groups such as the “Assassination Squad” and the “Anti-communist Army of Patriots.” While 918 victims were family members of the “four-types,” a significant number of individuals were apparently not in this category—those described as cadres, workers, ordinary peasants, and urban residents.

A third type of mass killing is the *summary execution of captives*. These victims were disarmed after a factional battle and were no longer armed combatants. Killings of this type occurred after one alliance (or faction) already had defeated another. The following example vividly illustrates the nature of this type of event. After a joint meeting attended by public security officers of a few counties on August 18, 1968,

the People’s Armed Forces Department (Renmin wuzhuangbu) in each county went ahead and carried out the “order.” About 4,400 (a number that exceeded what had been stipulated in the meeting) armed individuals of the “United Headquarters” (Lianzhi)¹⁷ besieged the members of “7.29” [a dissenting mass organization] who had fled to Nanshan and Beishan in Fengshan County. More than 10,000 were detained (the county population was then 103,138). During the siege and the subsequent detentions, 1,016 were shot to death, making up more than 70 percent of the total Cultural Revolution deaths of the county. . . . After the violence swept across the county, the establishment of the Revolutionary Committee of Fengshan County was finally [announced] on the twenty-fifth [of August, 1968].¹⁸

I should also say a few words about those counties for which I am not able to establish that mass killings occurred. If the reported number of deaths is

fewer than ten, I do not count the event as a mass killing. Even for those counties whose gazetteers mention a substantial number of deaths, I do not regard the county as experiencing mass killings, if

- (1) substantial numbers of deaths are implied rather than explicitly recorded;
- (2) recorded deaths were due to armed battles, not imposed upon unarmed civilians; or,
- (3) the recorded number of deaths is an aggregated number for the entire period of the Cultural Revolution and the manner in which the deaths occurred cannot be determined.

Quotations from three counties illustrate, respectively, these three scenarios:

On the evening of March 20 [1968], the militia of Huangqiao Brigade, Xinlian Commune, indiscriminately killed people on the pretext of quelling the “Pingmin Party.” Afterwards indiscriminate killings *frequently* occurred across the county and were particularly severe in Youping and other places.¹⁹

March 3, [1968]. The two [mass] factions engaged in armed battles in Liangtang, resulting in 144 deaths.²⁰

During the ten-year Cultural Revolution, 2,053 cadres and members of the masses were struggled against; 206 were beaten to death or otherwise caused to die; 541 were injured or permanently disabled during beatings.²¹

The first quotation, from the Mengshan County gazetteer, reports “indiscriminate killings” on March 20, 1968, and afterwards. From the text, we can discern that the number of deaths must be very substantial. But because no specific number is provided, I do not count those events as mass killings. In the second quotation, from Hengxian, 144 deaths are recorded on March 3, 1968, alone; but since these deaths were a result of armed conflict, I do not count this as a mass killing. The third quotation, from Tianlin County, reports 206 deaths, but because the manner of killing is not clear, I do not count this as a mass killing.

Mass Killings in Three Provinces

SCALE

The most severe mass killings were in Guangxi Province. Of sixty-five counties for which I have gazetteers, forty-three, or 66 percent, experienced mass killings (see Table 4.2). Among the most severe cases were fifteen counties

that reported more than 1,000 deaths.²² Wuming County had the highest death toll of all, 2,463. In one campaign alone, 1,546 were killed between mid-June and early July of 1968.²³ Guangxi Province exhibited all three types of mass killing I described above: pogroms against the “four-types,” killings in political witch-hunts, and summary executions of captives.

Guangdong Province exhibited a similar pattern. Twenty-eight out of fifty-seven counties, or 49 percent, experienced mass killings. In six counties the number of deaths exceeded 1,000.²⁴ The most severe case was Yangchun County, with 2,600 deaths between August and October 1968. The mass killings in Guangdong belong to two categories: pogroms against the “four-types” and political witch-hunts. No summary executions of captives, the third type, were reported.

In contrast, mass killings were rarely reported in Hubei Province—only four out of sixty-one counties. These four cases, however, all involved large numbers of deaths due to beatings in waves of political witch-hunts. No pogroms or summary executions were reported.

It is clear from Table 4.2 that mass killings were a widespread phenomenon in Guangxi and Guangdong. At the same time, Hubei seems to stand as a negative case, if the statistics from the county gazetteers of this province reflect the true historical picture.²⁵

At about the same time that mass killings occurred widely in Guangxi and Guangdong, counties in Hubei were by no means quiet. On the contrary, this was also a high time of persecution of previously and newly designated “class enemies.” Thirty-eight counties, or 60 percent of my Hubei sample, report that more than 1,000 people were beaten in the persecutions, many suffering permanent injuries. Unlike Guangxi and Guangdong, however, large-scale beatings in most cases stopped short of mass killings. Here is an example:

September 6, [1967]. The county seat witnessed the September 6 “Violent Event.” A group of “Rebels” paraded twenty-two “capitalist roaders” and “stubborn conservatives” during the daytime, and injured thirty-two individuals (eight permanently) during the night. These activities quickly spread to communes and villages, where 1,015 were severely beaten. Among them forty-four suffered permanent disabilities, one was killed, and nine others died of causes related to the beatings.²⁶

Most counties that experienced similar large-scale beatings report fewer than ten total deaths. In the particular case quoted here, although the death toll

TABLE 4.2
Frequencies of Reported Mass Killings, by Province

	Guangxi	Guangdong	Hubei
Total counties in sample	65	57	65
Counties with mass killings	43	28	4
Percent with mass killings	66.2	49.1	6.2
Counties with at least 500 deaths	27	10	0
Percent with at least 500 deaths	41.5	17.5	0
Average number of deaths	526	278	46.5
Highest overall county death toll	2,463	2,600	115

in a concentrated period reached my cut-off point of ten, I do not count it as a case of mass killing, because nine of these deaths were not explicitly intentional (the intention to harm and injure notwithstanding). Among the sixty-five counties of Hubei, I decided that four had experienced mass killings due to the number of deaths from the epidemic of beatings at the time. They are Yichang (10 killed, 105 driven to suicide, 60 permanently injured), Enshi (2,350 beaten, 51 killed, 314 permanently injured), Zigui (2,500 beaten, 40 killed, 440 severely injured, 35 permanently) and Yunxi (32 killed in Hejiaqu Commune, with 512 beaten and 276 “killed or disabled” in the county as a whole).

TIMING

Although the earliest known episode of mass killings occurred in August 1966 in the Beijing suburban county of Daxing,²⁷ in the three provinces in this study, mass killings did not occur until late 1967 or 1968, shortly before or after the establishment of the revolutionary committees there. Figure 4.1 compares the dates of the founding of the county-level committee with the dates of mass killings in Guangxi, Guangdong, and Hubei respectively. The data clearly show that the peaks of mass killings closely followed the founding of the revolutionary committee.

As shown in Figure 4.1, both in Guangxi and Guangdong, mass killings peaked in July 1968, just after most counties established their revolutionary committees. This was the month when the center issued two well publicized directives to ban armed battles and to disband mass organizations.²⁸ In Guangxi, the provincial revolutionary committee was not yet established,

and the opposition mass alliance, known as April Twenty-second, led insurrections in all the major cities. The provincial authorities therefore implemented the two directives to crack down on the opposing faction, forcing some of its members to flee to rural counties. At the same time, the newly established governments at the lower levels were called on to “preemptively attack class enemies.”²⁹ Some local governments, particularly communes, seemed to respond to this call with great zeal, whether or not there was significant organized resistance in the jurisdiction. In Guangdong, although the provincial government had been established since February, organized defiance represented by the Red Flag faction persisted, just as did the resistance of the April Twenty-second faction in Guangxi. The Guangdong provincial government also used the two directives from the center as a weapon in its face-off with Red Flag. As in Guangxi, policy pronouncements from Beijing and the provincial capital that targeted organized resistance translated into a climate of terror in lower-level jurisdictions (counties, communes, and brigades), whether or not organized resistance was widespread. Mass killings took place in such a climate.

In contrast to Guangdong and Guangxi, the few cases of mass killings in Hubei occurred not in July but about two months earlier (Figure 4.1). Beijing’s two directives against mass organizations seemed to have affected Hubei very differently from the way they affected the other two provinces. This may indicate that mass factional alignments in this period help to explain provincial differences in mass killings. In Hubei, unlike Guangxi and Guangdong, the rebel faction had been included in the new government (to be discussed further below).

Figure 4.1 shows that the mass killings in all three provinces were concentrated in a few months. This is important because it ties the mass killings to the establishment of revolutionary committees and the demobilization of mass organizations. It is known that most killings occurred in the wake of the formation of revolutionary committees, but we do not know the specific mechanism that produced them. Some scholars attribute them to a series of later campaigns, especially the Cleansing of the Class Ranks (*qingli jieji duiwu*) and One-Strike, Three-Anti (*yida sanfan*).³⁰

Our data show that in fact these national campaigns did not always lead to severe persecutions at the local level. Gazetteers suggest that counties selectively chose the rhetoric of some, but not all national campaigns. Just as important, the timing of adoption varied greatly across provinces and coun-

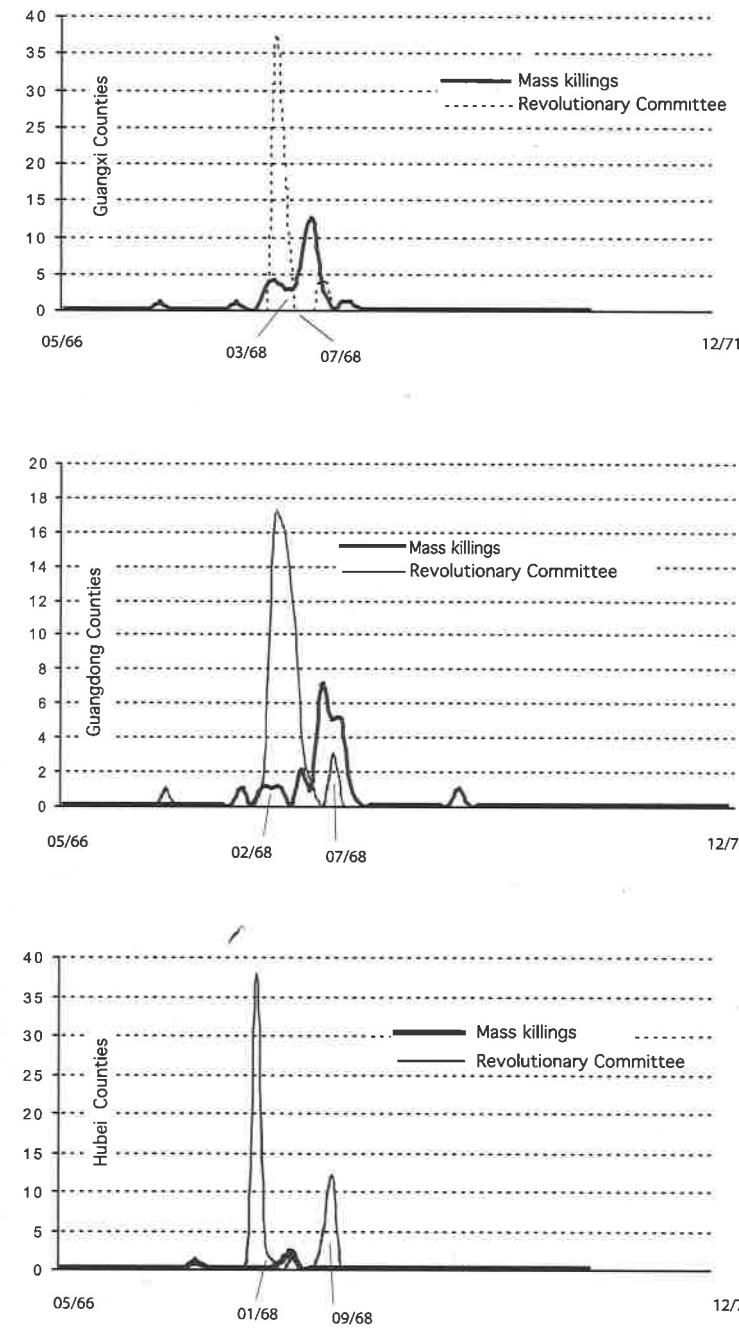


FIGURE 4.1 The Timing of Mass Killings in Relation to the Founding of Revolutionary Committees

ties. Each of our three provinces, in fact, generated its own campaign waves, which respectively affected persecutions in its counties.

LOCATION

Mass killings tended to occur in jurisdictions below the county level, usually in the commune (township) or in the brigade (village). If we recall the quotations above, specific names of communes or villages are mentioned in relation to mass killings. For example, *Sanjiang Brigade* is specified in the well-known Quanzhou (Guangxi) pogrom in which seventy-six family members of the “four-types” were pushed into a canyon. In the Lingui County case (Guangxi), the report specified that only two out of 161 brigades did not have mass killings. Among the twenty-eight Guangdong counties where mass killings were reported, six gazetteers contain detailed information regarding names of the related jurisdictions. For example, *Qujiang xian zhi* states: “In January [1968] serious incidents of illegal killings occurred in Zhangzhi Commune. Thirteen brigades of the commune indiscriminately arrested and killed; 149 were killed.”³¹ Other examples include the following: “Large number of beatings and killings occurred in the three communes of Chitong, Zhenglong, and Beijie, resulting in twenty-nine people being killed”; “Mass dictatorship was carried out by the security office of various communes”; “Litong Brigade, Xin'an Commune buried alive fifty-six ‘four-types’ and their family members.”³² The contrast between the lack of mass killings in the urban settings and their abundance in rural villages may reflect a *disconnect* between lower-level jurisdictions and the upper-level authorities, indicating the weakness of state control at the lower level.

The observation that mass killings were more likely to occur where state control was weakest is supported by another consideration with regard to geography: the variation in incidence across counties. In Table 4.3, I compare counties with mass killings and those without.³³ The table shows that more mass killings occurred in lower-level rural jurisdictions. The average distance of counties with mass killings from the provincial capital is 212 kilometers, while that of counties without mass killings is 179 kilometers. Counties with mass killings also were more sparsely populated and had lower per capita government revenue (see Table 4.3).

VICTIM IDENTITIES

Most county gazetteers do not provide detailed information regarding the

TABLE 4.3
County Characteristics and Mass Killings in Guangxi and Guangdong

	Counties with mass killings	Counties without mass killings
Average distance from provincial capital (kilometers)	212	179
Population per square kilometer	139.7	219.1
Government per capita revenue (yuan)	15.1	20.8

identities of the victims. Where such information is available, the most frequently mentioned category of the population is the so-called four-types, those previously classified as “class enemies.” A detailed breakdown of victims is available in some counties, such as one cited above from Lingui County, Guangxi. As shown in Table 4.4, among the 1,991 victims, 918—almost half—were “four-types” or their children.

A few points can be summarized from the profiles of victims presented in Table 4.4. First, as noted, the largest group of victims was the “four-types.” This shows clearly that mass killings targeted the weak rather than those who constituted a real threat to the authorities (alleged conspiracy notwithstanding). Second, the majority of victims were rural residents—that is, mass killings mostly occurred outside the county seat. This is also important, because it shows that mass killings occurred in the lower reaches of the government hierarchy where state control was particularly weak. Third, in some places, a significant number of non-four-types and non-rural individuals were killed. This may reflect mass killings in the form of a political witch-hunt or summary execution of captives. When mass killings were used to eliminate rival faction members, victims other than those of the “four-types” account for a very significant proportion. For example, in the case of Fengshan County described above, among the 1,331 victims killed in the wake of a siege, 246 were cadres or workers (both being urban residents).³⁴

A remarkable fact about the victims was the large number of children in “four-type” households. Some report that the perpetrators’ rationale was that they may grow up to seek revenge.³⁵ In some cases, it seemed to be an afterthought. In Daoxian, after killing the adult “four-types,” the perpetrators came back to drag out the children, killed them, and finally looted the victims’ residences.³⁶ But in other cases, the children were guilty by association and were killed along with their parents. The former landlord Liu

Xiangyuan and his wife, who came from a poor-peasant background, had two children. One was one year old and the other three. Before Liu was ordered to jump to his death in the Quanzhou County incident, Liu pleaded with the militia head Huang Tianhui: "Tianhui, I have two kids. Could the government decide that one of them belongs to my wife? How about I jump with one child but you spare the other one for my wife?" Huang said: "No!"³⁷

THE PERPETRATORS

The mass killings were by no means committed by misguided and spontaneous crowds. Where information is available, we find that the perpetrators were invariably organized by governmental authorities, usually militia members, members of mass organizations, or new volunteers. Without exception, available detailed accounts (about Daxing, Quanzhou, Daoxian, and Fengshan) report painstaking organizational meetings before the killings. In Zhang Cheng's account about Daoxian, meeting participants voted to decide who would be killed. One by one, the potential victims' names were read and votes were tallied. The process lasted for hours.³⁸ In another district in the county, Zhang reports: "From district to communes, mobilization took place through every level, involving the district party secretary, deputy secretary, commander of the 'Honglian' [a mass factional organization], the public security head and district chief accountants."³⁹ The killings were committed in a highly organized manner. The victims usually were rounded up and killed in a location away from public view. There were also cases in which a mass rally was held and a large number were killed, the so-called execution meetings.⁴⁰

Interviews with the perpetrators many years later indicate that most of them carried out the killing as a political duty.⁴¹ There is evidence that such acts were politically rewarded. In late 1968 and early 1969, provinces and counties began a campaign to rectify and rebuild the party organization. A large number of activists were recruited. Some official statistics show a chilling connection between violent zeal and political reward. According to a document published by the Guangxi government, during the Cultural Revolution in Guangxi, more than nine thousand people who had killed were recruited as new party members; another twenty thousand who had joined the party earlier in the Cultural Revolution through "fast-track" recruitment later committed murders. Another seventeen thousand party members were responsible for killings in one way or another.⁴²

TABLE 4.4
Profiles of Victims of Mass Killings, Selected Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Identity of Victims	Number	Percent
Linggui County	Four-types and their children	918	46.1
	Peasants	547	27.5
	Cadres	326	16.4
	Urban residents	68	3.4
	Workers	79	4.0
	Students	53	2.7
	Total	1,991	100
Binyang County	Rural residents	3,441	88.7
	Cadres	51	1.4
	Teachers	87	2.5
	Workers	102	3.0
	Total	3,681	100
Lingling Special District	Four-types	3,576	39.3
	Children of four-types	4,057	44.6
	Poor and middle peasants	1,049	11.5
	Other backgrounds	411	4.5
	Total	9,093	100

SOURCES: *Lingui xian zhi* (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1996), 492; *Guangxi wen'ge dashi nianbiao* (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1990), 111; and Zhang Cheng, "Daoxian da tusha," *Kaifang zazhi* (July, Aug., Sept., Dec. 2001).

Provincial Variations

The difference in the scale of mass killings between Hubei and the other two provinces in this study is very large. It suggests that the level of violence was a function of both national politics and local conditions. What accounts for this difference? I propose some tentative hypotheses.

The baseline hypothesis is that the provincial difference documented here is not a historical fact but an artifact of editorial policies in compiling *xian zhi*. The compilation and publication of county gazetteers was organized by a hierarchy of government agencies. Counties in one province may have followed a set of policy guidelines different in another. Among those guidelines was the principle known as "recording in broad strokes,

not in detail" on the history of the Cultural Revolution.⁴³ It is possible that the compilers in Hubei Province were more conservative and left out more information than their counterparts in the other two provinces. Indeed the average length of accounts of the Cultural Revolution in the Hubei gazetteers—2,361 words—is barely half that devoted to the subject in the gazetteers for Guangdong (5,198 words) and Guangxi (5,117).⁴⁴

On the other hand, although the Hubei gazetteers rarely report mass killings, they do not shy away from reporting large numbers of people who were beaten and injured. In fact they report many more injuries than the gazetteers of Guangdong (see Table 4.6). There are therefore reasons to suspect that the differences in the reported number of killings may actually indicate real differences in the course of political events across provinces.

Differences in death tolls could plausibly be linked to the divergent paths of prior conflict leading to the founding of revolutionary committees in these three provinces. According to Xu Youyu's summary of provincial-level conflicts nationwide, Hubei and our other two provinces represented two different paths.⁴⁵ Prior to the founding of their revolutionary committees, all provincial capitals experienced mass mobilization by factions and numerous government reorganizations. Two opposed alliances emerged. Typically, one of them sought to overthrow the pre-Cultural Revolution government, while the other made more moderate demands or in fact fought to defend the government. Power often shifted back and forth between the two sides after the January Storm of 1967, but after the Wuhan incident in July of that year, the balance of power shifted in Hubei, and in many other provinces. With the tacit support or explicit approval of the center, the more militant faction was designated as the revolutionary side. The government was thoroughly reorganized, and the moderate alliance discredited. Members of the more militant alliance were incorporated into the new government in large numbers.⁴⁶

But there were exceptions to this scenario, including both Guangdong and Guangxi. According to Xu, the center's policy was different for border regions—Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Guangdong, and Guangxi—due to considerations of national security.⁴⁷ In this group of provinces the faction that was more supportive of the incumbent government was designated as "revolutionary" and assumed a major role in the revolutionary committee. The revolutionary committee, in turn, cracked down on the more militant rebel faction.

TABLE 4.5
County Death Tolls in Two Types of Provinces

	Deaths per county	Number of counties
Type 1 Provinces	45.2	1,271
Type 2 Provinces	451	259
Type 2 Provinces, excluding Guangdong and Guangxi	70.3	135

In both types of provinces, mass conflict was severe. Superficially, the fault line was between pro- and anti-government factions. However, in provinces like Hubei—which I will call type 1 provinces—the government incorporated many who had stridently opposed the pre-Cultural Revolution government. A new fault line developed between opposition rebels who were included in the revolutionary committee and their former allies, who were excluded. On the other hand, in provinces like Guangdong and Guangxi—type 2 provinces—the revolutionary committee united officials from the former government with leaders of the more moderate faction and then used their power to crush the rebel opposition.

Following Xu's analysis, I classify provinces into two types. Type 1 provinces are those whose political experience was similar to Hubei's; type 2 provinces are those whose experience was similar to Guangdong's and Guangxi's. Table 4.5 summarizes information for a national sample of 1,530 counties. The table makes clear that the death toll in the 259 counties located in type 2 provinces far outstripped that in the type 1 provinces. The average number of deaths per county in type 1 provinces was 451, but in type 2 provinces it was only 45, a ten-fold difference. Even if we exclude Guangxi and Guangdong, two provinces with particularly severe violence, the average number of deaths per county in type 2 provinces is still 50 percent higher. Therefore, we may conclude that the difference between Hubei and the other two provinces may represent a nationwide phenomenon.

It is unclear what mechanisms produced these differences. Some suggest that the severe violence in Guangdong and Guangxi can be attributed to retaliation by "conservatives" operating as government-backed militias against the opposition faction. There is some evidence to support this explanation. For example, the mass execution of captives in Guangxi seemed to be an instance of retaliation. Also, in Guangxi the opposition April Twenty-sec-

TABLE 4.6
Deaths, Injuries, and Numbers Persecuted per County in Three Provinces

	Deaths per county	Injuries per county	Numbers persecuted per county
Guangxi	574.0	266.4	12,616
Guangdong	311.6	28.1	6,788
Hubei	10.8	44.5	2,317
All provinces	80	68	5,397

ond faction repeatedly organized protests against mass killings.⁴⁸ But, as we have shown, the majority of the victims were four-types, and we have no evidence that they joined the rebel faction in disproportionate numbers. In the remote villages and communes where mass killings were most extensive, it is not clear whether there was factional mobilization prior to mass killings at all.

In light of the literature on genocide, one may propose a different hypothesis from a policy angle. The fact that the victims were mostly from four-types families suggests the mass killing was an extreme version—extermination—of the party's long-standing class-elimination policy. Theorists of genocide and mass killing in comparative perspective suggest that a more representative polity provides a deterrent.⁴⁹ It is suggestive that the Hubei government was more representative of the oppositional elements than the Guangdong and Guangxi governments.

What can these findings tell us about the scale of mass killings in China's other provinces? Guangxi and Guangdong may represent provinces with particularly severe mass killings and Hubei may represent those provinces at the mild end. Most provinces may be in between, but were closer to Guangxi and Guangdong than to Hubei. This conclusion can be reached by comparing the total number of rural deaths during the Cultural Revolution. Based on the 1,530 collected county gazetteers, the national average of deaths per county is 80. The averages in Guangxi and Guangdong are far above the national average (574 and 311 respectively), while Hubei (10.8) is far below. The numbers injured and targeted for persecution show a similar pattern (see Table 4.6).

The Political Context

Extreme violence such as mass killing and genocide challenges both our conscience and intellect. One would be remiss not to attempt an explanation. The pattern of mass killings in fact provides some clues. They appear to be political in nature: the timing, the perpetrators, and the identification of victims were all tied to the consolidation of power by newly established local governments. The killings do not seem to be random and unfocused. If this premise can be established, an explanation needs to address two issues. The first is about the political environment surrounding the events. What are the political and legal conditions under which a perpetrator believes that killing will not result in punishment? A second has to do with the psychology of the perpetrator. Even if there is everything to gain (political or otherwise), why does he or she willingly commit such a repulsive act?

I will focus primarily on the first issue. What motivates my discussion of the causes of mass killings is this question: did state policy makers *intentionally* kill in this manner, or were the mass killings largely an *unintended* consequence? This question may seem simplistic at first glance, but it is nonetheless a useful starting point that will lead us to explore the state policies and structures related to the mass killings. In the following discussion, a distinction is made between the central authorities and local governments. On paper, central policy pronouncements time and again admonished against violent excess, but they were taken to heart only by some local leaders. This distinction will prove to be crucial as the discussion unfolds.

DEMOBILIZING MASS MOVEMENTS AND FORMING NEW GOVERNMENTS

The Cultural Revolution began in May 1966 and subsided in 1971. Two waves of events divided the movement into three periods: the power seizure campaign in January 1967 and the formation of new local governments (revolutionary committees) in late 1967 and 1968.⁵⁰ Participants at first only included students and intellectuals, but later involved people from all walks of life, including workers, peasants, and bureaucrats. For more than one year, citizens were permitted to form their own political groups. The freedom and "great democracy" (*da minzhu*), however, did not produce the new order that Mao may have had in mind. Instead, citizens everywhere split into factions and fought street battles.

By late 1967 mass factions were to be demobilized. Mao called for "great

revolutionary unity" of a divided and militant population. He envisioned new forms of government—revolutionary committees—in every jurisdiction by February 1968, the Chinese New Year.⁵¹ For local bureaucrats at the provincial, county, commune, and brigade levels, however, this was no easy task. In fact, Mao's plan failed. The last provincial revolutionary committee was not set up until September of 1968 (in Xinjiang). Some revolutionary committees at lower levels were not established until September 1969.⁵² In Hubei, the provincial revolutionary committee was established on February 1, 1968, and most new county governments were formed in the spring of that year. In Guangdong, the provincial revolutionary committee was founded on February 20, 1968; most county-level committees were founded in the months of January, February, and March. Guangxi's provincial committee was set up August 20, 1968, although most county governments were formed in the months of February, March, and April of the year (see Figure 4.1).

Establishing a new order involved two related tasks: installing an effective local government and cracking down on dissenting mass opposition. The new revolutionary committees were to consist of army officers, selected leaders from the former government, and selected leaders of mass factions. Which officials from the former government and which leaders of mass factions would be appointed to the revolutionary committee was often hotly contested, and leaders of mass factions who were shut out of the revolutionary committee could become vehement opponents of the new order. In Guangdong and Guangxi, oppositional alliances continued to wage armed battles against those who supported the new government. In Guangxi, armed battles plagued Nanning, the provincial capital, and delayed the formation of the revolutionary committee until August 1968, and even then it occurred only after the center's concerted intervention.⁵³ In Guangdong, Premier Zhou Enlai called for the formation of a revolutionary committee within a month and a half in early November 1967, but the task was not accomplished until February 20, 1968.⁵⁴ Nor did order ensue immediately. The dissenting mass alliance, Red Flag, remained openly defiant and engaged in numerous street battles, known as "great armed struggles" (*da wudou*), for the next three months.⁵⁵ In Hubei, the provincial revolutionary committee was an outcome of mass factional struggle that culminated in the well-known Wuhan incident of July 20, 1967, in which the former government and its mass allies fell in disgrace. The opposition emerged victorious,

thanks to the center's backing. Armed battles peaked that summer. The new government was formed on February 5, 1968, with the former opposition faction dominating the seats for mass representatives.⁵⁶

Persistent disorder in the provinces concerned the party center, which urged the new revolutionary committees to defend their power and to treat opposition in "class struggle" terms. The revolutionary committees took up the suggestion, and often played up the class rhetoric, which in turn influenced the behavior of officials in counties and other lower-level jurisdictions. Many responded with terror campaigns, whether the political threat was real or imagined.

DEFINING VICTIMS AND MANUFACTURING THREATS

The central party leaders' call for a political solution to establish the new order was unequivocal. A typical passage regarding such policies was the 1968 New Year editorial that appeared jointly in the party's three flagship publications:

Chairman Mao says: "All reactionary forces will fight to the last gasp at their pending doom." A handful of traitors, spies and capitalist power-holders in the party, the demons and ghosts (that is, those landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, bad elements, and rightists who have not yet been well reformed) in society, and the running dogs of the American imperialists and Soviet Revisionists are bound to continue their sabotage and instigation with all possible means, including spreading rumors and planting divisions.⁵⁷

Hitler's Nazi state promoted a racial theory that portrayed Jews as subhuman. Stalin's communist state created a category of "enemies of the people" who were subject to extermination. As such, early in the process, mass killings often involved the state propaganda machine dehumanizing a segment of the population. The Chinese equivalent of the subhuman category was "class enemy." What was unique during the demobilization of the Cultural Revolution is that the defining characteristics were based not so much on ascriptive traits (race, ethnicity, or religion) as a political standard: a class enemy was whomever the local government deemed to be standing in the way of the new social order. "Whether or not one is willing to overcome factionalism," asserted the same editorial, "is the most important sign of whether or not one is willing to be a real revolutionary under the present circumstances."⁵⁸

As at other times, party policy was general rather than specific. While it stressed the existence of “class enemies” and their potential threat, it did not provide criteria for identifying them. Local governments could define “class enemy” as they saw fit. To compensate for the deficiency in general pronouncements, the party promoted a series of examples of local practice. For example, four days after the above editorial, the center issued a directive praising the work of “deeply digging out traitors” by Heilongjiang Province.⁵⁹ At mid-year, a report on a Beijing factory’s experience of “fighting enemies” was distributed nationwide with great fanfare.⁶⁰ Local governments emulated these examples to comply with the national policy.

The rhetoric of “class struggle” was not new, nor was its effect unprecedented in dehumanizing certain categories of the population. For violence as extreme as mass killing to occur, there was an additional process at work: manufacturing threat. As commonly seen in other cases of mass killing in which the state not only creates a category of the subhuman but also manufactures a pending danger of inaction, the provincial and the lower-level governments manufactured tangible threats to justify terror.

In this case, local governments rushed to concoct stories of organized activities by so-called conspiratorial groups. Local governments called for “preemptive attacks against class enemies,” often in a manner of “launching a force-12 typhoon.” In Hubei Province, a moderate period came to an end in late March 1968 when Beijing suddenly stopped the anti-ultra-leftist campaign and switched to a so-called counterattack on rightist trends. In the provincial capital the self-styled mass dictatorship group turned the Wuhan Gymnasium into a large prison. Many were beaten.⁶¹ The anti-rightist attack also swept counties, as April and May that year witnessed a reign of terror across the province, under the banner of a campaign to “oppose three, smash one” (*sanfan yi fensui*), against the so-called class enemy’s ferocious attack (*jieji diren de changkuang jingong*).⁶²

In Guangxi and Guangdong, a large-scale conspiratorial network—“Patriots against the Communists” (PAC)—was reportedly unmasked on June 17, 1968. It was alleged that the Guangxi part of the network was only a “division,” and that the headquarters was in Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong. One of the two warring mass factions—the United Headquarters (Lianzhi)—soon attacked its rival in these terms: “The PACs are deeply rooted in the April Twenty-second Organization. The leaders of

April Twenty-second are the PACs. Let’s act immediately. Whoever resists arrest should be executed on the spot.”⁶³

There is evidence that the mobilization of terror was directly facilitated by the diagnosis of the situation by a few key central leaders. In a meeting with Guangxi mass representatives on July 25, 1968, Zhou Enlai and Kang Sheng sanctioned this theory of a large-scale conspiracy. They agreed that the PAC headquarters was based in Guangzhou and there were branches in Guangxi. More significantly, both leaders specifically linked the PACs to two mass alliances (April Twenty-second in Guangxi and Red Flag in Guangdong).⁶⁴

The general climate encouraged rumors of conspiracy and threat in communes and villages. Not only were those labels handed down from above used to signify danger, but allegations about tangible threats abounded—“assassination squads” and “action manifestos” were reported to have been uncovered. In the cliff-killing case of Quanzhou County, Guangxi, cited above, the commune militia head came back from a meeting in a nearby county and instructed his subordinates that the “four-types” were about to act, and that the first groups of victims would be cadres and party members, followed by poor peasants.⁶⁵ Information is limited in the county gazetteers of the three provinces, but a speech by the county leader in Zhang Cheng’s detailed account of Daoxian (Hunan Province) may illuminate the typical rhetoric of manufacturing an imminent threat before a mass killing:

At this time the class struggle is complicated. A few days ago, there appeared reactionary posters in the No. 6 district.⁶⁶ The class enemies spread rumors that Chiang Kai-shek and his gang will attack mainland China soon and the American imperialists will launch a new world war. Once the war breaks out, they [class enemies] will first kill party members, then probationary party members. In the No. 1 district, a [former] puppet colonel [who had served in the puppet army during the Anti-Japanese War, that is World War II] sought out the brigade [party] secretary and the peasant’s association chair and demanded reinstatement.⁶⁷

ADMONISHING AGAINST EXCESS

Understanding the role of the state in mass killings will not be complete without noting the other side of the story: the central and provincial officials constantly warned against excessive violence. No explicit endorsement of mass killings can be found in any party document or speech. To the

extent that information about mass killings was passed upward and treated as credible, the upper-level authorities reacted with condemnation and in some cases sent in the army to restore order.

As early as November 20, 1966, the party Central Committee distributed a Beijing municipal policy directive to all local governments nationwide, prohibiting “unauthorized detention stations, unauthorized trial courts, and unauthorized arrests and beatings.” It warned that those behaviors were a “violation of state law and party discipline.”⁶⁸ Thereafter, the spirit of “struggle through reason, not violence” was reiterated again and again by the center through a series of major policy pronouncements (for instance, on December 15, 1966, January 28, 1967, April 6, 1967, June 6, 1967, May 15, 1968, July 3, 24, and 28, 1968, December 26, 1968).⁶⁹

Although it is debatable whether a provincial government such as Guangxi was serious when it warned against excessive violence, it did so at least on paper. In December 1967, about one month after a new wave of mass killings spread across the province, the provincial authorities issued a ten-point order including this statement: “Mass organizations should not randomly arrest, beat, or kill. All the current detainees should be released immediately.” From this point on, a new term was coined, “indiscriminate beatings and killings” (*luanda luansha*) to label the widespread violence as a violation of social and political order.⁷⁰ For example, on December 18, 1967, the provincial authorities issued a report on *luanda luansha* in Li Village, Rong County; on May 3, 1968, issued an order to stop *luanda luansha* after an investigation in nine counties; on June 24, 1968, issued the document “Instructions about Prohibiting Luanda Luansha”; on September 19, 1968, confiscated firearms from mass organizations; and finally, on September 23, 1968, issued a “Notice about Stopping Luanda Luansha.”⁷¹

The most compelling evidence of official opposition to excessive violence is that in many locations, when the information about such incidents could be passed upward, the authorities sent in leaders or the army to intervene. For example, in the earliest incident of mass killings in the suburb of Beijing, a county leader went to Macun Village five times to stop the killings. His effort involved high-ranking leaders of the Beijing city government.⁷² In the case of the most severe mass killings in Daoxian, Hunan, an army division was sent in to end it.⁷³ Although no detailed information is available in the county annals as to how the mass killings came to an end, the data show that they were usually concentrated in a certain period of time, and in most

counties the upsurge in killings occurred only once, indicating that some sort of external constraints were imposed from above.

It is reasonable to conclude that such official policies from both the center and the provincial authorities served to prevent mass violence from escalating even further. But these efforts were relatively ineffective for two reasons. First, the official policy did not carry any real punishment. The admonition was usually meant to serve only as a guide for the future. In fact, there is no evidence of any punishment during or immediately after any mass killing. The following quote from a speech by Minister of Public Security Xie Fuzhi on May 15, 1968, is a telling example of the leniency toward the perpetrators of violence. In this speech, which was supposed to admonish against violence, he seemed to suggest that no violence would be punished:

Even counterrevolutionaries should not be killed, as long as they are willing to accept reeducation. It is doubly wrong to beat people to death. *Nonetheless, these things [killings] happened because of lack of experience; so there is no need to investigate who is responsible.* What is important is to gain experience so as to carry out in earnest Chairman Mao’s instructions to struggle not with violence but with reason.⁷⁴

The prosecution of perpetrators did not happen until the late 1970s, some ten years after the fact.

Second, it is not clear whether provincial and lower governments meant business in their warnings against extreme violence. For example, the above list of Guangxi actions regarding mass killings coincided with another long list of policies persecuting “class enemies.” Although the province may have seen the *luanda luansha* in communes and villages as unwarranted, its incentive to play up violence against the oppositional mass organizations in the cities undercut its role as guardian of social order.

STATE CONTROL CRIPPLED

The very nature of the Cultural Revolution—dismantling and rebuilding local governments—had severely damaged the vertical bureaucratic hierarchy. This included the overhaul of the public security system and the legal systems. By August 1967, the attack on these systems had been called for by no less than the minister of the Public Security, Xie Fuzhi:

From the beginning of the Cultural Revolution last year until the January Storm this year, the majority of apparatuses of public security, prosecution,

and the court were protecting capitalist roaders and repressing revolutionary masses. . . . The situation is hard to change, unless the whole system of public security is overhauled. The old machine must be entirely smashed.⁷⁵

In 1967, according to county gazetteers, the agencies of these systems ceased to function in local counties, communes, and villages. Detentions and prosecutions were carried out not according to any sense of law but according to the political standards of the moment.

Another result of the Cultural Revolution was the clogged channels of information flow both from top down and bottom up. Particularly germane to our discussion was the failure of the bottom-up information flow, such that when bad things happened at the lower reaches of the state, the upper authorities usually did not know until it was too late. When local leaders publicized their “achievements” in the movement, violence was covered up. For example, in January 1967 the Beijing municipal government submitted to the center a report about how the new administration of Qinghua University faithfully carried out the center’s policy. This report painstakingly described how the people who had committed “bad deeds” were well treated and given opportunities to reform themselves. The report drew Mao’s attention and he instructed it to be distributed across the nation as a model for emulation.⁷⁶ Not until 1978, ten years later, would another report, issued in an entirely different political climate, rebut the initial account, detailing the real fate of the struggle targets at this university. According to the new report, within only two months of the class cleansing campaign, more than ten people were killed in one way or the other.⁷⁷ Similarly, in local counties, due to the failure of information to flow from the bottom up, the upper-level authorities intervened only after large numbers of people had been killed.

Conclusion

We have uncovered four prominent features of the pattern of mass killings. First, they varied greatly across the three provinces, while within each province there appears to have been a great degree of uniformity. This pattern indicates that the occurrence of mass killings was more a function of province-specific political conditions than national politics as a whole. I tentatively attribute the provincial difference to the provincial pattern of mass factional alignment vis-à-vis the governmental authorities. In Hubei,

the opposition faction, having prevailed in the previous conflict with the central government’s support, was incorporated into the new government. In contrast, in Guangxi and Guangdong, the opposition was excluded from power, and revolutionary committees in these two provinces were more prone to use violence against the insurgents.

Second, mass killings were concentrated in the months after most counties established revolutionary committees but at a time when the provincial capitals were still entangled in mass factionalism. The peaks of mass killings coincided with two directives from the party center in July 1968 banning factional armed battles and disbanding mass organizations. This finding helps us understand the nature and source of mass killings. The fact that most of them occurred after the new revolutionary committees were put in place indicates that mass killings were the result of the repression by the local state rather than the result of conflicts between independent mass groups. The fact that they coincided with the crackdown on the oppositional mass organizations in the provincial capitals indicates that the provincial authorities promoted the rhetoric of violence, although extreme violence in local communes and villages may not be what they intended.

Third, mass killings were primarily a rural phenomenon. In other words, they occurred not in provincial capitals or county seats, but in communes and villages. This is in stark contrast to earlier mass movements of the Cultural Revolution such as campaigns against intellectuals and government officials and the factional street battles, which mostly occurred in urban settings. The image of top-down diffusion does not apply to the mass killings. This suggests that the class struggle rhetoric disseminated from urban centers found an expression in extreme violence in rural townships and villages, possibly due to the failure of the state to hold the lowest bureaucrats accountable for their actions. This explanation is supported by another piece of evidence—the poorer and more remote counties were more likely to have mass killings.

Fourth, the perpetrators were local leaders and their mass followers (for example, militia members). This speaks to the political nature of the mass killings in the Cultural Revolution.

What can we make of these patterns? What do they say about the role of the state in the mass killings? In order to answer these questions, let me explicate my conception of the Chinese state that has implicitly guided my discussion thus far. I differentiate the state into three levels—the center, the province, and the local governments (county, commune, and brigade).

The central authorities in Beijing played up the class struggle rhetoric as their time-honored method of solving the problem of the moment—how to set up local governments and demobilize mass movements. In this sense, they had a sponsoring role in the mass killings. However, as evidenced in the policy pronouncements, the center also saw extreme violence at the local level as an indication of unwarranted disorder. In this sense, the fact that mass killings nonetheless occurred represented a failure of the state to influence local actors' behavior.

The provincial authorities, particularly in Guangxi and Guangdong, had an incentive to promote class struggle rhetoric in dealing with mass opposition in the cities. They may have had more tolerance for violence than the center due to the particularly severe challenges they faced. In this sense, the state was the sponsor of mass killings. In fact, the high point of mass killings was exactly when the provinces used the two July central directives to crack down on mass opposition. However, it is unclear whether the large number of killings in local communes and villages, mostly against unorganized "four-types," helped the crackdown on the opposition in the cities. It may be reasonable to believe that it was not instrumentally useful except that it may have helped generate a climate of fear. In other words, the provincial authorities would also see the mass killings in villages as unwarranted, an indication of state failure at the provincial level.

In comparison, local governments (at county, commune, and village levels) were clearly the direct sponsors of the mass killings, although their motives are not clear. They may have misinterpreted the policies disseminated from above and showed their compliance with an extreme level of zealotry; or, they may have seen terror as a convenient way to solidify their grip on power in the local community. For whatever reason, it was the local bureaucrats and their followers who committed the violence. At a time when the formal public security and court systems had ceased to function and in an era when the justification for violence seemed to be palpable, local leaders, particularly those at the grassroots level and in remote areas, were unaccountable.

As such, when the state is considered not as a unitary whole but as a collection of actors at various levels, mass killings were created not by state sponsorship or state failure alone, but by a combination of both. The tragedy of mass killings in the later part of the Cultural Revolution was rooted in this paradox of state sponsorship and state failure.

A generation of research on the Cultural Revolution mass movement has been dominated by works that search for the underlying interest-group base of "rebellion."⁷⁸ Missing from these studies are two important features of the Cultural Revolution: violence and state sponsorship. The violence was rooted in the Stalinist doctrine of unmasking hidden enemies. Earlier scholars often bypass this doctrine and the violence it entailed. Their research is more about the interests and idealism of actors behind their violent actions. However, "as experienced by participants, bystanders, and victims alike, it [the Cultural Revolution] is now commonly understood not as a pursuit of abstract ideals," Walder once reminded us, "but for what it turned out to be: an unprecedented wave of state-instigated persecution, torture, gang warfare, and mindless violence."⁷⁹ The Stalinist doctrine in Mao's China was taken to heart by all actors in the political system. It matters little whether they were for or against the status quo. Seen in this light, the recent discussion by a group of Chinese scholars about the "democratic" elements in the Cultural Revolution is misguided.⁸⁰ The political witch-hunt approach and the bloody treatment of opponents did more to damage any semblance of democracy in social life than to advance it.

If the CR [Cultural Revolution] was "really" an idealistic quest for equality and democracy or a dispute over national policy, why did it take the form of a search for hidden traitors and enemies? If CR radicalism was a rhetorical mask for rational interest-group activity, why did these rational actors appear to take their rhetoric so seriously and routinely kidnap, humiliate, and fight wars of annihilation against other radical workers and students?⁸¹

In this study I confront the disturbing feature of violence head on. I do so by searching for an explanation in state institutions and state actors.

This leads us to the second defining feature of the Cultural Revolution: state sponsorship. Previous research often focused on preexisting social divisions that allegedly motivated mass movements. But as I have shown above, not only did the state lead the movement through policy pronouncements, but also local state actors took the interpretations of these pronouncements into their own hands. One of the consequences was the large-scale violence examined here. A switch of analytical focus to state institutions and state actors is necessary to do justice to this important feature of the Cultural Revolution.