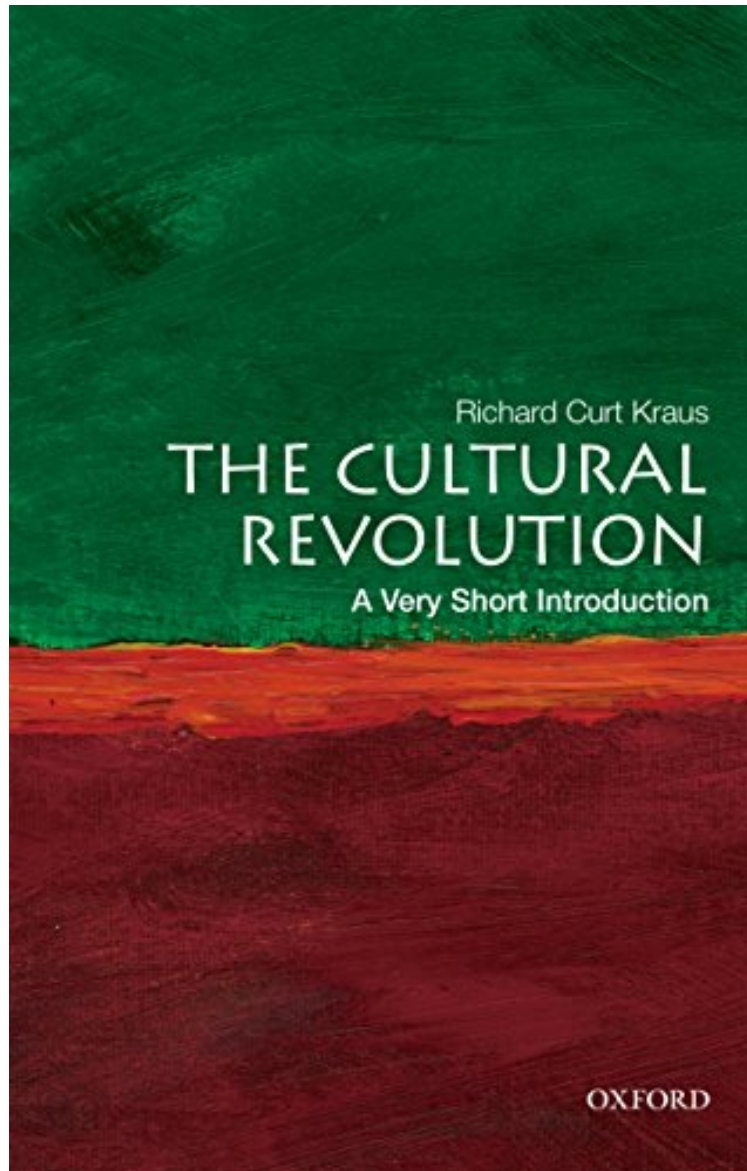


[FREE] The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)

Von Richard Curt Kraus

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and Insightful Look at one of the Biggest Social Disasters in History Von Dr. Bojan Tunguz Chinese Cultural Revolution is probably the most comprehensive and wide-reaching attempt at total social engineering in history. It was an attempt by the Chinese communist authorities to essentially uproot the three millennia of the national history and culture, and rebuild the whole society 'from scratch.' Needless to say, a program of such outsized scope and ambition required a lot force and violence in its implementation. The violence was physical, psychological, and, as the name suggests, cultural. It has left deep scars on the Chinese society and the ramifications that are still felt. Since its end, a lot has been written about the Cultural Revolution, but until relatively recently scholars haven't had that much of an access to the official Chinese state documents and had to rely primarily on the outside and secondary sources. 'The Cultural Revolution: A Very Short Introduction' takes the advantage of all of the best recent scholarship on the subject, and presents a very interesting and insightful book on this subject. Richard Curt Kraus has written a very accessible and readable introduction to the Cultural Revolution, covering the years 1966-1976, as well as the decades that preceded them and the aftermath in the ensuing years. One of this book's greatest strengths is its presentation of the forces that drove the Cultural Revolution in terms of power struggles in the top echelons of Chinese politics. This approach sheds a lot of light on otherwise opaque or seemingly irrational actions by Mao and the people around him. Far from being an absolute unassailable dictator, Mao was feeling very vulnerable in the 1960s, both from internal opposition as well as from the outside forces. From that standpoint the launch of the Cultural Revolution was a very rational, albeit devastating, attempt at consolidation of Mao's political base at home, as well as a way to sever foreign cultural ties. It all led to China's international isolation and suppression of all forms of domestic dissent. The Cultural Revolution has undoubtedly had a devastating effect on Chinese society and economy, but Kraus argues that the seeds of the latter economic boom were already laid during this period. The Cultural Revolution has taken a huge human toll on the Chinese society, and the estimates of the total number of people killed range from half a million to about a million and a half, with many more millions tortured, imprisoned, or otherwise persecuted. It is one of the most outrageous periods of such large-scale persecutions in history, and like all the other mass killings it has received a fair amount of attention and discussion, both in scholarly works as well as in more general accounts. Unfortunately, I feel that this very short introduction doesn't properly do the justice to this aspect of Cultural Revolution. The book mentions some of the atrocities, but mostly in passing and somewhat in the background. Inclusion of a whole chapter dedicated just to the devastating human toll would have been more than appropriate. Overall, I feel that this is a very good and insightful book, and anyone interested in the Cultural Revolution would benefit from reading it.

Kurzbeschreibung China's decade-long Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution shook the politics of China and the world. Even as we approach its fiftieth anniversary, the movement remains so contentious that the Chinese Communist Party still forbids fully open investigation of its origins, development, and conclusion. Drawing upon a vital trove of scholarship, memoirs, and popular culture, this Very Short Introduction illuminates this complex, often obscure, and still controversial movement. Moving beyond the figure of Mao Zedong, Richard Curt Kraus links Beijing's elite politics to broader aspects of society and culture, highlighting many changes in daily life, employment, and the economy. Kraus also situates this very nationalist outburst of Chinese radicalism within a global context, showing that the Cultural Revolution was mirrored in the radical youth movement that swept much of the world, and that had imagined or emotional links to China's red guards. Yet it was also during the Cultural Revolution that China and the United States tempered their long hostility, one of the innovations in this period that sowed the seeds for China's subsequent decades of spectacular economic growth. Pressestimmen "This remarkably full and efficient account provides a basic narrative of the Cultural Revolution, and then discusses in greater depth its politics, culture, economics, foreign relations, and memory. The book profits from Kraus's particular expertise on culture and the arts, and does not shy from controversial claims that are likely to provoke lively discussions." -Joseph Esherick, Hwei-chih and Julia Hsiu Chair in Chinese Studies, University of California, San Diego "It's just 152 pages, small enough to slip in your back pocket, and written by a political scientist who knows the complex event in question through and through, and does a nice job of, among other things, dealing with the strange shadows it continues to cast on contemporary Chinese politics." -- Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chancellor's Professor and Department of History Chair, University of California at Irvine "This remarkably full and efficient account provides a basic narrative of the Cultural Revolution, and then discusses in greater depth its politics, culture, economics, foreign relations, and memory. The book profits from Kraus's particular expertise on culture and the arts, and does not shy from controversial claims that are likely to provoke lively discussions." -Joseph Esherick, Hwei-chih and Julia Hsiu Chair in Chinese Studies, University of California, San Diego "It's just 152 pages, small enough to slip in your back pocket, and written by a political scientist who knows the complex event in question through and through, and does a nice job of, among other things, dealing with the strange shadows it continues to cast on contemporary Chinese politics." -- Jeffrey Wasserstrom, Chancellor's Professor and Department of History Chair, University of California at Irvine Kurzbeschreibung China's decade-long Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution shook the politics of China and the

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