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**“Political Contingency and Rebellious Alliance:  
The Case of the Chinese Red Guard Movement, 1966-1968”**

Abstract

Students of social movements and collective action have long been focusing on the structural sources of social mobilization. This model presumes that mass actors in structurally similar positions would make similar political choices with fixed interests and consistent identities that lead them into well-defined political alliance. However, at times of radical instability political ambiguity and contingency are likely to upset static models of mobilization. Based on the analyses of popular rebellion and factional contention in communist China in 1966-1968 with the more abundant sources available today, I identify two key mechanisms—contextual ambiguity and adaptive choice—to mediate political alignment in moments of radical change. I argue that the choices of mass actors are highly circumscribed by their entrenched local political context. When confronting with a rapidly changing and ambiguous political situation, mass actors in structurally similar positions would make varied political choices with fluid interests and flowing identities. During this dynamic process, new political identities are generated and new political interests are continually redefined that they sustain quite violent conflicts with greater scales of influence.