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On Practice And Contradiction (Revolutions Series): Slavoj Žižek Presents Mao



Synopsis

These early philosophical writings underpinned the Chinese revolutions and their clarion calls to insurrection remain some of the most stirring of all time. Drawing on a dizzying array of references from contemporary culture and politics, Zizek's firecracker commentary reaches unsettling conclusions about the place of Mao's thought in the revolutionary canon.

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Customer Reviews

Product as described

This seems to me the greatest disappointment by far in Verso's new Revolutions series. This series seeks, laudably, to reintroduce and reinterpret some past titans of left political thought, pairing classic texts with new introductions for a new era; but this Mao volume instead reproduces the most hackneyed, thoughtless stereotypes of Mao both in praising and blaming him. Slavoj Zizek's introduction to this volume, which will be many readers' main reason for buying the book, might be expected to be something like the substantial and interesting essay that accompanied his selection of Lenin from Verso. Instead, this introduction is one of the worst pieces of Zizek's career (and I say this as a great fan of the Slovenian thinker). This shallow piece, obviously dashed off to meet a deadline, completely misses the opportunity to reassess Mao's actual writing (and political actions) in a new historical moment. Instead of, for example, reading Mao's theory of contradiction as a still-useful political concept (as Althusser did, much more thoughtfully, in the

1970s), Žižek reproduces and embraces some of the cheapest old anticommunist chestnuts (Mao as "mass murderer," Mao as absolutist, Mao as totalitarian) in the interest of giving a "contrarian" defense of the Chairman's utility to radicals. Here, Žižek's desire to perform the role of the edgy, hip, more-ultraleftist-than-thou radical intellectual blinds him to the historical opportunity to reassess Mao's thought, whether in the context of the death of the '60s New Left's briefly fashionable appropriation of Maoism or its surprisingly continuous use in the new millennium's Third World revolutionary movements in places like Nepal. An introduction that just gave a brief overview of Mao's thought in its historical context would have been infinitely more useful than this. Apart from Žižek missing the opportunity to rethink and reintroduce Mao in a thoughtful and useful way to a new audience, the book is also a major missed opportunity for what ought to have been a fresh translation. The texts are some of Mao's most familiar essays, but they are offered in the same old dusty, awkward, clunky, sometimes nonsensical translations that have been circulating for decades in countless volumes from old left presses such as International Publishers. (The book's translation note gives an unconvincing defense of this cost-cutting move on the grounds that these texts are "familiar," when the point of the whole Revolutions series is ostensibly to defamiliarize its texts in order to open them up to new readings.) This is arguably Verso's greatest failing here: English readers, at least, cannot productively re-read and rethink Mao's work without more readable and reliable texts. These old and bad translations should have been put out to pasture, not dressed up in a pretty new cover design and sold as though they were something new.

the thoughts of Mao, were first of all a good place of political study, the Badiouian "Truth" moment for it was the bridge to Third World revolutions, in SouthEast Asia, Phillipines, Burma, Mao thought Vietnam was the beginning to Washington's attack of China itself, no great political clairvoyance for the Helmsman; trouble also was Mao didn't know theory, he refused to comprehend contradiction, in its original Hegelian formations, instead adopting the most naive, simplistic dimensions of dialectic; he simply utilized a hammer to crush the other side of negativity, hence study the failures of The Cultural Revolution, or the Great Leap Forwards, (which of course was Backwards monstrously) and if you read Žižek carefully he says this, Mao doesn't need to relish in the finer points of translation, we get it! first all of his theoretical writings were for rhetorical affect, effect, for Chinese Party functionaries insiders, the upper echelons; the internal cadre, not intended for the great unwashed, the peasants; there was another party line, so goes Stalinism which Mao practiced, there were lines and "other" lines always with a neurotic fear of all that exists; Badiou as well spends time with Mao's thought as a science, but only within his own theories of Event, Truth,

which Mao etc, but not only Mao but the context of China for world revolution, you need to get away from all this infallibility paradigms, Mao's genius was in inverse relation to his overwhelming blindnesses, A Thousand Blindnesses, things he refused to comprehend, like the function of the state, and the role of the party in relation to it, and foreign affairs as well, and how peasant cadre functioned together. He could have taken advantage of closer ties with the Soviet Union, and the co-relation of forces to make China more powerful, a real world beacon to the Third World; instead it had to wait until Deng came to comprehend Mao's monstrous myopias and you get the authoritarian capitalism now in China eradicating worker lifeworld through brutal crackdowns and this system will now be exported to the Third World. Where's Mao's so-called genius within this context?? Zizek comprehends all this very well.

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