

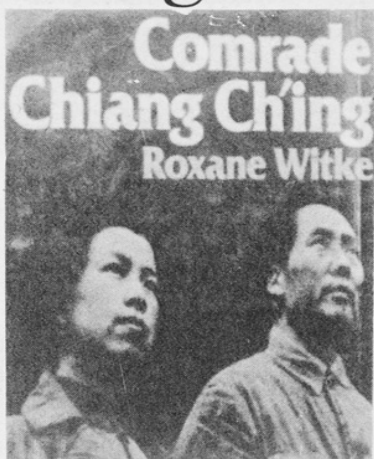


# Chiang Ch'ing: Absorbing biography

*Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*  
by Roxane Witke  
Little, Brown

Despite a few disturbing flaws, Roxane Witke has written an absorbing biography of one of the most fascinating and powerful political figures of the 20th century. Through this biography, the western world is just now becoming aware of the profound effect Chiang Ch'ing, better known to the world as Mao Tse-Tung's widow, had on Chinese politics.

Although Ms. Witke has done an outstanding job in preparing this biography, three flaws exist in the book. The first of these is the author's very clear dislike of Mao and her frequent practice of slipping derogatory comments about him into the narrative. Most of these remarks appear to be petty rather than relevant to the subject matter. Another



Comrade Chiang Ch'ing provides new insight into China

flaw—the most serious in the book—is her almost complete lack of commentary on Mao's and Chiang's relationship. Because of their position as leading comrades in the Communist hierarchy, an examination of how their relationship influenced their political struggles would seem to be a necessity. Frequent references are made to this concern, but very little deep analysis is offered. A final flaw is the way in which the author deals with Chiang Ch'ing's childhood years. These years were unquestionably critical in shaping Chiang's adult political life, but Dr. Witke fails to draw all the necessary connections between these two periods in Chiang's life, despite spending a good portion of the book describing her early life.

On the whole, however, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* is a most interesting and important book. The second half of the book, in particular, is fascinat-

ing. It's here that we really begin to see a more complete, moving picture of the century's most powerful and significant woman—the first time that such attention has been paid to a Chinese woman. The author's description of the cultural revolution and Chiang Ch'ing's leading role in that extraordinary historical event is brilliantly written. The intense political and cultural struggle of that time period are presented in a more penetrating, deeply emotional fashion than any other western writer has been able to achieve.

For those interested in Chinese politics and culture, the book is invaluable. With the exception of Edgar Snow, no other western scholar has had access to such personal information about the revolutionary struggle, and as such the book provides a rare view of the internal side of Chinese politics. At the same time, the book is just as important from a feminist point of view, in that we see a more extensive portrayal of a woman's political struggles than any other writer has provided. Of particular significance here is the author's ability to show the massive opposition Chiang Ch'ing encountered among the male dominated Chinese leadership. This struggle—with its proof of Chiang's eventual victory in the cultural revolution she created, represents Chiang Ch'ing's greatest achievement in her long political career, and the author's description of that victory is her own highest achievement in a very important book.

The result of a week-long series of secret interviews (sixty hours in all) held in August of 1972, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* has already proven to be one of the most significant biographies of our time. The existence of the book, coupled with Mao's death in 1976, led to Chiang Ch'ing's eventual arrest by the new Chinese leadership.

Of the five sections in the book, two are particularly interesting and provocative. The first is "Part Two: In The Hinterlands", which deals with the activities of the Chinese Communist Party through the late 1930's until their victory over Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces in 1949. The value of this section lies in the insight Chiang Ch'ing provides with respect to the deep psychological effects the revolutionary struggle had on its leaders, most of whom were powerful figures in Chinese politics for years after Chiang Kai-Shek was defeated. Chiang Ch'ing's comments here provide one of the few opportunities westerners interested in Chinese affairs have had to see more than the purely factual side of the revolution. Like Edgar Snow's brilliant book, *Red Star Over China*, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* shows us the human side of China's most important revolutionary figures. Chiang Ch'ing allows us to see the revolution as a deeply human struggle filled with emotion and conflicts, a view rarely presented to the western world.

## Revolutionary rock is reborn

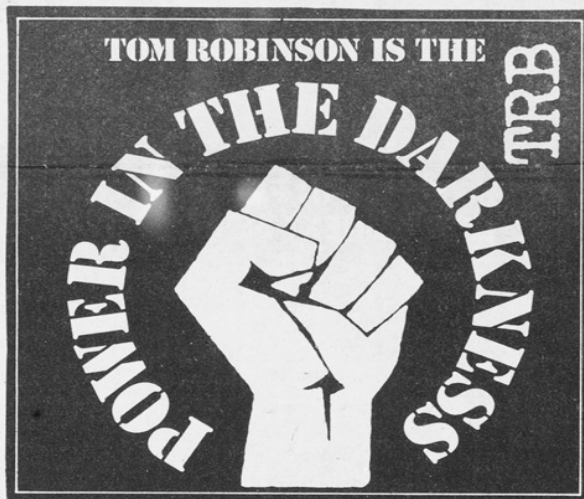
*"Freedom, we're talking about your freedom. Freedom to do what you want with your body, freedom to believe what you like. Freedom for brothers to love one another, freedom for black and white. Freedom from elitism and male domination, freedom for the mother and wife. Freedom from Big Brother's interrogation, freedom to live your own life. Power in the darkness, stand up and fight for your rights."*

Politically left-wing rock groups were supposed to have gone out of style along with peace symbols and love beads, but with the release of the Tom Robinson Band's first LP "Power In The Darkness," revolutionary rock is reborn.

The only other rock band as blatantly political as TRB was the MC-5, who, during their heyday (circa 1968-71) used to rip up and burn American flags on stage. Their association with John Sinclair and the old White Panther Party is legend in the Motor City, but the band split up after three LP's and a bumper European tour.

TRB just might break tradition and gain widespread popularity if the title cut from this album gets the airplay it deserves in this country. Tom Robinson, main mover and singer/songwriter behind TRB, is gay. The tune "Glad To Be Gay" is his statement on the current plight of homosexuals in England, and although the other material was also written about British society, it won't take much imagination to relate it to livin' in the U.S.A.

The cover on this album is a huge yellow clenched fist on a black background, and yes I'm sure it's not a re-issue from 1968. TRB was formed in January of 1977 in England, and apparently has a strong, small, and



intensely loyal following there. On the album's back cover they credit their diehard fans with the modest success and promising future that are now theirs.

They've already had a hit single in Britain called, "1-2-3-4 Motorway," and they are currently touring the U.S. TRB is heavily associated with an organization called Rock Against Racism, a group of musicians who have banded together to combat the mounting racism and general right-wing hysteria now building in England.

Despite all this, Tom Robinson has insisted in interviews with the media that TRB is first and foremost a rock band, not political activists. And despite that, Rolling Stone has some typical things to say about the leftist philosophy so powerfully set forth in "Power In The Darkness."

Rolling Stone said something like, "TRB is too good musically to be wasted on leftist broadsides." But

then who listens to millionaire rock journalists who sold their collective souls to RCA and put Jack Ford, the President's son, on their cover?

The point in TRB is uncompromising in its political stance, energetic and unique in its musical approach, and is addressing issues with their music that just aren't being talked about by rock musicians anymore.

Latch onto a copy of "Power In The Darkness." And while you're in the record store, see if they can dig up any old copies of the MC-5's "High Time" and "Kick Out The Jams." Then go home, put the records on the turntable, and rediscover your roots.

Better yet, flood the radio stations with requests for cuts from "Power In The Darkness," and get involved with us or any other activist groups. 'Cause when the music stops, we've got a world to change!