Reform Mao Now: Reading Jin Chongji's *Mao Zedong* in the Age of Xi Jinping

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Jin Chongji's biography of Mao Zedong was published in 1996 by the CCP Central Committee's Party Literature Research Office (中共中央文献研究室), covering the years from Mao's birth in 1893 until the start of the People's Republic of China in October 1949. The second part of Mao's life covering events until his death in 1976 was published first in 2003 under the direction of Pang Xianzhi (逄先知) with several writers, including Jin. In 2011 both parts were published together in a six volume set.[1] This set is being translated by the Translation and Compilation Bureau into English and will be published by Cambridge University Press, probably in 2017.

Jin Chongji's biography of Mao is, of course, an official version. Jin presumably wrote or revised it when he was in Maojiawan, the location of the Party Document Research Office in Beijing. The strength of this placement is the considerable access to primary documents this has afforded Jin Chongji and his colleagues, documents not available to other scholars inside and outside China. The limitation, of course, is that the story they tell is "within the system." It is like reading a biography of a Pope published by the Vatican. There are limits. The limits are clear in this case, and public: the 1981 CCP Central Committee resolution on "Some Questions in the History of our Party Since the Founding of the Nation."* This rubric allows a more humanized version of Mao that includes some recognition of his errors, but keeps Mao as the father of the revolution and font of Mao Zedong Though—though not the only contributor to that orthodoxy. Thus, in a way Jin's biography of Mao is a 列傳 in an orthodox 正史, combined, of course, with Basic Annals of the founder of the regime. Sima Qian he may not be, but the comparison is as least as helpful as the Papal biography

[1] 中共中央文献研究室，编，逄先知，金冲及，主编《毛泽东传》（北京：中央文献出版社，2011 年 1 月第 2 版）in six volumes; hereafter, *Mao Zedong zhuan*.

metaphor. In both cases severe constraints on the interpretive framework coexist with rich and useful historical detail, almost all of it reliable, and an intelligent and influential story to tell.

That the result is not the whole story is hardly a surprise; every biography has its perspective, point of view, its selectivity. Nonetheless, that this official biography shares broad historiographical constraints with all biographies does not make them equivalent. We expect academic biographers to face uncomfortable facts, directly engage alternate interpretations, and perform frequent and specific source criticism (not just in their introduction, but in considering the sources for any important event or theme within the biography). This we do not get in Jin's *Mao liezhuan*. However, neither is Jin's *Mao* simple propaganda or shameless myth. He cleaves closely to the historical record and Mao's publications (citing precise titles and publications on average one to four times per page). It is documented, it is reasonable in its presentation, and it is well-written and generally interesting and informative to read.

The work that Jin's *Mao* has to do is different from other biographies of Mao. It is not a straightforward contribution to academic knowledge in the modern sense of "scientific history" in Europe or North America since Ranke. Nor is it meant either as entertainment or as literature as literary biography aims to do. It is a political biography written from inside the Party. It is, after all, the political biography of the Chinese Revolution as celebrated by the CCP. It is the biography of the current order's 太祖, the founding ruler and builder of the current regime. It is, in many ways, a biography of the Party.

So, we ask the obvious questions: the *place* of the author, the *context* of its production, and the *project* of the biography. Biographies of Mao have existed since Edgar Snow's famous interviews were published as *Red Star over China* in 1937. Each biography produces different answers to our three questions. Snow writing for an international aucidence as war brewed in Europe gave us the "Lincolnesque figure" who, like a Chinese Robin Hood, refused to stay dead. A decade later at the 7th Party Congress in Yan'an in April 1945, the

Mao of the Rectification Movement was embraced by the entire CCP—the author of the ideology and the plan to make the revolution succeed. This Mao was chronicled by his writings, the first *Xuanji* being published in the Jin Cha Ji Base Area in 1944 and backed up in the docuemtns of *Liudao yilai* (六大以来). More versions of the Great Leader came in succeeding years, culminating in the cult of Mao in the Cultural Revolution years after 1966—which Daniel Leese (amongst others) has so well analysed. The post-Mao period brought a serious re-consideration of Mao and Mao's role in the history of the Party from 1949—as ratified in the 1981 Historical Resolution. The first Mao we could call Insurgent Mao, the second is, Great Leader Mao, and the third, the Mao we meet in Jin Chongji's *Mao*, is Reform Mao. Jin's is the orthodox version of Mao produced under the political line of Deng Xiaoping's reform China.

The Author and His Place

Jin Chongji's place is clear: *tizhinei*. He is an establishment intellectual working within the CCP Party State. He is also a fine scholar and serious historian. His scholarly work goes well beyond this biography of Mao. Professor Jin is among the first generation of historians of the PRC. He graduated from Fudan University in 1951 and taught there until moving to Wenwu Publishing House in 1973 and then to Maojiawan and the Central Party Literature Research Office in 1981. By his own account, Professor Jin spent the first twenty years of his career researching and writing on late Qing and Republican period history, with major works on the late Qing constitutional movement and on the 1911 Revolution. At Wenwu Publishing House he served as editor. Once at the Literature Research Office Professor Jin has worked on a number of official biographies in addition to the Mao volumes, including those on Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, Li Fuchun, and Chen Yun—all published in the 1990s. Over these years and since, he has continued his broader interests in modern Chinese history, publishing his own studies on the 1911 Revolution (1991), the turning point of 1947 (2002), and a *History of Twentieth Century China* (2009).[2] As we will see below, Professor Jin also joined his colleagues (such as Pang Xianzhi) in the Literature

[2] Details from Jin Chongji and Wang Xi, "History, Historians and the First 60 Years of the People's Republic of China—A Conversation with Jin Chongji," *The Chinese Historical Review*, 16:2 (Fall 2009), 228-246.

Research Office in contributing to the authoritative Party commentary on the 1981 Historical Resolution, the *Annotations (Revised Edition) of the Resolution* published in 1983.

Jin Chongji is, then, an establishment academic with a high reputation for sound scholarship. Thus, while we will expect Jin's interpretation of Mao to be orthodox, we will also expect it to be based on sound historiographical work—careful research, precise citation, and reasonable arguments. These he delivers, keeping in mind that disagreements scholars have over interpretation are distinct from well-done or poorly-done historical research and writing.

It is worth noting that Jin's *Mao* biography has already become a standard reference for a number of Western scholars who have done their own primary research into Mao and CCP history, including many here at this conference. Han van de Ven accords Jin's biography of Mao a high estimation by basing half of his chapter on Mao's life between 1937 and 1956 on Jin's and Pang's *Mao* volumes. Clearly he finds the information provided in Jin's and Pang's volumes to be reliable. This is a clear case of having different interpretations (van de Ven can hardly be counted as a fan of the late Chairman or of the CCP) but appreciating sound scholarly work.[3]

The Context: Historical, Political and Historiographical

The CCP's orthodoxy has changed over the 60 years since the first Party History resolution of 1945. It is worth tracing, however briefly, that change in historiographical context for Party historians, in order to better understand the context under which Jin Chongji completed his Mao biography in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1945 the Party needed an Elvis Presley to motivate the faithful and attract new followers, a Rock Star to compete with the Guomindang's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek who's 1943 book, *China's Destiny,* had made

[3] Han J. van de Ven, "War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority: Mao from 1937 to 1956," in Timothy Cheek, ed., *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87-109, van de Ven relies on Jin's *Mao* and it's "second volume" under Pang Xianzhi heavily in pages 96-105 (footnotes 29-54, with one or two notes from Wylie and Apter/Saich), drawing this material from Jin Chongjin, *Mao* (1996), pp. 632-652 and Pang Xianzhi's continuation of the Mao biography (2003), pp. 4-5, 213-16, and 273.

Chiang the hero of China. It was a battle for the hearts and minds of China's masses and the competition was tough. By the Cultural Revolution the needs were different, much more complex and much less inspiring. Mao needed to revive his charisma to fight off his own comrades and peers in a terrible inner-Party civil war that spawned social violence for most of a decade. The Mao Cult produced not an inspiring Rock Star but a Cult Leader of frighteningly benign demeanor masking a cruel and uncompromising political line. The post-Mao period brought a painful reconsideration of this history and produced the Reform Mao, a Father Figure with flaws but whose contributions far, far outweighed his unavoidable human slips. Reform ideology also made a related and very important move: it separated Mao Zedong Thought from Mao Zedong the man. Like the Catholic Church, the body is weak but the theology is divine. An individual Pope may have human frailties but the Papacy is infallible. This Reform Mao with the distinct Mao Zedong Thought is the version that Xi Jinping is peddling today.

The primary context for the work of the Party Literature Research Office and for the works generated from it, such as Jin Chongji's biography of Mao is the Party's line on its own history and the history of the Chinese revolution. This line is quite explicit and has been legislated by the Central Committee of the CCP twice: once in 1945 and again in 1981. I am not aware of any further major pronouncement that supersedes the 1981 consensus, though I imagine there have been further refinements and additions in the three decades since (but I have not seen them). The "Resolution of the CCP CC on Certain Historical Questions" was passed by the Seventh Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee on April 20, 1945 on the eve of the famous Seventh Congress.[4] The purpose of this historical resolution was very clear, at least as far as Party leaders in the 1980s were concerned—and this is,

[4] 《中国共产党中央委员会关于若干历史问题的决议》in 中共中央书记处，编 《六大以来：党内秘密文件《 （北京：人民出版社，1952，preface dated 1980), I: 1179-1200. Translated in Tony Saich, ed., *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party: Documents and Analysis* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996), 1164-1179. The historical and political context and proximate motivations and uses of the 1945 Historical Resolution are ably analysed by Saich in "Writing or Rewriting History? The Construction of the Maoist Resolution on Party History," in Tony Saich and Hans J. van de Ven, eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 299-338.

after all, the primary political historiographical context for Jin's *Mao*. The 1981 Historical Resolution concludes with this assessment:

> The "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party" unanimously adopted in 1945 by the Enlarged Seventh Plenary Session of the Sixth Central Committee of the Party unified the thinking of the whole Party, consolidated its unity, promoted the rapid advance of the people's revolutionary cause and accelerated its eventual triumph. The Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party [June 1981] believes that the present resolution it has unanimously adopted will play a similar historical role. This session calls upon the whole Party, the whole army and the people of all nationalities to act under the great banner of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, closely rally around the Central Committee of the Party, preserve the spirit of the legendary Foolish Old Man who removed mountains and work together as one in defiance of all difficulties so as to turn China step by step into a powerful modern socialist country which is highly democratic and highly cultured.[5]

This speaks to the "social responsibility" Jin Chongji mentions in his 2009 interview with Wang Xi.[6] The purpose of the Historical Resolutions is to unify thinking, consolidate unity, and promote development (both revolutionary change and modernization). The socially responsible thing to do would be to write an official biography of Mao that serves these three goals.

Of course, ideological, political or historiographical work is not so easily guided. If the 1981 Historical Resolution is the law then the *Annotations* are the regulations to implement the law in historiographical practice. The 1985 edition of the *Annotations* to the 1981 Historical Resolution provides of 600 pages of paragraph-by-paragraph commentary and additional

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[5] 《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议》is reproduced at the start of 《中共中央文献研究室，《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议注释本》（修订）[Annotations (Revised Edition) on the Resolution of Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the PRC]（北京：人民出版社，1985）. The front matter announces that this is a revised and public edition of an earlier and "internal" (内部) edition published in 1983. The quotation from the Resolution, above, appears in the 1985 volume on p. 71. The English version can be found in *Beijing Review*, No. 27 (6 July 1981), pp. 10-39; and in the reprint in Helmut Martin, *Cult & Canon: The Origins and Development of State Maoism* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1983), or online at: https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm

[6] Jin and Wang, *op cit.*

information on the Resolution in 130 annotations. The first twelve annotations reprise the years covered in the 1945 Resolution plus the Civil War that followed.[7] The next 91 annotations track through the decades in some 350 pages of details and supplementary materials. This is followed by the section on Mao and Mao Zedong Thought (annotations 104-118, pp. 500-578). The final section reiterates the policy themes of the Resolution—the sanctity of the socialist system, contradictions that need to be resolved in the socialist economy, the Plan and the Market, the correct view of class struggle and the non-class struggle contradictions in Chinese society, building socialist democracy and civilization, nationalities questions, religion questions, firmly putting an end to "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat," and a clarion call for the Four Modernisations.

It is the sections on Mao and Mao Zedong Thought in the 1981 Historical Resolution and *Annotations* that naturally enough speak to Jin's *Mao*. Two major themes stand out for me: the insistence on the "collective wisdom" of Mao Zedong Thought and the focus on the historical development of its enduring propositions. The Resolution and annotation No. 105 make it clear that Mao Zedong Thought, as represented in the official editions of Mao's writings published before his death in 1976 are considered by the CCP leadership to represent "the crystallization of collected wisdom in the CCP".[8] This has been the case since Mao Zedong Thought was officially designated as the guiding thought of the CCP in the June 1945 Party constitution passed at the 7th Congress of the CCP in Yan'an. The *Annotations* focuses, as well, on the contributions of other to this collective Mao Zedong Thought by leaders (most prominently, Liu Shaoqi, but a dozen others are named from Li Dazhao to Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, Chen Yun and others, including of course, Deng Xiaoping). This moves

[7] The coverage of the 1945 Historical Resolution is subject to some debate among scholars. Apparently the version passed in April 1945 (but never openly published) ended with the Zunyi meeting in 1935, but the revised version published in 1953 covers the 1942-44 Rectification Movement. For details, see Saich, "Writing or Rewriting History?", 328.

[8] Locus classicus of this claim is to be found in para. 28 of the Central Committee's June 1981 resolution, "On Questions of Party History"; *Annotations*, 507-12. English versions can be found in *Beijing Review*, No. 27 (6 July 1981), pp. 10-39; Martin, *Cult & Canon*, p. 213.

Mao from the sole agent of the Chinese revolution to *primus inter pares*, representative of the best of the collective experience.

This is the second theme that I draw from the *Annotations* that focus on Mao himself: the emphasis on the historical development—and documentation of that development—of "the living soul of Mao Zedong Thought." That is, the important ideological tools for use today that the life and times of Mao Zedong generated and whose efficacy the biography demonstrates. The *Annotations* stress three such enduring contributions: seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independence and self-reliance (annotations 116-118). Jin Chongji rehearses these "regulations" from the *Annotations* in his Mao biography almost word for word. Assessing Mao's now famous essay from April 1930, "Oppose Bookism" (反对本本主义) Jin writes:

> "It can be said that the three fundamental points of the living soul of Mao Zedong Thought, namely, seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independent thinking, had initially taken shape in this article."[9]

The key here is less the theme—familiar ideals of CCP policy—than the demonstration. The focus is on the history of the emergence of these correct ideas. The story is one of trial and error, insightful application of Marxist-Leninist theory, and collective contributions, with Mao at the centre by key documents by others—such as Zhou Enlai's draft of the 1929 "September Letter" or Liu Shaoqi's report to the Seventh Congress in 1945—both on issues of mass line. The point, however, is to *demonstrate* these points with extensive quotations from historical documents and a fairly rigorous presentation of the historical context for each text and development of these three core legs of Party ideology.

This seeking of truth from facts in Party historiography has always been conducted with the guidelines set in these historical resolutions.[10] Implementation of the mandate to revise

[9] *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. 1, p. 224.

[10] Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, "Party Historiography in the People's Republic of China," *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, 17 (January 1987), 82-8. She has also translated relevant historiographical documents in "Party Historiography," *Chinese Law & Government*, 19:3, 12-119 (1986).

party historiography according to the new Historical Resolution began in August 1981 with a series of national work conferences held in Beijing, which gave specific instructions to various research institutions.[11] Much of this work has been carried out and disseminated inside the party apparatus and in internal (*neibu*) publications, of which only a portion comes to Western attention. In recent years some of these works have reappeared in declassified editions, but at Jin Chongji notes in his 2009 interview, such publications are dispersed across the country and are not easy for outsiders to locate. Gong Yuzhi headed up the production of the *Annotations* which appeared in *neibu* version in 1983. Jin Chongji is listed among the two dozen or so Party historians who joined in producing the *Annotations*.

Clearly there is a tension between the explicit calls in these public historiographical guidelines to "seek truth from facts" and the implicit message to stay within the guidelines which legitimize the CCP—then and today the Four Fundamental Principles enunciated by Deng Xiaoping. It is prudent, therefore, to compare such official interpretations with unofficial ones written in China and those offered by professional historians outside China. In all, perhaps the best preliminary metaphor for the issues surrounding historicist Party history writings in the 1980s, including those specifically on Mao's writings, is that of academic theology in the Christian and Jewish traditions where "scientific" linguistic and historical analyses seek to contribute to a living faith. With the picture in mind of liberation theology and the movement for ordination of women to the priesthood and rabbinical orders, we should not be surprised that there would be considerable room for divergent interpretations and even political turmoil resulting from such "historicist" official analysis of Party history and the roots of PRC state ideology.[12]

[11] See Weigelin-Schwiedrzik, *Chinese Law & Government*, 19:3, 112-19.

[12] This discussion on the source criticism of Party history texts draws from Timothy Cheek, "Textually Speaking: An Assessment of Newly Available Mao Texts," in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene Wu, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward* (Cambridge: Harvard Contemporary China Series, 1989), pp. 75-103.

The Project: Reform Mao

With confidence in Jin Chongji's scholarship and an awareness of his place in the political order in China and the historical, political, and historiographical context in which he worked, we can turn to the text itself with some idea of what the *intellectual project* of this official biography might be. Jin Chongji has expressed himself on his goals in history writing in general and in writing at the Party Research Office in particular. In his 2009 interview with Wang Xi, Jin Chongji says that working at the Research Office and writing the biographies of Party leaders, such as Mao Zedong, "was actually my favorite job." He goes on to say "most of my energy was the writing and editing of these biographies." Jin Chongji insists that "As I set out to write these biographies, no one has ever given me any instructions about what was to be or not to be written or how I should write these biographies. I could sufficiently express my opinion of offer my interpretations based on the historical materials I had reviewed." He also states, "I would never make a false statement." Nonetheless, he qualifies these declarations: "Of course, I did not put everything I know into my writings, but I could manage to employ the art of subtlety to make a point." Indeed, he admits "Inevitably I encountered some difficult issues during the preparation of these volumes. … If I ran into a question whose complexity was beyond my control, I would not force myself to say what I actually do not know. Instead, I adopted the way of *shu er bu lun* (述而不論), that is, simply laying out the facts and letting the readers make their own judgment."[13]

It is worth keeping in mind Jin's own assessment of working at the Party Literature Research Office. He could not say everything he knew, but he would not lie, and he sometimes employed *shu er bu lun*. This, is centrally important for our reading strategy for two reasons. Frist, it speaks to the long tradition of Chinese establishment intellectuals of using *exegesis* to make points that are, for whatever reason, inconvenient for the powers that be. From Sima Qian on down the centuries court historians in the various dynasties have employed similar techniques. This is a form of agency made famous by precisely Jin Chongji's own generation of establishment intellectuals in the PRC, by people such as Deng

[13] Jin and Wang, "A Conversation with Jin Chongji," p. 239.

Tuo, Wu Han, and Jian Bozan, as well as younger generations working within the system (mostly after the Cultural Revolution) such as Bai Hua, Wang Ruoshui, and Su Shuangbi. Wu Han, of course, was famous before 1949 for his oblique criticisms of Chiang Kai-shek, for as the saying goes, "pointing at the mulberry to revile the ash" (*zhi sang ma huai* 指桑罵槐). Yao Wenyuan revived the sobriquet in 1965 to accuse Wu Han of doing it to Mao Zedong in the historical play, *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office.* Oblique reference, historical analogy, even wicked puns are one form of "hidden transcript" one might say. But a much more orthodox voice of varying interpretations offers more room for individual expression and difference of opinion than the superficial uniformity of quoting Mao or Deng or whomever is in charge might suggest. In my own work on establishment intellectuals in the 1960s what mattered was *which* Mao text an intellectual or political leader chose to quote.[14] For China's establishment intellectuals *exegesis* has been a key form of intellectual agency.

Second, *shu er bu lun*, to tell the story without making an argument, is perhaps the major historiographical method of contemporary Party historiography, what is generally called Contemporary History (当代史), as practiced by serious academic historians in the PRC today. One need only think of the many works of Yang Kuisong and his students, as well as many of the works of Shen Zhihua. Even Gao Hua, who was at times more outspoken and critical (and writing from Nanjing), certainly trimmed his sails as well. As I read Yang's studies I am shocked by what seems to me damning details of misrule or miscarriages of justice during Mao's rule, but Yang refuses to "connect the dots." Clearly, such authors are confident that educated readers can connect the dot for themselves. My conversations with graduate students and young academics in the PRC confirms that this is broadly the case. Equally important, the propaganda authorities in the PRC seem more or less tolerant of this form of indirect criticism. True, many of these *dangdai shi* studies cannot be published in China proper but are published in Hong Kong. Still, through the wonder of internet bookshops these books are generally available to interested scholars and, more importantly, their authors continue to live and work in the PRC without obvious

[14] A classic example is the varying exegeses of volume IV of Mao's *Xuanji* in 1960. I compare Lin Biao's authoritative "reading" and Deng Tuo's (made on behalf of the Beijing Party Committee) in Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China*, ch. 5.

punishment. In all, *shu er bu lun* is a fundamentally important historiographical style that needs to be explained to readers outside China if we are to appreciate fully what Jin Chongji and his professional colleagues are doing when writing on sensitive topics.

My reading of Jin Chongji's project in the *Mao* biography is based on the assumption that Jin as a scholar employed by the Party Literature Research Office followed the framework of the 1981 Historical Resolution and of the *Annotations* he helped edit. Nobody had to tell him what those themes were; he had helped annotate them. It is a dangerous task to impute the intentions of an historian, especially when he is sitting in the audience! In fact, it would be an honour to hear Professor Jin's own views on the question and I welcome his criticisms. I think there might be two other points from his 2009 interview that might help us square this circle between Jin Chongji's professions of intellectual independence and his position as 在朝太史—as an official historian. Again, I invoke the image of a Jesuit or Vatican scholar writing an academic history of a Pope or of the Church. Jin Chongji is very clear about his view of the Chinese revolution and the PRC:

> The establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, in my view, was not just a replacement of one government with another, or replacing one political power with another. It was a major social revolution of unprecedented scope. The problems that this revolution resolved were national independence, liberation of the people (especially the workers and peasants, who constituted the majority of the population and now had become masters of the country), and national unification (except for Taiwan).

He also speaks of the scholar's "social responsibility," invoking the simple example of self-censorship during a time of war so as not to provide information to the enemy.[15] With such a sense of the historical mission of the PRC and a sense of social responsibility to contribute to the development of his nation, I do not think Jin Chongji needed anyone to tell him what to write about Mao in order to get the text we have before us.

Keeping this frame work in mind, as I read Jin's Mao I have come to identify at least the following core features of this project: (1) to reform the image of Mao for Chinese politics

[15] Ibid., 238 and 241.

by reducing him from "the story" of China's revolution to *primus inter pares* in the revolutionary leadership so that the Cult of the Individual could never return. (2) To do this by documenting the contributions of *other revolutionary leaders* to both the theory (Mao Zedong Thought) and the practice of the revolution and socialist construction. (3) to retell the story of Mao's considerable contributions in a way to highlight the themes of Deng Xiaoping's reform ideology—collective leadership, Party leadership of that collective through consultations (Mao's endless meetings), and a correct understanding of their ideology (Mao Zedong Thought) as essentially three propositions: seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independence and self-reliance. Finally, (4) to address the skepticism with which Party pronouncements were viewed in the 1980s and 1990s by an assiduous documentation of all claims and an explicitly cool, rational, and reasonable presentation.

What does it produce? In the hands of a talented and experienced historian like Jin Chongji is produces a very readable, richly detailed account of the Chinese revolution as it first inspired the young Mao, then drew him into its vortex, and finally propelled him to the leadership of this historical transformation. Three themes in Jin's biography of Mao stand out.

First, Mao as Horatio Alger. We get a story of Mao's boot-strapping self-reliance, intelligence, pluck, and learning through trial and error. For the pre-1949 years Jin's tone is consistently positive, though he eschews the fawning "brilliant from the day he was born" tone of hagiographies. He notes that Mao's understanding of the centrality of the peasantry in the revolution did not come all at once but was a process across the 1920s. Similarly, Jin notes that Mao did not know how to lead and army in 1927, he learned because he had to, because circumstances threw him into the fires. This is the application of the historical development not only of Mao himself as leader and thinker, but of the generation of correct thought and, more emphatically, correct operation of the Party as a unified collective leadership.

Second, Mao as model of collective leadership. Jin regularly praises Mao for his foresight, hard work, and ability to "unite" or convince others. Throughout the volume Jin announces

the virtues that Mao's experience portrays, particularly in summary comments at the end of sections (as with "On Bookism") or at the conclusion of chapters. These virtues of collective leadership which Mao's life demonstrates include: reasonableness with colleagues and a preference to convincing others, skill in running leadership meetings to achieve this "unifying" activity, loyalty to the Party even when (as under Li Lisan or Wang Ming) it is wrong, a dedication to social investigation, and the ability to "summarize experience" and read correct theory to produce accurate policy, or Line (ex., I: 240-1).

This theme gives a sense of the narrative thread of Jin's biography: biography of an institution, the Party. Discussing Mao's and his colleagues' efforts to capitalize on the rising popular anti-Japanese sentiment in the December 9th movement in 1935, Jin notes: "It was necessary for the CPC Central Committee to make a scientific analysis of the whole situation and work out a complete political line and strategic principles for the new circumstances." (I; 380) Mao was pre-eminent in Jin's story, but the actor was collective—the Party, in the form of it's "brain", the Central Committee. The effort was handled at an enlarged politburo meeting at Wayabao 17-25 Dec. 1935. This *meeting* set military objectives/strategy (to cross the Yellow and go north to Suiyuan and east to attack Shanxi). Next, it addressed political problems, United Front policies. Here Mao defeats Bo Gu's radicalism. Yet, Jin notes, the resolution of the meeting was drafted by Zhang Wentian . Jin ends by declaring the Wayaobao meeting extremely important in the transition from civil war to the anti-Japanese war and the meeting achieved it by "summing up experiences and lessons in its successes and failures in the revolution." In all, this Jin offers readers a model for good policy deliberation with Mao as the model committee member:

> The meeting … enabled the Party to have the political initiative in its hands on the eve of a new era. It also proved that the Communist Party of China had matured politically through summing up experiences and lessons in its successes and failures in the revolution, and it could proceed from the reality of the Chinese revolution to implement the Comintern's resolution and carry on its work creatively. (I: 382)

With less explicit commentary Jin details what can only be seen as proof of Mao's consummate ability to navigate institutional rivalries. This involves a lot of irritating "the Party Centre in Shanghai followed an erroneous policy" and "so-and-so agreed with Mao's correct thought." Nonetheless, the praise redounds in the end more to the charismatic institution—imperfect but perfectable—than to the individual genius. Jin's is a story of a team sport with a terrific captain, but a team story in the end.

Third, a focus on historical development. Good leadership—good ideas and skills in applying them in political life come from dogged experience and careful reflection or "summarizing experience." The three core leadership skills in Mao Zedong's life and Thought that Jin's biography emphasizes are the three highlighted by the *Annotations*: seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independent thinking and initiative.

These themes hardly exhausts the themes of this massive six-volume biography of Mao, but I think they reflect key aspects of Jin's commitment to social responsibility in history writing on behalf of the CCP Central Committee. Some interesting further points do come to mind as a Westerner reading this Mao biography in the 2010s. First, Jin's narrative downplays the role of Comintern even as it notes, often in passing, the central role of Comintern and the Stalin. Interestingly, Jin avoids the opportunity to denounce both for their patently bad policy direction between 1927 and 1935. Given the nasty things Soviet establishment historians and propagandists said about Mao and the CCP since the early 1960s, this is certainly an example of Party self-discipline. Interestingly, on the question of whether or not to release Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi'an Incident in December 1936, Jin provides CCP documentation to show that the Central Committee under Mao decided to support releasing Chiang on December 19th, the day before the Comintern telegram ordering just that arrived (I: 423).

Finally, it has to be noted that reading Jin's biography is mostly quite interesting. There is a wealth of detail, much of it not available in other sources. This, of course, derives from Jin's privileged access in Maojiawan as part of the Research Office. He puts this detail to very good use in a generally lively narrative. Military exploits, based as I noted above on the

records, records which I saw reflected in the 1942-45 Mao texts I helped to translate with Schram, certainly contribute to the engaging narrative. War stories make for rippin' yarns. This makes for engaging reading but also brings forth some important interpretive points: the centrality of military work in Mao's life and work up to 1949. As Jin notes for Mao in 1927, Mao was not an experience soldier, much less a military leader then—despite a formal six-months stint in the army in 1926 during which, according to Jin, Mao got a lot of reading done. The military life was foisted upon Mao, as with his surviving CCP colleagues from the violent split with the GMD in April 1927. Yet, Mao proved an able student. We will return to the issue of the military narrative (the *wai* struggle, along with Jin's version of the inner-Party or *nei* struggle) when we consider differences in interpretation about the Futian Incident, below. By 1949 the CCP has not only improbably survived, it has prevailed. Likewise, Mao has survived and risen to the top. Jin Chongji succeeds in presenting this story in a richly documented, readable narrative that offers a coherent explanation of how this came to pass, emphasising the themes of Mao's learning and efforts, collective leadership and the three themes of social investigation, correct line, and independent thinking within the bounds of organisational loyalty.

Reading Jin's *Mao* in the time of Xi Jinping and Donald Trump

For most scholars Jin Chongji's unrelentingly positive assessment of Mao, despite its moderate tones and impressive documentation, is unlikely to convince. After the failure of the Autumn Harvest Uprising in 1927, for example, Jin reckons that Mao's initiative to head to the hills "conformed not only to prevailing conditions in China but also to basic principles of Marxism-Leninism" (I: 155). How exactly? And how much of the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism to had Mao mastered by summer 1927? Or, in 1931 on Mao and Zhu De's land policies in Xingguo County, Fujian, Jin holds: "In the process of long and arduous revolutionary struggles, Mao forged a set of scientific methods for work. … This was the most important reason why the Chinese revolution could win a victory. Without understanding this point, one cannot begin to say they truly understand Mao Zedong." (I: 226). Really? While I can understand this theme in Jin's narrative, I cannot say he has demonstrated to me that the course of Chinese political and social history took the course it did is due to Mao's "scientific methods for work." That said, for understanding

what Jin is trying to achieve and for assessing how believable the *material* he presents, as opposed to the conclusion he draws, it is important to return to the theme raised earlier: *exegesis* as a major form of intellectual agency and debate within an orthodoxy, what Jin himself alludes to with *shu er bu lun*. If we consider his place and his audience, and the requirements of orthodoxy, a substantive and significant agenda emerges: reforming the image of Mao and Mao Zedong Thought in the Chinese Communist Party to suit the post-Mao period.

For the academic historian, however, a recognition of such exegetical agency does not let a scholar off the hook for gaps, gratuitous judgments, or fundamental assumptions that warrant review. One of the biggest "gaps" in Jin's story and a troubling example of the limitations of his narrative frame—the historical development of the Party under Mao—is the case of the Futian Incident in late 1930. This all happens, or in the case of Jin's narrative does not happen, in chapters 11 and 12 of volume I: "Attacking Not Nanchang but Ji'an" (I: 227-241) and "Smashing the Three 'Encirclement and Suppression Campaigns'" (I: 242-269). For Jin the story is the *wai* or outer struggle between the CCP and the GMD in the life-and-death military campaigns we all know as Chiang Kai-shek's encirclement campaigns, with the related theme of the *nei* or inner-Party struggles between the doughty soldiers in Jiangxi and the doctrinaire adventurists of the Central Committee in Shanghai. Zhu De, and soon Peng Dehuai, support Mao in this dual fight. Jin presents Mao as consistently "correct", "right", "practical" in face of the revolutionary impetuosity of CCP Central and some Frist Army officers. Mao's views in this story are, as always, confirmed by "convening a meeting" and implemented by "making a decision." His brilliance only matters if enacted, and enriched, by collective leadership, in this case the local CCP when it chooses to attend to Mao's wisdom. These chapters are brimming with details of armies, attacks, political intrigues at the top, and Mao's steady hand and "correct" reading of particular strategic opportunities from guerrilla warfare to moderate land reform policies. Jin thus focuses the narrative on the attack on Ji'an of October 1930 and ongoing fights with the GMD military assaults on the Jiangxi Soviet.

But this is precisely the time of the infamous (to Western China scholars) Futian Incident—

the December 1930 crescendo of brutal inner-Party purges and killings on a fearsome scale. Jin glances over the Futian Incident in one vague sentence on p. I: 244. In the midst of Jin's main narrative—on the value of Mao's military strategy of "luring the enemy in deep" *youdi shenru* (诱敌深入), Jin says in passing: "On December 12th the Futian Incident occurred as the result of mistakes in the movement to eliminate counter-revolutionaries 肃反中的错误." This and an earlier mention that the Red Army troops that entered Ji'an in October 1930 had received mistaken information about the level of AB (Anti-Bolshevik) organization among rich peasants that would lead to "a serious mistake later in the movement to eliminate counter-revolutionaries" (I: 237) amount to the full coverage of a year-long bloody purges in which Communist Party members killed thousands of each other even while being bombed by GMD forces. This has to constitute one of the major "gaps" in Jin's biography of Mao.

We get hints of something else afoot, but it is a side show in Jin's main narrative of fending of the GMD and working around bone-headed leadership of the adventurist Shanghai Central Committee. Jin notes opposition of some units with "narrow localist mentality" not wanting to move out of their home districts to avoid oncoming GMD encirclement campaign. Jin cites Peng Dehuai as maintaining they should "oppose localism" and support Zhu De and Mao. The story focuses on the Oct. 26 Luofang meeting resolution which Jin marks as Mao's policy. Jin marshals PRC-period reminiscences that focus on Mao's "painstaking and penetrating education and persuasion." (I: 243). What we get is more than ten pages of a "Boys Life" narrative of our heroes, Mao and Zhu, and how they outfoxed the bad guys—it was a tough fight, but Mao's brilliance got them through by Oct. 1931 (even though all of the Base Area was occupied at one time or another by GMD forces).

Here we see the difference in focus between Jin's and most Western academic accounts. Jin focuses on the fight with the GMD in 1930-31 and against their Encirclement Campaigns as an early sign of Mao's leadership abilities. Western scholars have focused on the Futian purges as a sign of the ruthlessness of CCP rule in general and Mao's personal cruelty and will-to-power and sign of future abuses of the Communist regime. Both are narratives with

a basis in fact; both are incomplete and when offered as the whole or major story in themselves are inaccurate as given.

We have the official story and the alternate story, but we are not really getting the whole story that integrates local experience (Averill), military history (Jin), and the default focus on Mao and his struggle for dominance. A more comprehensive narrative not only *shares the blame* between social tensions and various leaders (i.e., the "dry tinder" of wide-spread social terror that outstripped Party leadership efforts to lead much less control the "hunt" for AB Tuan members, as documented by Averill, and accounting for the 肃反 that was also running in Shaanxi already in September 1935 before Mao and the Long Marchers arrived, I:374), but also *acknowledges agency* beyond an individual (Mao) or a single institution (the Party or Red Army)—as if either organization was unified at the time. It also raises another question: how on earth did the Party survive having shot itself in one foot with this raging purge while the other was being trampled on by Chiang's repeated military assaults? I cannot explain it. But it needs explaining. Furthermore, if we keep all these complex, contradictory, ethically diverse and troubling factors in our minds at one time what becomes of the narrative coherence of the story? How do we tell a biography this way?

Gratuitous judgments are an occupational hazard of Mao scholars. Mao is a protean figure, not simply from the propaganda and cult materials that have built up around him but from his writings—and a number of his pre-1949 writings are really impressive—and his activities (both admirable and despicable). Mao's life and work raise truly fundamental issues of personal and public morality that any scholar who does *not* engage simply isn't paying attention. How can we remain neutral to Miss Zhao's suicide? To the idealism in "The Great Union of the Popular Masses? To the signs of agency among downtrodden farmers in the "Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan"? To Mao's willing participation in the slaughter of the Futian Incident? To his inspiring nationalism in "On New Democracy"? or to the menace of "On the Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat"? For me, both sides are encapsulated in the text and the political life down to today of Mao's seminal *ex cathedra* pronouncement on culture and intellectual life under the Party: "Talks

at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art."

Such issues are a challenge, not an excuse for gratuitous assertions. We are all familiar with the unrelentingly negative portrayal of Mao and the CCP in Jung Chang's (Zhang Rong 张荣) and Jon Halliday's *Mao: The Untold Story*. Mao is rotten from day one and only gets worse. Western scholars have discredited Chang and Halliday's account on the basis of faulty and deceptive documentation, as well as their endless stream of negative assertions. A number of the scholarly assessments of Chang and Halliday's work, from Andrew Nathan—hardly a Mao patsy—and a number of other scholars, including myself—appear in the collection, *Was Mao Really a Monster?* edited by Gregor Benton and Lin Chun. My own take on Chang and Halliday is summarized in the title of my review of the Yan'an period material in their book: "Academic Biography as Mass Criticism"—all you have to do is change one name in their book and you have a Cultural Revolution denunciation (say, of Liu Shaoqi) that Zhang Rong grew up with.[16] Chang and Halliday are excessive in their judgments, but we all face the same challenge.

Jin Chongji's narrative assumes that Mao is both brilliant and "correct" in his assessment of the political challenges of the day, albeit after a few short periods of "historical development"—from liberalism and anarchism as a young man, and learning the ropes of rural insurgency and military strategy after 1927. I have noted some examples of Jin's continuous praise of Mao, above. This includes not only throw-away "correct" and "brilliant" comments, but more sustained assessments. For example, of Mao's approach to the Autumn Harvest Uprising, Jin opines: "where Mao was smarter than others" is that "…he could grasp the essence of a question quickly, make a new theoretical summary in line with reality, and use it to correct his own original thinking and guide future action." (I: 142). There are many more such statements that I find unconvincing. We can understand this as a way to "model" collective leadership, but I would need a great deal more analysis to explain just in what ways Mao's theoretical summaries were in line with reality.

[16] Part two of the four-part review essay. "Mao: The Untold Story—An Assessment" in *The China Journal*, No. 55 (January 2006), pp. 95-139; Cheek, "The New Number One Counter-Revolutionary Inside the Party—Academic Biography as Mass Criticism," pp. 109-118.

We all bring fundamental assumptions to bear in our history writing, otherwise our narrative make no sense. One does not have to be a devote of Derrida or follower of Foucault to take the point that some self-awareness or reflexivity is in order. How do we generate conscious awareness of our own "operating system"? In addition to assiduous theoretical interventions to disrupt hegemonic discourse, reading Jin Chongji's application of the 1981 CCP Historical Resolution to Mao's life provides a suitable provocation to engage our fundamental assumptions by presenting us with a contrasting axial assumption. The axial assumption in this case is Jin's consistent focus on the primacy of *political line* 路线 in his story of Mao and the Party. Jin presents political errors as errors in line, from Chen Duxiu's to Li Lisan's to Wang Ming's. Of course, in Jin's narrative, correct policy is correct political line, in this case the mass line 群众路线 (one of the key three themes of the *Historical Resolution* and Jin's biography of Mao). That political line frames Jin's interpretation raises two worthwhile questions, one to do with his work and the other to do with our own work.

First, why this focus on "line"? This is, of course, the ideological weapon of choice of high Stalinism, from Stalin's fight with Trotsky and, as Hans van de Ven has argued, in the CCP since the 1927 justifications for the purge of Chen Duxiu. The interviews in Apter's and Saich's study of Yan'an cadres and why they found Mao's rectification campaign of 1942-44 so reasonable gives further perspective: line is the instantiation of ideology, of one's committed beliefs. One of their respondents noted: in Jiangxi, if a comrade or group of comrades held an erroneous line, there was nothing to be done but to shoot them. They, like the cadre being interviewed, were going to stick to their beliefs. Since those beliefs were wrong, they would continue to hurt the revolution and so, for the sake of the revolution they had to be removed. Mao's innovation, according to these Yan'an veterans, was to promote *thought reform* 思想改造. Such ideological remolding was tough—as the record of the campaign against Wang Shiwei documents—but it obviated the need to execute holders of erroneous thought. A distinct improvement in inner-Party life. So, for these Yan'an cadres, as appears to be true in Jin Chongji's narrative, "correct thinking" or

correct line fundamentally shapes policy, political life, and the activities of political actors. It is a deeply idealist philosophy that Sinologists recognize as familiar in Chinese statecraft theory—as seen in Wang Yangming's adage, 知行合一.

Fine, and unsurprisingly, Jin Chongji's narrative reflects the CCP's preoccupation with correct thought: what is correct thought for the here and now, how do we generate correct though, how do we inculcate it, and how do we neutralize incorrect thought? But this brings us to a simple but challenging second question. OK, I don't believe in this fundamental power of "correct thought" in general much less political line or mass line in particular. But what do I believe? For me, what fills the space that "correct thought" occupies in Jin Chongji's explanatory framework?

A value of reading a well-constructed narrative with which one disagrees is that it focuses the mind on how we historians seeks to convince our readers much more than reading narratives that we find more congenial. Lack of relevant data or knowledge of the historical context is not Jin Chongji's problem—he has more of both than most scholars working on modern China. Engaging his text is not to raise issues of data (do we trust his information?) or reasoning (do we believe his commitment to reason and logic?). The problem is: does he persuade? Persuasion, of course, is a dance between the persuader and the reader. I am less interested in Jin's inability to convince me of Mao's brilliance, industry, and great skills at Marxism-Leninist analysis than I am grateful for the friction and self-awareness that reading his texts provokes in me. As I reflect on *why* Jin's narrative does not persuade me, I inevitably bring to consciousness my assumptions about what *does* persuade me, and what I think is important to show with the information we have on Mao's life.

This is the question of this conference: biography as historical science. I look forward to hearing your reflections on what biography should do and what we might want from a Mao biography.