Still Pursuing the Historical Mao:
Reflections on the Many Manifestations of and Views on the Chairman

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The outpouring of sources since the 1980s has provided an immense amount of material clarifying events centering on Mao Zedong, as well as offering subtle insights into the Chairman's possible motives and calculations. Nevertheless, enduring puzzles remain. In this brief paper I address four such issues with both propositions and questions, issues central to the conference theme of the "inner world" of seminal political leaders. I conclude with an addendum discussing the recent biography of Deng Xiaoping by Mao biographers Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine, a work that inevitably delves deeply into both the nature of Mao's leadership and its consequences for his closest colleagues, and which raises the overarching question of the relationship of biography to history.

1. To what extent and in what ways was the path from Yan'an to the Cultural Revolution determined by Mao's character? What explains the crucial turning points along this path?

Some scholars note similarities (greatly exaggerated in my view) between the ideological excesses of the Yan'an rectification and the Cultural Revolution, almost seeing a red thread between the two periods. Yet such views not only ignore vast differences (Roderick MacFarquhar's Yan'an roundtable and top down rectification v. the breaching of both leadership unity and Leninist organization), they also fail to take account of the shifting character of Mao's leadership. Throughout his career as CCP leader Mao evinced both sides of his political persona—the overly optimistic and impatient revolutionary romantic, and the tough-minded pragmatist—but in proportions and manifestations that varied considerably. While enduring aspects of Mao's character shaped the crucial turning points in his approach, these turning points were also affected by what former British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan referred to as his most difficult problem, "events, dear boy, events."

In the pursuit of power for himself and the CCP in the 1930s and 1940s Mao was primarily a unifier and a pragmatist. While developing an organization and ideology that enforced his personal authority and ideas, the content of the

emerging "Thought of Mao Zedong" was to work out appropriate strategy based on "truth from facts," and the practice was to draw widely on the inputs of leaders from diverse Party "mountaintops." This broad approach was essentially unchanged by the victory of 1949, but that year was a turning point in a crucial respect: Mao had reached the unchallengeable status of what Peng Dehuai would call the "severe and brilliant" founding emperor of a new dynasty. This did not produce a major change in the Chairman's pragmatic approach, but it undoubtedly encouraged his impatient side in pushing forward the general line for the transition to socialism in 1953 and the pace of agricultural cooperativization in 1955. Yet overall he acted in a centrist, if left centrist, manner, delegated a great deal of authority while holding the key levers in his own hands, and basically adhered to established Soviet-style Marxism. This approach was shattered in 1957-58.

This change that would deeply effect PRC politics and society for the remainder of Mao's life came through the rapid sequence of the Hundred Flowers experiment, The Anti-Rightist Campaign and the Great Leap Forward. The first and the last of these movements were Mao's projects reflecting his impatient optimism, the middle campaign was initiated by him but bore an imprint much more orthodox and welcome to the Party as a whole. The Hundred Flowers was an effort to appeal broadly to society in a context where the leadership as a whole believed that a new (largely) post-class struggle situation had been created, but Mao pushed the effort beyond sensible limits resulting in unacceptable criticism of the CCP. His reaction was swift and "pragmatic," an intense campaign that would scar society for decades, but one that in spirit seemed designed to restore the *status quo anti*. Yet in fall 1957 Mao began to push into totally uncharted waters that resulted in the crazy effort to greatly surpass any known production increases worldwide and to jump into communist society. Why this turnaround?

"Objective" reasons that can be offered include the perceived unreliability of intellectuals as a result of their Hundred Flowers criticisms that called into question the assumption that specialists could be relied on as a key "positive factor" for economic development, waves of industrial strikes and substantial peasant withdrawals from poorly performing collectives during the

relaxation of 1956–1957, and the lagging pace of economic growth, particularly in agriculture. Yet more subjective, indeed emotional factors are much more persuasive as explanations for the radical nature of the new policies and related political consequences. The complicated interaction with the Soviet Union treated separately below is one.

My own preferred ultimate explanation is deeply psychological: Mao had by 1957 only known success over the nearly two decades of his leadership, a history that not only produced an awestruck belief within the elite in the Chairman's exceptional insight, but undoubtedly fed his self-perception as a leader destined to achieve a powerful China. Yet the Hundred Flowers failed, and despite quickly and pragmatically righting the ship, Mao was faced with explaining what went wrong, above all to himself, and this became linked to finding a new approach that would demonstrate his brilliance. The new approach, of course, was the Great Leap, the explanation of what went wrong (it could not be his miscalculations) dishonestly focused on the moderate economic policies of Zhou Enlai and Chen Yun that Mao had approved, and the political result was unprecedented inner Party criticism and self-criticism of Standing Committee members which denied Zhou the right to speak on the economy and drove him to the brink of resignation. Occasional grumbling on his part notwithstanding, Mao had previously been willing to subcontract the economy to Zhou, Chen and others in a post-1949 version of the Yan'an roundtable while success was the hallmark of PRC developments, failure—even one that would have been easily overlooked by his colleagues, drove Mao to enforce deep changes in policies, leadership interaction, and structural arrangements with the Party apparatus under Deng Xiaoping taking over functions previously managed by economically competent officials led by Zhou.

Initially there was no sign of pragmatism in Mao's attitude toward the Great Leap, but by late 1958 he began to identify excesses and took initial steps to deal with them. Despite some scholarly efforts to deny a "cooling off" phase from the end of 1958 to the Lushan conference, such a phase clearly existed and was given its initiation and direction by the Chairman. But this was a different quality of pragmatism from that of the revolutionary struggle and early PRC period: Mao was so committed to *his* Great Leap that its fundamental premises

could not be examined, severe stresses caused by particular policies (such as the also emotionally fuelled meeting of grain commitments to the Soviet Union) were ignored, and while consistently favoring the views of more moderate provincial leaders like Shanxi's Tao Lujia, Mao avoided curbing the excessive plans of radicals like Henan's Wu Zhipu. And of course the Lushan events overwhelmed any intent on Mao's part for rational policy adjustments with Peng Dehuai's ill-advised critique producing a misperception of a personal attack, an unanticipated new radicalization of policy and the political atmosphere, and a major expansion of the loss of life caused by the Great Leap famine. Only over a year later in fall 1960 did the Chairman take decisive action to deal with the catastrophe. Although he returned to the emphasis on "investigation and research" that was such a mainstay of the revolutionary victory, this was less a sign of ongoing pragmatic leadership than a grudging giving in to what could no longer be denied.

The terrible indictment of the system is that only with Mao's initiative did the CCP move away from increasingly deadly extremism, whether in the somewhat half-hearted manner of late 1958 and 1959, or through the more decisive measures beginning in fall 1960. In the latter circumstances the Chairman again delegated policy to his colleagues, but in a different manner from the pre-Great Leap period, becoming more removed from those colleagues and increasingly withdrawn to the "second front." His power remained decisive, as seen at the 1962 Beidaihe conference, but he lacked goals for the future apart from the need to avoid Soviet-style revisionism. He was pragmatic in the limited sense that he eschewed any attempt at reviving the Great Leap approach, and he signed off on a wide range of policies to deal with practical problems presented by the "first front." But clearly Mao did not like what he was seeing, although this was only sporadically conveyed to his colleagues. And underlying it all, I believe, was the issue that exercised his thinking in much less disorienting circumstances in 1957: What had gone wrong? Who was responsible? And what could be done about it? The answer to the last question was the Cultural Revolution.

Mao never really tried to determine what went wrong with the Great Leap. Instead the focus shifted to the social and political malaise following the leap, for which the most obvious cause was the dislocation caused by the

movement itself. Mao could only come up with a Marxist explanation—revisionism—that was intimately linked to ongoing developments with the Soviet Union (again discussed in the following section). Moving beyond general dissatisfaction with social trends and with policy responses to his various concerns to launching a disruptive movement involved various factors. Finding an approach beyond the traditional controlled rectification approach which Mao deemed not particularly effective was undoubtedly one. But central, as indicated by attacks on the "bourgeois headquarters in the Party" was dissatisfaction with the top leadership. Obviously Liu Shaoqi was the prime target and ultimately brutally dealt with. Various motives can be imagined for Mao's hostility. The "first front" was responsible for all that the Chairman felt was wrong and Liu was its leader, there was resentment over Liu's extensive critique of the Great Leap disaster in 1962, and Mao noted with some concern Liu's vigorous leadership of the "first front" in 1964. Did Mao fear a threat to his power? What else can explain not simply the removal of Liu, but his cruel treatment? In a later section on successors I return to Liu Shaoqi.

Any number of further questions can be raised by Mao's actions during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution. To what extent did the Chairman determine the treatment of other high-ranking leaders? It is clear he ultimately decided who would be rehabilitated from 1969 on, but how was protection or exposure to rough treatment in the initial stage managed? What explains the clear protection provided Deng Xiaoping and the very early consideration Mao gave to his return to work, while at the same time allowing propaganda to lambast the "Liu-Deng line"? What led Mao to abandon his initial projection that the Cultural Revolution would be over in three months? What was the politics of the mini-turns in the conduct of the movement in 1967-68? And so forth. It seems to me that Mao engaged in little beyond observing the movement from Olympian heights during its chaotic stage, altering its trajectory through short-term adjustments with nothing remotely approaching a serious programmatic objective. Tepid pragmatism did appear following the effective end of the chaotic period in mid-1968, it received a cautious upgrade in the attack on the "ultra-left" under Zhou in 1972, and a much more systematic effort emerged under Deng in 1975. In 1975 Mao addressed a series of real problems, and gave Deng

strong support to deal with them until October of that year. But similar to the Great Leap, truly confronting the "70 percent correct" Cultural Revolution was ruled out. As before, this was *Mao's* project.

2. What factors shaped Mao's attitude toward the Soviet Union? Was the Sino-Soviet split inevitable after the death of Stalin?

No external relationship affecting both domestic and foreign policy had a more profound influence on Mao than that with the Soviet Union. Both a fervent nationalist and a committed Marxist, Mao saw no contradiction between the two. He was, after all, a child of the Communist International led by Moscow, and a significant part of his rise to CCP leadership was owed to Stalin's 1938 endorsement. As part of the international movement, he owed deference to the Soviet dictator as long as he lived. However much Mao may have been uncomfortable with the extensive copying of the Soviet model in the 1950s, he endorsed it as the template for national, urban-oriented growth. And ideologically, while the characterization by Pantsov that "the only socialism Mao knew was in the *History of the CPSU*" may be overstated, the Chairman's lack of theoretical confidence was underscored by his nocturnal visits to Soviet Ambassador Yudin for tutorials.

A common view is that while Stalin's status demanded deference, after his death Mao was not only determined to push China's interests in the relationship, but also to seize leadership of the international communist movement from the less worthy new leaders of the Soviet Union. This is highly unlikely. Whatever Mao thought of the new leaders and Khrushchev personally, he recognized both the history of the movement and the significant differences in national power between Moscow and Beijing. Mao had fought Stalin over CCP and Chinese national interests, winning important Soviet concessions. With the new leadership under Khrushchev seeking to correct Stalin's harsher behavior toward the PRC, improved relations emerged—until events intervened in 1956. With Khrushchev's secret speech, the Polish October, and the (somewhat delayed) crushing of the Hungarian uprising, Mao perceived errors in Moscow's policies—a perception with a rational basis. Moreover, China soon played a key role in mediating between East Europe and Moscow. Mao's undoubted sense of

superiority over Khrushchev was enhanced, but also the sense of further confirmation of the CCP as the *number two* party in the international movement—a status the Soviets strongly affirmed.

This was seen in Mao's prominence at the late 1957 Moscow conference marking the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution. During his visit Mao displayed a mix of the rational pursuit of China's interests (notably securing limited support for the PRC's nuclear weapons program), some "romantic" pronouncements (overtaking the UK in 15 years, the east wind now prevailing over the west wind), and a complicated underlying emotionalism. There was nothing to suggest a formal position of anything other than bolstering Soviet leadership of the movement, but the sense of competition with Moscow was palpable. The 15-year project to overtake the UK was modeled on Khrushchev's boast to overtake the US in the same period; more importantly, it clearly played a significant role in the emergence of the Great Leap Forward. Mao's declaration on east and west winds reflected the Soviet sense of a new turn in the struggle with the capitalist world, but carried it further into a more aggressive international posture. This would be played out between Beijing and Moscow in the coming years over specific international crises and more broadly Soviet efforts to establish peaceful coexistence with Washington. These differences were rooted in differing national situations and rational in that sense: the Soviet Union was a nuclear superpower engaged with the United States on a worldwide basis, while China was partially ostracized internationally, without diplomatic relations with the United States, and the Soviet Union's primary focus was Europe, with the result that the PRC's regional interests had a lower priority in Moscow.

But in pushing inherent differences into an ideological conflict (to be sure, the Soviets shared considerable responsibility) and ultimately a formal split, Mao seriously undermined not only a balanced assessment of his country's interests, but also a fundamental aspect of his revolutionary strategic approach. By the mid-1960s, rather than identifying the "main enemy," Mao had created two—both superpowers—at a time of intensifying war on China's southern border. Whether this development was ever questioned and in what form would be interesting to know. Moreover, the escalating Sino-Soviet conflict fed directly

into domestic politics and contributed to the Chairman's drift toward the Cultural Revolution. If the Soviet Union had developed a revisionist foreign policy, it was due to its revisionist leadership, and naturally such a leadership created a modern revisionist state. In the resulting polemics the need for China to avoid a similar degeneration was clear, but Mao offered no prescription beyond traditional approaches such as the mass line, rectification campaigns, and a firm Marxist leadership. But what if the leadership wavered, or even became a "bourgeois headquarters"?

During the ideological excesses of the Cultural Revolution the PRC (almost) practiced no foreign policy, but growing border tensions and the Brezhnev doctrine in 1968 finally led Mao to identify the Soviet Union as the main enemy and begin rapprochement with the US, an approach engrained as the core of Chinese foreign policy for the remainder of his life. Given the PRC's strategic position by the late 1960s this was a pragmatic policy, but it was in reaction to developments over the previous decade that had been shaped by the Chairman's ideological preoccupations, domestic fears, and personal resentments.

3. On what basis did Mao choose his successors? Was there a pattern in how these choices evolved over time?

During his lifetime Mao had designated four formal successors—Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, Wang Hongwen and Hua Guofeng. A fifth proto-successor—Deng Xiaoping—must also be considered. Each was selected, or in Deng's case positioned, in very different circumstances. Liu and Lin (and Deng) were old revolutionaries with substantial status and support within the CCP. Wang and Hua, while very different individuals, were thrown up by the Cultural Revolution; both were very personal choices by the Chairman that caught everyone by surprise, even amazement. What more discriminating factors can be identified in each case?

While I am not aware of the informal process in selecting Liu, it is difficult to believe that he was not Mao's choice. Probably Liu's biggest appeal was his strong opposition to the "left line" of the Returned Student group, precisely the approach Mao was intent on purging in the 1940s, and something distinguishing

Liu from Zhou Enlai. Yet there was no long-standing personal relationship between the two men, and Liu's (oversimplified) identification with the "white areas" suggests he did not have the strongest base within the CCP—something that might have had a perverse appeal should Mao ever choose to get rid of him. Indeed, on two occasions the Chairman appears to have considered precisely that, during the Gao Gang affair which Mao to some degree created, but apparently pulled back from in order to maintain Party unity, and in 1962 following Liu's speech at the 7,000 cadres conference that gave him "food for thought," but the fragility of the overall situation seemingly stayed his hand if that indeed was a serious thought at the time. Overall, Liu had been completely loyal to Mao, enthusiastically supported various leftist initiatives such as the Great Leap, and would quickly change tack when aware of Mao's views as at the 1962 Beidaihe conference. In terms of Liu's ousting in 1966, the need to remove the leader of the "first front" responsible for the revisionist trend plus the perception of his vigor in that role might suffice, but the evidence of dissatisfaction going back to the early 1950s raises questions about deeper resentments. The ferocity of Liu's treatment, plus the fact that of all the living top leaders he alone was expelled from the Party during the Cultural Revolution, underlines these unanswered questions.

Lin Biao, by all available evidence, was raised to the successor over his attempts to avoid the position. From 1954 to 1959 Lin held high positions, including elevation to the Standing Committee in 1958, but no executive authority before replacing Peng Dehuai as Minister of Defense following the Lushan conference in 1959. The combination of poor health and a reluctance to be involved in politics made Lin an unusual choice. What made him attractive to Mao? One factor, I suggest, was personal and structural relationship between the senior Mao and (like Deng as well) the decade younger Lin. It a situation that could never be replicated by the more senior Liu, Lin had a teacher-student relationship with Mao. Another factor was that Lin was the only Standing Committee member who, in Mao's eyes and by virtue of his PLA role, was not infected by the perceived revisionism of domestic policy. In choosing Lin the Chairman provided a candidate who, at least in formal status and historical prestige, was credible to the broader elite, perhaps suggesting that he was

indeed serious about a three-month campaign before returning to a more normal situation, while also calculating that Lin would be pliable if he opted for more radical measures. Undoubtedly Mao's admiration for military virtue and Lin's performance as one of the CCP's greatest generals, and the cultivation of Mao study by Lin's PLA were other factors. The bottom line would have been the expectation of total loyalty, and that's essentially what Mao got. Whether he actually anticipated Lin's rather vacuous approach of "do what the Chairman says" is an interesting question. But Mao's virtual emotional collapse after Lin's mysterious demise in 1971 suggests his difficulty in comprehending how a close subordinate could desert him, the pressure he had placed Lin under notwithstanding.

Wang Hongwen was, of course, a totally different case. In contrast to Liu, Lin and top pre-1966 leaders generally where Mao had intimate knowledge and strong opinions, the Chairman had extremely limited personal experience with Wang who, in fact, can be regarded as more a concept than an individual, someone who had been a Cultural Revolution rebel, was young enough to be a lasting "revolutionary successor," and who combined soldier, worker and peasant backgrounds. Wang had come to Mao's attention via television in 1967, was subsequently observed largely remotely to assess his qualities and behavior, invited to some of the Chairman's meetings, but never given an executive role. After arriving in Beijing in September 1972, Wang was treated more as a precocious student, enjoined to "study Marxist-Leninist books, and attend certain meetings to learn different things," than as a potential leader, yet quickly revealed to the elite as Mao's choice as successor. I can only speculate concerning this strangest of all selections: disorientation after the Lin Biao affair, a determination to reassert Cultural Revolution values, and/or the absence of an acceptable alternative. Zhou Enlai was never Mao's preferred successor and was now suffering from cancer, Li Xiannian had never been particularly highly regarded by the Chairman, Zhang Chunqiao attracted too much animosity, and Deng Xiaoping was still in the process of emerging from purgatory. But ultimately Wang's selection remains inexplicable, indeed delusional.

Mao's last choice, Hua Guofeng, was an entirely different proposition. Hua was from the political establishment, albeit the provincial level, had contact with

Mao since the 1950s and impressed the Chairman, and was a pragmatic, non-ideological leader. Indeed, when Hua was brought to Beijing shortly before Wang and assigned key administrative roles, Mao criticized him for having his head buried in practical matters and urged him to study politics. While clearly marked by Mao for significant roles, there was no sense that Hua would be considered a successor, but it was events that created an opening. In the narrow sense the death of Zhou left the premiership vacant, more significantly Deng was again being banished from office. The greatest similarity to Wang's case was the lack of acceptable alternatives; the suggestion by Hua, Ji Dengkui and Chen Xilian that Li Xiannian was a suitable senior leader for the premier's post was ignored by Mao. But Mao was much more pragmatic this time around, seeking an acceptable compromise candidate that might hold the Party together, a person capable of administrative leadership, and assuming that as a beneficiary of the Cultural Revolution Hua would protect its values. In the end, of course, this was too much to ask given the deep divisions Mao had created in the leadership.

While not designated the successor, in 1975 Deng was clearly positioned to assume that role. Wang Hongwen had fallen out of Mao's favor, the Chairman had entered a pragmatic phase focusing on economic development and political stability, and had placed Deng in charge of a consolidation program that had wide support. But Deng would not have been in that position had he not been a long-term favorite of the Chairman's. In this he was closest to Lin Biao, a younger leader greatly admired by Mao, but unlike the reclusive Lin one clearly welcoming major roles. Moreover, hints of an eventual successor role were dropped as in Mao's comment to Khrushchev about the future of "that little man," or by his designation of Deng as the vice-marshal to himself at the very point Liu was elevated to the state chairmanship in 1959. Even more striking was the protection Mao provided when Deng was under attack. During the early Cultural Revolution as radical propaganda pilloried the "Liu-Deng line," and again after the 1976 Tiananmen incident, Mao insisted on Deng's physical security and assigned his chief bodyguard, Wang Dongxing, to enforce it. Deng of course was a talented operative, decisive and tough, arguably reminding the Chairman of aspects of himself, and he was totally loyal, energetically doing what he was asked when he understood Mao's meaning. But there was a distinct

emotional aspect, nowhere better illustrated than after a fall 1973 Politburo meeting where Deng carried out Mao's order to criticize Zhou Enlai. Upon learning of Deng's performance, an excited Chairman exclaimed, "I knew he would speak," and wanted Deng brought to him immediately. Any elucidation of the emotional tie between these very different men is most welcome.

4. How much responsibility does Mao bear for the disasters of his "later years"? Is it possible to apportion blame to other members of the leadership and the system as a whole?

It is a truism that Mao was ultimately responsible for the two great disasters of the PRC period—"no Mao, no Great Leap Forward," and "no Mao, no Cultural Revolution." Yet the top down dictatorial system itself was prone to excess, something clearly seen before the dramatic turn in 1957-58 in the "high tide" of agricultural cooperativization where Mao's strong rhetoric but relatively restrained targets were translated into a dramatic increase in the rate of transformation by lower levels eager to satisfy the desires of the Chairman. Nevertheless, a degree of restraint was possible given that other leaders could/were willing to speak out to Mao, whether unsuccessfully by Deng Zihui on cooperativization in 1955, or successfully by Zhou Enlai on the pace of economic growth in 1956. The situation changed dramatically with the onset of the Great Leap and the virtual ban on dissent at the early 1958 leadership meetings, and the dramatic events the following year at Lushan—and this situation continued in fluctuating form for the remainder of Mao's life. In this context of careers most likely on the line, and unwavering loyalty to the founder of the regime, laments that disaster could have been averted if only some group of leaders had stood up to the Chairman, while atractive in theory, was never remotely possible. But this leaves the question of what responsibility the elite as a whole and individual leaders should bear for the disasters that unfolded.

The Great Leap and Cultural Revolution are very different cases. The Great Leap manifested all the excesses of the top down campaign mode in much more virulent form than the "high tide" of cooperativization, with Deng Xiaoping driving the apparatus from Beijing. Yet given both the extreme decentralization

of the period and the ingrained approach of adjusting policy to local conditions (*yindi zhiyi*), enormous local variation—including in responsibility—occurred. Thus there were cases of adjacent counties with minimal and huge famine deaths respectively, and a Shandong county where no deaths were recorded despite a high toll in the province as a whole. Yang Jisheng's wonderful book makes clear the concentration of deaths in a limited number of provinces with radical leaders: Anhui, Sichuan and Henan accounted for somewhere on order of 58 percent of all famine deaths as provincial death rates varied greatly. Individual provincial and local leaders must bear great responsibility for the unfolding disaster, particularly those who ignored Mao's change of tack during the "cooling down" phase from late 1958 to Lushan.

It is also important to ask about the responsibility of top national leaders in two respects. First, to what extent did they seek out information on actual conditions and pass it on to Mao. This is a vexing question given the systematic efforts level by level to prevent accurate reports on the real devastation moving up the chain of command. Yet evidence of food shortages and cases of starvation was known relatively early and treated as temporary and isolated phenomena, with no serious efforts to follow up. Even when the situation had significantly worsened and more dramatic evidence reached the top in early 1960, Zhou Enlai temporized, calling for investigation but suggesting the reports might be exaggerated and only reflect individual cases, and apparently not passing on the information to the Chairman. Second, and related to Zhou's quandary, were the choices to be made concerning advising a headstrong Mao and advocating policy adjustments. The opportunities offered by the "cooling down" phase notwithstanding, the time often did not seem right. At the start of that phase, these leaders as a whole appeared relatively mute, and only later as Mao continued to push for more realism did these leaders feature more prominently, but Chen Yun apart more as implementing Mao's new direction than as policy innovators. All of this was understandable given Mao's mercurial moods and inconsistent signals throughout the period, but the question remains whether they could have done more. Deng, at least, was in a position to influence Li Jingquan, his colleague from Sichuan, who was overseeing a murderous famine in the province.

A similar pattern of leadership hesitancy appeared during the "Cultural Revolution decade." Here I focus on the "liberation of cadres," a process that had begun earlier but expanded significantly under Mao's direct oversight following the Lin Biao affair. Despite the emphasis on Zhou Enlai's role in official sources and foreign scholarship alike, the rehabilitation of senior cadres was unambiguously *the* area where Mao's initiative drove the attack on "ultra-leftism" in 1972 and beyond. Mao clearly selected the targets for rehabilitation, leaving Zhou to carry out the process of clearing up individual cases that often met "gang of four" resistance, but would be settled instantly once Mao made a final decision. My main point concerns Zhou's (and later Deng's) extreme caution in handling cases unless or until absolutely sure of the Chairman's intent.

Despite Zhou's undoubted knowledge of Mao's favoritism toward Deng and his uniquely fulsome approving comment on Deng's August 1972 letter of self-criticism and request for work, Zhou proceeded with the utmost circumspection in considering what post should be considered for Deng. Following Mao's August comment, Zhou convened the Politburo, but, allegedly because of the attitude of Jiang Qing *et al.*, it was difficult to reach a conclusion and he did not push. Four months later, rather than making a proposal himself, Zhou contacted Ji Dengkui and Wang Dongxing to ask them to consider a post for Deng. Ji and Wang made recommendations concerning Tan Zhenlin as well as Deng, in Deng's case that he be appointed a vice premier. Zhou's response was to proceed with Tan's case first, on the grounds that Mao's views would have to be sought before anything could be done concerning Deng. Zhou then consulted Mao, who quickly agreed to Deng's posting.

More dramatic, and more relevant to my overall point, was the hesitancy to address issues where Mao had provided an opening but not a clear indication. By 1975 Deng was *de facto* premier, but Zhou remained influential in cadre liberation matters. In May, apparently reflecting Zhou's earlier instruction to release everyone but a very few that would surely have come from, or at least been coordinated with Mao, and in the context of the Mao-initiated criticism of the Politburo radicals, the so-called "61 traitors" were released from prison, but were still under investigation, and faced demands for confessions to fictitious crimes. While one source credits Deng with pressing for "solving" this case and

those of other significant officials "on many occasions" in 1975, Wu De recalled Deng merely raising the need for reexamining the case, but then backing off when Jiang Qing berated Wu, who had also backed the idea, as wanting "to reverse the verdict on traitors." Premier Zhou reportedly had a more telling role in this case—one that blocked its progress. According to a close relative, Ji Dengkui drafted a report accurately reporting the historical circumstances of the "traitors" and absolving them, but Zhou disagreed with proceeding on the basis that it would clash with current patriotic education aimed at the Soviet Union, and the issue never reached Mao.

In addition, Mao raised an even more explosive case in this same period, that of the highest-ranking living victim of the initial stage of the Cultural Revolution, Peng Zhen. In late 1973 Mao made a positive reference to Peng, and subsequently closely oversaw his release from prison. According to Deng Liqun, the radicals strongly opposed any additional action, arguing that more investigation was required of Peng's alleged past traitorous actions, and nothing further eventuated. This account does not record any argument against the radicals' position. In fact, Premier Zhou's cautious approach also served to obstruct Peng's case. As on previous occasions involving Jiang Qing and Kang Sheng when had Mao ruminated about bringing Peng back to work, like them Zhou reminded the Chairman of the unresolved accusations that Peng had been a traitor, and the matter did not proceed. Whether the Premier had some personal motive concerning Peng or was simply being cautious is unknown, but it was a clear case of not exploring a possibility where the Chairman had opened the door to reversing Cultural Revolution wrongs.

After 1949 there was no possibility of opposing Mao. The Chairman was seen by the elite as the leader who had brought the Party from a hopeless situation to national victory. To deny him was to deny themselves, no matter what his mistakes. As Peng Zhen put it at the nadir of the PRC in 1961, "if we don't support him, who can we support?" This was the key to Mao's political invulnerability—the relationship between himself and his highest colleagues. The Leninist apparatus and totalitarian system enforced his writ to the grassroots, with propaganda and the cult of his personality deeply embedding

his prestige in society. Change theoretically could still have come from the top, but the revolutionary victory meant there would never be a Chinese equivalent to the 1964 meeting on the tarmac at Moscow airport when Khrushchev was told by his colleagues that "we have betrayed you," no matter how many harebrained schemes emerged from Zhongnanhai.

For the central leadership the situation changed greatly in 1958. Before the Great Leap it was possible to advance views with some confidence of a hearing from Mao; even if he was particularly annoyed as with Bo Yibo in 1953 and Deng Zihui in 1955, careers were not finished. But from early 1958 the situation was transformed. Some (Zhou Enlai) were denied the right to speak, others (Chen Yun) waited for Mao's invitation, and still others (Peng Dehuai) blundered in their manner of speaking out. What had been a relationship of skewed collegiality had become one of total subservience. In fact, not many high-level leaders were removed before the Cultural Revolution and a semblance of regular policy-making reappeared, but the atmosphere had changed drastically. Of course, it became much worse for the elite after 1965. Yet they still obeyed.

As for Mao, from 1957-58 on his behavior was increasingly emotional and removed from practices that made him a successful revolutionary. His lurch into a truly romantic program with no basis in experience was based on, in my view, a combination of trying to make up for the Hundred Flowers failure and puerile competition with the Soviet Union. Investigation and research was only restored as a guiding concept during one of the most horrific famines in human history. Diplomacy had not simply given way to polemics, but China now confronted two "main" superpower enemies. Schram's "natural Leninist" gave way to tearing down the Party apparatus without a concept of what would follow, and no comprehendible vision of a broad objective that could justify the turmoil. A successor was chosen who was more the embodiment of a CV than someone with the capabilities required to lead a nation. And the Chairman left a leadership situation so poisonous that it was settled by a coup.

Mao's absolute power corrupted both the system and himself. But Mao's sin was less corruption than hubris, his belief that he was "alone with the masses" and had a special understanding of the needs of the revolution and the Chinese people. No one and no costs could stand in the way of his pursuit of

those visions, and he could not accept responsibility when that pursuit led to disastrous consequences, which, in his view, were ultimately someone else's fault. It was a conceit with enormous human costs.

Addendum:
Mao, Deng Xiaoping, and Problems of Biography

Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life by Alexander V. Pantsov with Steven I. Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 610 pp. $27.50.

Reviewed by Frederick C. Teiwes, The University of Sydney, in *Journal of Cold War Studies*

This biography follows on, and is intimately related to the Pantsov-Levine 2012 biography of Mao Zedong. The Mao-Deng interaction was not only the crucial aspect of Deng's political life, it provides a central basis for the authors' understanding of this seminal figure in the history of Chinese Communism. Pantsov and Levine claim their new book is "the only complete and objective biography" of Deng (p. 8). This claim is explicitly aimed at Ezra Vogel's 2011 study, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, both in that Vogel focused on Deng's post-Mao career while they provide the story of his entire life, and by (correctly) asserting that Vogel's account is unrealistically positive toward Deng. For them, an objective biography is "balanced," it acknowledges Deng's leadership in shaping China's post-Mao economic reforms, while emphasizing his complicity in repression and shedding blood under Mao's command, not to mention his own primary responsibility for the 1989 Tiananmen tragedy.

A strength of the book, although not a unmitigated one, is the authors' grasp of their protagonist's character: "Deng was tough, purposeful, ambitious,

and cruel. But he was also cautious and patient" (p. 7). They also underline such features of his behavior as devotion to Mao to the point of subservience and accepting humiliation, a cold ruthless streak in dealing with people, whether his father or colleagues who were no longer useful, and an increasing capriciousness as he aged. Yet, seemingly reflecting perceived similarities to Mao, they continue their characterization of the tough and cruel leader in a less satisfactory manner: "a master of manipulating people, engaging in intrigues, and luring people with beautiful slogans," something assertedly essential for his emergence as Mao's true successor. This will be discussed below.

The biography is divided into three parts: 1) "the Bolshevik" covers the period from Deng's birth, through to his joining the communist movement in Europe and absorbing Leninist-Stalinist values in Moscow, and his early revolutionary efforts back in China; 2) "the Maoist" examines Deng's period in the Soviet area and his introduction to Mao's policies from 1931, through to his return to work in 1973 following the Cultural Revolution; and 3) "the pragmatist" from that return to work to the end of his life. The dating of the shift from "Maoist" to "pragmatist" is unfortunate. The pragmatic tendencies Deng initially evinced, notably in 1975, were based on Mao's initiative; his downfall was a consequence of an insufficiently nuanced understanding of the Chairman, not any conscious intent to exceed Mao's remit. Despite the authors' claim, there was no disobedience on Deng's part shortly before Mao's death. And for his part the dying Great Helmsman continued to protect Deng.

Each section is based on extensive research which includes a great variety of CCP documentary materials, memoirs and scholarly Party history studies, Soviet and Comintern archives (most useful for the Moscow phase of the

"Bolshevik" period, demonstrating Deng's natural disposition as a budding Stalinist cadre), and an extensive secondary literature that is used erratically, notably by an apparently deliberate decision to not engage with recent scholarship at variance with the book's narrative. There is also a tendency to use unreliable sources as definitive, notably the account of Mao's doctor, Li Zhisui, and *The Tiananmen Papers*. Moreover, an important and extensively cited source was ignored when it did not fit the narrative: i.e., the account of Deng's daughter Maomao on his meeting with the "vile" Kang Sheng upon returning to Beijing in 1973 where she was present. Having portrayed Kang as a leftist enemy of Deng and close supporter of Jiang Qing, the authors find no place for Maomao's report of this meeting that not only revived a pre-Cultural Revolution family friendship, but more significantly her description of Kang fiercely denouncing Jiang as a traitor.

Although the array of sources used, especially the recent official CCP literature and memoirs, often provides useful documentation and insights, the resulting story does not break much new ground. What is particularly unfortunate is that the coverage of developments can be quite thin, strikingly so in the case of two of the most significant events in Deng's career: the Tiananmen suppression (a 10-page chapter), and his revival and deepening of economic reform with his 1992 southern tour (a mere three pages). Beyond this, the analysis of specific episodes is often misses important nuances, and on occasion fundamentally distorts developments encompassing several years, as in treating Mao's entire Hundred Flowers policy in 1956-57 as a plot from start to finish to lure "poisonous snakes" from their hole.

Deng's Maoist phase is the most satisfactory section of the book. It grasps Mao's shifting moods, charts Deng's rise, notes his complete loyalty even when concerns over the consequences of the leader's actions emerged, and correctly assesses that what Mao really wanted was for Deng to repent his mistakes. The authors wisely observe "Deng's main task … was to guess what the Boss really wanted at any given moment" (p. 155). The account of the pragmatic paramount leader and "architect" of reform is less satisfying, although it does capture the sense of Deng's ultimate authority without adequately explaining why. Moreover, it is in the initial post-1976 period that the book advances its most indefensible narrative—Deng's alleged struggle with Hua Guofeng.

To be blunt, the book's account of Deng-Hua interaction and Hua Guofeng more generally comes close to the official denigration of Hua at the time of his removal from leadership in 1981. Although noting some evolution in Hua's position, it essentially paints Hua as "this weak man," a "whateverist" who sought to maintain dogmatic Maoist ideology and resisted Deng's return, accords him no role in the rehabilitation of victims of the Cultural Revolution, and characterizes him as the leader responsible for the reckless new leap forward economic policies in 1977-78. It further paints a picture of Hua as less than the key actor in the arrest of the "gang of four," something never officially asserted even at the time of Hua's removal from office. And, of course, Deng gets credit for the emergence of reform around the time of the 1978 Third Plenum.

On all these points a quite different picture emerges from Western scholarship, Chinese Party history accounts and memoirs, and even Hua's official life assessment following his 2008 death that affirmed him as the "decisive actor" in the arrest of "gang," his launching the process of "reversing verdicts" on

Cultural Revolution victims, and much more. Despite the long prevalent view of a neo-Maoist-reform struggle based on Hua *versus* Deng, deep research indicates no major differences on issues before the Party leadership, finds Deng more excessive than Hua on the new economic leap forward, and documents how Hua played a bigger role in the initiation of economic reforms in 1978-79.

Given the gross inadequacy of the neo-Maoist/reformist struggle analysis, what explains Hua's demise and what does it say about Deng? The key factor was the great disparity in historical status between Hua, a youngster who only joined the CCP in 1938, and Deng, one of the heroes of the revolution who stood at the apex of the system at the start of the Cultural Revolution. It was an inherently unstable situation, but one that could not be easily or quickly resolved given the regime's need for stability. Which brings us back to the Pantsov-Levine picture of Deng as a master of manipulation and intrigues.

These characteristics do not fit Deng in his Maoist phase, and only to a limited degree as a post-1976 pragmatist. Under Mao, Deng's aim was to carry out his boss's wishes; there is little to indicate intrigues against other leaders, even Jiang Qing. After 1976, Deng did at some uncertain point start to engage in intrigues in the form of under-the-table lobbying of other senior leaders on the need to restore proper historical status in the Party leadership. Intrigue yes, but toward a result deeply embedded in Party culture, accepted rather easily if with some reluctance by the broad elite, and not resisted by Hua. Once ensconced as the paramount leader, Deng had no need for intrigue or manipulation, he got what he wanted once he set his mind on an objective. Having considerably less power than the Great Helmsman, he was also not as obsessed with determining a colleague's deep beliefs and loyalty, as Mao had been with Deng himself. In

contrast to Mao cutting a swathe through long-standing colleagues who simply could not comprehend his wishes in 1966, Deng only acted against Hu Yaobang after considerable resistance to his instructions on bourgeois liberalization, and Zhao Ziyang in the context of an unfolding crisis. Two emperors who removed their successors, but very different personalities despite significant similarities, and very different contexts.

The general reader, a major audience for this book, will come away with a generally insightful picture of the man—the primary objective of biography, but with an often distorted understanding of the circumstances in which he operated—the essential requirement of history. Without both, an adequate account of Deng and his times is missing.