

MAO ZEDONG

Mao Zedong remains one of the most controversial figures in modern world history. This 'living legacy' is the subject of intense, ongoing debate both within China and throughout the rest of the world. Here, volume I of the only biography of Mao written with full access to the Chinese Communist Party Archives to date is presented in English translation for the first time. This volume, produced by the historians of the Party Literature Research Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, covers Mao's career in the pre-revolutionary period, 1893–1949. As an extended official account of Mao, and Mao's thought, this work offers a unique source through which to view the ways in which today's Chinese Communist Party has understood and portrayed the transformative events of the twentieth century and Mao's pivotal role therein.

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MAO ZEDONG

A Biography

Volume I
1893–1949

CCCPC PARTY LITERATURE RESEARCH OFFICE

CHIEF EDITORS PANG XIANZHI

AND JIN CHONGJI

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION:
VOLUME I

TIMOTHY CHEEK, *University of British Columbia*

Mao Zedong lived from 1893 to 1976. He is the most famous Chinese of the twentieth century and certainly China's most influential political leader. He is remembered as China's paramount Marxist–Leninist leader and theorist. A junior Party member in the 1920s and controversial regional leader in the countryside in the late 1920s and early 1930s, by the mid-1940s Mao became the supreme leader of China's communist movement, and, in 1949, of the new People's Republic of China. The personality cult around Chairman Mao culminated in outrageous popular veneration in the turbulent Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, and his memory remains vibrant in China today. His writings continue to serve as the official doctrine of the still-ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and his memory elicits strong feelings (both positive and negative) among China's diverse population, as well as students of Marxism and revolution worldwide. In the international history of communism, Mao Zedong played a key role in leading the largest communist revolution in the world outside of Russia, and in his 'creative developments' or 'sinification' of Marxist–Leninist orthodoxy to suit Chinese conditions, adaptations that have influenced revolutions in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In all, Mao remains the pre-eminent representative of the successes and failures of the Chinese communist revolution.

Biographies of Mao have existed since Edgar Snow's famous interviews were published as *Red Star over China* in 1937.¹ Each biography looked at Mao from different angles. Snow, writing for an international audience as war brewed in Europe, gave us the 'Lincolnesque figure' who, like a Chinese Robin Hood, refused to stay dead. Almost a decade later, at the Seventh Party Congress in Yan'an in April 1945, the Mao of the Rectification Movement was embraced by the entire CCP – Chairman Mao, the author of the ideology and the plan to make the revolution succeed. This Mao was chronicled by his writings. The first *Xuanji*, or *Selected Works*, was published in the Jin Cha Ji base area in 1944, and Mao's version of Party history had been backed up in the internal Party documents that were studied by the leadership in late

¹ Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Gollancz, 1937) for the Left Book Club. Snow revised the text in 1939 and again in 1944. A new edition from 1968 is still in print.

1941.² More versions of the Great Leader came in succeeding years, culminating in the cult of Mao in the Cultural Revolution decade from 1966.³ The post-Mao period brought a serious re-consideration of Mao and Mao's role in the history of the Party from 1949, stepping back from the adulation of earlier years. The first Mao, we could call Insurgent Mao; the second, Great Leader Mao; and the third – the Mao we meet in Jin Chongji's *Mao* – is Reform Mao. Jin's biography is the orthodox version of Mao produced under the political line of Deng Xiaoping's reform China.

This volume comprises the first of three volumes of the English translation of the official Chinese biography of Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong zhuan*. The first part was published in 1996 by the CCP Central Committee's Party Literature Research Office, covering the years from Mao's birth in 1893 until the start of the People's Republic of China in October 1949. Jin Chongji (金冲及) is credited as the key editor and main writer of this part. The second part of Mao's biography, covering events until his death in 1976, was published first in 2003 under the direction of Pang Xianzhi (逢先知) with several writers, including Jin. In 2011, both parts were published together in a six-volume set on which this translation is based.⁴ My introduction will introduce Jin Chongji and his work, as well as provide a background for the general reader and an assessment of the strengths and limitations of this biography of Mao. Professors Chen Yung-fa of Academia Sinica, Taiwan, and Hans J. van de Ven of the University of Cambridge provide the introductions to the second and third volumes of this translation. Together, we agree that *Mao Zedong zhuan* is a substantial and well-researched work of historiography and that the translation presented in this edition provides a reliable and readable English version.⁵

Yet the question remains: why read this official Chinese Communist biography of their own leader, Mao Zedong? In what ways is reading this different

² *Mao Zedong xuanji* was published by the Jin Cha Ji New China Book Shop without indication of place in 1944; 毛澤東, 《毛澤東選集》 (n.p., 晉察冀新華書店, 1944) and CCP Central Secretariat, ed., 中共中央书记处, 编 *Since the the Sixth Congress: Secret Internal Party Documents* 《六大以来: 党内秘密文件》 (Beijing 北京: Peoples Press人民出版社, 1952, preface dated 1980). Discussed below.

³ Daniel Leese, *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual during China's Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁴ CCP Central Documentation Research Office, ed., 中共中央文献研究室, 编, Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, eds., 逢先知, 金冲及, 主编 *Biography of Mao Zedong* 《毛泽东传》 (Beijing 北京: Central Documentation Press 中央文献出版社, 2011年1月第2版) in six volumes; hereafter, *Mao Zedong zhuan*.

⁵ Under the general direction of Professor Hans J. van de Ven, the translation has been checked and edited particularly to bring the titles of the many writings by Mao and official documents cited in the biography into accord with standard English translations in Mao's works – the official Beijing *Selected Works of Mao* and the massive scholarly translation of Mao's work by Stuart R. Schram and colleagues, *Mao's Road to Power* – and of major Party documents, as in Tony Saich's documentary collection, *The Rise to Power of the Chinese Communist Party*.

from or preferable to reading Hitler's *Mein Kampf* or Stalin's *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks)*? Is this biography not simply more communist propaganda? I would argue that there are three reasons why it is worth reading this version of Mao's life. First, this official biography is not written by Mao to defend himself, as Hitler's and Stalin's were written during their lives to defend their policies. Rather, this biography would be more comparable to a revisionist biography of Stalin under Khrushchev or Gorbachev. There is a significant distance between the subject of this biography and its authors. Second, as far as we are able to judge, this biography is scrupulously researched. The authors have privileged access to Party archives not available to other scholars inside or outside China. It is loaded with information (usually with specific documentary citations) not available in current Western or non-official biographies of Mao. Finally, this biography provides a vivid window into the thinking of reform China, an example of the efforts of the post-Cultural Revolution CCP leadership to 'cope with Mao'. In the form of Jin Chongji, the lead author of this first volume, it has attracted the dedicated efforts of a respected and talented historian who, at the same time, professes his faith in the value of Mao's revolution, despite the depredations of Mao's later revolutions, and especially the Cultural Revolution. What on earth does this fine scholar find to believe in from the life of Mao? This biography tells that story. Most importantly, this biography is an authoritative statement of Deng Xiaoping's assessment of Mao and how to read Mao's works and life, which continue to shape China's establishment in the age of Xi Jinping.

There is a fruitful place for the intelligent observer – of Fox News as much as of state propaganda – between credulity and cynicism. To occupy that place requires some understanding of the author, the context in which he wrote, and the project of the work. Two metaphors may help the reader new to official Chinese history writing. This is like reading a biography of a pope published by the Vatican. There are limits. While the scholarship might be sound, the doctrine is not up for question. This suggests a second metaphor closer to home: the standard dynastic histories of China. These have been written by court historiographers ever since Sima Qian wrote the first and most famous 'Standard History' (*zhengshi* 正史), *Records of the Grand Historian*, in the second century BCE.⁶ This biography of Mao can be seen in this tradition as an 'Exemplary Biography' (*liezhuan* 列傳) for an orthodox Standard History, combined, of course, with the Basic Annals (*benji* 本紀) of the founder of the regime. Sima Qian our current authors may not be, and Jin Chongji has not written this biography during the lifetime of his supreme leader (as Sima Qian did), but the comparison to the famous court historiographer of the

⁶ Burton Watson translated selections from *Shi ji* in 1971 for Columbia University Press, under the title *Records of the Grand Historian*, in two volumes. Other fine translations have since been made, but this remains a lucid version with a helpful introduction, and is available as an ACLS Humanities e-book.

Han Dynasty is as least as helpful as the papal biography metaphor. In both cases, severe constraints on the interpretive framework coexist with rich and useful historical detail.

To make use of Jin's version of Mao, it is helpful to consider three questions: what is the *place* of the author, the *context* of its production, and the *project* of the biography?

The Author and His Place

Jin Chongji's place is clear: he is an establishment intellectual working 'within the system' of 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 Shanghai 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, producing major works on the late Qing constitutional movement and on the 1911 Revolution. At Wenwu Publishing House, he served as Editor.

Since being 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 to pursue 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).⁷ As we will see below, Professor Jin also joined his colleagues (such as Pang Xianzhi) in the Literature Research Office in contributing to the authoritative Party commentary on the 1981 Historical Resolution, the *Annotations (Revised Edition) of the Resolution* published in 1983.

Yang Kuisong, a fellow scholar of revolutionary China working in Shanghai, has called Jin's biography a work from a nationalist perspective rather than a class-struggle perspective. And Western scholars have already tapped Jin's *Mao* biography as a reliable standard reference for their own primary research on Mao and CCP history.⁸

⁷ 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), pp. 228–46.

⁸ Hans J. van de Ven, 'War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority: Mao from 1937 to 1956', in Timothy Cheek (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Mao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 87–109; Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and Alexander V. Pantsov and Steven I. Levine, *Mao: The Real Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007).

The Context: Historical, Political and Historiographical

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. 'The Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the Nation' of June 1981 has a clear purpose, at least as far as Party leaders in the 1980s were concerned – to unify thinking, consolidate unity and promote development (both revolutionary change and modernization).⁹ The 1981 rubric acknowledges some of Mao's errors, but keeps Mao as the father of the revolution and font of Mao Zedong Thought – though not the only contributor to that orthodoxy.

Of course, ideological, political or historiographical work is not so easily guided. If the 1981 Historical Resolution is the law, then the *Annotations to the Historical Resolution* are the regulations to implement the law in historiographical practice. The 1985 edition of the *Annotations* to the 1981 Historical Resolution provides 600 pages of paragraph-by-paragraph commentary and additional information on the Resolution in 130 annotations. 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: 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'.¹⁰ The *Annotations* focuses, as well, on the contributions of other leaders to this collective Mao Zedong Thought (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,

⁹ 《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议》 is reproduced at the start of CCP Central Documentation Research Office, eds., 《中共中央文献研究室, 编, (Annotations (Revised Edition) on the Resolution of Certain Questions in the History of the Party Since the Founding of the PRC) 《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议注释本》 (修订)》 (Beijing 北京: People's Press 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 English version of the 'Resolution' itself can be found in *Beijing Review*, 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: www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm.

¹⁰ *Locus classicus* of this claim is to be found in para. 28 of the Central Committee's June 1981 Resolution; *Annotations*, pp. 507–12. English versions can be found in *Beijing Review*, 27 (6 July 1981), pp. 10–39; Martin, *Cult & Canon*, p. 213.

Deng Xiaoping). This moves Mao from the sole agent of the Chinese revolution to *primus inter pares*, representative of the best of the collective experience.

The second theme one can draw from the Mao sections of the *Annotations* is the emphasis on the historical 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 have generated. The *Annotations* stress three such enduring contributions: seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independence and self-reliance (annotations 116–18). 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’, 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.¹¹

The key here is less the theme – familiar ideals of CCP policy – than the demonstration. Jin’s focus is on the history of the emergence of these correct ideas. The story he tells is one of trial and error, insightful application of Marxist–Leninist theory, and collective contributions, with Mao at the centre, all shown by key documents written 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 key documents on the ‘mass line’). Jin’s purpose is to *demonstrate* these points with quotations from historical documents and a fairly rigorous presentation of the historical context for each text and for the development of these three core legs of Party ideology. Unsurprisingly, Jin Chongji is listed among the two dozen or so Party historians who joined in producing the *Annotations*.

The Project: Reform Mao

Jin Chongji has expressed himself on his goals in history writing in general, and in writing at the Party Research Office in particular. In a 2009 interview published in an American scholarly journal, 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 given to 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.’ He also states, ‘I would never make a false statement.’

¹¹ *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. I, p. 224.

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.’¹²

This ‘layout out the facts’ without commentary is centrally important for making sense of Jin’s biography of Mao. We get no major thesis or interpretive framework, no review of the scholarly literature. Yet this is no bland chronology of events. Jin’s narrative is full of interpretive turns, but they are often subtle or implicit. This speaks to the long tradition among Chinese establishment intellectuals of using *exegesis* to make points that are, for whatever reason, inconvenient for the powers that be. From Sima Qian and down the centuries, court historians in the various dynasties have employed similar techniques. This is a form of agency made famous precisely by Jin Chongji’s own generation of establishment intellectuals in the PRC, by people such as Deng Tuo, Wu Han and Jian Bozan.¹³ Oblique reference, historical analogy, even wicked puns are all forms of ‘hidden transcripts’ in Chinese political life.¹⁴ This approach offers more room for individual expression and difference of opinion than the superficial uniformity of quoting Mao or Deng or whoever is in charge might suggest. For example, Jin opens the biography with a description of Mao’s father, Mao Yichang, that ends with the bland assessment, ‘he would have been reckoned a moneybags’. What Jin does not say is that this would have made him, and his son Mao Zedong, rich peasants – a problematic political category for the Party’s future leader. Likewise, Jin describes two years of incessant fighting for Mao and the Party forces in Jiangxi in 1930–1 in over forty pages of description of battles, attacks and internal recriminations among commanders (Chs. 11 and 12). While, as we will see below, Jin is not free to talk directly about the infamous Futian Incident (a bloody Party purge), his description leaves the reader with the impression that the Party of this time was shaped by intense and unrelenting violence.

¹² Jin and Wang, ‘A Conversation with Jin Chongji’, p. 239. The interview was with Wang Xi, a professor at Peking University and Indiana University of Pennsylvania. *The Chinese Historical Review* is published in the US and features the work of China-born historians working in Europe and North America.

¹³ A classic example is the varying exegeses of volume IV of Mao’s *Selected Works* in 1960. I compare Lin Biao’s authoritative ‘reading’ and Deng Tuo’s (made on behalf of the Beijing Party Committee) in Timothy Cheek, *Propaganda and Culture in Mao’s China: Deng Tuo and the Intelligentsia* (Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 5.

¹⁴ On the concept of ‘hidden transcripts’, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Two further points from his 2009 interview can help us square this circle between Jin Chongji's professions of intellectual independence and his position as an official historian at court. 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'. Jin invokes 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, Jin Chongji did not need anyone to tell him what to write about Mao in order to get the text we have before us.

What does this produce? First, Mao as Horatio Alger. Jin Chongji tells 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, replete with references to Mao's acumen. Nonetheless, he eschews the relentlessly fawning tone of hagiographies – for example, ruefully noting on Mao's 1938 marriage to Jiang Qing, 'This wrong choice of marriage caused great misfortune in the late years of his life, especially in his old age.'¹⁶ He notes that Mao's understanding of the centrality of the peasantry in the revolution did not come all at once but was the result of a process across the 1920s. Similarly, Jin notes that Mao did not know how to lead the army in 1927 when he first fled with a ragtag band into the hills. He learned because he had to, because circumstances threw him into the fires. For Jin, this is the historical development not only of Mao himself as leader and thinker but also of the generation of correct thought and, more emphatically, correct operation of the Party as a unified collective leadership. Jin's story is more about the leadership skills needed for organizational growth than about the inherent genius of The Great Leader.

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 'Oppose Bookism') or at the

¹⁵ Jin and Wang, 'A Conversation with Jin Chongji', pp. 238 and 241.

¹⁶ *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. I, p. 533.

conclusion of chapters (as with his account of the multiple authors of the 1945 Historical Resolution). These virtues of collective leadership which Jin presents as represented in Mao's life include: reasonableness with colleagues and a preference for 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.¹⁷ Jin marshals a wealth of information that does show Mao's consummate ability to navigate institutional rivalries, if not all the virtues Jin wants to impress upon his Chinese readers. Nonetheless, Jin's praise redounds in the end more to a charismatic institution – an imperfect but perfectible Party – than to the individual genius. Jin tells a story of a team sport with a terrific captain, but a team story in the end.

Third, a focus on historical development. This is the flip side of Jin's 'Horatio Alger' picture of Mao. Good leadership – good ideas, and skills in applying them in political life – comes from dogged experience and careful reflection or 'summarizing experience'. The three core leadership skills that Jin's biography finds in Mao Zedong's life and thought are the three highlighted by the *Annotations*: seeking truth from facts, the mass line, and independent thinking and initiative. These themes hardly exhaust the topics covered in this massive biography of Mao. For example, Jin's narrative downplays the role of the Comintern even as it notes – often in passing – the central role of the Communist International and Stalin's authority within the CCP.¹⁸ The reader cannot fail to notice the feeling of a bit of nationalist pride in such efforts to minimize the role of the Comintern.

Finally, this is a surprisingly good read. The stories that make up this narrative, particularly of the almost non-stop fighting, are engaging and informative. 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. The dominance of military exploits in Mao's life, which Jin bases on documentary citations, reinforces the centrality of military work in Mao's life and work up to 1949. Yet, as Jin notes, the military life was foisted upon Mao, as for his surviving CCP colleagues from the violent split with the GMD in April 1927. Jin Chongji succeeds in presenting a coherent explanation of how this came to pass, emphasizing 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 organizational loyalty.

¹⁷ Examples include Mao's handling of the 'Li Lisan line' and fighting in Jiangxi in 1930: *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. I, pp. 240–1; the example on multiple authors and consensual drafting of the 1945 Historical Resolution, pp. 677–82, with Jin's assessment on collegial process on p. 680.

¹⁸ For example, the December 1936 decision not to execute Chiang Kai-shek during the Xi'an Incident was made, according to Jin's material, before Comintern instructions arrived: *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. I, p. 423.

Reading Jin's *Mao*

For most scholars, Jin Chongji's unrelentingly positive assessment of Mao is unlikely to convince. Yet Jin's preoccupation with the Party, collective leadership and the importance of political line adds substantively to our understanding of Mao, in addition to the fresh details we meet in the text. Jin's praise does raise questions. 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, specifically the reform Maoism of Deng Xiaoping. This Mao biography is a major application of the 1981 Historical Resolution and a monument to what establishment scholarship can – and cannot – achieve in reform China.

There are gaps in Jin's story that reflect the limitations of his position within the PRC establishment. One of the most notable 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: 'The Red Army Attacks Not Nanchang but Ji'an' and 'Smashing Three "Encirclement and Suppression" Campaigns'. For Jin, the story is the outer struggle between the CCP and the GMD in the life-and-death military campaigns that are well known as Chiang Kai-shek's encirclement campaigns designed to wipe out the communists, with the related theme of the internal Party struggles between the doughty soldiers in Jiangxi and the doctrinaire adventurists of the Central Committee in Shanghai. For Western and non-official historians, however, the Futian Incident is the December 1930 crescendo of brutal internal Party purges, and killings on a fearsome scale. Scholars such as Stephen Averill have documented the local social tensions that contributed to the conflagration.¹⁹ Jin glances over the Futian Incident in one vague sentence.²⁰

The story Jin tells is, nonetheless, useful if incomplete. It focuses on the 26 October resolution of the Luofang meeting, which Jin marks as Mao's policy.

¹⁹ The Western, or international, version of the Futian Incident is best documented by Stephen Averill, and has been well covered in broader histories of the CCP by Chen Yung-fa in Taiwan and Gao Hua in the PRC (albeit often publishing in the relatively liberal Hong Kong press). See Stephen C. Averill, 'The Origins of the Futian Incident', in Tony Saich and Hans J. van de Ven (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 79–115. See also Stephen C. Averill, Joseph W. Esherick and Elizabeth J. Perry, *Revolution in the Highlands: China's Jinggangshan Base Area* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) Chen Yung-fa 陳永發, *Seventy Years of the Chinese Communist Revolution*, revised ed. 《中國共產革命七十年》修訂版 (Taipei 臺北市: Lien-ching 聯經, 2001), Vol. I, pp. 272–3, and Gao Hua 高華, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origins and Sequela of the Yan'an Rectification Movement* 《紅太陽是怎樣升起的: 延安整風運動來龍去脈》 (香港: 中文大學出版社, 2001), pp. 16–31.

²⁰ *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. I, p. 244. And there is a passing reference to the AB (Anti-Bolshevik) organization at the heart of the Futian purges: *ibid.*, p. 237.

Jin marshals PRC-period reminiscences that focus on Mao's 'painstaking and penetrating education and persuasion'.²¹ What we get is more than ten pages of a *Boy's Life* narrative of Jin's heroes, Mao and Zhu De, and how they outfoxed the bad guys – it was a tough fight, but, for Jin, Mao's brilliance got them through by October 1931.²² Importantly, Mao's views in this story are, as always, confirmed by 'convening a meeting', and implemented by the assembled leaders 'making a decision'. His brilliance only matters if enacted, and enriched, by collective leadership – in this case, the local CCP when it chooses to support Mao's policies. These chapters are brimming with details of armies, attacks, political intrigues at the top, and feature Mao's steady hand and ability to win over his fellow Party leaders. Behind the *de rigueur* declarations of Mao's 'correct' reading of particular strategic opportunities is a documented tale of organizational learning ranging from guerrilla warfare to moderate land reform policies.

Here we have the official story and an alternate story, both well documented. 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 would not only *share the blame* between local social tensions and various leaders, but also acknowledge *agency* beyond an individual (Mao) or a single institution (the Party or Red Army). If we keep all these complex, contradictory and troubling factors in our minds at one time, what becomes of the narrative coherence of the story? This is the challenge for the open-minded reader.

The same challenge comes with Jin's account of the Yan'an Rectification Movement of 1942–4 in Chapters 26 and 27. We again get considerable detail in Jin's narrative, particularly around Mao's famous 'Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art' in May 1942, and the notorious 'rescue campaign' purges that ran from then into 1943. Jin gives an extended account of Mao's literary 'Talks' as the centre-piece of the first of his two chapters on the Yan'an Rectification Movement.²³ Jin presents Mao as brilliantly addressing the Party's pressing need for cadre training that is both practical (for the conditions and problems facing their rural base area around Yan'an) and able to unify a fractious Party in which there are severe disagreements about what to do. Mao does this by announcing and enforcing his revision of Marxist–Leninist ideology as he has adapted it to these local conditions. This is the famous 'Sinification of Marxism' that is the hallmark of what would shortly become Mao Zedong Thought.

Yet not everyone was happy about Rectification in Yan'an in 1942, and not everyone went willingly into the 'self- and mutual criticism' sessions of the

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 243ff.

²³ *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. II, Ch. 26, esp. pp. 651ff.

process. Other histories have documented the scathing criticisms raised by the Yan'an intellectuals and the harsh response of the Party.²⁴ This dark side of Yan'an's Rectification Movement is largely obscured in Jin's narrative. He mentions the case of Wang Shiwei – famous in English-language studies and unofficial Chinese writings as a trenchant critic of Mao who was then publicly denounced, persecuted and finally killed. However, Jin presents Wang's demise in the ensuing 'rescue campaign' as the handiwork of Kang Sheng, Mao's security chief who has since been purged and often blamed for Party excesses. To be fair, Jin concludes: 'So the struggle against Wang Shiwei went astray.'²⁵ But the brunt of Jin's analysis is not personal; it is institutional and ideological. Jin quotes Mao's assessment (from archival notes of a talk at the Central Party School in May 1944) as: 'The fundamental mistakes of the "rescue campaign" boiled down to two: insufficient investigation and study, and insufficient distinction among different cases.' Jin concludes: 'The CPC Central Committee and Mao Zedong discovered and corrected this error, and it did not attain dominant importance in the rectification movement.'²⁶

Once again, we are left with the challenge of discordant narratives. However, such challenges are no excuse for gratuitous assertions.²⁷ Many are familiar with the unrelentingly negative portrayal of Mao and the CCP in Jung Chang (Zhang Rong, 张戎) and Jon Halliday's *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2005). In this reading, 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, including by Andrew Nathan – hardly a fan of Mao – and myself, appear in the collection *Was Mao Really a Monster?*²⁸ Chang and Halliday are excessive in their judgements and have resorted to deceptive documentation that has

²⁴ Most famously, Merle Goldman, *Literary Dissent in Communist China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967). The best political analysis remains Raymond Wylie, *The Emergence of Maoism* (Stanford University Press, 1980). The Wang Shiwei case is vividly documented by the Chinese journalist Dai Qing in *Wang Shiwei and 'Wild Lilies'* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), and Peter Seybolt, 'Terror and Conformity: Counterespionage, Rectification, and Mass Movements, 1942–1943', *Modern China*, 12, 1 (1986), pp. 39–73. The most daring of the PRC scholars on the topic, Gao Hua, has recently been translated, *How the Red Sun Rose: The Origins and Development of the Yan'an Rectification Movement, 1930–1945* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2019).

²⁵ *Mao Zedong zhuan* (2011), Vol. II, p. 656.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 664–5.

²⁷ Hans J. van de Ven usefully cites a scholar of German history, Ian Kershaw, on this point: 'To call Hitler evil may well be true and morally satisfying. But it explains nothing.' See van de Ven, 'War, Cosmopolitanism, and Authority', p. 87.

²⁸ Gregor Benton and Lin Chun (eds.), *Was Mao Really a Monster? The Academic Responses to Chang and Halliday's Mao: The Unknown Story* (London: Routledge, 2010).

scuttled their academic reputation. Meanwhile, 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, then mastering Marxist theory in the late 1930s. I have criticized above some examples of Jin's continuous praise of Mao. Yet unlike Chang and Halliday, Jin does not obviously confuse and confound his documentation. We may disagree or suspend judgement on his claims, but his data appear reasonable.²⁹

Yet I would argue that even Jin's more troublesome lines of analysis are useful. His axial assumptions are different from those of most Western readers and so both challenge us to consider our assumptions and introduce us to some important assumptions that drive China's leaders today. The axial assumption in this case is Jin's consistent focus on the primacy of *political line* (*luxian* 路线) in his story of Mao and the Party. This is a legacy of the internal Party education movement that culminated in the Rectification Movement in Yan'an in 1942 and continues to hold sway in the CCP today under Xi Jinping, who is currently pressing his own 'mass line' study movement. Jin presents political errors as errors in political line, from Chen Duxiu's in the 1920s to Li Lisan's in the early 1930s to Wang Ming's after that. The correct political line in Jin's narrative, of course, is Mao's, and includes the mass line (*qunzhong luxian* 群众路线) – one of the three key themes of the Historical Resolution as well as in Jin's biography of Mao.

Why this focus on political 'line'? This was, of course, the ideological weapon of choice of high Stalinism (enshrined in Stalin's famous *Short Course*, which Mao studied in the late 1930s), and was exemplified in Stalin's fight with Trotsky. Hans van de Ven has shown that the CCP has used 'political line' as a political weapon since the 1927 justifications for the purge of Chen Duxiu.³⁰ Jin's biography of Mao is thus utterly orthodox in its assumption that correct – and incorrect – policy has come from the leaders' political line. In story after story in these pages, we see that a political line is crafted precisely from the trial and error of previous policy and the collective deliberation of top Party committees. For Jin, this is scientific governance and its fruit is a political line that brings success.

Jin's biography of Mao thus provides English readers most familiar with a liberal, modernist and European image of the world, and of the Middle

²⁹ As with the Russian archives cited by Chang and Halliday, the Central Committee archives cited by Jin are not available to scholars in China or the West and so cannot be tested and confirmed independently. However, unlike several of the particulars Chang and Halliday have ascribed to their reading of such archives, Jin's have yet to be contested by scholars knowledgeable in these areas.

³⁰ Hans J. van de Ven, *From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party, 1920–1927* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

INTRODUCTION

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Kingdom within it, with an alternative story. Specialists will be able to cull considerable detail from the thousands of pages of documented material presented, and historians will have a useful mirror in which to consider our own assumptions about ‘doing history’. Readers of these volumes will not only learn a great deal more about Mao and his role in the Chinese revolution, but also obtain a sense of how ‘reform China’ thinks.

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