INTRODUCTION TO THE ENGLISH EDITION: VOLUME III

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Mao Zedong breathed his last breath ten minutes after midnight on 9 September 1976. Ten days later, on 18 September, some 750,000 carefully vetted people gathered at Tian'anmen Square and along Chang'an Avenue in the heart of Beijing to bid the Chairman farewell. The ceremony began at 3:00 p.m. with a three-minute silence. Following the playing of the short funeral music, 'The March of the Volunteers' (China's national anthem), and 'The Internationale', Premier Hua Guofeng delivered a eulogy. A eulogy is not history, not even a first draft, as memoirs are said to be, but nonetheless requires an assessment of the life of the deceased.

Premier Hua Guofeng's remarks were largely predictable. Mao Zedong had been 'a great leader and teacher' under whose stewardship the Chinese people 'won emancipation and became masters of the country'.[1] Premier Hua called on his fellow citizens to 'carry through to the end the cause of proletarian revolution in China, as pioneered by Chairman Mao', a message which large posters in the middle of Tian'anmen Square declared to have been Mao Zedong's last will. After Premier Hua ended his address, Vice-Premier Wang Hongwen called out the timing of the three bows to a black-and-white photographic portrait of Mao, which hung at the centre of the Gate of Heavenly Peace, which once had displayed portraits first of Sun Yat-sen and then Chiang Kai-shek. The ceremony concluded with a performance of 'The East is Red', with its famous lines 'The East is Red, the sun is rising / From China comes Mao Zedong / … / He is China's saviour' (which sounds rather better in Chinese). The sobbing that welled up from the Square could be heard from the nearby Beijing Hotel from where foreign reporters followed the proceedings on their televisions.

So far, so predictable. But Premier Hua's eulogy had sounded a distinctly discordant note when he 'called for the continuation of the criticism of Mr Teng Hsiao-ping [Deng Xiaoping]',[2] at the same time that Premier Hua issued

[1] Ross Munro, 'Peking Throng Bids Mao Farewell: 750,000 in Peking Attend Mao Eulogy', *New York Times*, 19 September 1976. The authors of this biography put the figure at 1 million.
[2] *Ibid.*

a stern warning against factionalism.[3] Deng Xiaoping, the man who would come to dominate China's reform era, had been purged earlier in the year for the third time. Behind the sourness lay an intense struggle not just for power, but also for the right to define Mao's legacy. Indecision about the disposal of Mao's body – was it to be cremated, buried, or embalmed and put on display? – was a reflection of the duelling then going on at the highest levels in the Chinese Communist Party (CPC).[4]

Even before a month had passed since Mao Zedong's death, on the evening of 6 October, three men – Premier Hua Guofeng, the veteran Minister of Defence Marshal Ye Jianying and the head of Mao's bodyguard Wang Dongxing – staged a palace coup. They arrested Jiang Qing, Vice-Premier Wang Hongwen and several others, later known as members and allies of the Gang of Four.[5] The three conspirators acted with the support of most of the military; the coup undoubtedly had been planned for a long time. It had widespread public support and encountered no serious challenge.

Premier Hua was bold: he, not Deng Xiaoping, inaugurated the Special Economic Zones, called for the implementation of the 'Four Modernizations', and sanctioned Deng Xiaoping's return as Vice-Premier. But, seeking to mollify radical Maoists, he vouched to uphold the Two Whatevers, namely 'we will uphold whatever decisions Chairman Mao gave; and we will unswervingly implement whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave'. That prevented a reversal of verdicts, not just on Deng Xiaoping but on countless other veteran communists purged during the first three decades of the PRC's existence. Having sacrificed so much for the CPC's revolution, they did not want to end their lives with their names (and hence those of their descendants) still besmirched. And perhaps, like Deng Xiaoping, they wanted a chance to put things right.

Premier Hua's Two Whatevers was quickly, and publicly, challenged by an article declaring that 'practice is the sole criterion of truth', approved by the later Premier Hu Yaobang. The veterans struck in November 1978 at a leadership work conference convened before the Eleventh Central Committee's Third Plenum. Premier Hua's authority dissipated as one after the other senior Party member called for the rehabilitation of scores of revolutionary veterans and a reversal of the official Party verdict on a 1976 mass protest, which had been declared counter-revolutionary, that had

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] David Bonavia, 'Peking Problem over Body of Chairman Mao', *The Times* [London], 9 October 1976; see also Geremie Barmé, 'For Truly Great Men, Look to This Age Alone: Was Mao Zedong a New Emperor', in Timothy Cheek (ed.), *A Critical Introduction to Mao Zedong* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 263–5.
[5] Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Mao Zedong* (London: Arrow Books, 1996), pp. 634–6.

followed the death of Premier Zhou Enlai. A month later the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee inaugurated the Deng Xiaoping era.[6]

Deng Xiaoping moved quickly to contain the disruptive potential of Mao's legacy and, at the same time, draw strength from it. He called for a period of research, reflection and discussion about Mao Zedong's role in the history of the PRC. A formal judgement endorsed by the CPC would conclude the debate, after which the matter would be declared settled and any further controversy would become a violation of Party discipline. Some 4,000 senior communists took part in the discussion at a time when radical Maoists denounced Deng's reform policies as a violation of Marxism-Leninism, while students in Beijing gathered at Democracy Wall to call for a Fifth Modernization, namely democratization. Some declared Mao's 'achievements, mistakes, and crimes equally great', others argued that he 'had serious character flaws', and yet others claimed that he had 'acted like a feudal emperor'.[7] Some went so far as to maintain that China's post-1949 history had been one big disaster.

Deng Xiaoping declined to go that far for the obvious reason that it would have pulled the rug from under the Communist Party's legitimacy. He latched onto the suggestion that Mao's life should be judged in the round and should include the pre-1949 period. Deng ruled that even after 1949, although 'serious and comprehensive errors' were made, there also had been achievements, including considerable progress economically and the 'recognition of China as a great nation', including by the USA and Japan.[8] A 1981 CPC Central Committee 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the PRC' set Deng's parameters of the permissible in concrete.

The Resolution hailed the CPC's and Mao Zedong's record of struggle against Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists and the Japanese invaders before 1949; it counted as post-1949 achievements national unification (with the exception of Taiwan), the creation of a socialist economy, improvements in industry and commerce, and China's military strengthening. It criticized the 1958–61 Great Leap Forward as an error born from inexperience in which Mao had played a huge role but in which others also had been involved. It held Mao Zedong solely responsible for the Cultural Revolution, but termed it 'the error of a great proletarian revolutionary'.[9]

[6] Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 184–248.
[7] Chen Donglin, 'Deng Xiaoping yu "guanyu jianguo yilai dang de ruogan lishi wenti jueyi"', *Dangdai Zhongguoshi yanjiu*, 11, 4 (2004), p. 36.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 38–9.
[9] 'Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China', 27 June 1981, www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/cpc/history/01.htm

This background is important in understanding the line of argument developed in this volume of Pang Xianzhi's and Jin Chongji's biography of Mao Zedong. Both men are Party members and served as Director of the Party Literature Research Office of the CPC's Central Committee. Their task was to produce a life that the Central Committee could endorse, as indeed it has. Inevitably, that meant they had to adhere to the 1981 Resolution. In a 2003 interview, they stated that it provided the main guideline for their construction of Mao's life. [10]

Whether one accepts their version of Mao Zedong or not, Pang Xianzhi's and Jin Chongji's biography is not simply an exercise in communist hagiography. Pang and Jin are part of a long tradition in China of history writing in which evidence drawn from written sources must back up historical judgements. Simple assertion will not do. In their 2003 interview, Pang and Jin made clear that, besides bearing out the key judgements articulated in the 1981 Resolution, they had three further aims. They wanted to clarify Mao's style of work, the development of his thinking and the contexts in which he reached his decisions. They were determined to let the documents speak for themselves. Their use of reports, orders, letters, drafts of speeches, and minutes and transcripts of conversations from the Central Committee Archives as well as diaries of leading communist officials makes their biography exceedingly valuable; the Central Committee Archives are closed to foreign as well as most Chinese scholars. We are presented with a Mao as he, suspicious of the reports he received, travelled the country in his special train to discover the real state of affairs; as he manipulated events at Party meetings, where, formally at least, all legitimate decisions were made; and as he met with Chinese and foreign visitors. We learn much that we did not know.

Mao Zedong, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji began work in November 1995. They published the first volume of their biography, narrating Mao's life from his birth until 1949, a year later in 1996. The second, covering the period from then until Mao Zedong's death in 1976, appeared only in 2003. This sequence of events suggests that they found it far more difficult to deal with Mao Zedong's life after the Chinese communists seized power in 1949 than beforehand. This is unsurprising given that the latter period included the 1958–62 Great Leap Forward, when excess mortality – the difference between expected population if normal demographic trends continued and the reality – reached at least

[10] Qu Zhihong and Li Shufeng, 'Pang Xianzhi, Jin Chongji tan *Mao Zedong zhuan*' (Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji Discuss their *Biography of Mao Zedong*), *Renmin ribao*, 26 December 2003, http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/69112/70190/70194/4763476.html

between 30 and 60 million,[11] as well as the Cultural Revolution, when the country nearly descended into civil war and at least half a million people were killed.

Care, too, was needed because the Maoist legacy remained a source of instability in a still tense China. Deng's reforms continued to be attacked as violations of Maoism; twice he had to sacrifice chosen reform-minded successors. After the PLA crushed – on Deng's orders – student protests during the 1989 Tian'anmen Massacre, the CPC put the reforms in abeyance. Only in 1992 was Deng able to swat away the last resistance. He made a famous 'Tour of the South', speaking out in favour of the Special Economic Zones and calling for greater daring in pursuing reforms and deeper relations with the outside world. It was then that China's economic take-off really began. By 2003 the evidence was in that Deng had been right.

In addition, by 2003 much more was known about the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. One conspicuous example among the flood of writing about these two events that by then had been published was *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, the memoir of Mao's personal physician, Li Zhisui, from 1950 until Mao's death. Li had fled to the United States, taking his personal diary with him. *Private Life* was a medical betrayal, of course, but also a raucous, inflammatory tell-all, all the more believable in its depiction of Mao as a cruel oriental emperor seeking longevity in sex with young women for all the small details it included about Mao, including his often uncouth personal habits, his popping of sleeping pills, his love of swimming, and his decline in health due to Lou Gehrig's disease. Even though inevitably banned in China, news about it and black market copies found their way into the country. *Private Life* could not be left unanswered.

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji set about their task, not by a denial of the broad truths of the Great Leap and Cultural Revolution disasters, but by limiting their scope and by arguing that Mao had worked actively and successfully to contain their fallout once he realized the mistake he had made. For instance, in the case of the Great Leap Forward, they show, as we knew, that Mao's decision at a meeting at Lushan (Mt. Lu) in central China in July and August 1959 was responsible for the worst of the disaster. Before the meeting, Mao Zedong had become well aware that the creation of communes, excessive requisitioning, the divergence of rural labour to large irrigation and industrial projects, and the insistence that all villagers take their meals in commune cafeterias was causing widespread difficulties. He knew, Pang and Jin show,

[11] Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Famine, 1958–62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), pp. 324–34. Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine* (New York: Henry Holt, 1996) was the first full-length monograph in English about the Great Leap Forward. Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone: The Untold Story of Mao's Great Famine* (London: Allen Lane, 2012) is a translation of Yang's comprehensive monograph in Chinese, which remains banned in China.

that '25.17 million people in fifteen provinces had no food'.[12] Challenged at the Lushan meeting by Marshal Peng Dehuai, who then served as Minister of Defence, Mao reversed his U-turn, began a witch hunt of a supposed anti-Party military clique, and pushed ahead with the Great Leap. Grain production fell by 'more than 26 per cent' compared to 1957,[13] they write, and in a country that had been a net food importer for centuries and where many people lived at a bare subsistence level. Pang and Jin conclude that Mao 'took a wrong step with the Lushan Conference', which rendered 'fruitless the less-than-one-year efforts to redress "Left" deviation', that is, overzealousness in pushing revolution before conditions were ripe.[14]

However, they argue, Mao's denial of reality did not last long: they say that 'the period from the winter of 1959 to the spring of 1960 marked the extreme point of reckless "Left" deviationist practices'.[15] In the spring of 1960, Mao Zedong yet again boarded his special train to see for himself the real situation on the ground and to counsel scepticism. In Tianjin, he made clear he did not trust overexcited reports about grain production, telling local officials 'the real situation is not totally clear: some areas conceal their grain output, some under-report, and some exaggerate'.[16] In the city of Jinan in Shandong Province, he praised a local official giving a realistic assessment of the consequences of a severe drought for the province.[17] In Henan Province, Mao wondered 'Can it be that much?' when a local official claimed that per unit yields of grain were smashing all previous records. In Anhui Province, after hearing a report about famine, Mao concluded that we 'do not know much about the actual situation'.[18]

Once a lack of raw cotton supplies forced the closure of textile factories in Shanghai, Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji inform us, Mao pressed for reductions in production quotas, infrastructure projects and grain requisitions; the reintroduction of private plots; the decentralization of decision-making power from the commune to lower levels; the reintroduction of rural markets; and the scaling down of the number of collective cafeterias. He warned officials to stop making exaggerated claims. According to Pang and Jin, 'Mao saw the problem coming and acted on it early.' [19]

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji treat Mao Zedong's role in the Cultural Revolution similarly. They are clear that Mao deliberately started the revolution. During a visit to the Jinggang Mountains in central China, where Mao

[12] See p. 60 in this volume.
[13] See p. 200.
[14] See p. 118.
[15] See p. 151.
[16] See p. 170.
[17] See p. 172.
[18] See p. 174.
[19] See p. 62.

Zedong had pioneered rural revolution in the late 1920s, Mao told an interlocutor that he was preparing to 'unleash a "tempest"' in the hope that 'at one cock's crow, thousands of monsters vanish like smoke and mist'.[20] Pang and Jin suggest that nearing the end of his life, fearful that the Chinese revolution would be undone in a period of reaction as had been the case with so many other revolutions, and believing that war threatened with either the Soviet Union or the USA, Mao decided that the Communist Party needed to undergo a period of purification before the country was ready to face the future and he could safely await death.

'I will be meeting Marx soon', Pang and Jin quote Mao Zedong as saying, 'so what should I say to him? Should I say that there is revisionism under my leadership? No way!'[21] He worried about 'a Yuan Shikai–style' person declaring himself emperor.[22] Yuan Shikai was a late Qing reformist official who during the 1911 Revolution negotiated the Qing Dynasty's abdication and then became the first President of the Republic of China. In 1915, he made a move to restore monarchical rule under his own emperorship. Mao had in mind Liu Shaoqi, Mao's designated successor. Liu had directed the Party's activities in urban areas before 1949 and had taken charge of the rehabilitation of China's economy after the Great Leap Forward.

As in the case of the Great Leap Forward, Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji provide in almost excruciating detail, as if scratching at a scab over a wound, the steps Mao took to drive the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution to an ever higher pitch of frenzy. But they also provide many examples of Mao seeking to contain it.[23] In October 1966, just a few months into the Cultural Revolution, Mao announced at a Central Committee work conference that the Cultural Revolution should be wound up in five months or so.[24] He ordered Zhou Enlai to protect government ministries, research institutes and courts as well as to shield nationally famous non-communist scholars, politicians and generals who in 1949 had decided to stay in China rather than flee the country. After military commanders told Mao that the army was descending into chaos,[25] Mao forbade violence in the army.[26]

After Mao's life came under threat in the central China city of Wuhan in July 1967, Pang and Jin argue, Mao Zedong drew back from the abyss. Two factions had emerged in the city, one called the 'One Million Heroes' and the other the 'Wuhan Workers' General Headquarters'. The Wuhan Military Area Command backed the One Million Heroes, which had a membership drawn

[20] See p. 472.
[21] See p. 477.
[22] See p. 476.
[23] See pp. 542, 572.
[24] See p. 524.
[25] See p. 542.
[26] See p. 543.

from skilled workers and state and Party employees. The Central Cultural Revolution Group, on which sat Jiang Qing and other members of the Gang of Four and which was formally in charge of directing the Cultural Revolution, supported the Workers' General Headquarters. When the Workers' General Headquarters attempted to seize power, the One Million Heroes besieged their buildings. The Wuhan military commander declined to follow central orders to abandon his siege, and even arrested representatives from the Central Cultural Revolution Group sent to defuse the stand-off. Mao Zedong as well as Zhou Enlai travelled – unannounced – to the city to broker a settlement, but violence and chaos were now all around and control broke down to such an extent that rioters burst into the hotel where Mao was staying. Believing that a mutiny might be under way, Mao escaped to Shanghai the next day, travelling on a plane protected by fighter jets for safety reasons rather than the special train he much preferred.[27]

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji describe in detail Mao's efforts to restore order after both the central and local government had become divided into camps that fought each other with real weapons and so threatened to engulf the country in civil war. He rejected a demand of the Central Cultural Revolution Group to execute Chen Zaidao and instead had some of its members arrested. He toured the country to build momentum for 'a great military alliance'. In Zhejiang Province he stressed 'officials can't be treated like landlords – being forced to kneel down, stand in the jet-plane position, wear dunce caps and insulting tags, being tortured, having family property confiscated – this is what I oppose. These practices ruin our tradition.'[28] In Jiangxi Province he announced 'we should now criticize the ultra-Left thought of suspecting everything … we should shrink the scope of attacks'.[29] He set wheels in motion for the convening of a new Party Congress to bring the Cultural Revolution to an end.[30] Mao carpeted Red Guard leaders, saying 'first of all I want to criticize you for being divorced from the people. The people don't like civil war.'[31] They made sure to distribute the same day a circular with the title 'Chairman Mao's Instruction (Key Points) on Stopping Armed Confrontation'. Soon after, he ordered the dispersal of urban youth to the countryside and the establishment of revolutionary committees under the supervision of the army, which were to take control.[32] It took time, but in April 1969 the Ninth Party Congress finally convened.

[27] For a lucid narrative of the Wuhan crisis, see Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 198–216.
[28] See p. 571 in this volume.
[29] See pp. 571–2.
[30] See p. 572
[31] See p. 588.
[32] See p. 592.

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji argue that the Congress marked the end of the most turbulent phase of the Cultural Revolution. It is more common to view the Cultural Revolution as having lasted until the death of Mao, but it is the case that Red Guard activity ceased, Mao brought back a number of veteran officials, including Deng Xiaoping, and in 1972 Nixon visited China, profoundly changing China's international position. But the situation remained very tense, with Gang of Four members sparring for a continuation of the Cultural Revolution. The chapters dealing with these events give the impression of a Mao clinging to his view that a Cultural Revolution was necessary to secure the future of revolution in China, but uncertain about how to proceed, now using the Gang of Four as a mouthpiece to give vent to his more 'Leftist' instincts, then using the always biddable Zhou Enlai to safeguard the economy, keep order and deal with foreign relations, shifting between the two as his mood changed. With Mao enjoying absolute power, the country could do little else than wait for his death.

It serves Pang's and Jin's purpose, that of defanging Mao's legacy, to argue that Mao Zedong contributed to the restoration of order after the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. The case they make, backed as it is by voluminous archival material, is a serious one. In recent decades we have heard much about all the harm that Mao inflicted on his country; the least that we should take on board from the case that Pang and Jin make is that Mao was a complex man. There was another side to him other than a revolutionary who used violence for violence's sake. Throughout his career, Mao had used violence as a tool of revolutionary governance, quite consciously and deliberately, and always seeking to learn from and improve on preceding practice. Before 1949, he had learned to start violent revolution and use violent means to discipline his Party, but he had also perfected skills to guide such violence and bring it to an end so that it would not destroy his instruments of power, on which of course he depended, including the Party and the army. Pang's and Jin's case suggests that this remained the situation after 1949.

Party History

In China, Party History, the history of the CPC, is a separate field of study with its own departments, journals, conferences and star practitioners. The scholars in this field see it as their task to trace the history of the CPC from Party Congress to Party Congress, from Central Committee meeting to Central Committee meeting, and from Politburo meeting to Politburo meeting. Their sources are the reports given to these meetings, the resolutions adopted by them, and the articles and speeches given by their participants. They use memoirs and diaries to leaven otherwise rather dull narrative. The thought that underpins their work is that the Chinese Communist Party, given the task of history to lead China towards a communist future, found the correct road

towards that future while veering off-course, now making 'Leftist' and then making Rightist mistakes, acquiring the knowledge of the correct path in the process. Roughly put, 'Leftist' mistakes were premature seizures of power before historical conditions were ready, while unnecessary compromises with existing governments were Rightist mistakes.

Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji are practitioners of Party history and the main narrative of their biography of Mao Zedong follows the habit of this field of taking us from one meeting to the next. Unlike other historians, who rarely cross the 1949 divide and certainly not beyond the 1950s, Party historians do so. Precisely because Pang and Jin were able to use the Central Committee Archives, Western historians interested in Chinese politics up to the rise of Deng Xiaoping will find their account of the later stages of Mao's life profitable reading. Their footnotes do not tell us the location of the documents they quote, but usually that will have been the Central Committee Archives.

While the limited space available to me makes it impossible to provide many examples of Pang's and Jin's often apt use of memoirs and diaries, they not only help spice up the narrative but are important for understanding Mao Zedong especially in the last decade or so of his life, as by then he had become a dictator and Party meetings had ceased to matter very much. One example is Mao Zedong's decision after the Wuhan incident to rein in the Central Cultural Revolution Group. In the wake of Mao's escape from Wuhan, Yang Chengwu, Acting Chief of Staff of the PLA, who had accompanied Mao to Wuhan and Shanghai, had a meeting with Mao. Yang Chengwu recalled the meeting as follows:

> While listening, Mao did not speak or ask questions, just smoked. After I finished, he said to me: 'You must be tired. Go back and rest now. I should think and read through the paper before meeting you.' The next morning, Mao said to me, 'Go and arrange a flight to Beijing before coming to meet me.' After I made the arrangements, I went to his place. Mao sipped his tea and then said, 'I have thought it over, now write down my words.' After I got paper and pen ready, he dictated: 'Wang (Li), Guan (Feng) and Qi (Benyu) are destroyers of the Cultural Revolution and they are evil.' You should report this only to the Premier [and tell him] to arrest them, asking him to be responsible for it … That's it, you now fly to Beijing to urge the Premier to do it right away.

The three were members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group. After Yang Chengwu relayed the message to Zhou Enlai, Zhou did as he was told. This account of Mao Zedong's decision to clip the wings of the Central Cultural Revolution Group has the ring of truth.

Another example is Mao Zedong's decision to attend the funeral of Chen Yi, one of China's ten marshals who had led large armies before 1949 and later served as Mayor of Shanghai, but who suffered grievously during the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong had never before attended the funeral of any veteran