

DENG XIAOPING

Chronicle of an Empire

Ruan Ming

*translated and edited by
Nancy Liu, Peter Rand, and
Lawrence R. Sullivan*

with a Foreword by Andrew J. Nathan



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Foreword

Ruan Ming provides a shrewd, insightful, readable, and convincing analysis of politics in the era of Deng Xiaoping. He takes as his central theme how Deng pragmatically accommodated with conservative forces in the Chinese Communist Party and lost the chance to put China on the road to democracy and thus links events in the economy, foreign affairs, and ideology. By weaving in the story of the power struggles among major figures, Ruan provides a persuasive synthesis of what the Deng years meant to China's development and how China worked in these years.

Ruan's account is full of new information from internal publications, documentary sources, and personal observation. Ruan was not at the inner core of power: He was an associate of Hu Yaobang who helped draft key documents and who knew many of the key players, especially in Hu's circle. But he was close enough to the center to have advantages in both documentation and astuteness over Western observers. For example, his account challenges the dominant Western view of Chen Yun as a reformer trying to move China away from Stalinism, albeit cautiously, and of Zhao Ziyang as committed to political democracy, and reveals much that is new about Chen's and Zhao's aims and strategies. Foreign analysts understood only murky events that Ruan analyzes with clarity, such as the Zhao Yiya incident of 1982.

Ruan portrays a fiercer struggle over reform than the West perceived. The conventional view is that after 1978 all the Chinese leaders agreed on reform, but disagreed on pace and methods. Ruan sees a battle for China's soul between real Stalinists on one side and true democrats, led by his mentor, Hu Yaobang, on the other, with Deng in the middle. He argues that China's 1979 Vietnam incursion was the crucial point at which Deng shifted from trying to democratize China to trying to consolidate his dictatorship. This convincing interpretation carries implications for our understanding of Deng's place in history, China's historic course, and theories of reform in communist systems.

Ruan shows how power worked in Deng's China. First, meetings, propaganda discussions, and the drafting of documents were occasions for testing the balance of sentiment and power in the broad, ill-defined party core where decisions were made. Second, interventions by senior leaders could block initiatives by other senior leaders—for example, when the senior general Nie

Rongzhen did not want to allow the purge of a liberal intellectual, Sun Changjiang, the purge was aborted. Third, contending factions carried out an endless chess game over positions. The Chen Yun group, the malevolent antagonist of democracy in Ruan's narrative, worked its way by a series of strategic alliances through which it knocked off one after another of Deng's paladins of reform.

Fourth, Deng was always the trump card. Ruan never fully explains the mystery of Deng Xiaoping's power—perhaps no one can—but he shows how all the factions went running to Deng with their problems and tried to manipulate his perceptions of the others. One group would take an article by a member of another group to Deng and claim that the article was an attack on him. As Ruan presents him, Deng was easily swayed and easily angered. A nod from him on any subject closed discussion. Ruan's metaphor of an empire is appropriate, for the machinations he describes are those of court politics.

Because Deng tried to balance factions and keep power, he failed to see that China needed to move away from dictatorship and toward democracy. On many occasions, such as the epic battle over the special economic zones, in which Ruan participated and on which he provides much fresh information, the ultimate issue was ideological. The irony of Deng's political pragmatism was that it blinded him to the importance of the issues the conservatives presented when they paraded them in the guise of personal power politics. Deng's pragmatism was not about the liberation of thought, as often described in China, or about economic efficiency, as commonly argued in the West, but about staying in power: not about guiding China across the river of reform to a specified place on the other bank, but about crossing the river without slipping on the rocks. In Ruan's view, it was the lack of any other principle than power that led to Deng's finding himself presiding over the tragedy of 1989.

Written in a lively narrative style, the book contains vivid memoiristic scenes, such as the description of a meeting Ruan attended at which Hu Qiaomu wept crocodile tears, and an account of the process by which Ruan himself was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party. As in a Chinese novel, each chapter centers on a phase of political struggle, describing its key characters and its setting, stratagems, and outcomes and leading compellingly to the next chapter. Ruan pauses in appropriate places to give the histories and sketch the personalities of key players.

Ruan has a point of view on matters large (China is inevitably headed for democracy), medium (Zhao Ziyang's fast-growth strategy was bad for the environment and workers' health), and small (Hu Qiaomu was insincere when he wept). He thinks highly of Hu Yaobang and deplores his enemies, led by Chen Yun, Deng Liqun, and Hu Qiaomu. In the last section of the book, when Hu Yaobang is dead, Ruan turns his disdain on Hu's last betrayer, Zhao

Ziyang, and his brain trusters, some of whom are today Ruan's colleagues in exile.

Ruan Ming left China in 1988 to take up a one-year Luce Fellowship at Columbia, during which I had the privilege of numerous conversations with him about the extraordinary crisis then unfolding in his country. He subsequently did research at the University of Michigan and Harvard University and is now at the Princeton China Initiative. At each institution, colleagues have found Ruan Ming to be a man of extraordinary intelligence, with outstanding insight into the personalities, issues, power and cultural considerations, and ideological discourse that make up Chinese politics today.

Since arriving in the United States, Ruan Ming has written three important books. The first was *Hu Yaobang at the Turning Point of History*, a study of the policies and politics of Party General Secretary Hu. The present book was published in Chinese and in French and is now before readers in this English version. He has also published *Essays on Chinese Communist Personalities* and is now working on *The Mao Zedong Empire*.

Ruan Ming's work has won respect from academics. His arguments are sophisticated, penetrating, and eloquently argued. His facts are reliable, often sourced to eyewitness experiences that he recorded in notebooks. In the vast literature on Deng's reforms, we have little on high politics, and nothing with such a keenness of discernment, covering such a long time span, and achieving such broad thematic synthesis. This book offers at once an absorbing narrative of China's recent political history, a vivid picture of the game of politics in China, and a powerful analysis of Deng Xiaoping's influence on China's historical trajectory.

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Note from the Translators and Editors

The power of *Deng Xiaoping: Chronicle of an Empire* resides as much in the lively flavor of its language as in its penetrating analysis of China's politics and its leaders during the first ten years of the reform era. In translating Ruan Ming's fascinating and insightful book, therefore, we have striven to realize the dry humor and scathing commentary that punctuate his narrative. This has called for an effort beyond the literal job frequently expected of standard Chinese political translation. In the course of rendering Ruan Ming's original Chinese idiom into something comparable for the pleasure and instruction of his English-language readers we have, in consultation with the author, employed a variety of literary allusions and a bit of poetic license.

The notes at the end of each chapter are from the original text by Ruan Ming. We have added a series of asterisked footnotes that explain difficult terms, obscure historical events, and esoteric Chinese Communist ideological concepts. Quotations in the text without citations are drawn from Ruan Ming's personal notes and accounts of conversations between the author and individuals such as Hu Yaobang. A historical chronology of the major events for the period 1976–1993 is also provided along with a glossary of *dramatis personae*.

We are grateful for the assistance of Susan McEachern of Westview Press; to Mark Selden of the State University of New York at Binghamton; to Adelphi University, Garden City, New York, for its generous financial assistance; to the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University; and to Nancy Hearst, the very capable Fairbank Center China librarian. Most of all, we are indebted to Ruan Ming for his intimate portrayal of the personalities and political forces at work in contemporary China.

*Nancy Liu
Peter Rand
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Historical Chronology: 1976–1993

1976

January 8: Death of Zhou Enlai.

April 5: “Tiananmen incident”: On the day of the Qing Ming festival honoring the dead, mass demonstrations break out in memory of Zhou Enlai on Tiananmen Square and are suppressed by state militia.

April 7: Deng Xiaoping suspended from all work.

September 9: Death of Mao Zedong.

October 6: Arrest of the “Gang of Four” (Jiang Qing, Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wen Yuan, and Wang Hongwen).

1977

February 7: *People’s Daily* editorial lauds the “two whatevers.”

March 10–22: Central Work Conference at which the “two whatevers” supported by Hua Guofeng and Wang Dongxing are reaffirmed and Wang Zhen and Chen Yun demand Deng Xiaoping’s rehabilitation.

July 16–21: Third Plenum of the Tenth Party Congress restores Deng Xiaoping to the Politburo Standing Committee vice chairman of the CCP and vice chairman of the Military Commission and appoints him to positions of vice premier and army chief of staff. Hua Guofeng is confirmed as Party chairman and chairman of the Central Military Commission.

August 4–8: Science and Education Work Forum at which Deng Xiaoping pushes for major reforms and praises intellectuals.

August 12–18: Eleventh Party Congress. Hua Guofeng praises Mao Zedong’s contributions to Marxism-Leninism.

Sources used in preparing this chronology include: Kenneth G. Lieberthal and Bruce J. Dickson, *A Research Guide to Central Party and Government Meetings in China, 1949–1986* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1989); the annual editions of *China Briefing*, ed. Steven M. Goldstein, Anthony J. Kane, John S. Major, and William A. Joseph (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984–1992); and “Quarterly Chronicle and Documentation,” *The China Quarterly*, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

1978

April 27–June 6: All-Military Conference on Political Work at which Deng Xiaoping criticizes leftists in Party leadership.

May 10: The editorial “Practice Is the Sole Criterion of Truth” is published.

August 3: Luo Ruiqing dies in a West German hospital.

November 10–December 15: Central Party Work Conference focuses on debate over the “criterion of truth.” Deng gives speech supporting shift of Party work from promoting class struggle to socialist modernization.

December 18–22: Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress inaugurates major reforms in agricultural and economic policies focusing on the “four modernizations.”

December 25: Politburo meeting appoints Hu Yaobang as secretary in chief of the Party and Hu Qiaomu and Yao Yilin to the positions of deputy secretaries in chief. Wang Dongxing is dropped from his post as head of the General Office of the CCP.

1979

January 27: Deng Xiaoping voices praise for Democracy Wall in Beijing.

January 29: Deng travels to the United States.

January 18–April 3: Conference on Guidelines in Theory Work. First session from January to February concentrates on democracy and freedom of thought. Second session takes more conservative turn highlighted by Deng’s speech “Uphold the Four Cardinal Principles,” delivered on March 30.

February 17: China invades northern territory of Vietnam.

March 16: Chinese forces retreat from Vietnamese territory.

April 5–28: Central Work Conference at which Party conservatives criticize the reforms inaugurated by the 1978 Third Plenum. Three-year period of readjustment proposed.

September 25–28: Fourth Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress promotes Zhao Ziyang and Peng Zhen to the Politburo. Other old cadres, such as Yang Shangkun and Jiang Nanxiang, are added to the Central Committee. Agricultural policies are revised.

1980

February 23–29: Fifth Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress adopts “Guiding Principles for Political Life in the Party.” Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang are added to the Standing Committee of the Politburo and the Party Secretariat is reestablished. Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, Wu De, and Chen Xilian are removed from Party and state posts. Yang Dezhi replaces Deng Xiaoping as army chief of staff.

April 1: Hu Qiaomu attacks Party Propaganda Department.

April 8–30: All-Military Conference on Political Work. Wei Guoqing pushes slogan to “promote proletarian ideology and eliminate bourgeois ideas.” Deng does not attend.

May: Deng at the behest of old comrade Li Weiham disassociates himself from leftist slogan on “promoting proletarian ideology” pushed by Wei Guoqing.

May 31: Deng attacks “feudalism” in the Party but critical elements of the speech are later excised from his *Selected Works*.

June 10: Politburo Standing Committee holds special meeting to discuss the issue of eliminating “feudalism” from the Party.

July: Political crisis in Poland erupts.

August 18–23: Enlarged Meeting of the Politburo. Deng’s speech “On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership” is delivered. Zhao Ziyang is slated to replace Hua Guofeng as premier. Proposals are made for a bicameral National People’s Congress (NPC) and tricameral CCP, complete with checks and balances.

August 30–September 10: Third Session of the Fifth NPC. Intense debate is allowed among delegates over the issue of reforming the political system.

September 23–24: Central Secretariat meeting decides to apply flexible and open policies in Guangdong and Fujian provinces. Agricultural responsibility system is strengthened.

November 10–December 5: Series of Politburo meetings where Hu Yaobang is charged with routine work of the Politburo and Deng Xiaoping is put in control of the Central Military Commission.

November 20–December 29: Trial of the “Gang of Four.”

December 16–25: Central Work Conference. Hu Qiaomu launches his “struggle against bourgeois liberalism.” Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang, and Chen Yun all endorse economic retrenchment.

1981

January 14–February 1: All-Military Political Work Conference. Wei Guoqing insists that the military must adhere to the “Four Cardinal Principles” enunciated by Deng Xiaoping while he also criticizes bourgeois ideology.

March 27: The “struggle against bourgeois liberalism” is mentioned by Deng Xiaoping for the first time.

March 30: CCP and State Council call for diversified agricultural economy.

June 27–29: Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress revises and then passes the “Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party Since the Founding of the PRC.” Hu Yaobang is promoted to Party chairman.

July: Party conservatives attack special economic zones (SEZs) while Deng Xiaoping remains silent on the issue.

July 17: Deng Xiaoping castigates liberal intellectuals such as Guo Luoqi and Wang Ruoshui in a speech titled “Concerning Problems on the Ideological Battlefield” to Central Propaganda Department leaders.

August 3–8: Forum on Problems on the Ideological Battlefield is held to launch attacks on “bourgeois liberalism.”

December 15–23: Central Committee discussion meeting at which Chen Yun criticizes Hu Yaobang’s alleged mistakes in economic policy. Chen also asserts a primary role for the state in the economy and opposes any further expansion of the SEZs.

1982

- January 11–13:** Enlarged Meeting of the CCP Politburo issues “Directive on Strengthening Political and Legal Work.”
- January 14:** Meeting of the Central Secretariat at which Hu Yaobang calls for utilizing foreign investment in China’s economic modernization.
- January 25:** Ad hoc meeting of the State Planning Commission. Chen Yun asserts that economic planning must remain supreme in the countryside despite the creation of the agricultural responsibility system.
- February 11–13:** Open Forum on Guangdong and Fujian provinces. Hu Yaobang focuses on the problem of corruption.
- April 10:** Politburo meeting discusses “economic crime” and calls for harsh punishments to be meted out by the Central Discipline Inspection Commission of the CCP.
- July 30:** Enlarged Politburo meeting discusses ways to end life tenure for leaders.
- August 6:** Seventh Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress. Hua Guofeng attacks the slogan “practice is the sole criterion of truth.”
- September 1–11:** Twelfth Party Congress. Party chairmanship is abolished and replaced by weaker post of general secretary. Chen Yun clique launches several campaigns against “bourgeois liberalism.”
- December 31:** Enlarged Politburo meeting emphasizes the importance of raising divergent views at inner-Party meetings.

1983

- January 7–22:** National Conference on Ideological and Political Work. Hu Yaobang and Deng Liqun clash on the role of ideological and political work in China’s modernization.
- March:** Academic Forum at the Central Party School to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of Marx’s death. Zhou Yang raises issue of humanism and alienation.
- October 11–12:** Second Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress. On the issue of Party rectification, Chen Yun calls for getting rid of the “three categories of people.” Deng Xiaoping’s speech at the plenum on “cleaning up spiritual pollution” is not published until after the fall of Hu Yaobang in early 1987.
- November:** Enlarged meeting of the Politburo decides to limit cleaning up spiritual pollution to the fields of art and literature.

1984

- January:** Hu Qiaomu’s article “On Humanism and Alienation” is published.
- January 24–February 23:** Deng Xiaoping tours several southern SEZs.
- February 24:** Central forum on the role of SEZs produces “heated” discussion on the policy of opening up China to the outside world.

March 26–April 6: Forum convened by the Central Secretariat and State Council on the SEZs opens up fourteen more coastal cities to foreign investment.

April 30: Enlarged Politburo meeting validates decision of March–April forum on the SEZs. *People's Daily* calls for a fundamental negation of the Cultural Revolution.

June 1: Central Committee Document Number One on agriculture is published calling for strengthening and improving the rural responsibility system.

October 1: At the National Day review in Beijing, Deng's popularity reaches its zenith.

October 20: Third Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress adopts "Resolution on the Structural Reform of the Economy."

December 29–January 5: Fourth Conference of the All-China Writers' Association is held in Beijing and calls for greater autonomy for writers.

1985

January: Deng Xiaoping's book *Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics* is published.

January 1: CCP and State Council jointly issue "Ten Policies on Further Enlivening the Rural Economy," calling for expansion of the free rural economy.

January 25–31: State Council meets on developing the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas.

March 2–7: National Forum on Science and Technology in Beijing calls for radical changes in these two areas.

March 27–April 10: Third Session of the Sixth NPC calls for initial steps toward price reform.

May 23–June 6: Central Military Commission decides to demobilize up to one million People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops and to retire older officers.

June: Restructuring of the administrative organs of the People's Communes is completed.

June 29: State Council decides to enlarge the Xiamen (Amoy) SEZ.

September 18–23: National Conference of the CCP. Chen Yun attacks "Resolution on the Structural Reform of the Economy" and criticizes Party members for loss of communist ideals.

1986

January 6–9: Central Cadres Conference focuses on "instability" in the national economy and criticizes "lax" work among Party organs.

June 28: Politburo Standing Committee meeting at which Deng Xiaoping gives speech on reform of the political structure and on strengthening legal consciousness. He also criticizes interference of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission in Party rectification.

September 28: Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress adopts "Resolution on the Guiding Principles for Construction of Socialist Spiritual Civilization."

- December:** Student demonstrations break out in Hefei, Anhui province, and quickly spread to other cities, including Beijing.
- December 30:** Deng criticizes Hu Yaobang's handling of liberal intellectuals in the CCP, such as Wang Ruowang.

1987

- January 4:** Politburo Standing Committee meeting with several members absent relieves Hu Yaobang of his duties as general secretary of the CCP. Fang Lizhi, Wang Ruowang, and Liu Binyan are expelled from the CCP for advocating "bourgeois liberalism."
- January 10–15:** "Party life meeting" led by Bo Yibo openly criticizes Hu Yaobang.
- January 16:** Hu Yaobang's formal resignation announced.
- January 28–29:** Zhao Ziyang announces the reasons for Hu Yaobang's dismissal to high-level cadres in Central Committee Document Number Four.
- April:** Series of conferences on ideological and political work convened by leftists to continue criticism of "bourgeois liberalism" as direct CCP control is established over newspapers and periodicals, including literary publications.
- July 1:** Deng Xiaoping's August 1980 speech "On Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership" is reissued.
- August:** Su Shaozhi, the director of the Institute of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought, is expelled from his post; Wang Ruoshui and other intellectuals are expelled from the party.
- October 20:** Seventh Plenum of the Twelfth Party Congress confirms Hu Yaobang's resignation as general secretary and appoints Zhao Ziyang as acting general secretary.
- October 25–November 1:** Thirteenth Party Congress. Zhao announces current state of development as the "primary stage of socialism." Deng Liqun fails to be elected to the Central Committee under a more open election procedure.
- November 2:** First Plenum of the Thirteenth Party Congress elects Zhao Ziyang as general secretary of the CCP. Sixth NPC Standing Committee approves Li Peng as acting premier.

1988

- March 25–April 13:** First Session of the Seventh NPC formally approves Li Peng as premier, Yang Shangkun as president, and Wang Zhen as vice president. Proposals are made by Zhao Ziyang's think tanks to establish a professional civil service in China.
- April:** Hainan Island is granted status as a separate province. State Statistical Bureau warns of inflationary pressure.
- July 1:** *Red Flag* terminates publication and is replaced by *Qiushi* (*Seeking Truth*).
- August 15–17:** After fierce debates among top leadership at Beidaihe summer retreat, commitment is made to pursue price reform, but decision is quickly withdrawn.

September 26–30: Third Plenum of the Thirteenth Party Congress calls for emphasis on stabilizing the economy with some leaders calling for greater “centralism and centralized leadership.”

1989

January 6: Fang Lizhi submits petition to Deng Xiaoping seeking release of Wei Jingsheng and a general amnesty for political prisoners.

February 16: Chinese dissidents begin petition drive seeking amnesty for China’s political prisoners.

April 15: Death of Hu Yaobang.

April 22: On official day of mourning for Hu Yaobang, massive crowds of students fill Tiananmen Square.

April 26: *People’s Daily* editorial, based on a speech by Deng Xiaoping, condemns student demonstrations as “anti-Party, anti-socialist turmoil.”

May 4: Zhao Ziyang at Asian Development Bank meeting in Beijing speaks positively about the student movement. More than three hundred journalists demand freedom of the press.

May 5: Zhao Ziyang calls for dialogue and most students return to classes, although a minority remain in Tiananmen Square.

May 12–19: Students initiate hunger strike as intellectual and cultural elites urge government to inaugurate a dialogue with student protesters.

May 18: Dialogue is held between Premier Li Peng and students led by Wu’er Kaixi.

May 19: Zhao in a pre-dawn appearance in Tiananmen Square appeals for students to leave. Students vote to end the hunger strike as later in the day martial law is declared in parts of Beijing.

May 26: Zhao Ziyang is reportedly placed under house arrest. Chen Yun delivers speech indicating his support for Li Peng and Yang Shangkun.

June 3–4: PLA troops force their way into Tiananmen Square and outlying parts of the city, killing several hundred or perhaps thousands of students and city residents.

June 23–24: Fourth Plenum of the Thirteenth Party Congress votes to strip Zhao Ziyang of all his posts and appoints Jiang Zemin as general secretary of the Party.

November 7: More than two million rural enterprises are shut down.

November 6–9: Fifth Plenum of the Thirteenth Central Committee. Deng Xiaoping resigns as chairman of the Central Military Commission.

December 22: Ceaușescu government in Romania is overthrown.

1990

January 2: Two-year austerity program announced.

January 6: Chinese police put on alert following the collapse of communist government in Romania.

March 20: At Third Session of the Seventh NPC Li Peng calls for tighter control of “hostile elements.”

April 3: Jiang Zemin named as chairman of the state Central Military Commission.

April 14: Mourning for Hu Yaobang is banned.

June 23: Wang Zhen in the *People's Daily* attacks moderates in the government as hostile anti-Party forces.

October 22: *People's Daily* announces a new campaign against crime and "liberal" influences such as pornography.

December 25–30: Seventh Plenary Session of the Thirteenth Central Committee adopts economic blueprint for the Eighth Five-Year Plan, which stresses stability and self-reliance.

1991

January–February: Trials are held of various 1989 democratic movement participants.

March 3: At a national meeting on economic reform, Li Peng supports further reforms to decentralize the economy.

April 8: Shanghai mayor Zhu Rongji and head of the State Planning Commission Zou Jiahua are appointed as vice premiers.

May 6: New press code encourages journalists to spread Marxism-Leninism.

May 29: Secret emergency directive issued to all Party and government offices to guard against hostile forces that seek to overthrow the government.

July 1: Jiang Zemin views the country's "central political task" to be opposition to alleged Western plots against China.

August: Attempted coup d'état against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev collapses.

September: Chen Yun's son, Chen Yuan, draws up document "Realistic Responses and Strategic Options for China Following the Soviet Union Upheaval."

October 6: State announces increases in payments to farmers for grain as of January 1992.

October 25: Internal CCP document accuses the Bush administration of attempting to bring about the collapse of communism through "peaceful evolution."

1992

January 13: Bao Tong, adviser to Zhao Ziyang, is charged with subversion.

January 19–21: Deng Xiaoping tours Shenzhen SEZ in southern China and calls for further economic reforms.

February 23: *People's Daily* attacks hard-line views and calls for bolder economic reforms.

March 14–15: Supporters of economic reforms attack conservative attempts to reverse economic reform policies.

March 16: Death of Wang Renzhong.

June 14: Liberal scholars hold unofficial forum to condemn continuing power of the hard-liners in the CCP.

September 28: Death of Hu Qiaomu.

October 12–18: Fourteenth Party Congress is held and enshrines the principle of a "socialist market economic system" for China's future development. Central Advi-

sory Commission chaired by Chen Yun is abolished and Yang Shangkun is dropped from the Party Central Military Commission.

November: Deng Xiaoping gives speech admonishing people to follow the “three don’ts,” that is, do not revise the political interpretation of the 1989 Beijing massacre, do not tolerate “bourgeois liberalism,” and do not replace any more leading leftists.

1993

March 12: Death of Wang Zhen.

December 26: China marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong.



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Introduction

Late in spring 1989 an eighty-four-year-old man announced his impending resignation as chairman of China's Central Military Commission, his last official position. Then to the surprise of the entire world, he mobilized several tens of thousands of troops to surround his own capital city of Beijing. After a more than two-week standoff between troops and demonstrators, he ordered infantry and tank units to recapture Tiananmen Square by force, resulting in the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians. At the same time, he forced from power his own designated successor of the past two years: General Secretary Zhao Ziyang. Although unwilling to accept the appellation of supreme leader, between 1980 and 1989 he had successively driven from office three of China's top leaders: Hua Guofeng, Hu Yaobang, and now Zhao Ziyang. This elderly man, whose absolute power doesn't come with a crown, is none other than Deng Xiaoping.

On two separate occasions between May 31 and June 16, 1989, during and after ordering the slaughter in Beijing, Deng issued the extraordinary declaration that he was "transferring political power."¹ Though from the very start of the reform movement in December 1978, Deng had always refused the formal position of supreme leader, it was he who "in practice held the key position." Whereas Mao Zedong had been the "core of the first generation" of the Chinese Communist Party [CCP] leaders, according to Deng, he himself had embodied the "second generation." Now the "third generation" of leaders would be centered around the newly designated General Secretary Jiang Zemin.² What had occurred in *reality*, however, was that the Deng Xiaoping empire had now replaced the empire of Mao Zedong.

The last act of Mao's empire had been the events on the day of the April 5 Qing Ming festival in 1976. Yet back then Mao had been content to order in the militia with their truncheons to disperse the masses on Tiananmen Square. Blood was shed, but no one died. Arrests were made, but not a soul was executed. This time around, however, Deng deployed tanks, machine guns, automatic weapons, and flame throwers to slaughter people. Waves of house-to-house searches swiftly followed, together with arrests, summary ex-

ecutions, and extensive investigations. The old Chinese adage describes it as “stamping out trouble at its source.” It was a bloody tragedy, and there is not yet an end in sight.

This same Deng Xiaoping was once famous for avidly promoting both the policy of reform and opening up China to the outside world. Twice he was chosen as *Time* magazine’s Man of the Year, an honor that made him immensely proud. Deng had also won the love and respect of China’s farmers, workers, students, and intellectuals. Five years earlier when in great majesty, Deng reviewed military marchers from the top of the Gate of Heavenly Peace in Beijing, pennants fluttering in the parading crowd called out in written characters, “How are you Xiaoping!” No average Chinese person in recent memory had publicly greeted a leader in such an informal way, and it showed just how close Deng was at one time to the hearts of the people.

This complicated character has played a role as both reformer and despot. At several crucial junctures in China’s recent history, I had the chance to observe him close up. The first was in 1956 soon after Deng was appointed general secretary [*zong shuji*] of the Communist Party Central Committee by Mao Zedong at the Eighth Party Congress. This was during the period of Mao’s great love affair with Deng. From that time date Mao’s famous speeches, the “Double Hundred Policy” and “On the Ten Major Relationships.” These gave every sign that Mao was ready to begin de-Stalinization on the political, economic, and cultural fronts. Preparing the way for opening up relations with the West, Mao asserted: “Our policy is to learn from the strong points of all nationalities and all countries, learn all that is genuinely good in the political, economic, scientific, and technological fields and in literature and art.”³

Mao was the first leader in the history of the world communist movement who had successfully resisted Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s. At the time, the young Deng Xiaoping had supported Mao in opposing Stalin—thereby defeating the Wang Ming line in the Chinese Communist Party. It was for that reason, in fact, that Deng was purged from his position along with Mao Zedong’s younger brother Mao Zetan.⁴ But after the Korean War, as relations with the West were completely severed, Mao gave up on his New Democracy policy and embraced Stalin. By 1956, however, Stalin was dead and the Korean War was history, so contacts with the West could be restored. Now Mao planned to follow his own way, and his “Double Hundred Policy” and “On the Ten Major Relationships” were aimed at the Soviet Union and China’s Stalinists. From the Korean War onward, Mao had been determined to eliminate dogmatism just as he had altered Wang Ming’s Stalinist policies in the 1930s and 1940s.

The political events in Poznan and Budapest in 1956, however, quickly put Mao in a severe dilemma: On the one hand, to carry out domestic reform, Stalinist dogmatism had to be criticized; on the other, such criticism would as-

sist those forces committed to democracy and liberalism in Poland and Hungary. Mao's reaction to the political developments in Poland and Hungary was peculiar: During the outbreak of the Poznan riots, Khrushchev had threatened intervention by sending Soviet army units to the Polish border. Mao stopped him, explaining that Gomulka was a comrade and the Polish issue was a conflict among the people. During the Hungarian fighting, however, although Khrushchev had originally planned to stay out of the fray, Mao sent Zhou Enlai as his envoy to persuade Khrushchev to order in troops, claiming that the situation in Hungary amounted to a counterrevolutionary riot and that Nagy was an enemy of communism.

In China, the only effect of these challenges to communist rule in Eastern Europe was modest ideological unrest on university campuses. With some students boycotting classes and signing petitions, Mao Zedong charged Deng to go and make a speech at Beijing's Qinghua University, where at that time, I was the secretary of Qinghua's New Democratic Youth League. Prior to Deng's coming, the university president, Jiang Nanxiang, sent me to the leadership compound at Zhongnanhai in central Beijing to provide Deng with an initial report on the students' thinking.

When I arrived the first question posed to me by this VIP was: "How old are you?" "Twenty-five," I replied. "You're certainly qualified; my age is just the reverse, fifty-two." Pointing at his ear, Deng then remarked: "Speak louder I'm a bit hard of hearing." I gave him a very short report on the nature of questions raised by the students after the outbreak of the disorders in Poland and Hungary. Deng then noted that the Party Central Committee was preparing a major statement to answer the many questions raised about recent international and domestic events. The central issue, Deng continued, was the question of Stalin. Khrushchev and Tito's method of "knocking Stalin down with one stroke," he complained, had resulted in the Polish and Hungarian situations, something Premier Zhou had criticized Khrushchev about while in Moscow. China's proposal on handling the issue of Stalin, Deng asserted, was to: "first protect, and second criticize." Right now, Deng noted: "There is turmoil in Eastern Europe, but in China we have relative stability, except for some unrest in the universities. Chairman Mao has ordered all Central Committee members and provincial Party secretaries to give reports at universities, and he has asked that I be the first one to do it. That's why I'll be coming to your place next week once the official statement is published."

From what Deng said, I had the impression that his focus had shifted from internal to international affairs: from the dead Stalin to the live Khrushchev. Ever since Stalin's death, new and more deeply troubling divisions had emerged between China and the Soviet Union, replacing the old conflicts of the Stalin era. Mao's new ideas on reform as depicted in his speeches "On the Ten Major Relationships" and the "Double Hundred Policy," obviously

aimed at Stalinism, were in danger of disappearing under the huge shadow of Khrushchev's knocking off Stalin in one stroke.

In December 1956, the day after the Central Committee published its major editorial criticizing Khrushchev and defending Stalin titled "More on the Historical Experience of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," Deng arrived at Qinghua. After he briefly toured the university labs, I accompanied him to the auditorium, where his speech on the editorial lasted for a good five hours, the longest lecture I ever heard from Deng. Mao would later pay great attention to this speech, as is evident in volume 5 of his *Selected Works*, where it's mentioned three times, something quite extraordinary for Mao.⁵ In affirming the positive role of Stalin and the Soviet road to socialism, while also condemning Khrushchev and Tito, Deng's speech marked a historical turning point as criticism in China now shifted from Stalinist dogmatism to Khrushchev's revisionism. This clearly preordained the political storm that would break out in the summer of 1957, the anti-rightist campaign.

The second time I met Deng was in July 1962, when I listened to his speech at the Seventh Plenum of the Third Communist Youth League. Though now employed at the CCP Propaganda Department, I still attended Youth League conferences as my term as secretary in the league had not yet ended. It was at this conference that Deng first uttered the famous line: "It doesn't matter if the cat is yellow or black as long as it catches the mouse" (when the phrase was publicized, the cat's color was changed from yellow to white).

This all occurred during a period of general political relaxation following the Three Difficult Years 1959–1962, when the Party leadership abstained from criticizing "Khrushchev's revisionism." At the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference held earlier in January–February 1962, Mao had acknowledged the errors in his work over the past few years. Later in May when Mao was away from Beijing, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun, and Deng Xiaoping convened a small work conference where "leftist" errors in the Party were subject to severe criticism by among others, Mao's secretary, Tian Jiaying (who later committed suicide at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution). He proposed that opposition be mobilized against the "leftist" disease, which was a view totally contrary to Mao's persistent anti-rightist position. During the discussion on the revival of agricultural production, the participants in this conference also advocated a policy of legalizing the household contract system [*baochan daohu*] so as to increase incentives among the peasants for greater production. Building on the comments he had made to the Youth League conference, Deng said:

New conditions have appeared in the villages. I believe that altogether the various types of household contracts now make up more than twenty percent of the villages in agriculture. In deciding on the best production system, we might have to embrace the attitude of adopting whichever method develops agricultural production most easily and rapidly and whichever method the masses desire most.

We must make the illegal legal. To quote an old saying from Sichuan province once uttered by Comrade Liu Bocheng: "It doesn't matter if the cat is yellow or black as long as it catches the mouse."

Deng's speech hit the nail on the head and was warmly received by all the participants. The suffocating atmosphere that had followed the 1957 anti-rightist campaign and the 1959 campaign opposing rightist trends was suddenly swept away. But although Youth League cadres sensitive to such changes felt that a new era of ideological emancipation was about to unfold out of Deng's speeches, it all proved to be a flash in the pan.

Deng made his comments on the morning of July 7, 1962. That evening after returning from his inspection tour of Hunan, Mao immediately informed Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping that his investigations of rural conditions in the province had convinced him that the poor and lower-middle peasants opposed the single-family household system, and thus Mao demanded that the collective economy be consolidated. This was obviously a view diametrically opposed to the proposals held by the rest of the Standing Committee of the Politburo.

So what resulted from this conflict? Not a soul stood up to challenge Mao. On the same night and again the next morning, Deng told Hu Yaobang over the phone to delete the "yellow cat, black cat" phrase from his speech and to add a paragraph focusing on the consolidation of the collective economy. In my own notebook, however, I still have a copy of the original speech containing the yellow cat, black cat phrase.⁶

This sudden alteration by Deng demonstrated that Mao was preparing for a new ideological storm in tune with his general anti-rightist position. Soon afterward, Mao ordered the publication of his famous speech delivered at the leadership's summer resort in Beidaihe, "Never Forget Class Struggle"; in it he vehemently criticized tendencies toward the single-household system and the temptation to reverse verdicts, that is, to rehabilitate his earlier critics, especially Marshal Peng Dehuai. With the attacks on Khrushchev quickly resumed, Mao had launched his ship toward the unprecedented "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution."* As for Deng's "yellow cat, black cat" speech, although altered and revised to fit Mao's prescriptions, it did not escape Mao's vigilance. A major target of Mao's call to "Bombard the Headquarters" in his famous big-character poster issued on August 5, 1966, Deng Xiaoping was thus purged for a second time.

*Ruan Ming frequently employs quotation marks around this and other political terms concocted in China (e.g., Gang of Four) as a way to express his general distaste for such ideologically charged jargon in China's contemporary politics. In other words, the "Cultural Revolution" was neither about culture nor was it a revolution.

Sixteen years passed before I saw Deng again; this time he was an elderly man of seventy-four. It was now December 1978, a time when, following the smashing of the leftist “Gang of Four,” China was at a critical political crossroads. Hua Guofeng and Wang Dongxing’s proposals for the “two whatevers” and the call for “continuing the revolution under proletarian dictatorship”—policies that had been followed in Mao’s later years—were now meeting with enormous resistance from the common people. Both the Xidan Democracy Wall movement in Beijing and the Central Work Conference held just prior to the 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh Party Congress couched their opposition to the “two whatevers” policy in practically the same language of calling for democracy and reform.* Yet the Work Conference could not proceed until Deng gave his speech. Hu Qiaomu had prepared a draft for Deng that sought a middle way between endorsing and opposing outright the “two whatevers.”⁷ Dissatisfied with this approach, Deng showed a copy of the speech to Hu Yaobang and commented: “This is not very useful. Qiaomu’s line of argument just won’t work. Look for someone to rewrite it.”

On the morning of December 1, Hu Yaobang called me to his room at the Jingxi Hotel [a military hostel], where after showing me Hu Qiaomu’s version, he proposed I produce an alternative draft. I was a little confused since I didn’t really understand Deng’s train of thought. And although Hu Yaobang provided some of his own proposals, I was still unsure whether I could write the kind of powerful speech that was needed at the time. Thus I decided to consult with Lin Jianqing, who was then working for the Policy Research Office of the State Council [*Guowuyuan Tanjiushi*] under Deng’s direction. Together we worked out an outline around the theme of negating the policies of the “two whatevers” and the theory of “continuing the revolution under proletarian dictatorship,” while emphasizing democracy and modernization. The next day, Lin Jianqing sent me an urgent message indicating that Deng had some new ideas and I should go to Zhongnanhai right away. There Deng received all those who had drafted various versions of the speech. Obviously excited, he mentioned eight important issues, with the focus on ideological emancipation and democracy.

Deng was obviously preparing for a decisive battle at the Third Plenum. His demeanor gave me the impression that this time he was finally acting on his own. During the Cultural Revolution when Mao had condemned the Secre-

*The December 1978 Third Plenum of the 1977 Eleventh Party Congress brought Deng Xiaoping to the fore as China’s paramount leader and launched China’s economic reforms. It also effectively destroyed the political force of the leftist faction in the CCP that had affirmed Mao’s infallibility with the notion of the “two whatevers”—“Whatever policies Mao had decided, we shall resolutely defend; whatever instructions he issued, we shall steadfastly obey.” *People’s Daily (Renmin ribao)*, February 7, 1977.

tariat headed by Deng as an “independent kingdom,” Deng had not really been all that independent. Indeed, the Deng I had met on the first occasion had been a proud follower of Mao. During the transition from criticizing Stalinist dogmatism to criticizing Khrushchev’s revisionism, Deng had in fact served as the frontline commander in Mao’s two big battles against rightists and revisionism.⁸ On the second occasion, in 1962, Deng seemingly possessed something of an independent mind and understood that to “go forward, one has to retreat.”⁹ Yet after being attacked by Mao, who was unwilling to retreat an inch, Deng immediately ordered revisions of his speech to suit Mao.

At the time of Deng’s next reappearance, in 1973, I was exiled in Ningxia province and under the supervision of a military surveillance group sent by Jiang Qing and Yao Wenyuan to oversee members of the Party Propaganda Department, and I didn’t meet Deng in person. But I heard that the price of his rehabilitation had been the admission of being a “capitalist roader,” along with a promise “never to reverse the verdicts.” Yet when Deng once again began to take an independent line in 1975, Mao commented: “Never reverse the verdicts? I don’t buy it.” Mao quickly followed by launching a campaign to criticize Deng and the rightist trend of reversing verdicts that led to Deng’s purge for a third time.

After Mao’s death, however, acting on a belief that Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng “doesn’t possess a scant of independence except on the issue of the two whatevers,”¹⁰ Deng considered himself the only person qualified to determine China’s fate. But I personally think that at that time Deng had not yet decided on the role he would play in China’s history. Perhaps his desire to become the democratic leader who would terminate Mao Zedong’s empire was greater than any contrary temptation to build his own empire. Indeed, his emphasis on democracy (exhibited in the following quote) left a deep impression on me:

Democracy must be emphasized in all situations especially in this era. The reason why centralization was practiced for so long was due to the lack of democracy. Since everybody is still afraid to speak out because of their lingering fears, we are unable to come up with decent ideas. What we should fear most is the masses refusing to speak up. “The loudest thunder comes from dead silence.”¹¹ We’re not afraid of the masses speaking up, what we do fear is “ten thousand horses standing mute.” Thus in order to develop the economy, we must have democratic elections, democratic management, and democratic oversight. Factories should be supervised by the workers and the rural areas by the entire society. We should also emphasize the legal system. The reality of democracy must be stabilized in legal form. It must be institutionalized so that it is protected by the system. We should emphasize civil law, criminal law, and all kinds of special regulations.

One must understand that the period after Mao’s death in 1976 was a time in Chinese history when just about anything could be said. On the streets and