

# Deng *Deng Rong* Xiaoping

## *and the Cultural Revolution*

A Daughter Recalls  
the Critical Years



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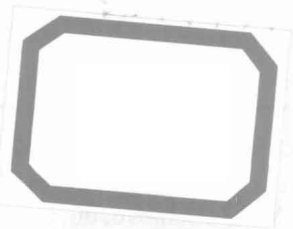
# **Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution**

— *A Daughter Recalls the Critical Years*

*By Deng Rong*

*Translated by Sidney Shapiro*

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS · BEIJING



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Deng Rong

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# 1

## Crowded Events of 1966

**O**N May 16, 1966 the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (hereafter called the Politburo) issued a circular (which became known as the famous “May 16 Circular”). It launched the explosive “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution”.

This was no accident. It was the inevitable result of “leftist” errors within the Party carried to an extreme.

After the People’s Republic was established, we had more than seven years of successful socialist reform and construction. But then, the domestic and international situation, plus the combined influence of our victories, inflated self-confidence, and over-heated brains, engendered inside the Party a kind of joyous arrogance. An exaggerated estimation of our accomplishments, plus an eagerness to speed up the progress toward communism, further stirred unrealistic thinking and opened a broad avenue for impetuous surges in violation of the laws of economics. A number of “leftist” theories evolved, and finally found prominence inside the Communist Party.

At the same time democratic foundations within the Party weakened, worship of the top leader and arbitrary decision by the individual grew. Internal Party relations were already abnormal. Mao Zedong made wrong appraisals of the domestic and international situations, particularly in regard to class struggle. He had already set himself up as an absolute authority, and was increasingly impatient with any disagreement. Now he adopted extreme measures in matters of policy and organization, and ultimately even regarding personnel. He brushed aside all hindrances

and obstacles, determined to push through a revolutionary line he insisted was correct.

At first, 1966 seemed no different than any other year. We had the usual icy winter weather, the usual cold north winds. The winter sun illuminated the broad land, bringing new strength to all living things.

After three years of hard work between 1963 and 1965, and thanks to unrelenting efforts from the Central Committee down to the grassroots Party organizations, the economy was much improved. The great difficulties brought on by natural calamities and other problems<sup>1</sup> had at last been conquered.

Gone was the pressure on our hearts, frowns were smoothed from our brows. The Central Committee had begun discussing the Third Five-Year Plan. Although grain was still rationed and goods were in short supply, most people had enough to eat, and could live and work in a fairly relaxed manner. Their warmest wish was that in the coming year the country would be still more peaceful, their lives would have still more meaning, and that socialist construction would progress better still.

But events frequently turned out very differently from what we had envisioned, contrary to our good intentions and simple desires.

People hadn't paid much attention to certain things which happened at the end of 1965, things we had not anticipated.

On November 10, 1965, the Shanghai newspaper *Wen Hui Bao* published an article by Yao Wenyuan criticizing Wu Han, the author of a new historical play called "Hai Rui Is Dismissed from Office", claiming that, by allegory, it sought to justify Peng Dehuai's "attempt to reverse the judgment".<sup>2</sup> The article had been secretly conceived by Jiang Qing

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<sup>1</sup> The "other problems" were due less to the natural calamities than to the rash impractical measures adopted during the commune and "Great Leap Forward" period of the late 1950s. At the same time the Soviet Union, in order to pressure China to yield to exploitation and control, in 1960 suddenly pulled out all her experts and engineers. The combination of these factors caused a sharp drop in agricultural and industrial production, resulting in severe privation and hardship.

<sup>2</sup> At the Communist Party Conference in Lushan in 1959 Marshal Peng Dehuai wrote a letter to Mao Zedong, concerning the failures of the communes and the "Great Leap Forward." Peng was removed from his posts and forced into retirement. The play told of a Ming Dynasty emperor who arbitrarily dismissed a good official named Hai Rui. Mao believed that he was being portrayed as the wicked emperor and Peng Dehuai as the wronged official, and that this was all part of a general vendetta of forces opposed to him.

and Zhang Chunqiao, and written by Yao Wenyuan.

Jiang Qing was Chairman Mao's wife. Nominally, she was head of the Motion Picture Division of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee. Actually she seldom did any work, saying she was ill.

Zhang Chunqiao was the newly appointed chief of the Shanghai Party Secretariat. He was in charge of propaganda and culture.

Yao Wenyuan wielded a poison pen for the Political Research Section of the Shanghai Party Committee.

In February, 1965, Jiang Qing arrived in Shanghai. With the support of Ke Qingshi, First Secretary of the Shanghai Party Committee, she connived with Zhang Chunqiao to have Yao Wenyuan write his critical article. After it was drafted, it was submitted to Mao Zedong three times for his examination. He approved it, and it was published.

Highly political in motivation, the article had a strong influence on the Cultural Revolution which later followed. In the lengthy process from its conception to its publication the article was kept secret from the members of the Politburo. None of them knew anything about it. Even after it was published in Shanghai, leaders in the Central Committee in Beijing didn't realize its implications, and paid little heed. The Secretariat reserved judgment.

My father, who was General Secretary, completely disapproved of criticizing Wu Han. Peng Zhen told him Wu Han was worried.

Papa said: "I saw that play. Ma Lianliang played Hai Rui. There's nothing wrong with it. Some people try to climb on others' shoulders. They have only half-baked understanding, but they nit-pick and squawk, hoping to make a name for themselves. I can't stand that sort. Tell the professor there's nothing to it. We'll still play bridge together. Political and academic matters should be kept apart. It's dangerous to mix them. It blocks free expression."

My father often played bridge with Wu Han. "Professor," he said, "Don't be so gloomy. What are you afraid of? Is the sky going to fall? I'm 61 this year. From the time I joined the revolution to this day I've survived plenty of storms. I've learned two things: One, fear nothing.



Two, be optimistic. Take the long view. When you do that, you can cope with anything. You have my support, so relax.”

Papa wanted to protect him. He didn't realize the situation would get out of hand so rapidly. When the Secretariat learned that Mao was behind Yao Wenyuan's article, it had no choice but to let the Beijing papers carry it as well. Their original reluctance seemed ordinary enough, but it irritated Mao, and turned out to be the fuse that was to ignite a huge political storm.

In November 1965, Yang Shangkun, alternate member of the Central Committee Secretariat and Chief of the Central Committee General Office, was removed from his posts. His “crime” was “installing a listening device without the knowledge of the Central Committee.”<sup>1</sup>

Yang's family and ours had been quite close. Papa thought what Yang did wasn't very serious. During the Cultural Revolution when Papa was compelled to make a “self-criticism”, he said for a long time he didn't consider Yang's action to be “spying”, and that his own response to it, as General Secretary, had not been “timely” or “conscientious”.

Papa clearly disapproved of the criticism of Yang Shangkun, and felt it without foundation. Yang was transferred to a post in Guangdong Province. His daughter Niuniu was then going to school in Beijing. My parents took her into our home for a time.

If one were to say the criticism of Yang Shangkun was an isolated incident, what happened after that certainly was not.

In December, Lin Biao, Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission in charge of the national military operations, for reasons best known to himself, accused Luo Ruiqing, Vice-Secretary of the Central Committee Secretariat and Chief of Staff

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<sup>1</sup> According to one foreign journalist, Mao Zedong did not like having secretaries present taking notes when he was receiving foreign visitors. In order for the government to be informed of any casual policy statements he may have made, Yang, as Director of the Communist Party's Central Committee General Office, had a tape recorder installed. This was done openly, in 1964. Several officials knew about it. During the Cultural Revolution Jiang Qing perverted this into an allegation that Yang Shangkun had dared to record the top-secret words of Chairman Mao, that he was a Soviet spy, conveying to his Russian masters the innermost thoughts of Mao Zedong.

of the PLA, of attempting to usurp control of the armed forces.<sup>1</sup>

On hearing Lin's accusations, Mao Zedong convened an enlarged session of the Standing Committee of the Politburo in Shanghai, to expose and criticize Luo Ruiqing. Luo was not invited to attend.

My mother was in Shanghai at the time. As she recalls it, the atmosphere was very tense. There was none of the usual friendliness and smiles among the people she knew who had come to take part. At the meeting not even the secretaries were allowed to look at the documents. Mama was sure something bad was brewing, but she didn't dare ask.

Papa said nothing at all. His face was solemn, and unusually serious.

On December 10, a special plane carried Luo and his wife from Beijing to Shanghai. Mao directed Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping to talk to Luo.

"You come along, too," Papa said to Mama. "And comfort Hao Zhiping (Luo's wife)."

In the car on the way she sat with Papa and Zhou Enlai. No one spoke. The men looked serious. Mama didn't know why. She felt very tense.

When they got to the house where Luo was being detained, Zhou Enlai and Papa spoke with him on the ground floor. My mother and Hao Zhiping went upstairs.

"Try to relax a little," Mama urged. She herself began to sob.

Later, during the Cultural Revolution at a criticism session of Papa, his accusers said the women had embraced each other and wept. They seized upon this as evidence that Deng Xiaoping had protected Luo Ruiqing.

Papa had always disliked Lin Biao. He didn't believe Lin's vicious smear of Luo Ruiqing. He was passive about it, obstructive. As he said when under fire during the Cultural Revolution, "I never could see the seriousness of the charge against Luo. In fact, I forgave him."

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, it was Lin Biao who was trying to usurp control of the armed forces, and beyond that all of China. He considered Luo Ruiqing one of the persons in his way, and attacked him before the Central Committee on framed charges verging on treason.

After the Shanghai meeting, the Army held another one in Beijing. Mao ordered my father to act as chairman. Papa's attitude was distinctly passive.

"I was named as one of the chairs for the meetings," he told us later, "but I spent most of my time in the Northwest, checking military installations. I told Peng Zhen to take charge. I made it plain I didn't want any part of the attacks on Luo."

Many high-level leaders were shocked and puzzled by the criticisms of Yang Shangkun and Luo Ruiqing. They didn't know that bigger and even more disastrous charges were even then being secretly fomented. Things happened so fast people had no time to comprehend or respond.

At the beginning of 1966 a series of events erupted one after another.

January. Lin Biao convened a full session of all military units involved in political work. In order to lay a theoretical basis for his planned activities he spoke at length about "stressing politics."

February. A "Forum on Literature and Art in the Armed Forces", sponsored by Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, opened in Shanghai.

March. The "Highlights" of the "Forum", after review and editing by Mao Zedong, were distributed nationwide. This was to be the springboard for the armed forces' intervention in the Cultural Revolution.

March. Luo Ruiqing was dismissed from office. He was subsequently imprisoned.

That same month Mao had several discussions with Kang Sheng<sup>1</sup> and Jiang Qing. He said if the offices of the Central Committee impeded him, he would call on the regional units to rebel. The leftists should be supported, Mao said, and organized into factions to start a Cultural Revolution.

Looking back after more than 30 years at the above incidents, no one today can imagine how strong the smell of gunpowder was. Most of the high Party leaders had no inkling of the terrible storm about to break.

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<sup>1</sup> Kang Sheng exercised a Machiavellian influence on Mao Zedong for many years, starting in the 1940s in Yan'an and extending through the Cultural Revolution. Of the same generation, like Mao, he was a classicist and a scholar. Underneath, he was narrow, bitter, vicious. He perverted Party policy, and hurt a great many people. Unfortunately, Mao trusted and respected him.

There were things they didn't approve of, or which made them suspicious. But they had absolutely no conception of what would follow, the madness, the uncontrollable chaos.

Deng Xiaoping, member of the Standing Committee of the Politburo and General Secretary of the Central Committee, felt the same as other high Party leaders. He disapproved of what was going on, but he was not alert to the dangers which were impending. And he certainly was not mentally prepared.

April 8. Kang Sheng telephoned Deng Xiaoping to notify him that he was urgently wanted in Beijing. At that time my father, together with Vice-Premiers Li Fuchun and Bo Yibo, and ministers of the State Council, was investigating work in the Northwest. All during the trip they discussed and thought only about how to improve the economy in Northwest China and build up the military installations. Hurriedly, they took a special plane back to Beijing. Only then did Papa learn that Peng Zhen was in trouble.

What caused it was that Peng Zhen had not agreed with the publication by Shanghai's *Wen Hui Bao* of Yao Wenyuan's attack on Wu Han. A distinguished historian, Wu Han was also a vice-mayor of Beijing. Peng Zhen, First Secretary of the Beijing Party Committee, as well as Mayor, naturally wanted to know why Beijing was not consulted beforehand.

Jiang Qing, Kang Sheng and Zhang Chunqiao, without first informing the Central Committee, flew to Shanghai, where Mao was staying, and complained that Peng was "checking up on the Chairman". Mao became very angry, and ordered that Peng be criticized.

From the 9th to the 12th of April the Central Committee Secretariat held several meetings.

Kang Sheng, alternate member of the Politburo, and member of the Central Committee Secretariat, read out the criticisms Mao had leveled against Peng Zhen. Namely, that Peng, by his opposition to the publication of the article, had muddied the line between classes; that he had made no distinction between right and wrong; that he had committed serious errors. And, Mao had continued, the Central Committee Publicity Department was

a “palace of demons”, and the Publicity Division of the Beijing Party Committee was shielding bad people (meaning Wu Han).

Mao’s anger was far from abating. In Hangzhou from April 16 to April 22, 1966, he convened a series of enlarged sessions of the Standing Committee of the Politburo aimed at criticizing the “anti-Party crimes” of Peng Zhen.

Papa had not agreed with the criticism of Luo Ruiqing, and neither did he agree with the criticism of Peng Zhen. Not only had he had close contact with them in his work; their personal relations were also very good. In mind and deed he opposed their persecution.

But this latest attack was particularly fierce. Mao’s rage was obviously out of control. At a time when democracy within the Party had reached a low ebb, high-ranking Communists like my father, despite their opposition, were not able to state it openly.

As he later recalled: “Peng Zhen’s question was not serious. I didn’t go along with the criticism. I sent him half a crate of oranges to show him how I felt. Under the circumstances that was the best I could do.”

An enlarged session of the Politburo was held in Beijing from May 4 to May 26. Its agenda, arranged by Mao Zedong, linked Peng Zhen, Luo Ruiqing, Lu Dingyi and Yang Shangkun, charging them with “anti-Party activities” and “abnormal relations among themselves.” In a speech, Lin Biao painted a shocking scenario, ranting that some persons within the Central Committee were planning a political coup. The session concluded with the passage of a document drawn up by Chen Boda, after several amendments by Mao Zedong.

Known as the “May 16 Circular”, it called for the castigation of “reactionary bourgeois thinking” in the fields of academia, education, news media, literature and art, and publishing, and urged a purging of the “bourgeois leadership” in these areas. In a hint of what was to come, the Circular warned that “representatives of the bourgeoisie” had wormed their way into the Communist Party, the government, the armed forces, and all aspects of the cultural field. It said that these were “counter-revolutionary revisionists” who, when the time was ripe, would seize political power, moving it from the hands of the proletariat to the

hands of the bourgeoisie. "Some of them we have already recognized, some we have not. Some are receiving our trust, and are being groomed as our successors. Khrushchov-types are slumbering in our midst. Party committees at all levels must give this their strictest attention."....

The "May 16 Circular," in solemn and dangerous terms, heralded the advent of an enormous political storm.

Political and public opinion preparations had been completed. The curtain was about to formally rise on the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution", replete with political criticisms and political anarchy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There were indeed ideological hindrances to the development of socialism in New China. These were mainly hangovers from the reactionary mentality and methods of two thousand years of feudalism. These were manifest everywhere, in education, in customs and habits, in the arts, in attitudes and operations in the government and within the Communist Party. Bourgeois influences were small. By concentrating the attack on the bourgeoisie Mao diverted attention away from the main danger — feudal mentality.

But the abuses were real, although mislabeled, and resentment was widespread. People, particularly the young people, responded quickly to what they saw as a call for them to take action. Their own impetuosity, fanned by exhortations from Mao and radical extremists, led to the organization of factions.

With an almost religious fervor they savagely tortured, mentally and physically, any and all persons — especially Communists — in positions of leadership or authority, while brawling noisily, and often bloodily, among themselves. Violence led to more violence, with many parts of the country debuting into anarchy.

How could people normally so self-disciplined, so decent, so law-abiding, behave so chaotically? Ironically, the majority were firmly convinced of their pious orthodoxy according to "the thought of Mao Zedong."

It was Mao who had opened the Pandora's Box. Some said that later he regretted the horror he had unleashed, but then it was too late.

## 2

# Trouble Begins at Home

**M**AO Zedong was not in Beijing, but he ordered the convening of an enlarged session of the Politburo, to be chaired by his successor, Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee and President of the People's Republic, Liu Shaoqi.

Liu didn't realize that everything Mao did at that time, and the many, many things which displeased and angered him, were not simply brought on by the immediate matters of Peng Zhen, Luo Ruiqing, Lu Dingyi and Yang Shangkun.

After the failure of the "Great Leap Forward" in 1958, and particularly after the rectification of the rash policies in the 60's, Mao started being dissatisfied with Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping. They shared the responsibility for general work in the Central Committee, but in many respects their ideas were not in harmony with his own. Naturally, he was most angry with the higher-ranking Liu Shaoqi.

In keeping with his goal of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat" so as to prevent "revisionism" and a "return of capitalism", Mao had already made up his mind. He decided to replace Liu Shaoqi by Lin Biao as his designated successor as leader of the Communist Party. Lin always made a point of posing as being assiduously "faithful" to Mao and all of his theories.

Liu Shaoqi was not aware of Mao's intention, nor was Deng Xiaoping, nor were the high-ranking Party leaders.

Nor were they prepared for the thunderclap events which rapidly followed, and Mao's completely irrational thoughts and deeds. And



when they finally did realize what was happening, they couldn't understand it. It was this "slow-wittedness" on their part which made them "unable to keep up" with developments, and commit "errors" which, of course, resulted in their being drowned in the mad floodwaters of the "revolution".<sup>1</sup>

On May 25, the day before the meeting scheduled to criticize Peng, Luo, Lu and Yang, a large poster was put up on the campus of Peking University. It was signed by seven persons, including a woman named Nie Yuanzi, who was secretary of the Communist Party's general branch of the Philosophy Department. The poster attacked the University's Party Committee, plus the Party Committee of the Beijing Municipal Government. Instigated and planned by Kang Sheng, this was the notorious "First Marxist-Leninist Poster". It launched the Cultural Revolution.

The poster threw Peking University into an uproar. My sister Deng Nan, who was a student there, after reading it, immediately phoned my mother. "Nie Yuanzi is a bad person," Mama said. "She behaved badly in Yan'an. Don't tell anybody I said so!"

She was reflecting what my father thought. He was very much against this sudden assault.

The storm had begun. No one could stop it. A thousand more posters went up at the university expressing a broad diversity of opinions. Posters criticizing the deans of nearly every college and middle school and voicing declarations of revolt proliferated throughout the city. After June 1 a flurry of posters flew in all of Beijing's schools and academies. An irresistible surge spread like the plague. The schools were chaotic. Revolts multiplied and became more intensive. In some schools the principals and teachers were excoriated, even beaten.

On May 28 the Central Committee officially established a Cultural Revolution Leading Group. On the instructions of Mao Zedong, it was headed by Chen Boda, with Kang Sheng as advisor. Jiang Qing and

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<sup>1</sup> These were epithets cast at victimized leaders who disagreed with the turmoil deliberately engineered by the self-professed "revolutionaries".



Zhang Chunqiao were vice-leaders. Yao Wenyuan was named a member. These people, who formerly had been scheming in private, could now openly play major roles. In full armor and war paint they took the stage.

Mao's fundamental principle was "smash first, then build". He believed that "only chaos under the heavens can bring stability throughout the land." From his vantage point away from the scene of action he found the destruction and turmoil in Beijing eminently satisfactory.

But in Beijing, Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, responsible for running the major affairs of the Party and government, were put in a very difficult position by the sudden anarchy.

May 29. Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping, the three Politburo Standing Committee members who were handling the general affairs of the Central Committee, summoned all of the concerned departments to discuss developments in the Cultural Revolution. It was decided to send one work group under Chen Boda to the *People's Daily*, and another under Zhang Chengxian, the vice-minister of education, to Peking University. Zhou Enlai telephoned Mao Zedong in Hangzhou, telling him of the decision, and requesting approval. A formal request, signed jointly by Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping, was formally dispatched by telegram to Mao on the 30th. His reply came the same evening: "I agree to this course of action."

While the Central Committee top leaders were busily trying to cope with the confusion, the movement suddenly changed. On June 1, Mao Zedong stated his approval of Nie Yuanzi's poster. He directed the Xinhua News Agency to broadcast it in its entirety, and ordered its publication by all newspapers and periodicals. He said: "This marks the commencement of the smashing of Peking University's reactionary fortress."

*People's Daily* on June 1 immediately published an editorial entitled "Sweep Away All Ox Demons and Venomous Spirits".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Symbols of evil in Chinese mythological superstition. The term was indiscriminately applied during the Cultural Revolution to smear intellectuals and moderate Party and government leaders.