



**My Father
Deng
Xiaoping
—The War Years**

Deng Rong



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

我的父亲邓小平——战争年代 / 邓榕著；卢敏等译.

—北京：外文出版社，2006

ISBN 978-7-119-04408-8

I. 我... II. ①邓... ②卢... III. 邓小平 (1904-1997)

—生平事迹—英文 IV. A762

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2006) 第 041843 号

责任编辑 张重光

翻 译 林祥明 卢 敏 李桐年 马海荣 金绍卿
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我的父亲邓小平——战争年代

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© 外文出版社

外文出版社出版

(中国北京百万庄大街 24 号)

邮政编码 100037

外文印刷厂印刷

中国国际图书贸易总公司发行

(中国北京车公庄西路 35 号)

北京邮政信箱第 399 号 邮政编码 100044

2008 年(16 开)第 1 版

2008 年第 1 版第 1 次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-04408-8

14000(精)

11-E-3713

Author's Note

To My English-speaking Readers:

China is an ancient civilization with a culture stretching back over 5,000 years. Our most recent 150-year history has been fraught with hardships. Amid this torrent of history a number of names are probably familiar to you: Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Chiang Kai-shek. Today, more people also think of Deng Xiaoping.

I am the daughter of Deng Xiaoping. In writing about my father I do not intend to give a complete appraisal. Rather, I want to tell you the story of Deng Xiaoping and the period of Chinese history that coincides with his life.

Deng Xiaoping traveled a 93-year course. His life was both difficult and extraordinary. I hope my book will enable you to better understand this man and this Oriental land. And perhaps it will no longer seem as strange to you.

I give you my best wishes and hope you will enjoy this book of mine.

Acknowledgements

In 1993, the original Chinese-language version of *My Father Deng Xiaoping* was published and distributed by China's Central Party Literature Publishing House. In 1995, the English version was published and distributed by BasicBooks (a Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.) of the United States of America.

I have been pleased to revise the book for the Foreign Languages Press (FLP), after it obtained the English copyright. FLP is republishing the book under the title *My Father Deng Xiaoping—The War Years*.

Many people assisted me during the republishing process. Special thanks are due to Mr. P. Miles Young of Ogilvy & Mather, Ms. Yan Lan of Gide Loyrette Nouel and Ms. Lü Wei of the China Association for International Friendly Contacts because of their warm-hearted and selfless help, and their professionalism.

Here, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who have helped me in this venture.

Preface

In January, 1950, I was born in the city of Chongqing, in southwestern China. My country had just undergone an earthshaking revolution. After losing eight million troops, the Kuomintang (KMT) had been overthrown, and the new People's Republic of China had been established on the vast Chinese land.

I was the fourth child born into the family. I have two elder sisters and one elder brother. One and a half years after my birth, my younger brother was born. Our big family then consisted of my parents, their five children, and my grandmother, who was my father's stepmother and came from his hometown of Guang'an in the countryside of Sichuan Province.

I was born and grew up in a special environment. I had firsthand experience of history in the making. Many historical persons surrounded my life, and many historic events unfolded around my family and me. The events and experiences and my environment that I have recorded here should not be lost or forgotten.

Most especially I am referring to what I know of my father. He was originally called Deng Xixian or Deng Bin. Later he changed his name to Deng Xiaoping. At the age of 16, he left China and crossed the wide oceans to travel to the West in search of a way to realize his ideals.

By 18, he was an ardent Communist devoted to saving his country and his people. In his 70-year revolutionary career, he did underground work and served as a military commander, an important government official, and a key leader of the Communist Party of China. One section of the lengthy annals of Chinese history is already engraved with his name.

In this book, I have written about the first half of the life of a man who represents a generation of heroic, larger-than-life leaders. What I can recount covers only a short period of time, but that period is an

important link in the magnificent chain of Chinese history that has lasted for thousands of years.

Although what I have recorded only concerns the past, I believe that we can learn lessons by reflecting on the past and thus will confidently approach the future as our forefathers did.

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I

The Day of Retirement

It was November 9, 1989.

Early in the morning it was still dark. Drizzle dampened the late autumn land in Beijing.

Father rose and had breakfast at his usual hour. Then, as was his custom, he sat down to read newspapers, books, and documents. His youngest grandson had stayed home from kindergarten with a cold. I took him to see Grandpa.

“Is it still raining?” Father asked me. “It’s turning to snow,” I replied.

Father stood up abruptly, opened the window, and walked outdoors.

The air was cold and damp. As a light north wind blew, wet snowflakes drifted down, mingled with icy raindrops. Watching the sleet fall, Father said with feeling, “Beijing needs the snow badly. This wet weather is good news.”

Perhaps it was because of the “greenhouse effect” that both fall and winter came so late that year. Although it was already November in Beijing, the weather was mild. The snow that day was not very heavy, but it was the first snow of the year.

At around nine o’clock, the director of Father’s office, Wang Ruilin, came to give him an update on the Central Committee plenary session that was being held. One of the issues addressed by the session was that of Father’s retirement. Mr. Wang told Father that after the participants read some relevant documents and held discussions, they had come to recognize his determination to retire and the significance of his retirement. There had been emotional speeches and a considerable

amount of debate. A vote was scheduled for that afternoon, with the news to be announced that evening. Father was very pleased with Wang Ruilin's briefing, saying, "We are finally close to home."

It was time for lunch. The whole family sat together around the dining table. Discussions were focused on Father's retirement. One of my elder sisters proposed a family celebration. My elder brother offered to produce a bottle of famous brand wine. Mother said that if she felt up to it, she'd like to go and watch the participants take a picture with Father that afternoon.

Father expressed his desire to lead the simple life of a common man after retirement, to walk freely in the street, and to pay visits here and there. The eldest granddaughter, Mian Mian, said with a smile, "Grandpa is really an idealist."

At about three o'clock that afternoon, the Fifth Plenary Session of the 13th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) voted to accept Father's resignation from the post of chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CPC.

At about four o'clock, Father drove to the Great Hall of the People to have his photo taken with the participants in the plenary session that had just concluded.

As Father entered the reception area, senior comrades of the Central Committee came out of the meeting hall. One comrade after another approached him to shake his hand. Jiang Zemin, the newly elected chairman of the Military Commission, stepped forward and grasped Father's hand. Jiang proposed taking a group photo of Party leaders with Father. As Father posed with Jiang Zemin, Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, Yao Yilin, Qiao Shi, Song Ping, Li Ruihuan, Wang Zhen, Bo Yibo, Wan Li, Song Renqiong, and Hu Qiaomu, journalists rushed forward, their cameras flashing, to record the historic moment.

When Father and the group entered the banquet hall of the Great Hall of the People, there was a roar of applause.

Standing at the microphone, Father said with a broad smile, "I wish to express my thanks for your understanding and support. The plenary session has accepted my request to retire. My sincere thanks to the ple-

nary session and to all comrades.”

Although night had fallen, our house was brightly lit. The rest of the family had been busy that afternoon preparing for the celebration of Father’s retirement. When it was time for dinner, four grandchildren ran in to invite Grandpa to the table. They gave him a congratulatory card that they had made for him. On the card were four beautiful butterflies, representing the four grandchildren. The card’s message was: “We wish Grandpa to be as young as we are, for ever and ever.” One by one they gave Grandpa a big kiss. The youngest, three-year-old Xiao Di, planted a very wet kiss on Grandpa’s cheek, leaving quite a trail of saliva. All the family members laughed heartily.

In the dining room, our family’s cook, Yang, who had worked in our house for 30 years, provided a sumptuous feast. On the sky-blue wall was a bright red poster: “1922-1989-Eternity.” Looking at the poster, Father smiled.

As the dozen family members happily gathered around Father and raised their glasses of red wine in a joyful toast, my heart was filled with deep feelings. A lifetime of over 80 years and a revolutionary career of more than 60 years would certainly be full of hardships for anyone. It is time to rest and relax!

On the following day, November 10, 1989, the *People’s Daily* published Father’s letter requesting that his retirement be approved, as well as the resolution adopted at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 13th CPC Central Committee.

In his letter to the Central Committee, Father wrote:

“As early as 1980, I proposed reforming the leadership system of the Party and the state and abolishing the lifelong tenure of key leadership positions. In recent years, many veteran comrades have quit their leadership positions on the Central Committee. In 1987, prior to the 13th National Congress, I expressed my desire to retire so as to sincerely demonstrate my resolve to abolish the lifelong tenure of leading posts. At that time, after repeated deliberations regarding my opinion as well as those from within the Party, the Central Committee agreed to my resignation from the membership of the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee,

from the Central Committee, and from the chairmanship and membership of the Central Advisory Commission. The Central Committee decided that I should continue to serve as chairman of both the Party and state military commissions. Since then, when consulted on major issues by the collective leadership of the Central Committee, I have respected and supported the views of the majority within that body. I have, however, insisted on assuming no responsibility for day-to-day matters, and I have been looking forward to replacing the older generation with the younger generation as soon as possible so that I can realize my wish to resign completely from leadership positions.

“The Fourth Plenary Session of the 13th Central Committee elected a leading nucleus headed by Comrade Jiang Zemin, which is now working effectively. After careful consideration, I wish to resign from my current post while I am still in good health so as to realize my long-held aspiration. This will be conducive to the interests of the Party, the state, and the armed forces. I sincerely hope the Central Committee will approve my request.

“As a veteran Party member and a senior citizen who has fought for decades for the cause of communism, national independence, unity, construction, and reform, my life belongs to the Party and the state. After I retire, I shall continue to be loyal to the cause of the Party and the state. The achievements our Party, state, and armed forces have made are the result of the efforts made by several generations. Our cause of reform and opening to the outside world has begun quite recently. The tasks before us are arduous, and the road ahead will be tortuous. But I am convinced that we will be able to overcome difficulties and carry forward from generation to generation the cause our predecessors pioneered. Since the Chinese people have the ability to stand up, they will surely have the ability to stand ever more proudly among the nations of the world.”¹

The resolution of the Fifth Plenary Session read as follows:

“Comrade Deng Xiaoping is an acknowledged leader of the people of all ethnic groups in China who enjoys high prestige, and he has made

¹ *People's Daily*, November 10, 1989.

tremendous contributions during all the historic periods of the Chinese revolution and national construction under the leadership of the Party.

“The plenary session highly evaluates Comrade Deng Xiaoping’s outstanding contributions to our Party and the country. Revolutionary practice during several decades shows that Comrade Deng Xiaoping is an outstanding Marxist, a staunch Communist, a brilliant proletarian revolutionary, a statesman and military strategist, and a long-tested leader of our Party and the country. The series of viewpoints and theories he put forward according to the principle of combining Marxism-Leninism with China’s practice constitute an important component of Mao Zedong Thought. They have inherited and developed Mao Zedong Thought under new historical conditions and represent valuable ideological wealth for the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese people.”²

From then on, Father was indeed retired, and he was able to rest and relax. We sincerely hoped that he would live happily and peacefully in his later years and enjoy a healthy and long life.

Father had another aspiration, which was never fulfilled. He wished to set foot in Hong Kong after China resumed sovereignty over it in 1997. He said that even if he had to visit Hong Kong in a wheelchair, he would; even if he stood on Hong Kong soil for only one minute, he would be satisfied. By then he would be 93 years old. Our family believed that he would be able to visit Hong Kong and we would do all we could to help him fulfill this wish.

Although Father was retired, people still cared for him a great deal. Both the Chinese people and foreigners were very concerned about his health. People are still interested in the merits and demerits of his long career. Many commentaries and research papers have been written, both at home and abroad, about his political achievements. His rich and complex experiences fascinate people. Biographies have been written by authors in Germany, Hungary, and Hong Kong, and by some Chinese writers.

Father was an introvert and a man of few words. He was unpretentious

² Ibid.

and preferred to keep his experiences to himself. Even we in his family know little of his past. As a result, many people know his present but not his past, the outer Deng Xiaoping but not the inner man. There are many misconceptions about his life.

Father's life was an extraordinary and remarkable one. I am not qualified to write his biography. However, I want to record what I know about him to set the record straight and to add something more real and valuable to the already rich literature about him.

All things on earth have their origins, and every story has its beginning. To write about Deng Xiaoping, I must begin with his hometown—Guang'an County in Sichuan Province.

2

An Affection for Sichuan

Known as “the land of abundance,” Sichuan, in ancient times, belonged to the states of Ba and Shu.

Sichuan has a very long history of civilization. Two million years ago, the ancestors of mankind lived and multiplied there.¹ Later, the two small states of Ba and Shu were established in the eastern and central-western parts of present-day Sichuan. During the late Warring States Period (475-221 BC), the emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) marched his army south to first attack the State of Ba and subsequently conquer the State of Shu. Both states were annexed by the Qin Dynasty in 316 BC. Not long after that, the Qin Dynasty established the two prefectures of Ba and Shu, one in the area near present-day Chongqing and the other in the area of Chengdu. Since then, the states of Ba and Shu have belonged to a unified China.

The name of Sichuan was designated during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). During the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) the province was officially named the Sichuan Province.

There are plentiful resources in Sichuan. Because the weather is mild and humid and the four seasons are distinctive, the region is well suited to agriculture. The Sichuan Basin has been known as a granary since ancient times; many military strategists had their garrison troops claim

¹ Human fossils two million years old were discovered in Longping Village, Damiao District, Wushan County, near Chongqing. These are the most ancient human fossils discovered in China so far. See *People's Daily*, November 19, 1988.