

Deng *Deng Rong* Xiaoping *and the* *Cultural Revolution*

A Daughter Recalls
the Critical Years



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Acknowledgements

Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution

— *A Daughter Recalls the Critical Years*

By Deng Rong

Translated by Sidney Shapiro

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我的父亲那十年

文革岁月

莫文敏

柳塔

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Deng Rong

Translator's Introduction

Maomao wrote the biography of her father Deng Xiaoping during the Cultural Revolution, 1966 to 1976, and asked me to translate it into English. I read the book and enjoyed it, but realized it would present difficulties to the average foreign reader.

For it is a book about remarkable persons in a land called China, people with their own history, culture and customs, under extremely trying circumstances. How to interpret their actions, their motivations? How to faithfully reproduce what the author says, while at the same time conveying her style, her spirit?

A daunting task, severely straining my limited capabilities. Let me try at least to offer a few subjective opinions regarding China and the Chinese during the two millennia prior, and leading up, to the Cultural Revolution.

China was a huge, primarily agricultural, imperial country, in which a small number of wealthy landlord families ruled over the vast majority of the population, consisting mainly of serfs and tenant farmers. A wealthy elite controlled the government, the army, the judiciary, the law enforcement agencies, at every level. The depredations of the rulers were sanctified by an absolutist philosophy positing unquestioned obedience to authority in a paternalistic, male chauvinist, autocracy. When oppression reached unbearable proportions, as it frequently did every few centuries, the people revolted and brought the emperor down — only to bring in a new emperor, a new dynasty, without any fundamental, substantive change in the social and political system.

As in Europe, and in feudal countries generally in the same period, there was little thought of “freedom” and “democracy” as we understand the terms today. The traditional concepts were not only accepted by the general public, but were, indeed, considered morally admirable.

They served China well enough for two millennia — from the time

of Confucius around 500 BC until roughly the 16th century, when China led the world not only culturally but even scientifically. But then imperial arrogance and complacency began closing Chinese eyes and Chinese doors to the advances in other lands. China fell behind, a weakened prey to internal corruption and incursions from abroad.

By the 19th century, when their unsuitability to a modern world became increasingly evident, there was a great deal of discussion and soul-searching on how to “save China”. The Japanese model? The American? Inept experiments all failed.

Finally, in the early 20th century it appeared that conditions in Russia, and its epochal revolution, bore considerable resemblance to the situation in China. A handful of intellectuals in a secret meeting in Shanghai in the 1920s formed a Chinese Communist Party. After a long and bitter struggle under the leadership of that Party, strongly influenced by the Soviet experience, the People’s Republic of China was formally established in October 1949. Mao Zedong was chosen Chairman of the Party.

Most decisive in these victories was clearly Mao’s analytical powers and vision. He defined the fundamental problems as feudalism and imperialism — China’s main internal and external obstacles. Moreover, he developed the magic formula for overcoming backwardness and rallying a vast impoverished populace to create military and economic miracles. Namely, a selfless Chinese Communist Party, dedicated to serving the people, whom it treated with the utmost respect and admiration on a democratic basis.

The success of this formula astonished the world and sent shivers down the backs of certain major powers. Worried about the effects it might have on other lands in which they had “special interests”, they increased harassment in and around China’s borders.

Mao was superbly confident in the country’s ability to cope with military attacks by “paper tigers”, and sure of China’s ability to “leap forward” economically. But he was erratic and subjective. He pushed ambitious projects without feasibility studies, with disastrous results.

He saw all problems in terms of “class struggle”. Other members of the Party leadership expressed doubts and opposition, but Mao simply

over-rode them.

What particularly concerned him was the fact that the Communist Party of the Soviet Union decided in the 1960s to opt for what Khrushchov hailed as “goulash communism”, an euphemism for thinly disguised capitalist enterprise. By unhappy coincidence, within the Chinese Communist Party many distinct evidences surfaced of a growing elitism, use of power for personal gains, corruption, moral frivolity, and a neglect of the public’s interests. Mao felt this was very dangerous, that it could lead to an abandonment of Party principles and a slide into capitalism, or even fascism.

Mao therefore called for an examination of all Communists in positions of authority, for an appraisal of their qualities, and for the correction of their errors, as well as a corresponding reformation in the cultural field. The formal implementation of this policy, starting in 1966, became known as the Cultural Revolution. At that time most Party leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, and the majority of China’s intellectuals, supported these reforms. They seemed reasonable and necessary.

The tragedy was that none of us, including Mao Zedong, was able to see that the Cultural Revolution would be taken over and manipulated by nefarious persons for their own purposes, causing enormous social and political damage. Mao, when he woke up to the seriousness of the situation, was unable to control it.

I have tried to faithfully render the content of the original, condensing a bit here and there, and to convey as closely as possible Maomao’s refreshing literary style.

Where I feel that certain points would not be clear enough to the foreign reader, I have taken the liberty of adding comments. These appear in footnotes. They are entirely my own opinions, obtained from various Chinese and Western sources, and do not necessarily represent the views of the author. I cannot vouch for their authenticity. Only that they seem plausible to me.

Sidney Shapiro
Beijing

Contents

1. Crowded Events of 1966	1
2. Trouble Begins at Home	10
3. "Bombard the Headquarters"	20
4. Criticize Liu and Deng	25
5. Go All Out Against "Persons in Authority Taking the Capitalist Road"	33
6. Down with Liu, Deng, Tao!	41
7. The Chill of Autumn	50
8. A Lonely Craft on a Bounding Sea	56
9. The "Deng Xiaoping Case Team"	66
10. The Enlarged 12th Plenary Session of the Eighth Party Central Committee	74
11. May Terror	80
12. Calamity Drops from the Skies	86
13. The Performance of the Deng Xiaoping Case Team from Beginning to End	95
14. The Ninth Party National Congress and "Continuing the Revolution"	99
15. A Strategic Exodus	106
16. The Lonely Flight South	113
17. Early Days in Jiangxi	120
18. Working Life	125
19. A Visit Home	133
20. Feifei Returns	140
21. A Quantitative Change	148
22. Shock Waves from the Lushan Conference	156
23. Uneasy "Quiet Days"	161

24. What Happened to Pufang	169
25. Heaven Doesn't Forget People with Hearts	177
26. Winding Back Through Precipitous Heights	189
27. Spring Comes Early South of the Yangtze	195
28. Correcting the Extremist Errors	207
29. Breaking the Fetters and Climbing the Jinggang Mountains	214
30. Old Places Revisited	223
31. Farewell, Infantry School	230
32. Summer, and Back at Work	240
33. The 10th Party National Congress Continues the Line of the Cultural Revolution	249
34. Into the Military Commission and the Politburo	257
35. The Storm over the Special Session of the United Nations	264
36. An Ugly Battle	270
37. The Struggle for a New Cabinet at the Fourth National People's Congress	275
38. The Deep Significance of the Fourth National People's Congress	285
39. Prelude to All-out Rectification	290
40. The Railway Restoration Confrontation	295
41. Mao Zedong Criticizes the Gang of Four	302
42. All-out Rectification	311
43. Documents on National Rectification	322
44. Great Accomplishments	332
45. A Critique of <i>Outlaws of the Marsh</i> , and the Last Days of Zhou Enlai	342
46. Wicked Persons First Accuse	349
47. Difficult Days	358
48. Tragic Misery	371
49. "Criticize Deng, Oppose the Right-deviationist Attempts to Reverse the Judgments"	380
50. The Great April 5 Movement	389
51. The "Two Resolutions" and Deng's Second Overthrow	396

52. Fearlessly Confronting the Waves	405
53. Heaven Angered, the People Enraged	415
54. Mao Zedong, a Great Man, Passes	426
55. Thoroughly Smash the Gang of Four	436
56. A Splendid Restoration	444
57. In Conclusion	450
Glossary	455
Index	472

On 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

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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 problems¹ 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".² The article had been secretly conceived by Jiang Qing

¹ 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.

² 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.”¹

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

¹ 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.¹

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."

¹ 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.