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The Man, the Myth, the Message: New Trends in Mao Literature From China

Zusammenfassung: Dies ist die erweiterte Fassung eines früher publizierten englischen Aufsatzes. Er untersucht 43 Werke der neueren chinesischen Mao-Literatur aus den frühen 1990er Jahren, die in ihnen enthaltenen Aussagen zur Parteigeschichte und zum Selbstverständnis der heutigen Führung. Neben zahlreichen neuen Informationen über die chinesische Innen- und Außenpolitik, darunter besonders die Kampagnen der Mao-Zeit wie Großer Sprung und Kulturrevolution, vermitteln die Werke wichtige Einblicke in die politische Kultur Chinas. Trotz eindeutigen Versuchen zur Durchsetzung einer einheitlichen nationalen Identität und Geschichtsschreibung bezeugen sie auch die Existenz eines unabhängigen, kritischen Denkens in China.

Schlagworte: Mao Zedong, Parteigeschichte, Ideologie, Propaganda, Historiographie, politische Kultur, Großer Sprung, Kulturrevolution

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Abstract: This is the enlarged version of an English article published before. It analyzes 43 works of the new Chinese Mao literature from the early 1990s, their revelations of Party history and their clues for the self-image of the present leadership. Besides revealing a wealth of new information on Chinese domestic and foreign policy, in particular on the campaigns of the Mao era like the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, the works convey important insights into China's political culture. In spite of the overt attempts at forging a unified national identity and historiography, they also document the existence of independent, critical thought in China.

Key words: Mao Zedong, Party history, ideology, propaganda, historiography, political culture, Great Leap, Cultural Revolution

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The Man, the Myth, the Message - New Trends in Mao-Literature From China

Thomas Scharping

Biographies and memorial literature are in vogue in China. After more than three decades in which the anonymous driving forces of history, the arid analysis of class struggle and worn-out ideological clichés dominated the scene, the traditional Chinese penchant for the personalized version of history is celebrating a happy revival. The tendency to present the past as the product of the moral behavior of great men, firmly rooted in the political culture of the country, the gusty appetite of the public for a peep show into the private lives of leaders, and the commercial instinct of a multitude of publishing houses aiming at profitable sales, have all combined to create a veritable deluge of biographies on the Chinese book market. These include works on Richard Nixon and Margaret Thatcher, Napoleon and Hitler, the Rockefellers, Hughes and Vanderbilts, the Ten Wealthiest Hongkong Tycoons, the Ten Richest Japanese, and many others. Wealth and power are the catchwords, today just as one century before.

And the craze has gone further. There are biographies of Deng Xiaoping, Zhou Enlai, many old guard revolutionaries and even relative newcomers to the Politburo such as Li Ruihuan, apparently signaling an end to the long-held taboo on publicizing private information on contemporary politicians. Another, on non-polemical biographies of Kuomintang leaders, also seems to have disappeared, with Chiang Kai-shek and Chiang Ching-kuo enjoying a wide audience on the Chinese mainland, too.

Mao and the biography craze

The most rewarding subject of biographies and memorial literature, however, has been Mao Zedong. The nostalgia of people who are suffering from the relentless push of economic reforms and yearn for the good old days when everything was clean and simple has helped to bring about the new Mao fever - which is rocking not only Chinese book shops but also the music scene, the textile industry and the curio market. A deep generation gap is noticeable in this regard. While the majority of Chinese youth in present-day China seems to view Mao as a creature from outer space, the Chairman's figure continues to haunt the dreams of the older generation. Depending on individual inclinations and experiences in life, these can be either nightmares or wish dreams.

Mao also remains a challenge for the Party. Its evaluation of the late Chairman testifies to official positions in regard to different phases of modern Chinese history. It also documents the self-image of the present leadership, its future role expectations and the degree of freedom it concedes for political debates. Vacillating between veneration and fear, co-option and rejection in its attitudes toward the Übervater, the Party has assigned no mean task to official

propaganda. Its propaganda apparatus has been gearing up for Mao's 100th anniversary during recent years. It revived the occupation with Mao that had abated after the early 1980s. While openly restorative tendencies emerged after the crush of the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989, the internal resistance against the resurrection of left-wing ideology became equally conspicuous later on.

Spontaneous social developments and deliberate political decisions have thus combined to create a huge corpus of new Mao-literature. The resulting volume of publications defies calculation, but rough estimates put the number of monographs at more than 100, plus innumerable articles published in historical and political journals, new editions of Mao's writings, a great number of treatises expounding his theoretical contributions, and many internally published memoirs.¹

The 43 books under review here cannot claim to exhaust the subject. Nevertheless, this collection is indicative of the new trend. It includes serious historical work which fills many blanks in Party history or provides fascinating glimpses into the political process at Zhongnanhai, and also books which degenerate into hagiographic gossip and popular myth. All the books show the still remaining taboos of political discourse and new attempts at rewriting history, but they also confirm the extent to which opinion undermining such attempts persists.

Besides grappling with the daunting size of this new literature, the scholar is confronted with a major difficulty in using such materials: documentation and citation are not up to Western standards - if present at all. In some instances new information and leaked internal documents can be checked against other reliable sources, but mostly the reader is left with the decision to believe or disbelieve. Mao biographers of long standing like Li Rui or former members of the Chairman's personal entourage should vouch for a certain authenticity, even if the danger of censoring is always there. But what about unattributed information in the works of unknown authors or circular citation without giving credit? Works published in large editions by the Central Party School or the People's Press can certainly claim to represent (parts of) current official thinking. In contrast, small publishers with more limited editions seem to concentrate on plagiarizing - but they can be just as effective at smuggling in controversial information not deemed to be ready for mass-circulation. These caveats should be borne in mind in considering the following comments on the sample of books under discussion.

Genealogies

The first group of works, a further tribute to traditional scholarship, are meticulously compiled family histories. The most elaborate example is Li Xiangwen's history of the Mao family which covers 61 people in the Mao clan and the

¹ For a fairly large but still incomplete bibliography confer: Wang Jin (ed.), *Mao Zedong da cidian (A Great Dictionary Concerning Mao Tse-tung)* (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 891-1101. Other bibliographies are included in: Lu Haijiang and He Mingzhou (ed.), *Mao Zedong he ta tong shidai de ren (Mao Zedong and His Contemporaries)* (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 474-478; Xiao Feng and Ming Jun (ed.), *Mao Zedong zhi mi (The Enigma of Mao Zedong)* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 373-374; Sun Baoyi, *Mao Zedong de dushu shengya (Mao Zedong's Reading Career)* (Beijing: Zhishi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 373-375. Compare also the earlier *Mao Zedong shengping, zhuzuo yanjiu suoyin (Index to Research on Mao Zedong's Life and Works)* (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 1987).

families related to Mao by marriage.² It includes the enterprising and profiteering abilities of Mao's father, a subject once neglected but now taken up by the official press which praises him as a model rich peasant, "knowledgeable in how to make a fortune".³ Mao is preferably pictured as an obedient son whose untiring diligence is eventually acknowledged by the strict father. Devouring his books at the border of the fields and late at night under the dim light of an oil lamp, he prepares for the wide world. Descriptions as such testify to the power of traditional role models and ideals of learning. They can totally overgrow Mao's own much more rebellious account of his childhood as he told it to Edgar Snow in 1936.⁴

For the first time, the history of Mao's ten children, among them seven who died early in infancy or were lost during the wars, is recounted in detail. We learn of Mao's three oldest sons, pre-school boys entrusted to the Communist underground of Shanghai in the late 1920s where they were finally reduced to roaming the streets and begging for a living. The two surviving ones were later conducted to the Soviet Union, where they studied until the late 1940s. One of them, Mao's oldest son Mao Anying, fell in the Korean War 1950, the second one, the still surviving Mao Anqing, suffered from constant fits of mental derangement due to his experiences in early childhood. Until his retirement in the 1980s he worked in the Translation Bureau for Marxist-Leninist Classics under the Central Committee's Propaganda Department. Mao's last wife Jiang Qing gave birth to only one child: Mao's daughter Li Na, who played a role during the Cultural Revolution and later worked in the Central Committee's General Office. Six children by Mao's second wife He Zizhen either died or were handed over to peasants; only his daughter Li Min, who later worked for army offices, survived. These children attest to the ordeal of the Long March and Mao's role as a Great Procreator and Great Abandoner.

He Zizhen, who dictated her memoirs shortly before her death in 1984, is testifying to this uncanny characteristic again when she recalls her curtailed re-encounter with Mao on Mount Lushan in July 1959 after a separation and retirement of 22 years that was forced on her.⁵ And so do Mao Anqing, Li Min and Li Na, Mao's surviving children who enjoyed only sporadic access to him during his later life.⁶ Although the theme of abandonment is not mentioned in the accolades about the pious son, the thoughtful husband, the impartial father disinclined to family patronage, it is lurking between the lines.

² Li Xiangwen, *Mao Zedong jiashi (The Mao Family)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993); Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (New York: Grove Press, 1973), pp. 129-138.

³ Zhongguo tongxun she (China News Agency), Hongkong: 12 January 1990.

⁴ Li Pengcheng, *Mao Zedong yu Zhongguo wenhua (Mao Zedong and Chinese Culture)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 79-90; Shi Zhongquan and Chen Dongcao (eds.), *Mao Zedong de gushi (The Mao Zedong Story)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao, 1993), Vol. 1.

⁵ Wang Xingjuan, *He Zizhen de lu (He Zizhen's Road)* (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 1985). The reencounter has also provoked comment in: Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong waixun ji (Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours)* (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 235-249.

⁶ On these children cf. also: Song Yixiu and Yang Meiye (ed.), *Mao Zedong de renji shijie (Mao Zedong's Personal Relations)* (Beijing: Hongqi chubanshe, 1992), pp. 1-24; Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Mao Zedong shenghuo shilu (Records of Mao Zedong's Life)* (Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1989), pp. 44-49, 79-91; Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, pp. 532-542; Wang Haobin, *Ziyunxuan zhuren (The Master of the Purple Cloud Pavillion)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1991), pp. 177-197.

Among the members of Mao's family it is Jiang Qing who has wielded the greatest political influence. Because of her involvement in the Cultural Revolution her treatment in the literature is particularly sensitive. The new books therefore either ignore her completely or seem to stick to some unpublished internal material when telling her story. In any case, it is striking that another genealogy published one year before Li Xiangwen's volume produces exactly the same text on Mao's third wife.⁷ It dwells at length on her long periods of illness in the 1950s, her four sojourns for medical treatment in the Soviet Union, her politico-cultural activities in the early 1960s and her estrangement with Mao since 1974, which led to an open clash before the Politburo and numerous denigrating remarks by the Chairman. But there is conspicuously little on the couple's co-operation during the heyday of the Cultural Revolution or the reasons why Mao kept her in the leading circle. And it is like a slip of the tongue when the fact of the Politburo's official endorsement of Jiang Qing as one of Mao's major secretaries in 1956 is briefly mentioned.⁸ Also rather curt is the treatment of Mao's leftist nephew Mao Yuanxin who lived with him as an adopted son, rose to prominence in the Cultural Revolution and acted as liaison between the Chairman and the Politburo from September 1975 until Mao's death and his subsequent imprisonment.

In contrast, Mao's relations to the host of wider relatives, former neighbors and friends from his native Shaoshan receive extensive treatment. In the 1950s they make pilgrimages to Beijing in order to admire their fellow villager in his new home on the imperial palace grounds.⁹ These visits cannot have been pure joy for Mao, for after the exchange of reminiscences and information the conversation unfailingly concentrates on one main concern: the request for patronage. Should we wish to believe the books, Mao seems to have been a friendly alms giver, an unwilling job broker and only a hesitating helper in political troubles. Asked by an embarrassed township administration to assist in the assignment of class status to his own family, he is supposed to have pleaded for their partial expropriation as rich peasants.

Mao the bibliophile

Loving care is given to the presentation of Mao the bibliophile. We now have another book by the prolific Li Rui, who details the reading matter of the young student Mao.¹⁰ There is nothing really new in the volume as it basically repeats the mixture of traditional works, popular novels, Yan Fu translations of Western philosophers and early

⁷ Pei Jian, *Mao Zedong de jiashi (Mao Zedong's Family)* (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 1992), pp. Some further details on the beginnings of the Mao-Jiang relationship in 1937-38 are supplied in: Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Life*, pp. 253-262.

⁸ Li Yinqiao, *Zai Mao Zedong shenbian shiwu nian (15 Years at Mao Zedong's Side)*, (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 54; Nan Guang (ed.), *Mao Zedong he ta de si da mishu (Mao Zedong and His Four Major Secretaries)* (Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 1993), p. 217. Jiang Qing's position is also mentioned in passing by Quan Yanchi, *Lingxiu lei (Tears of the Leader)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1990), p. 83.

⁹ Li Xiuqing (ed.), *Mao Zedong de qinqing, xiangqing, yuqing (Mao Zedong's Relatives, Fellow Villagers and Friends)*, (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1992); Pei Jian, *Mao Zedong's Family*, pp.170-196.

¹⁰ Li Rui, *Zaonian dushu shenghuo Mao Zedong (The Reading Matter of the Young Mao Zedong)* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1992). Compare also: Feng Wenbin (ed.), *Mao Zedong yu qingnian (Mao Zedong and Youth)* (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 295-300.

revolutionary journals from China which Mao mentioned to Edgar Snow in 1936. More interesting is a monograph by Mao's personal librarian on the reading habits of the accomplished politician since the 1950s.¹¹ It contains the same list of some eight to ten preferred Marxist-Leninist classics that have been cited over and over again in the Party's ideological debates. Marx's *Capital* was not taken up again by Mao after 1954, and the last concentrated treatise on the theoretical works of Communism seems to have been in 1958 with his comments on Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*.

With the one major exception of Lu Xun, Mao's readings in Western or modern Chinese literature are equally limited. They are decidedly less impressive than the incidental portraits of him as an erudite traditional scholar. Just like a literatus of old, he is shown travelling with two wooden book cases full of dictionaries, Tang poems and other classical works. The "romantics" Li Bai (701-762), Li He (790-816) and Li Shangyin (812-859) are among his favourite poets. During the Chengdu conference of 1958 he is reported to have read all the old regional gazetteers of Sichuan, and it is noted with every sign of approval that he is one of the few Chinese who has read every one of the 24 dynastic annals. His studio in Zhongnanhai includes not only the conventional encyclopedic series of the Qing period but also the rare, huge Ming Yongle Encyclopedia, yet his favorite work on the bedside table is a torn copy of Sima Guang's *Zizhi Tongjian (Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government)* from the 11th century.¹² Such is Mao's immersion in classical literature that he is said to have bewildered Lin Biao by quoting unfathomable classical aphorisms, provoking the latter's nervous rush to the telephone and consultation of a dictionary.¹³ Mao's librarian recalls the Chairman as a great collector amassing a private library of 70,000 volumes. Some readers might remember that this was accomplished at the same time as other private collections were ransacked in 1966 and the books were burning on Beijing streets.

Mao the strategist

Balancing this portrait of Mao as the literary recluse in his latter days are reminiscences of his role as the strategist of revolutionary warfare. Here we have a work of the staff officer and later military instructor Guo Huaruo who accompanied Mao from 1926 to 1939 during the guerrilla campaigns in southern Jiangxi and on the Long March.¹⁴ Another volume dwells on the mastermind of the Yan'an base area.¹⁵ It stresses Mao's persuasive skills in public relations and united front activities, his (mostly practical and policy orientated) theoretical contributions and his first

¹¹ Sun Baoyi, *Mao Zedong's Reading Career*; Wu Yi and Wen Xianzhu (ed.), *Mao Zedong dushu yu xiewen (Mao Zedong as a Reader and Writer)*, (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993). For recollections of another of Mao's librarians cf.: Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Life*, pp. 211-224.; Guo Simin, *Wo yan zhong de Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong as Witnessed by Me)* (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 151-156. Also the earlier: Gong Yuzhi, Pan Xinzhi and Shi Zhongxuan (ed.), *Mao Zedong de dushu shenghuo (Mao Zedong's Reading Life)* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1986).

¹² Cf. also: Guo Jinrong, *Mao Zedong de huanghun sui yue (The Twilight Years of Mao Zedong)* (Hongkong: Tiandi tushu, 1990), pp. 53-74, 89-102, 122-138.

¹³ Nan Guang, *Mao Zedong and His Four Major Secretaries*, p. 276.

¹⁴ Fan Hao, *Mao Zedong he ta de guwen (Mao Zedong and His Advisor)*, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993).

¹⁵ Zhang Xixian et al., *Mao Zedong zai Yan'an (Mao Zedong in Yan'an)* (Beijing: Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993).

intensive reading of Communist classics. The book draws on numerous Yan'an memoirs published in recent years which complement the travel accounts of visitors to the base area during the late 1930s and early 1940s. It also contains an interesting summary on changes in the CCP leadership between the sixth and seventh Party congresses from 1928 to 1945. Although the passages on Mao's eclipse during 1931-34 continue to be unclear, the staffing and organizational set-up of the Politburo and Secretariat, which were long treated as Party secrets, are discussed in great detail. Especially revealing is new information on the intricate maneuvering between Mao and Stalin's follower Wang Ming after the latter's return to China in November 1937. It confirms that Mao's formal appointment to Chairman of the Politburo and Chairman of the CC Secretariat was due to a Politburo decision of 20 March 1943.

In contrast, the memoirs of Mao's bodyguard Yan Changlin, which cover the last year of the Yan'an base and the period 1946-1951, have very little political content.¹⁶ The book is mainly limited to anecdotes about Mao's march through North China during the military campaigns of the civil war. A similar case are the memoirs of Li Yinqiao who commanded Mao's bodyguards and was a close witness of Mao's life from 1947 to 1962.¹⁷ Like Yan Changlin he also had no access to political decision-making.

Reminiscences of companions

Following Yan Changlin and Li Yinqiao, numerous other reminiscing body guards, doctors, secretaries, interpreters, nurses, photographers, pilots, train attendants, and comrades in arms, dance and conversation, have taken up the pen to recall their encounters with the Chairman. Much of it is sycophantic, but some books have assembled worthwhile personal recollections. A rather uneven volume on Mao and Chinese youth combines trite adorations of Mao's youth work in Yan'an with more matter-of-fact statements on Mao's own youth during the early Republican period.¹⁸ Mao's former class-mates Xiao San and Zhou Shizhao provide a contribution culled from previous publications.

More original is a volume which brings together many witnesses of Mao in daily life such as members of his family and various attendants. Mostly restricted to minor episodes, it occasionally touches high politics such as veteran Republican politician Zhang Shizhao's daughter's account of her father's plea for a reconciliation between Mao and Liu Shaoqi and Mao's terse refusal in a letter in March 1967.¹⁹ Similar in character is a collection of five memorial articles under the flowery title *Tears of the Leader*.²⁰ With a print run of 425,000 copies it is clearly intended for mass consumption. The most noteworthy piece here is a further contribution by the former head of Mao's bodyguards, Li Yinqiao.²¹ It is a defense of Mao's stand in the Great Leap Forward and during the subsequent conflict with Politburo member Peng Dehuai, pleading that his behavior stemmed from deception by lower levels

¹⁶ Yan Changlin, *Jingwei Mao Zedong jishi (The Notes of Mao Zedong's Bodyguard)* (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1992). The book was published before in two parts under different titles by the Worker's Press and China Youth Press.

¹⁷ Li Yinqiao, *15 Years at Mao Zedong's Side*.

¹⁸ Feng Wenbin (ed.), *Mao Zedong and Youth*.

¹⁹ Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Life*, pp. 79-91.

²⁰ Quan Yanchi, *Tears of the Leader*.

²¹ *Ibid*, pp. 1-32.

and outright provocation by Marshal Peng. This article also contains the aside that reports in September 1959 about mass starvation in Anhui, Henan, Shandong and other provinces were made available to the then six members of the Politburo Standing Committee only.

The memorial literature stays well within the bounds of propriety, but it contains enough examples to corroborate the story of Mao's fondness for young, pretty nurses or dance-companions.²² Whispering during the Politburo's Saturday-night dances in Zhongnanhai or other social events is frankly acknowledged to have been a good source of underground information, with the Chairman playing the *agent provocateur*, torn between his love for the rebellious and his preference for the submissive. Mao's secretary Mei Bai recalls a dance preceding the April 1959 Central Committee plenum in Shanghai:

Before the session I went to Mao and he asked me: "Do you know Hai Rui [the upright 16th century official who dared to criticize the emperor]?" And he added: "I wish there would be more Hai Ruis in China." I asked: "Is it about getting big fish on the hook?" He answered: "No. I just danced with a comrade. I asked her about work conditions in Shanghai. She replied only that she was an university professor and could not comment. I said, Are you not interested in politics? She replied, Interest is not the question - I don't dare to take interest. I asked her, how she thought about [Shanghai Party boss] Ke Qingshi? She said, I dare to comment even less. I then asked, And what about me? She said, You are brilliant and great. It seems, this professor had only limited trust in me."²³

Mei Bai adds a dry note on the correct handling of contradictions within the Chairman: "On the next day's meeting Mao Zedong spoke about Hai Rui. He said to me: 'I regret having spoken about Hai Rui. If a Hai Rui would really turn up, I probably couldn't bear it.'"²⁴ Defense minister Peng Dehuai, who took up the challenge and criticized the ill-founded Great Leap Forward, thereby provoking his violent dismissal by Mao, later testified to the aptness of his remark.

Sixteen years later the jolly choleric was living in solitude. One of his last two nurses-cum-confidantes, former ballet trouper Meng Jinyun, confided in a ghost-writer to publish her memoirs in Hongkong²⁵, while the other, train-attendant-turned-private- secretary Zhang Yufeng, wrote a book and an article herself.²⁶ These are eerie recollections about an old man suffering from constant geriatric ailments since 1971, dependent on tales from informants and documents read aloud, reduced to mumbling and scribbling hardly intelligible Supreme Instructions, driven incognito to a car park at Wangfujing in order to risk a last silent glance at city life from behind the sedan's curtain. Access to Mao was tightly controlled, as he was effectively secluded from even most Politburo members. With mistrust and skepticism taking hold of him more and more, he was increasingly withdrawing to an inner world peopled by the archetypes of the Peking opera and classical literature.

²² Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao's Life*, pp. 103-105, 134-138; Jia Zhenqiu, *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, pp. 217-234.

²³ Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, pp. 195.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Guo Jinrong, *The Twilight Years of Mao Zedong*.

²⁶ Zhang Yufeng, *Mao Zedong yishi (Unrecorded Facts About Mao Zedong)* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1989); Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Life*, pp. 169-194.

Like Peng Dehuai, China's famous philosopher Liang Shuming is well known as an object of Mao's ire. Among the dozens of hagiographic books on Mao Zedong is a volume on his connections to this living legend of Confucianism, a relationship which lasted from 1918 until the notorious duel of words in September 1953.²⁷ In essence, the book is a tribute to Liang rather than an eulogy to Mao. It offers the full background to the clash between the two equally obstinate men, acclaims Liang's opposition to the Cultural Revolution and records his steadfast refusal to accept class struggle as the key to all historical progress.

Mao and the Soviet Union

One of the few books on Mao with foreign policy implications has been published by the Central Party School.²⁸ It introduces the Chairman in hymnal tones: "In the East of the world, a venerable, great country is rising, a country of outstanding men, a blessed land that has produced generations of heroes..." But this disguises the main subject: the troubled relations between the Soviet Union and the CCP. This is hardly new to the Western reader who has followed the long-time research into the relationship, or to the Chinese cadre who has read the many internal publications on it. But for the general public in China it means breaking another taboo. In 690 pages the book painstakingly lists all the mistakes of Stalin's China policy, from his misjudgment of the Kuomintang in 1925 to his lack of support for the Chinese side during the Korean War in 1950, from his opposition against the Chinese peasant movement to his concern about pro-American and anti-Soviet forces in the CCP. There is some new information on the secret Mikoyan visit to China of April 1948, the Liu Shaoqi return visit to Moscow in May 1949 and the drawn-out negotiations for a friendship treaty from December 1949 to February 1950. "It should be both tasty and handsome!" was Mao's guideline for the long face-saving exercises whose substance, as it turns out, was to cancel the Soviet prerogatives contained in the Yalta agreements and the embarrassing 1945 friendship treaty with Kuomintang China.²⁹

The Central Party School surely sticks to Mao's old formula for evaluating Stalin: 70 % good, 30 % bad. But by experienced dialectics this turns into 70 % text on Stalin's mistakes and 30 % on his positive contributions. Confirmation that Sino-Soviet relations can be discussed in a more frank way also comes from Mao's doctor Wang Haobin. In his otherwise disappointing memoirs he quotes the gist of Mao's opposition to Khrushchev's 1958 proposal for a joint fleet on a 50:50 basis: "Even in Yuan Shikai's unequal treaties with Japanese imperialism there were 51% for Yuan Shikai and 49% for the Japanese..."³⁰

²⁷ Wang Donglin, *Liang Shuming yu Mao Zedong (Liang Shuming and Mao Zedong)* (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1989). For the text of Mao's diatribes against Liang see also: *Mao Zedong xuanji (Mao Zedong's Selected Works)*, Vol. V, (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1977), pp. 107-115.

²⁸ Liu Jiecheng, *Mao Zedong yu Sidalin (Mao Zedong and Stalin)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1993).

²⁹ Cf. also the recollections of Mao's interpreter in Moscow in: Zheng Yi and Jia Mei (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Life*, pp. 26-43.

³⁰ Wang Haobin, *The Master of the Purple Cloud Pavillon*, pp. 141-142.

Unfortunately, the Mao-Khrushchev relationship which was also tense on the personal level is not further scrutinized. The reminiscences of Mao's translator on the world conference of all Communist Parties in Moscow 1957 remain faint and imprecise. Besides some brief information on a meeting between the Chinese Party chief and his Polish colleague Gomulka, they are only atmospheric.³¹ They are included in a collection of 73 memoirs that are mostly less interesting or have been published before. The book also contains articles by Western visitors of Mao's like Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Edward Heath or Franz Josef Strauss.

Mao and XXX

In addition to the above sources there is a whole class of secondary literature with endless variations on the theme "Mao Zedong and xxx", making use of memoirs published elsewhere. Among the better ones is a volume on 46 of his personal acquaintances in Party, educational, intellectual, united front and foreign visitor circles.³² The list is limited to persons in (mostly posthumous) grace, as all followers of Mao from the Party's Cultural Revolution group are banished. The same procedure applies to such special and close advisors from the Politburo as security chief Kang Sheng, who gained lasting "merits" by compiling dossiers against true or alleged Party enemies, or Wang Dongxing, the commander of the Central Committee's guard regiment and chief administrator of the Zhongnanhai compound, who also assisted in the selection and grooming of entertaining nurses. Similar works are largely repetitive with some new information or additional cast every once in a while.³³ In one instance, episodes from memorial literature are brought together to produce a rambling private biography.³⁴

Often these compilations touch briefly upon the fate of Mao's erstwhile colleagues during the Cultural Revolution. The general tendency is for an expurgated version, leaving out the cruel facts and craving for some ultimate reconciliation with a well-intentioned but erring Chairman - if not in life, then in ideal. Nowhere do the accounts reach the gruesome density of earlier personal recollections by the victims of the Cultural Revolution which were produced in the political thaw of the mid-1980s.³⁵ It is indicative that the names of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping are often dropped. Their clashes with Mao during the early 1960s are hardly mentioned. In those cases where Liu turns up, the details of his death are never mentioned. While the low points of Deng Xiaoping's career are mostly

³¹ Guo Simin, *Mao Zedong as Witnessed by Me*, pp. 111-120.

³² Song Yixiu and Yang Meiye (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Personal Relations*.

³³ The following monographs have been checked: Lu Haijiang and He Mingzhou (ed.), *Mao Zedong and His Contemporaries*, with 80 figures in Mao's youth as well as later acquaintances among renowned Republican politicians, CCP leaders, scholars and foreigners; Yu Jundao and Li Jie (ed.), *Mao Zedong jiaowang lu (Records of Mao Zedong's Social Contacts)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), with 57 personages of the same composition; Xue Jianhua, *Mao Zedong he ta de youpai pengyou (Mao Zedong and His Rightist Friends)* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1992), with 13 intellectuals, capitalists and former KMT politicians; Yu Hui and Zhong Hua (ed.), *Lingxiu jiaowang shilu xilie: Mao Zedong (The Encyclopedia of Leader's Contacts: Mao Zedong)* (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1992), with 75 Party leaders, united front contacts, intellectuals, family members and foreigners; Sun Qin'an and Li Shizhen (ed.), *Mao Zedong yu mingren (Mao Zedong and Famous Personages)*, 2 Vol., (Nanjing: Jiangsu renmin chubanshe, 1993), with 182 intellectuals.

³⁴ Hai Lude (ed.), *Shenghuo zhong de Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong in Life)* (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 1989).

³⁵ Compare in particular: Zhou Ming (ed.), *Lishi zai zheli chensi (Here History Is Steeped in Thought)* (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1986-1989), 6 Volumes.

glossed over, among the high points mentioned is the Politburo meeting presided over by Mao on 12 December 1973 during which the Chairman ordered a chorus singing of the "Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention" before announcing Deng's accession to a leading post in the Military Commission.³⁶

There is an inadvertent element of humor in such scenes. But is it humorous to read about Mao's acquaintance Wu Han who also misunderstood the Hai Rui ruminations of the Great Helmsman and whose ensuing suicide in 1967 is just faintly hinted at?³⁷ – His wife followed him to death, his imprisoned daughter became insane. And how are we to react to former classmate and biographer Xiao San who took proletarian internationalism too literally by marrying a German and cultivating Russian friends? He is on the record as a great friend of Mao - with either just a few sentences on his imprisonment as a spy during the last decade of the Chairman's life or no word on that subject at all.³⁸ His only consolation may be that even the tribulations of Zhou Enlai shrink to a pale shadow of reality. He is remembered by his gallant defense of many of Mao's later victims, by his and the Chairman's race against time after their increasingly threatening diagnoses in 1972, and their last personal encounter in December 1974. The most Zhou merits is a mention of the astounding fact of Mao's complete silence on the occasion of his death. But nobody dares to plunge into the depths of a very complicated master-servant relationship with changing roles over the years.

There is one singular exception to the general rule of evasion which permeates most of the literature. With a minuscule print-run of 5,000 copies, the collected biographies of 182 famous Mao friends compiled by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences reads like a requiem for China's intellectuals with whom the Chairman allegedly had the most intimate relations.³⁹ In contrast, and according to the observations of the commander of his bodyguards, he entertained almost no private relations with other Party leaders. In their introduction to the two volumes of the collected biographies the editors declare to aim at "an objective description... without passing judgment" in order to "avoid the curse of later generations". And they live up to this promise. The biographical entries are carefully edited and crammed with interesting details. They contain largely unknown correspondence with Mao and describe the relationship between the Chairman and numerous writers, academics, educators and journalists of the generations born between 1867 and 1931.

It is well-known that it has always been an ambiguous love-hate relationship on Mao's part. In detached, cool and emotionless language the two volumes record just how difficult it has been – thereby leaving an even greater impression. Elders of more than 70 years are sent for re-education to the countryside where they have to herd cattle or clean the latrines. Defendants get their arms stretched into the "jet-plane position" during their interrogations before "people's tribunals" or are kicked back and forth between their torturers. More than half of Mao's acquaintances are condemned to forced labor or years of imprisonment. But even if he learns of such tribulations, the Chairman rests in Olympian serenity: sometimes he intervenes, sometimes he lapses into an eloquent silence that

³⁶ Song Yixiu and Yang Meiye (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Personal Relations*, pp. 218-224.

³⁷ Yu Jundao and Li Jie (ed.), *Records of Mao Zedong's Social Contacts*, pp. 200-205; Lu Haijiang and He Mingzhou (ed.), *Mao Zedong and His Contemporaries*, pp. 39-42.

³⁸ Xue Jianhua, *Mao Zedong and His Rightist Friends*, pp. 274-298.

³⁹ Sun Qin'an and Li Shizhen (ed.), *Mao Zedong and Famous Personages*.

results in one more decade of imprisonment for the defendant. A list drawn up by Zhou Enlai and approved by Mao in August 1967 contains the names of only eight cadres to be spared from the attacks of the Cultural Revolution. Apart from the President of the Academy of Sciences Guo Moruo these are the still useful veteran politicians Song Qingling, Zhang Shizhao, Cheng Qian, He Xiangning, Fu Zuoyi, Zhang Zhizhong and Shao Lizi who survived from the Republican period and stayed on the Chinese mainland.

But the Shanghai collection of biographies is not only noteworthy for the recording of human misery. Among all the books under discussion here, only this work musters the courage to report on Mao's left-wing followers Zhang Chunqiao and Yao Wenyuan who have been intellectuals, too. It reports in detail their collusion with the Chairman from the secret preparations for the Cultural Revolution in 1965 until the ouster of Deng Xiaoping in April 1976.

Another exception to the usual conventions is a book which - although almost hidden by its publication via Guizhou Nationalities Press - is definitely one of the most important work under review here. Making use of authentic memoirs, minutes, self-examinations and other first-hand materials, it outlines the experiences of four of the men who acted as officially endorsed major secretaries for Mao: Tian Jiaying (1948-66), Li Rui (1958-59), Zhou Xiaozhou (1936-38) and Chen Boda (1939-70).⁴⁰ (The Chairman's other major secretaries Hu Qiaomu, Ye Zilong, Jiang Qing and Qi Benyu are not covered). The main focus is on Mao's behavior during the Great Leap Forward, the Peng Dehuai affair of 1959 and the Politburo and Central Committee meetings of August 1970 which foreshadowed the fall of his designated successor Lin Biao.

The day-by-day account of the 1959 Lushan conference based on minutes taken by conference participants and a later report on Zhou Xiaozhou is particularly detailed.⁴¹ Because it broke with the tradition of relatively frank discussion in the Party's leading bodies and cemented Mao's absolute dominance, this conference became the turning-point for Chinese communism. The main source for the account is a diary kept by Li Rui who acted as one of Mao's secretaries at that time. When he was arrested during the Cultural Revolution, the diary was confiscated by Chen Boda. After the rehabilitation of Peng Dehuai in 1980 the diary served as basic evidence for an officially commissioned work on the Lushan conference. It first was published in an internal edition of 1989. Since 1993 an enlarged Hongkong edition with additional materials from the Party archives and the struggle sessions against Peng Dehuai is available.⁴²

⁴⁰ Nan Guang (ed.), *Mao Zedong and His Four Major Secretaries*. Sources for the book are four commemorative pieces on Mao's secretary Tian Jiaying written by his wife and close colleagues, Peng Dehuai's and Chen Boda's self-examination, two research pieces on Zhou Xiaozhou and Chen Boda, the CC circulars on the Lin Biao affair as well as a volume by Li Rui on the 1959 Lushan conference. The latter was commissioned by the Party leadership in 1980 on the occasion of Peng Dehuai's rehabilitation.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 71-172, 196-201, 238-241.

⁴² Li Rui, *Lushan huiyi shilu (Records of the Lushan Conference)* (Hongkong; Tuandi tushu gongsi, 1993). For the earlier edition see: Li Rui, *Lushan huiyi shilu (Records of the Lushan Conference)* (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1989). An abbreviated summary and Li Rui's statements during the meetings for the discussion of the Central Committee's 1981 resolution on Party history can also be found in: Li Rui, *Mao Zedong de zaonian yu wannian (Mao Zedong's Youth and Old Age)*, (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1992), pp. 120-209.

Li Rui quotes Mao's admission of grave mistakes in numerous conversations during the earlier phase of the meeting and during an amicable chat with his critics after the receipt of Peng Dehuai's famed letter on the mistakes of the Great Leap. But this is followed by ominous machinations in regard to the conference's agenda and procedural questions. Mao's well-known conference speech signals a sudden volte-face characterized by self-defense. Even though the attacks on his opponents become increasingly violent, the counter-criticism of Peng Dehuai first starts in a mild manner. In this context, Zhou Enlai's attitude is particularly instructive. He and Politburo member Chen Yun had opposed Mao's economic "adventurism" during the first leap of 1956, causing the Prime Minister to become the target of repeated attacks by the Chairman in 1958 ("... only 50 meters distance from the rightists!") and to deliver a self-criticism. The minutes of his dialogue with Peng Dehuai that were recorded on 23 July 1959 only a few hours after Mao's speech throw a revealing light on the division of labor and the informal rules of the game in the leading circle:

Zhou Enlai: 90 million people have climbed to new heights. 10.7 million tons [of steel] are a revolution. But 27 to 30 million are without substance. We now have realistically targeted 13 million.

Peng Dehuai: [In my letter] I spoke of "losses and gains". This referred to the small, indigenous ones [steel furnaces] by the masses. Only them, not the ones with foreign [technology].

Zhou Enlai: Putting losses first was done intentionally. Realism and discouragement are two things.

Peng Dehuai: After 10.7 million tons the heads became heated. He [Mao Zedong] is also responsible for this. But the main line cannot vacillate. Moreover, he cooled down relatively early, already in October [1958]. Why did I send this letter to the Chairman? I had the feeling that the Communist Party does not dare to allow criticism. If you write something down, every word must be balanced. I really could not bear this any longer.

Zhou Enlai: The Chairman has said, in the main it [the letter] is good, but its direction is not quite correct. Of course, he did not mention names. But beware, there is nothing great here. You still have not reached the stage of "anti-adventurism", but there is such a tendency. It is only a problem of cognition until now, only this. Such a criticism is also beneficial.

Peng Dehuai: It violates basic principles of the Party, if no criticism can be voiced in the Communist Party !

Zhou Enlai: The targets for steel, iron, coal cannot be fulfilled. Quite tight. Transportation is a big problem, too. Timber, fertilizer, grain continue to be scarce. Capital construction is even more important. And then machines, budget, finances, foreign trade... Shanghai coal reserves are down to only seven days. Grain reserves stood at only 15.5 million tons in June. The population increased by 20.8 million last year. Judging from our experiences from the First Five-Year Plan, the relationship between money and material value should amount to 1 : 9.6 Yuan. In 1956 we had reached 1 : 8.8. Things became critical at that time.

Peng Dehuai: Why do we never talk about these things at the conference?

Zhou Enlai: We first talked about these difficulties, like on a meeting for remembering past bitterness. It is not good, if this is misunderstood and leads to discouragement.

Peng Dehuai: You know people just too well, always cunning and wily.

Zhou Enlai: That's a method. Didn't I commit the mistake to oppose adventurism in 1956? At that time I made big words and was ill-prepared. I spoke out at the second CC plenum. You have to be careful and learn your lesson. This time you stepped in for me. But in view of my experience you even wrote that the general

line has been mainly correct. You didn't use the word "adventurism". But I made statements in both directions.⁴³

However, three days after this dialogue the tone of criticism changes and a merciless witch-hunt starts against the persons who had dared to openly blame the Chairman for the Great Leap debacle and who had commented his diatribes against the inner-Party opposition with the remark "Like in Stalin's later years!". Meticulous minutes are produced. We thus learn that the speech of Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhang Wentian with critical statements on Mao was 8,000 characters long – but only 270 characters dealt with the achievements of the Great Leap, while the word "but" was used 39 times, the word "imbalance" 13 times, the words "bottleneck of production" 12 times, and the words "big losses" 108 times.⁴⁴

The verbatim records of two Politburo Standing Committee meetings on 31 July and 1 August 1959 are most noteworthy. Here a revengeful Chairman is lashing out on his critics, disciplining a dissenting Zhu De, cherishing a sycophantic Lin Biao and concentrating his dreaded powers of memory on the past career of Peng Dehuai.⁴⁵ Li Rui also pitilessly records the assiduous consent of most other Party leaders to Mao's tactics and their participation in the weeks of unceasing criticism and self-criticism. There also is the new text of a speech before the Central Committee on 11 August 1959 in which an incensed Mao condemns them all: the "anti-Marxists, people opposed to dialectical materialism, subjective idealists, empiricists..., bourgeois democrats..., dogmatists...."⁴⁶ After 29 days of such relentless accusations Peng Dehuai and his followers capitulate, and Mao at long last accepts their resignations from office and their self-criticisms as sufficient.

In all these cases the power of definition plays a crucial role. It is the Chairman who passes the judgment on sufficiency or insufficiency, and it is him who single-handedly decides the direction and scope of criticism. With his remark "We do not only debate problems but persons!" he unleashes attacks against opposition activities that, according to him, had been organized and planned long in advance. His order brings all attempts to treat the Peng Dehuai case as "a problem of cognition" to an end. In the Cultural Revolution it effectively amounts to a death verdict for Peng Dehuai. Mao played the same role as supreme judge in 1953 when he answered the carefully thought-out question whether Liang Shuming suffered from ideological or political problems. His answer "ideological problems", uttered after long hesitation before a breathless audience, spared the philosopher the worst.⁴⁷ Two years later Mao again intervened decisively when he changed the designation of writer Hu Feng from "anti-Party" to "counterrevolutionary element". This time the small editorial modification resulted in 21 years of imprisonment without trial and the insanity of the accused.⁴⁸

⁴³ Li Rui, *Records of the Lushan Conference*, pp. 162-163.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 136-144.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 201-239.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 330-345.

⁴⁷ Wang Donglin, *Liang Shuming and Mao Zedong*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ Sun Qin'an and Li Shizhen (ed.), *Mao Zedong and Famous Personages*, pp. 629-639.

Even in old age Mao continued to be feared for his outbursts of anger. In August 1970 he demonstrated the same ability to turn the tables on inner-Party opposition on Mount Lushan, where he suddenly claimed decades-long differences with his aghast secretary Chen Boda. This conference, the Politburo meeting preceding it and the Byzantine intrigues concerning the office of state presidency are also covered meticulously.⁴⁹

The more Mao refuses the position of state president (“I am a good director, not an actor!”), the more Lin Biao insists on a re-appointment to this office that had become vacant after the purge of Liu Shaoqi. Speculations focus on the likelihood that under the circumstances it will automatically fall to Mao’s deputy. But the more Lin Biao clings to his position, the more determined Mao becomes to abolish the office and to counter the plans of his “closest comrade-in-arms” who threatens to become too powerful. As a counter-move the Lin Biao camp pushes the glorification of the “ingenious, creative” contributions of the Chairman to ever new heights. It starts zealous attacks on “counterrevolutionary elements who will leap up for joy, if they hear that Chairman Mao will not become state president, ... who take advantage of his great modesty in order to denigrate Mao Zedong-thought...” Mao answers with a theoretical debate on the question whether in Marxism geniuses or the masses are the driving forces of history. After profound deliberations of such interesting matters of principle an uneasy truce is reached between the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman: Mao prevails with the abolishment of the state presidency, Lin is allowed to continue as his deputy. However, Mao’s secretary, Party theoretician Chen Boda who had supported Lin Biao, is purged for theoretical overestimation of the genius but practical underestimation of his ingenuity. His steep fall leads straight into the Qincheng jail for political prisoners where he stays for nearly a decade.

While these are the highlights of the volume on the four major secretaries of Mao, it also contains many other interesting details on customs in the Zhongnanhai compound for the political leadership. Life in the historical courtyards and villas of this hermetically secluded part of the imperial palace grounds is characterized by graded access privileges that gradually undermine the comradely atmosphere of former days and replace it with envy, mistrust and mutual observation. Also covered are decision-making processes in the CCP, such as Hu Qiaomu’s editing of Mao’s works in 1950 and 1960, secret stipulations adopted at the August 1958 Beidaihe conference against cadres doubting the steel production targets, Chen Boda’s and Zhang Chunqiao’s row over the drafting of the 1969 Party Congress documents, the use of secretaries for conducting grass-root surveys, and Mao’s skill in playing off feuding factions of the leadership.

Another important source is a volume with reminiscences on Mao’s major secretary Tian Jiaying who committed suicide in 1966. The work was edited by his widow and contains important information on internal Party affairs during the 1950s and 1960s, among them details on the conflicts between Mao and Liu Shaoqi after 1960. So domineering is the Chairman’s presence even in June 1962, that it is his single veto which prevents an early recourse to household farming at that time. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping had supported it and had asked Tian Jiaying to suggest this sensitive step to Mao Zedong in a clever way:

Mao Zedong listened silently. He did not utter one single word. This was completely different from the reporting to Liu Shaoqi, who had soon interrupted Tian Jiaying and had continuously stated his opinion

⁴⁹ Nan Guang (ed.), *Mao Zedong and His Four Major Secretaries*, pp. 258-286.

without any reservation. Mao Zedong finally posed a question to Tian Jiaying: "Does your suggestion give pride of place to the collective or the private economy?" This nailed down Tian instantaneously. He had not prepared an answer to this question which struck like lightning from the sky. Mao Zedong continued to ask: "Is this your personal opinion, or is it the opinion of somebody else?" Tian answered: "This is my personal opinion." Mao Zedong did not state his opinion at that time. But refraining from a statement also expresses a kind of attitude. He only did not voice his opinion.⁵⁰

Mao's inspection tours

Two books on Mao's inspection tours since 1952 also stand out. Both are uneven collections of disparate materials. These include the rather dull tour reports from the early 1950s which document Mao's emerging personality cult. They are mainly based on the complete text of Xinhua reports that were only published in abbreviated form at that time. More interesting are the reports on Mao's hectic inspection activities during the Great Leap Forward, ranging from his ebullient visions for a land of plenty during his August 1958 talks with commune zealots in North China to his increasing doubts about grossly inflated production figures after November of that year.⁵¹

Mao's sobering encounter with unabashed village elders from his native Shaoshan just prior to the Lushan conference is recorded here. His interlocutors complain about hunger rations, cadres beating up peasants, meals in unpopular canteens and the separation of couples in collective dormitories for men and women. Also recorded is a villager's reaction to official reports about paddy yields of 5,000 catties per mu: "What devil has cheated you there? They must have dumped grain on the fields!" Further topics are the Mao-Peng confrontation on Mount Lushan and Mao's veering between anti-Right and anti-Left courses in the rectification of communes.⁵²

Other highlights of the inspection tour accounts are the December 1965 meetings in Hangzhou and Shanghai, with Mao watching the inner-Party conflict about the Wu Han case and withholding judgment for days, inviting everybody to his birthday party and finally proclaiming his stand against his guest Peng Zhen in a toast at the dinner table⁵³; the inspection tour to Zhengzhou, Wuhan and Shanghai from July to September 1967 during which Mao personally mediated between royalist and ultra-leftist factions in the Wuhan incident before he escaped from the hot spot and revoked his more radical instructions for the Cultural Revolution⁵⁴; the autumn 1971 tour to the middle and lower Yangzi area, adding detail to the alleged assassination attempt which occurred at that time⁵⁵; and the long

⁵⁰ Dong Bian et al. (ed.), *Mao zedong he ta de mishu Tian Jiaying (Mao Zedong and His Secretary Tian Jiaying)*, (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1991), p. 69.

⁵¹ Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*; Xiao Xinli (ed.), *Xunshu dajiang nanbei de Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong Inspecting Areas North and South of the Yangzi)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1993).

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 163-287; Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, pp. 1-39, 194-198, 209-212, 217-285.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-208.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 174-180, 289-303; Xiao Xinli (ed.), *Mao Zedong Inspecting Areas North and South of the Yangzi*, pp. 371-381.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 402-419; Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, pp. 182-193.

sick-leave in Changsha from September 1974 to spring 1975 when Mao manipulated inner-Party feuding between the Left and the Zhou Enlai-camp from afar.⁵⁶

The inspector must have wavered in his evaluation of tour impressions. In addition to his usual infatuation with the creative powers of the masses, the literature also records the following excerpt from Mao's conversation with one of his bodyguards: "I worry. They hide many things from me. They can make preparations wherever I arrive. You should go down! You can see the true situation and report to me..."⁵⁷ A Chinese publication has even less illusions when it describes the inspection syndrome, in particular after 1959:

We can imagine that Mao Zedong's personal inspections of provinces, prefectures and counties at that time were different from his former investigations of the Hunan peasant movement or of land reform in Xingguo. What he could see on the spot were the ideal, successful points, the glorious side. As grass-root cadres, the lower-level cadres of provinces, prefectures and counties held an attitude handed down by Chinese culture: you report your successes to your superior and not your difficulties. Who among them would have shown Mao Zedong the dark, unfavorable or problematic aspects of his work? Who would have reported to him his defeats, mistakes or contradictions with the center? ...

Whenever reports on difficulties showed up, Mao Zedong immediately took them to mean criticism of himself. In this way, an intense atmosphere of struggle took hold of the whole Party. The character of problems gradually changed, people who held different views in front of Mao Zedong became persons who were bought, seduced, corrupted or influenced by the class enemies (including bourgeoisie, imperialism and revisionism), weak figures succumbing to the sugar-coated bullets.⁵⁸

Unfortunately, the inspection tour accounts are incomplete. They contain only partial minutes, suppress many pro-leftist interventions by Mao during his last years, and omit a large number of the Chairman's sojourns in various parts of China. There should be, for instance, approximately 25 different stays in Changsha⁵⁹ - but only ten are covered. Hangzhou, a favorite resting place for Mao during the winter season, is also neglected. And there is a striking absence of any account on Mao's campaigning during the Hundred Flowers Movement of 1957. In contrast to the well-documented Lushan conferences of 1959 and 1970, the decisive Beidaihe conference of August 1958 and Mao's internal statements on the eve of the Great Leap remain largely taboo. They seem to be embarrassing to some Party leaders who were carried away by Mao's rhetoric at that time.

Only hints are dropped in regard to the Chairman's prophesies that shook the mind of many a leader: the impending fall of the family institution, the industrialization of the country within five to seven years and the soon arrival of communist society, the abolishment of salaries and monetary payments and the transition to natural supplies, further forced expropriations on the way to the People's Commune of China.⁶⁰ The literature therefore presents the familiar picture of a mosaic that has to be pieced together from fragments. Nevertheless, some gems are revealed. One of these is the report on the Red Guard trial of former Foreign Affairs Minister Chen Yi. In the course of repeated mass interrogations Marshal Chen has been reduced to a thin shadow of his former corpulent and witty self. But Zhou

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-100.

⁵⁷ Li Pengcheng, *Mao Zedong and Chinese Culture*, p. 357.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 333, 338.

⁵⁹ Jia Zhenqiu (ed.), *Mao Zedong's Inspection Tours*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ Li Rui, *Mao Zedong's Youth and Old Age*, pp. 246-248.

Enlai and the then Chief of Staff Yang Chengwu rushed back to Peking from Wuhan in July 1967 in order to pass on a fresh insight from Mao: "Chen Yi is a good comrade." This produced the following scene during another struggle meeting in the Foreign Affairs College:

Chen to Yang: "Have you got any news?"

Yang: "Yes. The Chairman has said: 'Chen Yi is a good comrade'."

Chen: "What kind of face did he make during that remark?"

Yang: "He sat on the couch, smoked and was happy."

Chen mustering his spirit and suddenly declaring to the meeting in a loud voice: "Please, open the last page of *Quotations From Chairman Mao*. The Great Leader, Chairman Mao, is instructing us: 'Chen Yi is a good comrade'."

Instant outburst from the rebels down there: "Cheating!", "There is no such line!"

Chen after amusedly studying the children shouting and waiting until the clamor has subsided: "It has been transmitted by Comrade Yang Chengwu, testified by Premier Zhou and said by the Great Leader, Chairman Mao: 'Chen Yi is a good comrade.' Would all comrades please recite this Supreme Instruction together with me!"⁶¹

Political folklore

This episode leads straight to the last group of materials under review, for which the term political folklore seems most appropriate. Two examples should suffice to demonstrate the bent which Mao's life can take in the hands of Party propagandists with a sense for popular mythology. One consists of disjointed episodes put together under the tell-tale title *Mao Zedong in Danger*.⁶² Excerpts from the chapter head-lines give a flavor: "As Soon As Mao Zedong Stepped Into the Sleeping-Room of the Director, a Company of Soldiers Was Storming In"; "Li Te Exploded Like Thunder, Drew His Left Revolver and Pointed It At Mao"; "Chiang Kaishek Sent Three Telegrams to Invite Mao Zedong for Negotiations to Chongqing, Mao Did Not Care For His Own Safety and Made For the Tiger's Lair", "While the Enemies' Bullets Kept Whizzing Past Mao's Head, He Walked On Steadfastly". All the couplets for a modernized edition of *Water Margin* seem to be ready ... and a volume on *The Enigma of Mao* picks up the thread.⁶³ It recounts the struggle between Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong, "the two dragon sons of heaven", the "water dragon's" flight to Taiwan and the "heavenly dragon's" ultimate triumph, made possible by Mao's prudent consultation of a Daoist. The old wizard advised the conqueror to enter Beijing on 9 September 1949, a good date for strengthening the Yang and weakening the Yin. And in reply to Mao's question about the length of the newly-won peace he uttered a mystical number: 8341. It turns out to be the later code for Mao's unit of bodyguards, with

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 299.

⁶² Li Zhanping and Li Shuqin (ed.), *Mao Zedong lixian ji (Mao Zedong in Danger)* (Beijing: Zhongguo shuji chubanshe, 1993).

⁶³ Xiao Feng and Ming Jun (ed.), *The Enigma of Mao Zedong*.

83 presaging the span of Mao's life and 41 alluding to the years that will pass between Mao's ascent to leadership at the Zunyi meeting of 1935 and his death in 1976.

We have left the sinister domain of politics and are back to the blissful land of the preordained - which, because of its inherent justification for the status quo, is just the way some people would like to have it. But as foreign infidels we cannot fail to take note of the victims on the long march to destiny. This modest reading of just 43 works reveals: eight major secretaries of Mao, among whom three committed suicide, three suffered more than a decade of imprisonment and one was forgotten for nine years; four designated successors, one dumped in a crematorium (Liu Shaoqi), one crashed in the desert (Lin Biao), one imprisoned until his death (Wang Hongwen), and one disposed of soon after the Chairman's decease (Hua Guofeng); nine other close comrades-in-arms who perished in the Cultural Revolution and dozens sent off to prolonged periods of labor reform; three wives divorced or sacrificed for politics, three sons meeting death in war and revolution, one son mentally deranged, one adopted son imprisoned immediately after his benefactor's death, and four daughters dead or missing. And there are other disturbing scenes: General Luo Ruiqing whose limbs were broken during a failed suicide attempt insists on a limping salute to the Chairman; former Party-head Li Lisan praises Mao before swallowing a deadly overdose of pills; secretary Tian Jiaying who, after risking some frank remarks in front of Mao, breaks down, kneels before the Chairman and begs for forgiveness; writer Ding Ling, banished to a Chinese Siberia, who returns after Mao's death to confirm the greatness of her persecutor...

Mao has put it well: "Revolution is not a dinner party." But what else is it ? The literature reviewed here seems uncertain in its final judgment. Mao as the founding-father of New China, the architect of national unification, the guardian of China's independence and the prime mover of her renewed march to wealth and power is uncontested.⁶⁴ But he remains controversial as the Great Rebel and Great Egalitarian of modern Chinese history, provoking reactions that range from deliberate down-play to lasting horror.

It is reassuring to read Li Rui's reflections on traditional elements in Mao's thinking and his left-wing voluntarism starting in 1951-52 with the acceleration of rural collectivization and the abrupt termination of New Democracy - they signify the existence of independent thought and a new, more empirical Party history literature.⁶⁵ His personality cult and his belief in historical cycles, his clinging to Confucian or Legalist philosophies of the state and his borrowings from the Chinese classics, his peasant egalitarianism and utopian thought from the Chinese tradition are the catchwords that describe Mao's deep ambivalence vis-à-vis China's heritage. Radically rejected and favorably received at the same time, it continues to provide points of reference for molding the country's future. Li Rui finds the circumstances of the Great Leap revealing for the mental universe of Mao. While the Party's agricultural department hoped to whip up enthusiasm by transmitting the utopian writings of China's late-Confucian philosopher Kang Youwei (1858-1927) to the grass roots, and Mao eulogized the Daoist revolutionary Zhang Lu

⁶⁴ Comp. the archetypical Qu Zhi (ed.), *Lishi da chao zhong de Mao Zedong* (Mao Zedong in the Surge of History) (Beijing: Renmin Zhongguo chubanshe, 1992).

⁶⁵ Li Rui, *The Reading Matter of the Young Mao Zedong*, pp. 279-286; also printed in: *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), Beijing: 28 March 1988. Comp. also Li Rui, *Mao Zedong's Youth and Old Age*, pp. 294-319.

(2nd century A.D.) before the Central Committee, Party theoreticians excerpted the passages on the future Communist society contained in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. Basic supplies free of charge, restrictions for private property and limitations for social hierarchies are the common denominators of these diverse sources of inspiration which fired the communist movement in Europe as well as Chinese peasant uprisings of the past.

Another work on the Chairman interprets the old and new Mao cult in the context of a popular craving for protecting deities firmly rooted among Chinese peasants.⁶⁶ It shows that many members of the urban elite are well aware of Mao's dubious position in Chinese political culture and his dual role as a harbinger of future tidings and a burden from the country's past. Li Rui links up with present times by warning against the continuing obstacles for reform policies that are created by Maoist thinking. He traces the roots of the Party's disregard for democracy back to a tradition of paternalism and feudalism. Moreover, he calls for taking the 1981 *Resolution on Party History* as the beginning rather than the termination of new studies on Mao.⁶⁷ The implications become evident in his remarkable work on the left-wing extremism of Mao Zedong during the later stages of his career. The book openly points out the similarities that exist between Mao's early abandonment of New Democracy (in 1950 still declared as a project for the next decades) and the transition to socialism pushed through in 1953 on the one side, and the utopian leap experiments pursued by the Chairman since 1958 on the other.⁶⁸ This is clearly different from the orthodox Party line which has reaffirmed Mao's policies before 1958. Yet another study therefore vaguely alludes to problems "that until now have found no thorough theoretical solution".⁶⁹

The majority of the studies under discussion here does not contribute to such reflections on Party history. Quite the opposite, they resort to anecdotal story-telling and to a high degree of conformity with the 1981 *Resolution on Party History*. Criticism is allowed only of the Chairman's post-1957 policies. In these works Mao's campaign against counter-revolutionaries after 1949 and his intensely debated timing for the expropriation of industrialists, the Gao Gang purge of 1954, the Hu Feng affair and the accelerated collectivization drive of 1955, the first Leap Forward of 1956 and the Hundred Flowers of 1957 continue to be taboo. Mao the revolutionary strategist before 1949 is also sacrosanct. A Mao-saga for children shows the desire to continue the hero cult, uphold socialist legitimacy and eschew unwanted debates in its most extreme form: it simply terminates Mao's biography in the early 1950s, at a time where many people who used to wish him "ten thousand years of never-ending life" and who now have got wiser would have liked to send him off to honorable retirement.⁷⁰

Of course, it is legitimacy what it is all about. How can it be explained that in 1981 the Central Committee continued to endorse the achievements of the 1955 collectivization drive – with quasi-privatization of agriculture prevailing today? Why was it necessary to confiscate private enterprises during the mid-1950s – when so much effort is spent on their re-establishment today? Why do we have to praise Mao's campaigns against the Chinese

⁶⁶ Xiao Feng and Ming Jun (ed.), *The Enigma of Mao Zedong*, pp. 342-372.

⁶⁷ Li Rui, *Mao Zedong's Youth and Old Age*, pp. 319-326.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 210-326.

⁶⁹ Li Pengcheng, *Mao Zedong and Chinese Culture*, pp. 295f, 300, 302f, 329, 331.

⁷⁰ Shi Zhongquan and Chen Dongcao (eds.), *Mao Zedong de gushi (The Mao Zedong Story)* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao, 1993), 10 volumes.

intellectuals since 1951 – when almost all their victims have been openly or tacitly become rehabilitated by now? What remains of Chinese communism, if only the struggle for an independent, free and democratic China is reconfirmed – and all later campaigns are seen as ending up in failure?

Most Chinese studies want to preserve positive memories of the Chairman. Their stance reflects the very traditional assumption that stability and power rest on unity in publicly proclaimed thought and strength in autocratic leadership. Not surprisingly, this belief is expressed by another Chinese autocrat. Yet the unresolved issues of the literature signal an unresolved conflict between yearning for a strong man and aching under him, a conflict, which transforms into the tensions between compliance and defiance in Chinese politics and in its twin - Chinese historiography.

Coping with problems by resorting to hero worship, trivialization and suppression of deviant thought seems to be a ready solution for many difficulties, those of past interpretation as well as those of present policy. But in this browsing of the new Mao-literature we have also strolled across different chambers and corners of China's memory. While politics still enter it with much noise through the front door, history quietly slips in through the back door.