**From Mao to Deng: Feldman, Harvey.**

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*The revolutionary zeal that characterized Mao's programs was transformed into pragmatism under Deng Xiaoping*.

In 1945, shortly before the Japanese surrender, Gen. Albert Wedemeyer, the representative in China of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and senior American military adviser to the Nationalist government, cabled Washington: "If peace comes suddenly, it is reasonable to expect widespread confusion and disorder. The Chinese have no plans for rehabilitation, prevention of epidemics, restoration of utilities, establishment of a balanced economy and redisposition of millions of refugees."

Peace did come suddenly, and in the months that followed, Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government showed itself quite unable to manage the country's reconstruction. Economic mismanagement and widespread corruption eroded the popular support that had been theirs when the war ended.

More than anything else, it was this that gave Mao Zedong's communist forces the opening for victory in the civil war that had started in Shanghai in 1927 and had gone on, with fits and starts, even during the fight against Japan. Despairing, China's urban population-the shopkeepers and small businessmen as well as the academics and intellectuals-- came to feel that any other government would be preferable to the incompetent, fumbling Nationalists.

In Chiang's armies, many times larger than Mao's in 1946, entire divisions deserted with their weapons. Other units simply refused to fight. When, on October 1, 1949, Mao proclaimed the People's Republic of China (PRC), an exhausted people, hoping for stability and reconstruction, exulted.

Mao was born on December 26, 1893, in Hunan Province. His father, he said, was a "middle peasant" who farmed a four-acre rice paddy, a cruel man who often beat Mao and pulled him out of school to work on the family farm. He ran away from home several times, and his education remained spotty until 1913, when at age 20 he entered a teacher's college in Hunan's capital, Changsha.

The rise of Mao

It was there that Mao had his first exposure to Marxism, an exposure heightened when in July 1918 he found a position at Being University as an assistant librarian. In Being the 25-yearold Mao learned of the October Revolution in Russia and the triumph of Leninism; and it was there, Mao later wrote, that the books he read "built up in me a faith in Marxism from which once I had accepted it as the correct interpretation of history, I did not afterwards waver."

Among those who stood in the group with Mao at the proclamation of the PRC was a short, stocky communist from Sichuan, Deng Xiaoping. In late 1919, when only 16 years old, Deng had traveled to France together with Zhou Enlai and other older students as part of a work-study program. They lived in or near Paris, studied French, and took menial jobs to support themselves. Together with Zhou, Deng joined first the French Communist Party then, after it was established, the "European Section of the Chinese Communist Party." In 1925, a few years after returning to China, Deng was in Moscow, where he studied at "the Toilers of the East University." He was back in China in 1927, just in time for the outbreak of fighting between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kuomintang (KMT). Before long he joined Mao in his guerrilla base in the Jingkang Mountains of Jiangsi Province.

Deng remained loyally at his side as Mao led his forces in ferocious battles against Chiang's KMT troops and in equally ferocious battles contesting leadership within the CCP and Stalin's interference from Moscow. As Mao rose to the top after the CCP settled in Yenan following the Long March in 1934, Deng rose with him, becoming senior political commissar for the Red Army, a post he held throughout both the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and the resumed civil war that followed.

Although Mao's armies had been peasant formations led by intellectuals, and although Marxist dogma demanded that the revolution be spearheaded by the proletariat, victory had been achieved by the capture of China's cities, bastions of the urban bourgeoisie. Therefore in a mid-1949 essay, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," Mao called for a "domestic united front" linking the "peasantry, the urban petite bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie" under the leadership of the working class.

Making China red

The main tasks the new government set itself were restoring order, reducing ruinous inflation, rebuilding heavy industry on the Soviet model, and boosting agricultural production. The educated technical and managerial elites had to be persuaded to work for the new state, and the rich peasants-whose surpluses would be crucial to feeding China's cities-- had to be persuaded that they had a bright future under communism.

Land reform destroyed the power base of the old landlord class and the rural gentry. Landlords denounced in "speak bitterness" meetings were often executed. In the cities, workers were reorganized into CCP-led unions, and newspapers, films, and radio worked ceaselessly to build support for the new government.

As party membership increased in cities, control was extended down to the ward and ultimately to the block and housing-unit level. In rural areas, party activists, often demobilized members of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), moved from county to town and into the villages themselves. Each of these units had responsibility for security and could be used to track criminals or the disaffected, enforce curfews, and mobilize neighborhood groups for government-appointed tasks.

The people's desire for stability and reconstruction seemed to be shared by the government-- until June 25, 1950, when North Korean troops invaded across the 38th parallel and the Korean War was on. As long as the North Koreans appeared to be winning, PRC media paid scant attention to what was going on. But as the U.S.led UN forces regrouped and turned the tide, Chinese propaganda became increasingly harsh.

The whole country was summoned to condemn "the barbarous action of American imperialism and its hangers-on in invading Korea, menacing the peace of Asia and the world in general, and seriously threatening the security of China." Chinese troops began quietly infiltrating into North Korea and in November began a general offensive.

The domestic significance of the Korean War was profound. The PLA suffered almost a million casualties in the two and a half years of fighting, affecting an enormous number of Chinese families. But Mao was inspired by the courage and endurance of the Chinese troops who were willing to attack, and fall, in huge numbers against better-armed and better-equipped troops. Human wave attacks had fought the Americans to a standstill.

Domestic calm was now shattered by anti-American and anti-foreign movements, soon joined by an "anti-rightist" campaign. As those foreigners, missionaries, and businessmen who had remained behind were imprisoned, beaten, and expelled from China, the "national bourgeoisie"-previously part of Mao's united front-were targeted as well. As China scholar Jonathan Spence has written, "For millions of Chinese, the violence and humiliation of those days effectively ended any hope that they would be able to live out their lives peacefully under the Communist regime."

Campaigns and mass movements followed each other in rapid succession and would continue to do so as long as Mao remained alive: the rural cooperative movement in which peasants "voluntarily" handed to cooperatives the land that had been distributed to them; the Hundred Flowers campaign in which the frightened intellectuals were encouraged to air their grievances, followed by the anti-- rightist campaign, which punished those who dared to do so. These were followed by one of Mao's most destructive ventures, the Great Leap Forward.

The Great Leap Forward

China's drive toward economic modernization on the Soviet model was beginning to stall, and the Soviets were making China pay handsomely for aid. Agricultural production had plateaued. The solution, said Mao, was "continuing revolution"-- mobilization of society on a gigantic scale. The peasantry would voluntarily form shock battalions to bring new lands into production while organizing themselves into communes with "community dining rooms, kindergartens, nurseries, sewing groups, barber shops, public baths, and happy homes for the aged."

But the commune life proved a severe disincentive, and the diversion of labor into reclaiming marginal land dropped production rather than increasing it. Meanwhile, in the cities, neighborhood groups were urged to start backyard "steel mills," which produced mostly slag. Before long, famine surged through the countryside, and deaths, according to later official figures, exceeded 20 million between 1959 and 1962.

Mao's Great Leap and its obvious failure was derided by the Soviet Union, China's principal ally. The theory of "continuing revolution" looked like the heresy of Trotskyism, and Mao's demand that the USSR share with China the secret of making thermonuclear weapons was unnerving, particularly in the aftermath of PRC attacks on Nationalist-held islands in the Taiwan Straits. In September 1960, after a continuing series of disputes, the USSR withdrew all its 1,390 experts working in China, taking with them their blueprints. According to the PRC, 343 contracts were summarily canceled and 257 other technical projects halted.

With the immense failure of the Great Leap and his inability to manage relations with the USSR apparent, Mao now "retired from the front line," leaving others in the leadership group-Liu Shaoqi the head of state, Zhou Enlai the premier, and Deng Xiaoping, the secretary-general of the CCP-to find ways to make good the nation's losses. Revolutionary enthusiasm was dethroned and more pragmatic policies introduced.

By 1965 agricultural production had reached the pre-Great Leap levels of 1957, light industry was expanding at 27 percent annually, and heavy industry at 17 percent. Domestic oil production was up tenfold, thanks to the new wells at Daqing. The party professionals' formula of slow, steady progress seemed to point the way to China's future.

The Cultural Revolution

But even on the sidelines Mao retained considerable authority. Lin Biao, whom Mao had made minister of defense and later elevated to be his heir-apparent, made the PLA into an instrument personally loyal to Mao. He found a natural ally in Jiang Qing, a former stage and screen actress who was now Mao's third wife.

In February 1966, Mao declared that party bureaucrats were "taking the capitalist road" and that conservatism and lethargy had drained away the necessary revolutionary elan. He called on the masses to arise up and assault the headquarters." Together with Lin, Jiang, and Jiang's allies from Shanghai, the 73-year-old Mao declared war on the party of which he was chairman.

Over the next two years China descended into a kind of hysteria without parallel in world history. All the leading members in the party and the government were purged, with the sole exception of Zhou and those few whom he was able to protect. Students as young as elementary school age were organized into the Red Guards and turned loose to demolish priceless art objects and temples that had stood for a millennium and to denounce their teachers, party leaders, and parents. Tens of thousands of intellectuals were beaten to death. Anyone who had had a Western education, or had dealt with westerners, was liable to denunciation.

For years the party had demanded that the youth lead lives of restraint, selflessness, and revolutionary sacrifice. Now they had their revenge. Deng was beaten and paraded through the streets of Being. His eldest son, Deng Pufang, became a paraplegic after being thrown from a high window by Red Guards. The Red Guards were told to attack "everything which does not fit the socialist system and proletarian dictatorship." Just what those things were was left to them.

Much later, long after the madness had subsided, the government estimated that 20-30 million people lost their lives during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. More recently, we have learned that in some provinces, like Gueizhou, Red Guards actually ate their "class enemies." No one will ever know the true number of those who perished, but it was probably closer to 40 million.

With society close to complete breakdown, the pendulum began slowly swinging in the other direction, assisted by external events. The decade-long battle of polemics between Moscow and Being grew more heated. In the spring of 1969, there were military clashes with Soviet troops on China's western and northeastern borders. These culminated in a major battle along the Ussuri River, a battle in which 100 Soviet and 800 Chinese soldiers died.

Rebuilding the ruins

Mao-the product of continuous struggle and guerrilla warfare, first against his family and thereafter against both the Nationalists and the Japanese-- had wanted to build in China a new, purified form of Marxism, based on mass revolutionary zeal, self-sacrifice, and self-reliance. But the Cultural Revolution left the country in ruins, threatened by a powerful neighbor with whom it shared a 4,500-mile border, and with an exhausted population. Once more, reconstruction had to be the principal task of the government. This time, even Mao agreed.

Against the opposition of Jiang and her group, Zhou persuaded Mao to recall Deng from internal exile. He was made vice premier and given responsibility for economic planning. But the left-right struggle was far from over, particularly since it was clear by 1974 that leadership change was inevitable. Zhou was ill with cancer, and Mao, who could no longer conceal his Parkinson's disease, never appeared in public without nurses at his side.

The group around Jiang, dubbed the "Gang of Four" representing the party's left wing, demanded continuation of the commune system, rural development based on Maoist enthusiasm, and self-reliance internationally. Medical care was to be provided by "barefoot doctors" rather than Western-educated physicians. Youth from poor peasant families should be admitted to colleges and universities without formal examination.

Zhou and the resuscitated Deng wanted more dynamic economic growth, drawing on foreign technology, expertise, trade, even investment. Late in 1969, Mao together with Zhou began planning a strategic breakthrough in foreign affairs by rapprochement with the United States. Although Henry Kissinger awarded himself credit, it was the Chinese side that initiated the process in January 1970, by stating at one of the periodic meetings in Warsaw that it saw the possibility of "talks at a higher level, or through other channels acceptable to both sides." Meanwhile, Hua Guofeng, whom Mao had raised up from obscurity and appointed his successor-to-be with the words With you in charge, my heart's at ease," seemed to be the man in the middle, leaning first toward one group then the other.

Zhou died of cancer on January 8, 1974, and the whole country seemed to mourn. But Mao sent no message of condolence to Zhou's widow, nor did he attend Zhou's state funeral, perhaps because it was Deng, then vice premier, who delivered the eulogy. In what many thought were words aimed at Mao and Jiang, Deng praised Zhou as a man who "showed boundless warm-heartedness toward all the comrades and the people."

Later that spring crowds filled Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou and demand that the leadership hear their grievances, only to be dispersed brutally by security forces. Jiang said Deng had instigated "the rioters.' Two days later the Central Committee announced that Deng had been removed from all posts in the government and party.

For most of the next two years the party, led by Hua and Jiang, engaged in a bitter anti-- Deng campaign. Deng, they said, believed the class struggle was over. He wanted "to rely on those proficient in technical or professional work" rather than party cadres. He was accused of other, similar sins. Meanwhile, Deng had taken refuge in Canton, protected by Xu Shiyou, the military governor of Guandong.

Mao died on September 9, 1976. Hua gave the eulogy, but Jiang and her allies were prominently present. Less than a month later, she and the other members of the "Gang of Four" were arrested and charged with counterrevolutionary crimes. Nine months after that, in July 1977, backed by China's most senior military leaders, Deng was back in Beijing: vice premier, member of the Politburo, chairman of the Military Affairs Commission. Hua, never punished, never purged, faded slowly from the scene.

Those senior party members still alive were brought back into public life, or at least allowed to live out their final days in honor. Chinese students were sent overseas. Foreign businessmen and investors were welcomed back to China. "Learn truth from facts," said Deng. And "I don't care if the cat is black or white, so long as it catches the mice."

The communes, those decaying institutions throttling agricultural production, were abandoned, and while the price paid for grain demanded by the state under the quota system was raised 20 percent, the price paid for grain sold to the state over and above the quota was raised by 50 percent. [Coca-Cola](http://www.historystudycentre.co.uk/search/displaySuitemPqProxyAsciiItemById.do?UseMapping=SuitemPqProxyAscii&QueryName=suitem&fromPage=studyunit&ItemID=19987&PQID=45215864&format=TG&collectionsTag=&cacheImages=true&resource=pq) was invited to open a bottling plant in Shanghai. The Chinese national airline announced it was buying three [Boeing](http://www.historystudycentre.co.uk/search/displaySuitemPqProxyAsciiItemById.do?UseMapping=SuitemPqProxyAscii&QueryName=suitem&fromPage=studyunit&ItemID=19987&PQID=45215864&format=TG&collectionsTag=&cacheImages=true&resource=pq) 747s. The era of Deng Xiaoping, with its economic triumphs and its recurrent political tragedies, had begun.

Sidebar

Casting a Long Shadow

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Sidebar

The Tragedy of Tiananmen

On April 15, 1989, a disgraced former secretary-general of the CCP named Hu Yaobang died. Plucked from the ranks and elevated to be Deng Xiaoping's heir-apparent, Hu had been dismissed after flirting with the idea of greater democracy for China. But Beijing students began demonstrating by the thousands in Tiananmen Square to honor Hu's memory and to demand more transparent, more democratic government decision making and an end to official corruption.

Angered by the students' refusal to abandon their protests, frightened by their growth and spread in Being, Shanghai, and beyond, in late April the CCP began calling the movement a "planned conspiracy against the government"-implying arrest and punishment. But instead of being intimidated, the students increased their protests, and the calls for democratic freedoms became bolder. Teachers, journalists, ordinary citizens, and-to the Communist Party most frightening of all-workers joined in. On May 4, the 70th anniversary of student protests against warlord governments, over 100,000 marched in Beijing.

With the protests and marches continuing, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in Beijing on May 15 for a summit with Deng intended to formally mark the end of the Sino-- Soviet feud. Students welcomed him as the man who had liberalized communism in the USSR and used the occasion to demand similar reforms in China. A hunger strike to reinforce their demands began, and television images of fasting students formed the background to Gorbachev's calls on Chinese government officials.

CCP Secretary-General Zhao Ziyang tried to mute the conflict, but with students calling openly for his resignation and the Gorbachev visit marred, Deng was furious. On May 19 Zhao was close to tears, begging the students to end their fasts and go home. The next day, the government declared martial law and began bringing troops into Beijing.

The ordinary people of Beijing began building barricades. They sabotaged army vehicles by putting sugar in the gas tanks and letting air out of the tires. For two weeks the army seemed unable to clear a square crammed with demonstrators and filled with dirt and garbage. But then, just when the movement seemed to be waning, art students from Beijing University brought to the square a plaster and Styrofoam statue of the goddess of liberty, 30 feet high, reinvigorating the protests.

Late on the night of June 3, newly summoned veteran troops struck in full force. Backed by heavy tanks and armored personnel carriers, they smashed the barricades, firing at random into the crowds. In the early hours of June 4, their leaders called on the students to depart. But as the students left the square, the troops attacked, chasing and shooting indiscriminately

Rumors of civil war and coup were in the air. But in the end, the victory of the party hardliners, headed by Deng and Premier Li Peng, was complete. Zhao was dismissed and placed under house arrest. Many of his associates went to labor education camps. Those student leaders who could be caught were given long prison terms.

No one can be quite sure how many civilians died on June 4 or in the roundups that followed. But it was clear that many hundreds had been killed and many thousands wounded. And despite Deng's view that the world would soon forget all about it, the stain remains.

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