

# **POLITICS AT THE 'CORE': THE POLITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF MAO ZEDONG, DENG XIAOPING AND JIANG ZEMIN**

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During the grand parade celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1 October 1999, three floats appeared among the displays of regime achievements and the demonstration of military might. These floats represented the three 'core leaders' of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the PRC period and indeed going back to the 1930s during the Party's revolutionary struggle—Mao Zedong, the 'core' of the so-called 'first generation' which won the revolution and established the PRC, Deng Xiaoping, the 'core' of the 'second generation' who became the 'paramount leader' after Mao's death and guided China on her reform course, and Jiang Zemin, the current Party leader and 'core' of the 'third generation' who gradually consolidated his leading position during the 1990s. While the concept of 'core' was designed to convey a predominant guiding role for an individual in a collective leadership, the three leaders so designated have been dramatically different men, who emerged in very different times with contrasting problems, and were moved by their own visions and goals. My task is to examine these contrasting individuals and their circumstances, as well as the linkages among them and to the larger political system.<sup>1</sup>

In broad terms, key distinctions among the three leaders are well known. Mao was the visionary, the romantic revolutionary, and above all the all-powerful figure who, after 1949, was always obeyed even when he launched initiatives profoundly destructive of individual, organizational and national interests. 'Emperor' well and truly captures the Chairman's position in the system. Deng was,

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<sup>1</sup> In carrying out this task I have benefited greatly from my decade and a half collaboration with Dr Warren Sun of Monash University, particularly with regard to our joint work on the Maoist period, and our current research on the early post-Mao period (see below, n. 60).

in comparison, a pragmatist more interested in measurable results than grand visions, but he shared Mao's steely determination to get things done his way. This, however, was linked to a willingness to consult and modify positions in a manner foreign to the 'later Mao' of the post-1957 period. Nevertheless, while falling well short of Mao's power, Deng still had enormous clout and, in my view, never lost a battle he decided to contest. He might best be characterized as the 'political boss' of the post-Mao period into the early 1990s. Jiang, of course, is a figure who cannot remotely compare to Mao or Deng in initiating great historical developments or in political power. His role has been to manage and develop policy orientations already laid down by Deng, while at the same time consolidating his own political power and sustaining that of the CCP. He has had to operate in a much more complex setting than his predecessors without anything like their revolution-based authority. He is perhaps best understood as the 'Chief Executive Officer'—the 'CEO'—of today's China.

While the above characterizations capture essential aspects and differences of the three 'core leaders', more subtle understandings of their evolving personas and situations will be discussed below. First, however, some remarks on the concept of 'core' are in order. The notion of a 'core leader' only emerged in the context of the crisis of spring 1989 which culminated in the Tiananmen tragedy. While paling in comparison to such terms as 'great helmsman' and 'paramount leader' that reflected the majesty and clout of Mao and Deng respectively, the term 'core' was clearly designed to bolster the position of Jiang Zemin, newly installed against all expectations as CCP General Secretary following the removal of Zhao Ziyang during the crisis.<sup>2</sup> It was a higher rhetorical and symbolic position than those granted his predecessors as General Secretary, Hu Yaobang and Zhao, who laboured under the notion of 'collective successors'. Yet the notion of 'core' was firmly tied to that of the collective leadership of different generations in an effort to

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<sup>2</sup> The first reference to the concept appears to be in Deng's talk of 31 May 1989, when he informed 'two leading members' of the Central Committee (Politburo Standing Committee members Li Peng and Yao Yilin) that the lower ranking Jiang would be promoted over them to become the new Party leader; *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping, vol. III (1982-1992)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994), p. 293. Deng subsequently laid out the concept more systematically in a talk on 16 June, and used it to confirm Jiang's status on a number of additional occasions during the remainder of 1989. See *ibid.*, pp. 300-1, 308, 312-13.

balance the need for an authoritative leader with the need to prohibit the type of destructive one-man rule that Mao had exercised in his 'later years'. In the hasty construction of the concept, however, several historical distortions resulted.

One aspect, obviously, was the inappropriateness of the notion of collective leadership as it applied to Mao's rule, where at best it had a limited scope, and in some crucial respects to the Deng period as well, matters to be explored below. Only Jiang has been clearly answerable to a collective. Another issue has been the designation of the three generations, a convenience to describe separate periods of inner-Party power arrangements rather than the age or revolutionary history of the individuals concerned. In some respects it would be more appropriate to telescope the 'first' and 'second' generations into a single category—the key figures were all makers and shakers of the Chinese revolution. While 'first generation' leaders headed by Mao, Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai were usually older and more senior in Party status, this was not invariably the case.<sup>3</sup> The crucial distinction was simply those who survived Mao to play a key role after 1976—most importantly Deng and Chen Yun, and those who did not. Arguably, the true (missing) 'second generation' was represented by Deng's initial failed choices as successor, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. These leaders, 10 to 15 years younger than Deng, performed significant if comparatively low-ranking leadership roles during the revolution, and held quite important positions from 1949 to the Cultural Revolution before becoming key reformers under Deng. In comparison, Jiang's 'third generation' was too young to play more than a tangential role in the revolution, rose steadily through bureaucratic institutions after 1949, and only achieved truly significant positions in the reform era.

In assessing the three 'core leaders', various issues will be examined including the historical context in which they emerged, the means by which they achieved power, the nature of their rule as leader, and their arrangements for successors. Inevitably, in dealing with these issues we are faced with a decline in the volume and accuracy of information as one proceeds from Mao to Deng to Jiang.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Liu and Chen Yun, the ranking figure of the 'second generation' after Deng, both joined the Politburo in the early 1930s, and worked together at the very highest level under Mao after 1949. 'Second generation' leader Ye Jianying, moreover, was actually older than either Liu or Zhou.

This is not simply a question of the greater attention Mao's spectacular career has drawn in Western scholarly works and Chinese documentary sources. For all its remaining political sensitivity, in key respects the Mao era, and Mao himself, qualify as 'history' in the PRC today, while the Deng era with its policy and personnel links to the current leadership still falls squarely in the realm of 'politics' with all the limitations and distortions that implies.<sup>4</sup> And for Jiang, the grey bureaucratic nature of much of his early career combined with the deliberate opaqueness of elite politics in the 1990s presents an especially restricted record. These problems notwithstanding, meaningful assessments can be made of each of the 'core leaders'.

### **Mao Zedong: The Great Helmsman, the Saviour of the Chinese People, the Emperor<sup>5</sup>**

The very terms used to describe Mao Zedong, the first two staples of official propaganda during different periods, the latter a perception within the elite<sup>6</sup> as well as the observation of outsiders, convey the awe attached to someone who fundamentally reshaped and dominated his country. What was the context which shaped and facilitated the emergence of so remarkable a character, and the way he was regarded within the CCP?

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Deng acknowledged the overlapping of the two generations by noting the pre-Cultural Revolution 'collective leadership' including himself and Chen Yun; *ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>4</sup> Compare *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao* [Mao Zedong's Manuscripts since the Founding of the State], 13 vols. (September 1949-July 1976) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1987-98), where a year's coverage could amount to over 600 pages of unabridged written documents and speech drafts, to the heavily edited single volume *Deng Xiaoping sixiang nianpu (1975-1997)* [Chronology of Deng Xiaoping's Thought, 1975-1997] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998). On the Mao collection, see Frederick C. Teiwes, 'Mao Texts and the Mao of the 1950s', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 33 (1995).

<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, a voluminous literature on Mao in Chinese, English and other languages. The early leader in the Western biographical field, although limited to the pre-Cultural Revolution period, was Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967). Of subsequent studies, Lucian W. Pye, *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), is notable for its psychological approach. Recent biographies are Philip Short, *Mao: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong* (New York: Viking, 1999); and the latest edition of Ross Terrill, *Mao: A Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Of the many PRC studies in Chinese, the most authoritative is Jin Chongji (ed.), *Mao Zedong zhuan (1893-1949)* [Biography of Mao Zedong, 1893-1949] (2 vols., Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), which, of course, deals only with the revolutionary period.

<sup>6</sup> Note especially Defence Minister Peng Dehuai's 1959 comment that like 'the first emperor of any dynasty in the past [Mao] was ... ruthless and brilliant'; see Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in*

Mao emerged at a time of crisis—both for the nation and for the Marxist revolutionary movement he had joined. China was beset by internal divisions and foreign intrusion. The young CCP had suffered a massive setback in the bloody split with the Guomindang (GMD) in 1927, and the Party’s subsequent rural bases were under severe GMD attack when the Long March began in late 1934. Crisis was conducive to experimentation, unorthodox ways of looking at things, the entertainment of extreme solutions, and reliance on military struggle. These tendencies were reinforced by the Marxist tradition, a tradition that portrayed a world of enemies and struggle, and emphasized the importance of developing correct strategy. All of this resonated with the young Mao, a bold and decisive revolutionary convinced of his superior insight, someone prone to excess and deeply impressed by military heroism,<sup>7</sup> and a thinker eager to link strategic insights to a still underdeveloped knowledge of Marxist theory. Importantly, the context was also conducive to the type of charismatic leader that Mao became—someone who, as events unfolded, seemed to have the answers to the crisis and the ability to unlock the mysteries of the revolutionary process.

Out of this context emerged a Mao who was indeed a visionary with large goals, a revolutionary romantic who remained so for the rest of his life and who combined his visionary goals with an indomitable will to achieve them. Yet it is important to emphasize that for the majority of his career Mao’s visionary goals were firmly linked to pragmatic realism. Thus during the revolutionary period his strategy was marked by caution to the degree that he identified ‘left’ adventurism as the greatest danger to the CCP,<sup>8</sup> and he himself had been attacked for ‘rightist’ deviations before becoming Party leader. As leader of a Marxist party, Mao understood the need for theoretical validation, yet his revolutionary writings were deeply pragmatic. Ironically, given that Deng would adopt the slogan as his signature for negating the excesses of the ‘later Mao’, ‘truth from facts’ is the most

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*China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms 1950-1965* (2nd edition, Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 322-3.

<sup>7</sup> The outstanding example of excess on the part of the revolutionary Mao was the inner-Party bloodletting during the Futian Incident in 1930. See *ibid.*, p. 49. On Mao’s fascination with military heroism, see Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (revised and enlarged ed., New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp. 22-4, 125-6, 157.

<sup>8</sup> The classic attack on ‘leftism’ was the 1945 Historical Resolution; see *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. III (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), pp. 177-225.

pithy expression of Mao's thinking during the pre-1949 period and into the early PRC. Only subsequently was the pragmatic side of Mao subjugated, resulting in the major disasters of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, it is most useful to consider successive Maos who developed over time. As someone who has long argued the 'changing Mao' interpretation,<sup>9</sup> I have a clear preference for giving prominence to identifiable changes in the Chairman's thinking and behaviour. This is not to dismiss the importance of continuities in character, what might be called the 'original sin' thesis.<sup>10</sup> There may indeed be linkages between the slaughter of factional enemies in 1930 and the vicious treatment of disgraced officials during the Cultural Revolution. The adequacy of specific conclusions about Mao's personality such as Lucian Pye's claim that he was inevitably driven to abandon wives and successors is, as we shall see, another matter.<sup>11</sup> Yet there are key character traits present in all periods that I would emphasize—an indomitable willpower, a sense of calling and belief in his own near infallibility, and a preoccupation with the souls of his colleagues. How these and other personal continuities were manifested, however, was crucially affected by intervening variables.

Three distinct Maos can be identified for our purposes: the revolutionary Mao in the process of developing a winning strategy and obtaining power within the CCP, 1935-45, and beyond that up to the victory of 1949; the new emperor, 1949 to about 1957; and the aging, increasingly destructive emperor, the 'later Mao', from 1957-58 to his death in 1976.

The revolutionary Mao gradually built his authority in the decade after 1935, a process which saw policy struggles with other groups in the Party, especially with the so-called 'Returned Student faction', as well as the prudent avoidance of military conflict with the forces of senior CCP leader Zhang Guotao. The key to Mao's ultimate success was the development of policies that worked, together with

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<sup>9</sup> Initially in a 1974 article republished as Ch. I of Frederick C. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China: From A Charismatic Mao to the Politics of Succession* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> Such continuities in Mao's character are an underlying theme of Roderick MacFarquhar's classic trilogy on the origins of the Cultural Revolution; see especially volume 3 (n. 30, below).

<sup>11</sup> See Pye, *Mao Tse-tung*, Chs. 8, 10 and 11.

building an organization and leadership to implement those policies.<sup>12</sup> As already suggested, Mao's strategic approach was profoundly pragmatic. While obscured by the CCP's own subsequent romanticism about its past as well as the Western construct of a voluntaristic 'Yan'an syndrome', the basic thrust of Mao's revolutionary policy was to attempt only what was possible, to mobilize the masses behind *achievable* objectives while avoiding reckless adventures in a context where the CCP was the weaker force. Moreover, notwithstanding romantic notions of popular initiative, the essence of the 'mass line' during the revolution was calculated top down leadership by the Party. In short, while Mao would carry a faith in the revolutionary masses into the post-1949 period, this had been largely subordinated to shrewd realism during the actual struggle with the Japanese and GMD.

A key aspect of Mao's approach was a disciplined party on the Leninist model—indeed, Stuart Schram's description of Mao as a 'natural Leninist' is particularly apropos for this period.<sup>13</sup> The 'organizational weapon' of Leninist discipline, although quite able to produce disastrous results, both during the revolution and under the PRC, was crucial to CCP success. While not fully implanted in the Party's early years, the hierarchical organization and demand for absolute obedience once a decision was made gradually transformed the CCP into a 'weapon' far more disciplined and effective than the GMD which had its own Leninist pretensions. This organizational weapon was first and foremost the contribution of Comintern agents dispatched by Moscow, but the Leninist approach was eagerly grasped by Mao and elaborated by him and other leaders, notably Liu Shaoqi.<sup>14</sup> In elaborating Chinese Leninism in the 1940s, Mao and his colleagues developed a set of norms that were closer to the letter of Leninism than the Stalinist perversions of the contemporary Soviet Union.

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of Mao's struggle to consolidate his authority, see Frederick C. Teiwes with Warren Sun, *The Formation of the Maoist Leadership: From the Return of Wang Ming to the Seventh Party Congress* (London: Contemporary China Institute Research Notes and Studies No. 10, 1994), pp. 3-23. Another key factor, contrary to many earlier analyses, was the decisive support of Stalin and the Communist International for Mao as CCP leader in 1938; see *ibid.*, pp. 23-34.

<sup>13</sup> Schram, *Political Thought*, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis refuting claims that Mao and Liu represented conflicting organizational approaches over a long period, see Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, Ch. 1.

One aspect of Leninist norms that took hold in Mao's revolutionary CCP was a significant degree of collective rather than autocratic decision making. This was undoubtedly due as much to political reality, the fact that before the early 1940s Mao's power was insufficient for him to have the sole final word, as to Leninist norms, but it also reflected Mao's shrewd understanding of the requirements of revolutionary success. These encompassed relatively uninhibited discussion in the making of policy so that all aspects of a problem could be considered before iron discipline took over in implementation. They also mandated Party unity in the face of a more powerful enemy, something reflected in both a persuasive approach to Party discipline and a subtle handling of factions within the CCP. In the former case the 'save the patient' emphasis of Party rectification was adopted in conscious rejection of both Stalin's blood purge and the CCP's own earlier sanguinary handling of inner-Party disputes in which Mao had participated, even if excesses occurred during the Yan'an rectification. Even this 'persuasion', however, was firmly linked to the need for struggle against erroneous ideologies and the recognition that some genuine enemies had infiltrated the Party, but the emphasis was on an inclusive organization.<sup>15</sup>

Especially revealing was Mao's role as revolutionary unifier in a more narrow political sense. Developing successful strategy and tactics for dealing with the Japanese and GMD enemies was of course essential to Mao's growing acceptance as CCP leader, but equally essential for both victory and Mao's leadership was the creation of a talented and committed leadership cohort. Mao shrewdly constructed a broad coalition of inner-Party constituencies, the mountaintops (*shantou*) of dispersed armies and base areas, which now all had their representatives on key CCP bodies. Rather than rely on a group of close followers, Mao placed in top positions those like Zhou Enlai who had opposed him earlier but had since accepted his leadership. The aim was to utilize capable people, mend fences (Marshal Chen Yi would later recall how Mao forbid former opponents to apologize to him), and deepen the commitment of the mountaintops to the Party's program. This was combined with vigorous debates over policy, Mao's willingness to listen, and to let people in the field have their way if they could make their case.

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<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*, Ch. 3; and Teiwes with Sun, *Formation of the Maoist Leadership*, pp. 52-9.



By 1943 Mao was clearly the boss with final say on policy matters, and raised to exalted heights as 'saviour of the Chinese people', but he had created a collective where everyone had a stake.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Mao had been the unchallenged leader of the CCP during the latter stage of the revolutionary struggle, 1949 marked a major turning point. Mao was now the emperor, the founder of a new dynasty. The key feature of the new situation was the weakening or removal of constraints on the CCP as a ruling party, and on Mao as leader. With the defeat of the GMD, the discipline of revolutionary struggle which had repeatedly forced pragmatic policy adjustments had passed into history. To paraphrase Benjamin Yang, whereas previously Mao's 'revolutionary idealism' was controlled by his 'political realism', now that constraint was significantly diluted.<sup>17</sup> Equally, nation-wide victory eliminated the possibility of failure that would have undermined Mao's authority—instead the almost unimaginable success of the revolution created belief in and a sense of 'near religious awe'<sup>18</sup> concerning Mao for colleagues and populace alike. From then on it would be simply a matter of Mao's self-restraint whether the successful patterns of the revolutionary struggle would be adhered to, or whether he would head off into uncharted waters and drag the Party-state with him.

The key question of unshakeable elite loyalty to Mao from this point to his death deserves further examination. Both fear and belief were involved. Fear in the sense that any dissent from Mao's perceived wishes could end one's career was a major and intensifying factor during the subsequent 'later Mao' period, but it was also present during the early 1950s, most dramatically during the Gao Gang affair of 1953-54. On that occasion, Mao's dissatisfaction with Liu Shaoqi and Zhou Enlai, together with Gao's efforts to suggest that the Chairman was pondering a change in the succession with Gao replacing Liu, virtually paralysed the leadership for much of 1953 until late in the year when Mao's attitude clarified in favour of Liu and

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<sup>16</sup> See Teiwes with Sun, *Formation of the Maoist Leadership*, especially pp. 40-52.

<sup>17</sup> Benjamin Yang, *Deng: A Political Biography* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 136-7.

<sup>18</sup> The term was used by Henry Kissinger to describe the atmosphere conveyed by Mao's top colleagues during meetings in the 1970s; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 142.

undisrupted Party unity.<sup>19</sup> More important in this early period was belief. Not only had Mao been responsible for the strategies that resulted in revolutionary success, on the two occasions when he enforced his views against the majority in the early and mid-1950s—the decision to enter the Korean war in 1950 and the speed-up of agricultural cooperativization in 1955<sup>20</sup>—the results were viewed as confirmation of the Chairman’s brilliance. The world’s greatest military power was fought to a standstill, and the socialist transformation of the countryside was achieved much more rapidly than anyone imagined possible. As a senior Party historian put it, when leaders found themselves with different opinions from the Chairman they tended to ask where they had gone wrong, why they couldn't keep up with Mao.

Yet something deeper than fear and belief was involved. Ultimately, loyalty to Mao was based on the inability of the elite to separate him from their life mission. Their lives were meaningless without the revolution, and in their view it was Mao who had delivered revolutionary success. As time wore on and Mao took measures directly detrimental to their personal interests and national well being, these revolutionary veterans could not move against him. To reject Mao would have been to deny themselves. In the 1949-57 period, however, the issue never arose.

In this early period the Chairman was a rational, if sometimes impatient and threatening emperor who continued many of the approaches of the revolutionary Mao. He listened to his colleagues, and delegated large grants of authority—notably to Chen Yun concerning the economy. The new institutions of the socialist state played key roles in designing and implementing policy, usually with comparatively limited input from Mao. This was the period of the Soviet model, a comprehensive guide which laid down the basic outlines of economic strategy and many other policy approaches, and which by and large produced satisfactory results. Within this framework Mao occupied a relatively centrist, or at most centre-left, position. With few exceptions, little space was left for bold, unprecedented initiatives, and like his colleagues Mao normally played a game of incremental adjustments. The Chairman also continued to be attentive to Party unity. Apart from his temporary

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<sup>19</sup> See Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court: Gao Gang and Party Factionalism in the Early 1950s* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> See 'Editors' Introduction' to Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun (eds), *The Politics of Agricultural Cooperativization in China: Mao, Deng Zihui, and the 'High Tide' of 1955* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

lapse during the Gao Gang affair, he saw to it that all of the revolutionary mountaintops shared in the spoils of the new regime. However much his authority had expanded due to the success of 1949, throughout these early years Mao continued to seek Party unity, pragmatic policy, and vigorous policy debate.<sup>21</sup>

As indicated by adherence to the Soviet model, and also by reliance on Soviet personnel and material resources in implementing that model, there was a significant international component in Mao's relatively centrist and restrained performance. The Chairman's vision had, even before 1949, assigned China a major place in the world revolution, but one clearly secondary to the Soviet 'big brother'. Moreover, Mao accepted Stalin as the leader of international communism, notwithstanding personal tensions linked to past differences over revolutionary strategy and the difficult 1950 negotiations affecting the national interests of both sides, as well as China's place in a Moscow-led world movement. But as often argued, when Stalin died in 1953, Mao undoubtedly felt himself the true leader of international communism in terms of revolutionary status, certainly much more worthy than any of the Soviet politicians competing for Stalin's mantle. Yet here as domestically, Mao's approach was rational, accepting the Soviet Union as the only possible leader of the international movement, gaining improved conditions in the relationship from the new Soviet leaders, and, while critical of their perceived mishandling of the secret denunciation of Stalin and the uprisings in Poland and Hungary in 1956, placing China's weight behind shoring up Moscow's leadership of the socialist camp.<sup>22</sup>

In the domestic context, perhaps the most revealing example of the early relationship between the new emperor and the CCP's collective leadership occurred in April 1956.<sup>23</sup> At a Politburo meeting, after several months of efforts by Premier Zhou Enlai and others to wind back the 'little leap forward' of early 1956 without

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<sup>21</sup> For an overview of the period, see Frederick C. Teiwes, 'The Establishment and Consolidation of the New Regime, 1949-57', in Roderick MacFarquhar (ed.), *The Politics of China, Second Edition: The Eras of Mao and Deng* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> See Donald S. Zagoria, *The Sino-Soviet Conflict 1956-1961* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), pp. 14-15 and Ch. 1; and Odd Arne Westad, 'Introduction', in idem (ed.), *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-20. Cf. n. 12, above.

opposition from Mao, the Chairman proposed an increase in capital construction funds. Zhou and others argued against this with only one Politburo member backing Mao, but when the Chairman insisted his position was accepted by the collective. Afterwards, a troubled Zhou approached Mao and continued to argue the case. The Chairman, after venting his anger at Zhou's temerity, listened to the Premier's arguments and was persuaded to change his view. What is telling is that while Mao was able to enforce his will on the collective, he was also persuadable, and sensitive politicians like Zhou, who fully understood Mao's absolute power, still felt confident enough in his rationality and acceptance of the norm of vigorous discussion to approach him. This comparatively open atmosphere soon disappeared in the period of the 'later Mao'.

By all evidence, a far-reaching change in Mao's politics and thinking began to emerge by the end of 1957 with the initial moves toward the Great Leap Forward.<sup>24</sup> Now the ageing emperor appeared, prone to grand initiatives and visionary objectives devoid of significant pragmatism, intolerant of opposing views, changeable and difficult to read in his preferences, and increasingly paranoid and despotic in his relations with his colleagues. This intemperate Mao, and the chilling effect he had on his ranking colleagues, became apparent early in the Great Leap. In pushing wildly unrealistic production targets and totally unprecedented social and economic methods promising full communism in a very short period, Mao created a hyper-tense atmosphere where policy issues were turned into questions of political line, where it became impossible to say anything different. The key turning point was the January 1958 Nanning conference where the Chairman launched a furious attack on Zhou Enlai, Chen Yun and other leaders who had (with Mao's support) crafted the moderate economic policies of 'opposing rash advance' in 1956-57. The pressure was so great that Zhou *et al.* were forced into repeated self-criticisms, with

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<sup>23</sup> For further detail, see Frederick C. Teiwes with Warren Sun, *China's Road to Disaster: Mao, Central Politicians, and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward, 1955-1959* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), pp. 23-9.

<sup>24</sup> This is the official dividing line as laid down in the 1981 Historical Resolution between the overwhelmingly positive Mao of the revolutionary and early PRC periods and the 'later Mao' who fell prey to conceit, 'leftist' ideology, and undemocratic practices; see *Beijing Review*, No. 27 (1981), pp. 18-20. The same periodization was also argued in my *Politics and Purges* which originally appeared two years earlier in 1979. In addition, the suspect but still valuable memoirs of Mao's

the Premier feeling the need to offer his resignation in June before Mao relented. In stark contrast to his boldness in April 1956, Zhou now dedicated himself to a course of determining the Chairman's wishes and hewing to them as much as humanly possible. It was also a period where state institutions, so influential in shaping policies in the early years of the PRC, now simply competed in implementing Mao's wild demands.<sup>25</sup>

Once major problems with the leap became apparent in fall 1958, Mao made some superficial concessions to pragmatism by calling for a rollback of some of the most outlandish targets, but he refused to countenance any reconsideration of the Great Leap 'line'. When Defence Minister Peng Dehuai, following Mao's encouragement of critical opinions, called for further modification of leap policies in a private letter to the Chairman at the July 1959 Lushan conference, Mao reacted violently, taking it as a personal attack and removing Peng from his portfolio. These developments stunned the gathering for their unpredictability and vehemence, and they also involved a further deterioration of leadership collegiality beyond what had happened at Nanning. Now, for the first time in the PRC period, Mao dismissed a Politburo member for exercising the right of policy discussion guaranteed by the Party norms established in Yan'an in the 1940s.<sup>26</sup> The result in the short term was a reradicalization of the leap forward, and in the longer term a further chilling of candid discussion between the Chairman and his colleagues.<sup>27</sup>

When Mao was finally forced to alter course in 1960-61, not by leadership opposition, but by the collapse of the economy and massive starvation,<sup>28</sup> other leaders took increasing responsibility for cleaning up the mess as the Chairman

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doctor, Li Zhisui, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), points to the same conclusion.

<sup>25</sup> On these developments in the first half of 1958, see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, pp. 73-5, 92, 97-9, 101ff.

<sup>26</sup> Technically, Peng was only dismissed from his defence post, but from that point on his Politburo membership was entirely nominal. The Gao Gang case had essentially concerned issues of power and Party unity; policy differences were involved but only in a secondary fashion and in any case were not raised by Mao when he turned against Gao. A case where Mao did act against a high leader (although not a Politburo member) over policy concerned Deng Zihui and agricultural cooperativization in 1955. On that occasion, Mao subjected Deng to sharp criticism for his temerity in continuing to argue a dissenting position after the Chairman made his position clear, but he did not remove him from his posts.

<sup>27</sup> On these developments, see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, Ch. 4 and Epilogue 1.

<sup>28</sup> By various estimates the Great Leap famine claimed between 15 to 46 million lives, if not more.

retreated to the 'second front'.<sup>29</sup> Mao retained absolute power, however, and when in summer 1962 he considered the concessions to private agriculture in particular too far-reaching, he ordered a change of policy course, sharply criticised a number of leading figures, removed some (including Chen Yun) from power, and harboured deepening suspicion of his colleagues generally. Paranoia had clearly set in, and combined with an increasing aloofness as Mao remained on the 'second front', produced an abnormal and unpredictable leadership politics. Essentially, the collective leadership on the 'first front', with Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping the key figures, would formulate policies with reference to both practical problems facing the state and an imperfect understanding of Mao's wishes, and then take them to Mao, who was often outside of Beijing, for approval or veto. Usually the Chairman approved, although on occasion he shocked his colleagues within unexpected rejections, but Mao's discontent with both the drift in national affairs and his colleagues' performance grew apace. Significantly, there was little indication of major divisions within the 'first front' collective. The tensions of this period, as with the sharp disruptions to leadership unity at Nanning, Lushan and in 1962, were essentially Mao generated. The collective neither opposed Mao nor feuded among themselves, but the Chairman's growing disillusionment set the stage for the Cultural Revolution.<sup>30</sup>

The Cultural Revolution, designed to infuse selfless revolutionary values in the population and weed out those he believed were practising 'revisionism', marked the most destructive phase of Mao's politics. Up until 1966 institutions still functioned, and notwithstanding the various disruptions since 1958 relatively few leaders were purged—Party unity still meant something to Mao even as he undermined it. But now the 'great helmsman' initiated a chaotic movement that

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<sup>29</sup> The so-called 'two fronts' had been introduced in the 1950s with the aim of smoothing the eventual succession to Mao by increasing the prestige of other leaders. Under this proposal, Mao was to retreat eventually to the 'second front' to concern himself with issues of ideology and overall direction, while leaders such as Liu, Zhou and Deng would assume direction of concrete affairs on the 'first front'. See Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court*, pp. 32, 116-17; and Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 1: Contradictions among the People 1956-1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 152-6.

<sup>30</sup> The outstanding detailed study of this period is Roderick MacFarquhar's *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 3: The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961-1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). For briefer overviews of the matters at issue, see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, Epilogue 2; and Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. xxxvi-xliv, lvi-lxii.

severely disrupted society, destroyed the Party as a functioning organization, disrupted nearly all other institutions, set various 'factions' at each others' throats, and lead to the purge and physical abuse of hundreds of thousands of officials. In a display of vindictive or at the minimum callous behaviour, the Chairman either initiated or stood by as leaders were 'persecuted to death', including three Politburo members—Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai and Marshal He Long.<sup>31</sup>

While the Chairman again, rather pathetically, returned to the Party unity theme toward the end of the 'Cultural Revolution decade', in his incoherent pursuit of a 'dialectical' combination of revolutionary politics and economic development Mao had placed bitterly opposed groupings on the Politburo. Significantly, in this 'moderate' v. 'radical' split, the leaders of the various mountaintops of the revolutionary period basically held together despite the unbridled factionalism of the late 1960s, while the 'radical' forces led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, lacked revolutionary credentials and had largely been on the margins of political power before the Cultural Revolution. Mao's imperial power remained such that he could place anyone he wished on the Politburo and alter the balance of power between the opposed forces, but he could not create unity. When he finally turned on Deng Xiaoping (who he had restored to the leadership in 1973) in late 1975-1976, the Chairman further muddied the waters, but this last intervention would not long outlive him. Intellectual incoherence and, remarkably, political naivete combined to nullify Mao's last revolutionary vision.<sup>32</sup>

What explains the emergence of the 'later Mao'? If we focus on the seminal cases of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution, although various 'objective factors' were involved,<sup>33</sup> the key was the interaction of Mao's vast visions

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<sup>31</sup> On the abuse of high ranking leaders and Mao's knowledge of same, see Michael Schoenhals, 'The Central Case Examination Group, 1966-79', *The China Quarterly*, No. 145 (1996).

<sup>32</sup> The best study of the entire 1966-76 'Cultural Revolution decade' is Barbara Barnouin and Yu Changgen, *Ten Years of Turbulence: The Chinese Cultural Revolution* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1993). The political naivete I refer to, remarkable in a leader so politically shrewd for much of his career, concerns any expectation that a leadership so hopelessly at odds to the level of deep personal hatred, could possibly cooperate in a post-Mao period.

<sup>33</sup> In the case of the leap, the slowdown in economic growth, and particularly the lag in the agricultural sector, doubts cast on emerging expert-led developmental policies as a result of the failed Hundred Flowers experiment, and negative consequences of political relaxation such as worker strikes and the dissolution of agricultural cooperatives. In the case of the Cultural Revolution, the loss of revolutionary idealism and the deterioration of social morale more generally, widespread corruption, and an increasingly routinized bureaucracy.

and impatience, his absolute power which fundamentally undercut political constraints, and his human frailty. The last psychological factor is emphasised here, and can be illuminated if we examine the contrast between Mao's behaviour at Nanning in 1958, when he ferociously attacked the architects of the moderate economic policies of 1956-57 and then pressed ahead with the Great Leap, with his earlier behaviour in 1956 when he repeatedly endorsed those very same policies after Zhou Enlai and others wound back the little leap which the Chairman had launched. The different contexts were crucial. During the first leap Mao was building upon the perceived success of cooperativization, which he singled out as an even more gratifying personal achievement than the victory of 1949, and while this encouraged unrealistic expectations, it arguably left him in a secure frame of mind so that he could 'cool down' in spring 1956 without self-reproach, or recriminations toward others. In contrast, as the Great Leap unfolded Mao lived with the memory of the Hundred Flowers where his determination to encourage intellectuals to speak out was clearly at fault in producing their outpouring of criticism of the CCP, and he reacted with a passion that preposterously directed blame elsewhere, and brooked no interference as he set out to validate his infallibility with a new, even bolder program.<sup>34</sup>

The launching of the Cultural Revolution can be seen in similar, if more sinister terms. The social phenomena that distressed Mao in the early 1960s—loss of idealism, corruption, demoralization—were fundamentally a result of the drastic economic and social disruption of the Chairman's beloved Great Leap. But given Mao's intense personal identification with the leap,<sup>35</sup> this could not be acknowledged, even as Mao accepted a set of policies that were very different from those of 1958-59, and his suspicions that the leaders who designed those policies were embarking on a 'revisionist' course and were personally disloyal gradually hardened. Somebody had to be responsible, and it could not be his own errors. The

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<sup>34</sup> For further discussion of this comparison, see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, pp. 80-2. Mao's tortured explanation of the link between the policies of 'opposing rash advance' and the 'rightist attack' on the CCP during the Hundred Flowers was that the economic program (which was at best a secondary issue in the criticisms of spring 1957) encouraged the 'rightists' to attack the Party on a broader front.

<sup>35</sup> As seen earlier at Lushan in Mao's reaction to Peng Dehuai's criticism of the leap. See Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 326-7.



extent of the paranoia was suggested in his late 1965-early 1966 ruminations about a possible *coup d'état*. A dramatically different approach to dealing with erring officials and suspect institutions, one directly at odds with the norms of the 1940s by unleashing the 'masses' to attack the establishment without clear organizational guidance, was initiated with the consequent political and social disruption. On those occasions when voices were raised against the resultant costs, Mao reacted sharply because *his* Cultural Revolution was under attack. While he came to accept that the movement had major shortcomings, he insisted to the end that it was 70 percent correct, and his last falling out with Deng Xiaoping was his perception that Deng did not truly accept this verdict. The Chairman could not be wrong—the system would not allow it, and Mao himself could not accept it.<sup>36</sup>

International factors played a vital role in these developments, factors again involving grand visions and personal frailties, not to mention Mao's unlimited power which allowed him to create a foreign policy diametrically at odds with his cautious revolutionary principle of only taking on one major enemy at a time. An important contributing cause of the Great Leap was Mao's vision of 'the east wind prevailing over the west wind', i.e. the victory of the socialist bloc over imperialism both via support for revolutionary forces throughout the world and by overtaking the capitalist world economically. In this Mao fed off of unrealistic Soviet economic projections,<sup>37</sup> but at the same time his nationalist pride pushed China to do even better than the Russians while breaking away from the Soviet model. Soviet criticisms of Great Leap policies in 1958-59 only enhanced Mao's insistence on the correctness of his domestic line, and his anger contributed to a dramatically soured overall relationship. The main items of contention were concrete foreign policy differences and general strategies for dealing with imperialism, and Mao's escalation of these issues led to total schism by the early 1960s. In the context of this developing schism, as well as China's deepening social malaise, Mao began to

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<sup>36</sup> On Mao's preoccupation with coups on the eve of the Cultural Revolution and instances of his sensitivity to perceived attacks on *his* movement in 1967 and 1970, see Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao: Riding the Tiger during the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1971* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1996), pp. 61-2, 75-6, 148-9. On Mao's suspicions of Deng in late 1975, see Mao Mao [Deng Rong], *Wode fuqin Deng Xiaoping: 'wenge' sui yue* [My Father Deng Xiaoping: The 'Cultural Revolution' Years] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2000), p. 426.

<sup>37</sup> Mao returned from Moscow in late 1957 enthused with Soviet projections of overtaking the US economically in 15 years, and committed China to overtaking Britain in the same period.

expand his analysis of 'Soviet revisionism' from insufficient support of world revolution to inherent flaws in the Soviet system—flaws he feared were being replicated in China and which intensified his suspicion of his colleagues, notably Liu Shaoqi, 'China's Khrushchev'. Ironically, the overthrow of the real Khrushchev in 1964 further enhanced Mao's paranoia—particularly when he learned that the Soviet Defence Minister had suggested to a Chinese military leader that this was something the CCP might consider. Mao's negative vision of 'Soviet revisionism', plus his paranoid (if not entirely baseless) fears of a socialist coup, contributed mightily to the onset of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>38</sup>

A further window into Mao's political character and the changing aspects of his rule is provided by his choice and rejection of successors. As is well known, Mao discarded his first two choices as successor, Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao, who both perished in different but politically created circumstances.<sup>39</sup> Subsequently, although not designated the successor, Deng Xiaoping had been placed in a position so strong that he inevitably would have emerged as Mao's heir after the Chairman's death, but for Mao's withdrawal of support.<sup>40</sup> Late in life Mao also engaged in considering younger successors, leaders who could take over in the longer run—notably, but not limited to, Wang Hongwen, a member of the radical 'gang of four', and the eventual successor, Hua Guofeng.<sup>41</sup> Broadly speaking, Mao placed great weight on a number of criteria in choosing and considering successors—theoretical

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<sup>38</sup> See Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 327-9, 388-9; idem with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, pp. 70-1, 85-91, 100, 110, 128-9, 166; Zagoria, *Sino-Soviet Conflict*, Parts 2-4; Westad, 'Introduction', pp. 20-31; and MacFarquhar, *Origins 3*, Ch. 16. In addition to the dubious rationality of forcing a split with the Soviet Union, thus making simultaneous enemies of the world's two superpowers until he began to explore rapprochement with the US at the end of the 1960s, Mao subjected Khrushchev to personally demeaning situations. For example, on one occasion he received the Soviet leader in his pyjamas; on another he ostentatiously smoked in front of the cigarette-averse Khrushchev. None of this is to suggest that the Sino-Soviet split was entirely one-sided, or that Khrushchev's impulsiveness in particular did not play a part, but it is to claim that Mao's intellectual and personal rigidity was the predominant factor in the schism.

<sup>39</sup> Liu died a miserable death in custody in 1969 as a counterrevolutionary who had been expelled from the CCP. Lin, although still the designated successor, died in an air crash while fleeing the country in September 1971 when Mao had made clear his intention of having a showdown with Lin. In neither case had these leaders been anything but loyal to Mao.

<sup>40</sup> For a brief period in 1972-73, Zhou Enlai was in a similar position to that subsequently held by Deng. Zhou's illness, plus Mao's dissatisfaction with aspects of his performance, soon changed that, and Deng's increasing prominence can plausibly be seen as in part a criticism of Zhou.

<sup>41</sup> According to Party historians specializing in the period, Ji Dengkui, Wu De and Li Desheng were among those also considered.

acumen, willingness to use power, administrative ability, military qualifications, capacity to unify the Party, and personal loyalty.<sup>42</sup>

Liu Shaoqi scored highly on all these criteria except military qualifications, and was particularly valued by Mao in the 1940s for his theoretical views which paralleled Mao's own, and his willingness to use power.<sup>43</sup> By the 1960s, Liu's views, although in fact probably the furthest to the 'left' of the 'first front' collective,<sup>44</sup> were regarded by Mao as increasingly revisionist, and his comfort with power became a threat. Also (perhaps particularly) significant was that Liu, although unquestionably loyal, had not been in an early subordinate relationship to Mao as had Lin and Deng, who were clearly by all evidence were the Chairman's personal favourites among the top leadership.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, Lin Biao not only was a favourite, regarded as totally loyal, and arguably the greatest CCP general during the revolution, he was also someone who, because of his revolutionary credentials, could be a credible successor when suddenly named to replace Liu in August 1966,<sup>46</sup> notwithstanding the considerable shortcomings of limited administrative experience, poor health, a basic disinterest in power, and a theoretical record that amounted to little more than promoting a simplified version of Mao's thought. Arguably, Lin's attractiveness for the Chairman was his military prestige which promised to bolster army support during the Cultural Revolution, together with his history of personal loyalty and political passivity that ruled out any potential challenge. This was an accurate assessment, but in the weird factional world Mao

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<sup>42</sup> This builds on the factors of theory, power, ability and loyalty discussed in Frederick C. Teiwes, 'Mao and His Lieutenants', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 19-20 (1988), pp. 56ff, and applied, somewhat imperfectly, to the cases of Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Lin Biao and Deng Xiaoping. In the case of Zhou, who survived all of Mao's twists and turns, definite theoretical shortcomings in Mao's eyes were offset by absolute loyalty and enormous administrative capacities, but the Chairman apparently never considered him a suitable successor.

Another significant consideration for Politburo membership was the representation of the various 'mountaintops' in the Party's revolutionary history, but this was a relatively secondary consideration for the most significant individuals.

<sup>43</sup> On Liu as Mao's 'natural successor' from the perspective of the 1940s, see Teiwes with Sun, *Formation of the Maoist Leadership*, pp. 34-40.

<sup>44</sup> See Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. xli-xlii.

<sup>45</sup> By the start of the 1960s, Mao had identified Lin and especially Deng as possible future successors, presumably after Liu. See MacFarquhar, *Origins 3*, pp. 433, 640-1; and Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy of Lin Biao*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> Remarkably, even Liu Shaoqi's former secretary, Deng Liqun, considered the replacement of Liu by Lin as reasonable at the time. See Teiwes and Sun, *Tragedy of Lin Biao*, p. 16.

had created during the Cultural Revolution, Lin was forced into conflict with the Chairman against his will in 1970-71, with tragic consequences.<sup>47</sup>

At the end of his life, in the respective choices of Deng and Hua, Mao gave more consideration to the real needs of China than he did in selecting Lin Biao. In Deng's case, as with Lin, there was the crucial perception of personal loyalty, notwithstanding the Chairman's ousting of Deng as the 'number two capitalist roader' in 1966. With the exception of his lack of any real theoretical acumen, Deng fully met Mao's criteria, and had seemingly been the preferred choice for eventual successor since the late 1950s. Even during the Cultural Revolution Mao held a special regard for Deng, strictly protecting him from the physical abuse suffered by many other leaders, considering him as a possible replacement for Lin Biao in 1967, and of course bringing him back to play the leading role in restoring the economy and social order in the mid-1970s. And following his late 1975 disillusionment with Deng, Mao initially continued to grant him a significant role, and, after Deng's April 1976 dismissal in the context of that year's Tiananmen disturbances, again protected him both physically and, by allowing him to retain his Party membership, politically. Lucian Pye notwithstanding, whatever else was happening in the Mao-Deng relationship, the Chairman never abandoned his favourite subordinate.<sup>48</sup>

As for Hua, the issue was very different. Mao did not have decades of close contact with which to form an opinion. Although Mao had been impressed with Hua on several occasions since the mid-1950s and brought him to Beijing after the Lin Biao affair, as already indicated Hua was merely one of several younger leaders considered for future leadership, one who incidentally had also been promoted for such a role by Deng in 1975.<sup>49</sup> There was nothing particularly personal in the choice of Hua apart from the fact that it was Mao's alone. In the event, Hua's actual investiture with the clear successor's mantle only came with the 1976 Tiananmen

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<sup>47</sup> The complicated factors leading to Lin's demise are detailed in *ibid.*, pp. 134-51. In brief, factional conflict involving Lin's family and key military officers on one side, and the civilian radicals led by Jiang Qing on the other, precipitated a crisis with Mao coming down in Jiang's favour.

<sup>48</sup> On the Mao-Deng relationship, see *ibid.*, pp. 20, 83; Teiwes, 'Mao and His Lieutenants', pp. 68-72; idem with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, pp. 148-9; and Mao Mao, 'Wenge' *suiyue*, pp. 122-7, 132, 224-5, 235, 270, 448-9, 474-7.

<sup>49</sup> On Deng's consideration of Hua as a future successor (Ji Dengkui was another figure considered by Deng), see *Deng Liqun guoshi jiangtan, disance* [Deng Liqun's Speeches and Talks on National History, vol. III] (Beijing: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo shigao bianweihui, 2000), p. 102.

crisis,<sup>50</sup> a situation eerily similar to that of Jiang Zemin in 1989—in both cases selection came as a result of unanticipated events and hasty consideration. And Hua’s qualifications in Mao’s eyes? On most criteria Hua simply did not measure up, although there could be no doubt of his loyalty. But he did have considerable administrative experience and ability for someone of his junior status, and perhaps crucially, he avoided factional entanglements—thus, in Mao’s mind, Hua was capable of providing Party unity.<sup>51</sup> Mao had returned to the unity theme that had been so important to his revolutionary success, but in a context where it could not be realized except by turning on the Cultural Revolution that he believed to be one of his greatest accomplishments. Both Hua and Deng would play key roles in that development, although inevitably Deng’s greater revolutionary status meant that he would be the crucial actor after the initial coup against the ‘gang of four’.

### **Deng Xiaoping: The Paramount Leader, the Grand Architect, the Political Boss<sup>52</sup>**

These titles convey a less grand image than those associated with Mao, but one still bristling with power and the ability to direct the course of the nation. Of the official titles, ‘paramount leader’ adequately conveys the dominant, supreme above all others role of Deng in the ‘second generation’ collective. ‘Grand architect’, however, implies a greater degree of detailed involvement in the actual design of reform era programs than was actually the case. What Deng provided to the reform undertaking was political muscle, the wherewithal to force through contentious policies and keep things moving in the general direction of marketisation and openness—thus my characterization of Deng as China’s post-Mao ‘political boss’.

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<sup>50</sup> Hua was now designated CCP First Vice Chairman, an unprecedented position, as well as full rather than just acting Premier. What has not been commented on is that even after Hua became acting Premier in January, his overall responsibility was limited to government affairs, with Wang Hongwen again in charge of Party affairs in place of Deng. See Mao Mao, *‘Wenge’ sui yue*, p. 450.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Mao’s January 1976 comment when asked why he chose Hua as acting Premier: ‘[Hua’s] standard is not high, but he is sincere and honest, [and] does not engage in plots or factionalism...’. Qing Ye and Fang Lei, *Deng Xiaoping zai 1976, shangjuan: Tiananmen shijian* [Deng Xiaoping in 1976, vol. 1: The Tiananmen Incident] (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1993), p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> The most notable biographies of Deng in English are David S.G. Goodman, *Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Revolution: A Political Biography* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Yang, *Deng*. No official PRC biography of Deng has yet appeared, but, among voluminous other works, are his daughter’s two volumes, Mao Mao [Deng Rong], *Wode fuqin Deng Xiaoping, shangce* [My Father Deng Xiaoping, vol. 1] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1993), and vol. 2, *‘Wenge’ sui yue*. Vol. 1 covers Deng’s pre-1949 and 1949-52 experiences, while the much more significant vol. 2 covers 1966-76. An English translation of vol. 1 is Deng Maomao, *Deng Xiaoping, My Father* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

Taking a longer view, there is no better summary of Deng's career than Benjamin Yang's observation: '[he] was an expert on nothing—except politics'.<sup>53</sup>

Being an expert in politics meant expertise in two radically different contexts: as a subordinate to the all-powerful Mao, and as the emerging and then unambiguous 'paramount leader' following the Chairman's death. The latter role was impossible without the former. The importance of the link cannot be overstated—in fact, it can be argued that, his 1975-76 actions notwithstanding, Mao in effect anointed Deng as his successor.<sup>54</sup> Mao had given Deng important assignments early in the latter's career, and crucially raised him to the key position of CCP General Secretary in 1956, referring to him as 'vice marshal' to himself as 'main marshal' a few years later. Even more significant was the Chairman's recall of Deng in the mid-1970s to deal with the nation's deteriorating problems, a role in which, in elite eyes, Deng not only undertook decisive measures to deal with these problems, but in effect came to represent the collective interests of the revolutionary generation against the radicals who had no role in that defining experience. Even when Mao again dismissed Deng, something that could be explained away as a consequence of creeping senility and manipulation by the radicals, Deng was—figuratively at least—the only one of 'Chairman Mao's close comrades-in-arms' still standing when Mao passed away.<sup>55</sup> As such, it was predictable that demands for Deng's return to power would quickly come to the fore.

A number of additional things can be said about the Mao-Deng relationship. While Mao's various criteria for a successor discussed above were all relevant, arguably two factors particularly inclined Mao to Deng, factors also present in the case of his other great favourite, Lin Biao. One is military accomplishment (see below), glorification of martial virtues having long been a feature of the Chairman's thinking. As already alluded to, a second factor might simply be age and seniority, and the deference it implies. Whereas Liu Shaoqi, who had roughly equal Party

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<sup>53</sup> Yang, *Deng*, p. 281.

<sup>54</sup> For a similar argument, see Roderick MacFarquhar, 'The Succession to Mao and the End of Maoism, 1969-82', in idem, *Politics of China*, p. 328.

<sup>55</sup> Two other figures who had held that label were still alive, but far less prominent in collective elite consciousness. Peng Zhen, denounced as a counterrevolutionary during the Cultural Revolution, was still imprisoned. Chen Yun had not particularly suffered during the Cultural Revolution and still held nominal posts when Mao died, but he had not exercised political power since 1962.

seniority to Mao and was only five years younger might have been seen as too much of an 'equal', Deng was dependent on Mao for his rise and undoubtedly manifested great admiration in their exchanges, perhaps even along the teacher-student lines so significant in Chinese culture.<sup>56</sup> Such considerations, when linked to the personal loyalty manifested by Deng since the early 1930s and the decisive and determined qualities of leadership which arguably reminded Mao of himself, may explain not simply Mao's favouritism, but his repeated willingness to distinguish Deng from Liu Shaoqi and later Lin Biao.

Whatever the precise reasons for the Chairman's exceptionally high evaluation of Deng, Deng's political expertise involved an unquestioning subordination to Mao which, although apparently falling short of the abject behaviour often displayed by Zhou Enlai, nevertheless involved some degree of self-abasement when Mao was displeased.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the loyalty between Mao and Deng was mutual and genuine. We have already seen Mao's protection—never abandonment—of Deng. For Deng's part, his admiration of the Chairman was real even during the Cultural Revolution. When exiled to remote a remote area of Jiangxi in the early 1970s, Deng chastized his children when they expressed criticism of the movement. After the Chairman's death, Deng led the effort to demystify Mao, but this was very different from de-Maoization. Deng's 1980 claim that 'We will not do to Chairman Mao what Khrushchev did to Stalin' was no mere political statement. Instead, during the entire process of drafting the 1981 resolution of Party history, Deng repeatedly argued for a more favourable verdict on the Chairman than even Mao's devoted secretary, Hu Qiaomu, was advocating. In

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<sup>56</sup> The student-teacher relationship was explicitly argued for the Mao-Lin Biao relationship by a senior oral source, but this source was not questioned in these terms concerning Deng. Interview, March 1986. On Deng's relationship to Mao as a relatively junior leader, see Yang, *Deng*, pp. 81-83, 86ff.

<sup>57</sup> The account of Deng's daughter, Mao Mao, '*Wenge' sui'yue*, pp. 426-7, attempts to paint a portrait of a principled Deng resisting Mao's demand to affirm the Cultural Revolution, but a closer reading of the details she presents concerning that occasion and earlier events suggests a willingness to accept whatever the Chairman required. See *ibid.*, pp. 127, 209-10, 234-5, 431-2, 436, 447-8.

On the vexing question of why, if this was the case, the Chairman twice ousted his favourite, the answer is found in a combination of factors: no one on the pre-1966 'first front' grasped the depth of Mao's dissatisfaction, Deng had indeed distanced himself from certain of Mao's emphases during this period, albeit in a subtle, non-confrontational manner, and in 1975 he believed he was carrying out Mao's current policies, a view the Chairman confirmed. See Teiwes, 'Mao and His Lieutenants', pp. 68-9; and Mao Mao, '*Wenge' sui'yue*, pp. 417-18.

Deng's mind, as for so many of the 'second generation', the link of Mao's leadership to the CCP's success was unbreakable.<sup>58</sup>

While the link to Mao was a prerequisite for power, as with the Chairman four decades earlier, Deng's rise to paramount status took place at a time of crisis. This time the crisis was Mao made—the same threat to political unity within the CCP and to economic development and social cohesion in China generally that Deng had faced when leading the 'first front' in 1975. The need to deal with the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution, to bring order to the country, to make up for lost time in economic construction, these were the pressing tasks facing the Party after the arrest of the 'gang of four', tasks which dovetailed with Deng's broad administrative responsibilities in the past, and with his widely recognised personal traits as a tough, decisive leader used to getting obedience from subordinates. As pressure built for Deng's return following the purge of the radicals, there was a widespread sense both within the elite and among significant sections of the public that his talents were needed to deal with the crisis.<sup>59</sup>

The process of Deng's obtaining paramount status has been widely misunderstood.<sup>60</sup> In the conventional view, Deng engaged in a power struggle with Hua Guofeng over the 1977-78 period, overcoming Hua's attempts to block his return to office, gaining the decisive upper hand at the December 1978 Third Plenum, and finally replacing Hua with Hu Yaobang in 1980-81. In fact, the process is better understood as power gravitating to, rather than seized by, Deng due to his revolutionary status, the aforementioned expectations concerning his role, and the fact that he acted like a leader in this crucial period. Deng's return to the leadership was fundamentally settled by the end of 1976 with Hua Guofeng's active support. Deng's pre-eminence not only came very quickly, it was not contested. The events

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<sup>58</sup> See Mao Mao, 'Wenge' *suiyue*, p. 162; *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975–1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), p. 329; and Cheng Zhongyuan, *Di'erge lishi jueyi de qicao he tongguo* [The Drafting and Approval of the Second Resolution on History] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo yanjiusuo bangongshi, 1998), pp. 1-13.

<sup>59</sup> These often exaggerated expectations were indicated in interviews with both Party historians and members of the general public. Cf. the official statement at the time of Deng's formal retirement in November 1989 that Deng had 'lived up to the great expectations of the Party and the people' in dealing with the 'very grave situation and arduous tasks' caused by the calamities of the Cultural Revolution. *Beijing Review*, No. 47 (1989), p. 19.



that undermined Hua's standing were not designed by Deng: in some cases such as the 'criterion of truth' debate, the prime mover (Hu Yaobang) was friendly to Hua; in others—for example, the overambitious economic program of 1978—Deng was equally culpable but politically invulnerable. The politics was complex, but it was not polarised. As a key player at the time, Deng Liqun, recently recalled, 'The contradiction and struggle did not form into two opposing armies; that wasn't the situation then'.<sup>61</sup>

Two factors deserve further emphasis. First, Deng's military credentials not only were a source of Mao's favouritism, but also crucial to the support of an elite that had come to power through armed struggle. As one of the co-leaders of the Second Field Army and a key figure in the crucial Huai-Hai battle of 1948, Deng was one of the true heroes of the military struggle, a status in no way challenged by the essentially civilian careers of leading 'second generation' figures Chen Yun and Peng Zhen, not to mention youngsters like Hua. Indeed, when military ranks were granted in 1955, it had originally been planned to name Deng a marshal, a proposal that was dropped because it was decided no 'civilian' leader would hold the rank. Deng's military prestige was perhaps most graphically illustrated when he visited the home of Defense Minister Ye Jianying in early 1977, i.e. before resuming official duties. During this private meeting Deng respectfully addressed Ye as 'old marshal', and Ye quickly replied that 'you too are an old marshal, you are the *leader* of us old marshals'.<sup>62</sup> Such a perception by the leading military figures of the revolution makes credible the reports that Deng subsequently was placed under considerable army pressure to retain ultimate military authority as Central Military Commission (CMC) head when he may have wished to appoint Hu Yaobang and then Zhao Ziyang to the position. In fact, Deng had taken effective control of the military as soon as he returned to work in mid-1977.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The following is based on research for a projected two volume study, coauthored with Warren Sun, and tentatively titled *Between Restoration and Reform: Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping and the Politics of Transition, 1975-1981*. Chris Buckley is also making a major contribution to this project.

<sup>61</sup> *Deng Liqun guoshi jiangtan*, p. 358.

<sup>62</sup> Hu Hua (ed.), *Zhonggong dangshi renwuzhuan* [Biographies of Personalities in CCP History], vol. 44 (Xi'an: Shaanxi renmin chubanshe, 1989), p. 107 (emphasis added).

<sup>63</sup> Deng's military positions as CMC Vice Chair and army Chief of Staff were immediately restored, but equally important were the assignment of revolutionary veteran Luo Ruiqing as the official in charge of daily military work, and a substantial shake-up of the command structure. The true power

The second factor to be emphasised, one which became much more explicit in the 1980s as the ‘second generation’ retreated to the ‘second front’, was the proprietary attitude of these revolutionary elders. While more than willing initially to accept Hua as the future custodian of their country, China was essentially ‘theirs’—they had won the revolutionary struggle and would have the ultimate say in guaranteeing the CCP’s cause. This attitude was articulated in the first person by Deng in a conversation with Lee Kuan Yew shortly before the Third Plenum explaining why he would have to delay retirement: ‘I have the whole of China [to change]’.<sup>64</sup> While there was ambiguity initially given Mao’s belated anointing of Hua, deference was given to the old revolutionaries from the outset and the early Hua-Deng relationship can be considered a regency. While this undoubtedly overstates how the principals themselves saw the situation, Deng did take control of various critical matters—notably foreign policy as well as military affairs, and provided much guidance generally while Hua learned the ropes. Once he replaced Hua with his own choices as successor, ‘first front’ leaders openly acclaimed both Deng’s ultimate authority and the proposition that problems would be easy to solve ‘because the elders are still in good health and around us’.<sup>65</sup>

What sort of leadership did this powerful, self-confident and decisive figure provide? In contrast to the ‘later Mao’s’ increasingly visionary pursuit of hard-to-define, indeed incoherent goals, Deng was clearly a results-oriented, pragmatic politician seeking ‘wealth and power’ for China. As an American interlocutor with significant access to the Chinese leadership in the late 1970s put it, with Deng there was ‘no ideological crap’.<sup>66</sup> For Deng, ideology was less important as a guide to

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equation was sharply revealed in spring 1978 when Deng unilaterally cancelled a military inspection by Hua, the CMC Chair.

<sup>64</sup> *Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew: From Third World to First, The Singapore Story: 1965-2000* (Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings, 2000), p. 668.

<sup>65</sup> The regency model, which was used briefly in the US government in 1977-78, fits with evidence that many in the elite saw Deng’s experience as essential given Hua’s comparatively shallow background, and the fact that there is little indication of resistance to such a role by younger Politburo members. On acknowledgements of Deng’s pre-eminent status and the role of the elders in the 1980s, see Frederick C. Teiwes, ‘The Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition: From Obeying the Leader to “Normal Politics”’, *The China Journal*, No. 34 (July 1995), pp. 62-3, 79.

<sup>66</sup> Interview, June 1999. In comparison to others, Deng was less ideological in his encounters with foreigners even while Mao lived, as in his November 1974 meeting with a US academic delegation. I am indebted to Merle Goldman for a transcript of this encounter.

While the following discussion of pragmatism relates largely to domestic affairs, the same approach dominated Deng’s foreign policy. In contrast to Mao, there was neither the phobia of

grand objectives than as something which set boundaries as to what was permissible—notably the inviolability of Party rule. Yet the conventional emphasis on Deng's pragmatism is somewhat misleading. While he was clearly willing to consider radical departures from orthodox principles as captured in his famous 1962 remark that 'it doesn't matter if a cat is white or black as long as it catches the mouse', the full circumstances of that remark point to a pragmatism that was fundamentally political in nature. First, Deng's 'cat theory' was offered in an unusual period of economic collapse and widespread starvation—it was not meant as a prescription for all circumstances. Moreover, when Mao forcefully rejected the household responsibility system for agriculture that Deng and a wide range of CCP leaders were advocating at the time, Deng abruptly reversed course and suppressed any mention of his 'cat theory'.<sup>67</sup> The 'political expert' was very much in evidence.

Deng's heavily political pragmatism was also in evidence later when he, not Mao, was the 'core' of the system. This can be seen in his circumstances and approach as contrasted to Mao's. Deng was well aware that, for all his pre-eminence and clout, he could not command the reflexive obedience of the late Chairman.<sup>68</sup> Deng further understood that the circumstances required an effort to build support, less for himself as the 'core' figure, than for the various policies which added up to 'reform and openness'. It was not simply a matter of getting the numbers to push a policy through—it was more fundamentally an effort to obtain a consensus that would sustain the policy direction through the inevitable challenges and setbacks it would face. There was a clear negative lesson that Deng learned from the late Chairman: Mao could impose virtually anything on the Party, but his most deeply cherished goals were being dismantled within months of his death precisely because they had been imposed. This was clearly linked to the elite's heartfelt desire for consensual decision making, the restoration of the Yan'an norms of inner-Party

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'Soviet revisionism', nor the pretense of leading the world's revolutionary people. He did continue the real politik aspects of Mao's approach toward the Soviet Union and United States since the late 1960s, but the larger thrust of Deng's foreign policy was to facilitate China's opening to the outside world, i.e. to support the PRC's modernization, a very different emphasis from the late Chairman's.

<sup>67</sup> On the 1962 developments, see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, pp. 225-8.

<sup>68</sup> 'Reflexive obedience', if taken to mean Mao speaks and everyone unhesitatingly strives to obey, is somewhat overstated. Mao's subordinates would try to interpret his views in a manner favourable to themselves, or to delay and avoid them where possible, but there was no sense, at least for the 'later Mao', that the Chairman's views could be questioned or debated.

life, and respect for historic contributions to the CCP following the disruptions and personal costs of the Cultural Revolution, all integral aspects of the post-Mao emphasis on ‘stability and unity’—a theme stressed to this very day. Deng’s actions as ‘paramount leader’ were finely attuned to this climate.<sup>69</sup>

In this context, Deng engaged in both consensus building and the imposition of his will when necessary. In this he was more ‘political boss’ than ‘grand architect’. He did not design the key policies of ‘reform and openness’, or even articulate a particularly coherent vision for the overall program.<sup>70</sup> But he did assess policy imperatives, achieve broad agreement where possible, knocking heads together in true ‘boss’ fashion when necessary, and even enforce a dramatic break from orthodoxy against solid majority opinion once convinced of the desirability of such a course of action. Deng’s 1980 endorsement of household responsibility systems in agriculture was a crucial case of a dramatic break, one that illustrated various aspects of his political expertise.

Before 1980, Deng had not played a major part in agricultural policy which, despite its critical subsequent role, was not the centrepiece of early reform efforts. In fact, such alleged ‘neo-Maoists’ as Hua and Ji Dengkui played more significant roles in the movement of agricultural policy away from Mao’s Dazhai model in 1977-78, and Hua offered some tentative support for household responsibility systems on a restricted basis in 1979. While the evidence indicates that Deng was quietly supportive of Wan Li’s experiments in Anhui, as late as January 1980 he avoided expressing an opinion concerning responsibility systems at an inner-Party forum. In 1980 the majority view among central agricultural officials, provincial leaders, and seemingly rural cadres and the Politburo itself was to shore up the collective system and keep responsibility systems as little more than supplements in marginal areas. At the start of the year Deng did not see a political consensus, nor was he seemingly yet convinced on policy grounds of the need for the radical innovation. But in the spring, perhaps more due to the financial drain of the collective system on the state

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<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of the pursuit of consensus under Deng, see Teiwes, ‘Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition’, pp. 82ff. The push to restore traditional norms led to the February 1980 ‘Guiding Principles for Inner-Party Political Life’ which basically restated the Yan’an understandings.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Deng’s 1984 claim that he had a limited role in that year’s crucial decision on urban economic reform, and his only contribution during the previous year was to work on the anti-crime drive; *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, pp. 90-1.

than any other factor, Deng began to endorse responsibility systems on a limited basis, and a Party directive expanding the scope of such systems was issued against majority opinion in September. Opponents of the policy were not afraid to voice their criticism after the decision, but once the policy was in place, it soon became near universal practice given peasant enthusiasm and increasing agricultural output.<sup>71</sup>

Among other things, the responsibility systems case demonstrates that Deng was more 'paramount leader' than 'emperor'. While Deng was an unusually strong leader who did not lose any battles he undertook,<sup>72</sup> he was nevertheless constrained by various factors. He was to some degree constrained by other Party elders of the 'second generation' who could lobby him and who had their own people throughout the elite, by the institutions of the Party-state that Mao had severely disrupted during the Cultural Revolution but which had been restored to central policy roles in the new era, and above all by his own results orientation. The institutional constraint was less due to the political power of the bureaucracies concerned, than to their necessary role in achieving outcomes. Deng could and did override powerful opposition when he felt the issue significant enough, but he was not prepared, and it is questionable that the system would have been willing, as it had in Mao's day, to push counterproductive policies to the brink of disaster. Thus Deng's 1988 demand for radical price reform was not opposed by any actor initially, but as inflation skyrocketed concerned leaders went to Deng and argued the case for pulling back, Deng listened, and price reform was quickly suspended.<sup>73</sup> Reform intellectual Yan Jiaqi captured the essence of both this case and Deng's leadership

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<sup>71</sup> This is based on the research described in n. 60, above. Key sources include: Ji Yecheng, 'Memories of Two Events from the Early Period of Rural Reform', in Du Runsheng (ed.), *Zhongguo nongcun gaige juece jishi* [A Record of the Policies of Chinese Rural Reform] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 98-119; Chi Biqing and Gao Chunsheng, 'The Events Around the Implementation of Household Responsibility Systems across All of Guizhou', in *ibid.*, pp. 268-298; and Zhang Guangyou and Han Gang, 'Wan Li Discusses How Rural Reform Was Carried Out', *Bainianchao* [The Hundred Years' Tide], No. 3 (1998), pp. 1-9.

<sup>72</sup> This is contested by many analysts who argue that Deng was often confronted by major opposition and, at various junctures, overridden by conservative forces led by Chen Yun. The most detailed discussion along these lines is Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). For a more extended statement of Deng's dominance, see Teiwes, 'Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition', pp. 62ff.

<sup>73</sup> See Cheng Xiaonong, 'Decision and Miscarriage: Radical Price Reform in the Summer of 1988', in Carol Lee Hamrin and Suisheng Zhao (eds), *Decision-Making in Deng's China: Perspectives from Insiders*

generally: 'Whatever Deng Xiaoping says must be carried out, *unless it is not feasible*'.<sup>74</sup>

The price reform case reveals an impulse to obey Deng, but at the same time a significant if incomplete step toward 'normal politics'. What is the essence of 'normal politics'? Most fundamentally, it means that political leaders at the apex of an at least partially institutionalised system are beset with an enormous range of issues and pressures, without any dogmatic ideological compass to guide them. It means that leaders perform the function of aggregating diverse interests into a coherent, or not so coherent, program to satisfy various constituencies in order to maintain a policy thrust or to build support for an individual or a leadership group. Unanticipated problems are the stuff of normal politics, whether it be policies that fail to produce desired outcomes (as in the price reform case), or more disorienting political challenges requiring truly improvised responses (as in the 1989 Tiananmen crisis). It is a world of opponents, whether to specific policies or, usually in exceptional circumstances, to the leadership of a system's ranking individual. Leaders fight hundreds if not thousands of battles of various types, and the currency of power is results, or the perceived ability to achieve results. In the CCP context, it also meant restraint in fighting those battles in contrast to the gross excesses of the 'later Mao' period.<sup>75</sup>

'Normal politics' was not inconsistent with Deng's dominance *per se*. His position as 'paramount leader' was never challenged, and once he took a firm position only policy failures, not political opposition, could bring about change. But Deng did aggregate interests, seek non-ideological results, zig and zag according to pressures and unanticipated developments as he strove to sustain the reform orientation. The process was incomplete, however. Certain instances, most dramatically the 'southern tour' of 1992 where a retired Deng bypassed the central leadership to go to the 'masses' to advocate a deepening of reform, even using Maoist phrases in the process, strain the notion of normal politics. With no official

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(Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995). The striking contrast is the several years it took to abandon the Great Leap Forward in the face of Mao's intense commitment.

<sup>74</sup> Yan Jiaqi, 'The Nature of Chinese Authoritarianism', in Hamrin and Zhao, *Decision-Making*, p. 7 (emphasis added).

<sup>75</sup> On 'normal politics', see Frederick C. Teiwes, 'Normal Politics with Chinese Characteristics', *The China Journal*, No. 45 (2001); and idem, 'Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition'.

position, Deng was able to shift significantly overall CCP policy, bringing to heel both the new 'third generation' leadership of Jiang Zemin, and his remaining, more sceptical 'second generation' comrades.<sup>76</sup> Yet while the imperial and Maoist legacy of enormous personal authority lived on, overall Deng skilfully used this authority to shape a consensus and guide the system in the direction he sought.

In this context, political conflict at the top was very different from that under Mao—or at least the 'later Mao'. Naturally, different bureaucratic interests, policy preferences and personal aspirations produced conflict under both leaders,<sup>77</sup> but with Mao the crucial disruptive conflicts were brought about by the Chairman himself. Mao's unsustainable initiatives, tendency to turn policy questions into matters of political line, and scapegoating of colleagues for failures where he bore the main responsibility resulted in extensive purges during the Cultural Revolution and bitter conflict between the sharply divided groupings he had placed on the Politburo. In contrast, the key divisions under Deng were consequences of the problematics of the reform program itself which, at least in broad outline, had consensus support. Part of the problem were substantial differences over the pace of the reform effort—what was sustainable and what risks were appropriate in forging ahead. There were also more ideological differences over where to draw the line between plan and market, and how much political relaxation was desirable. Beyond that was the sheer difficulty of forging a coherent program where one initiative could impact negatively on another reform policy, and the interests behind it.

Apart from dramatic personal initiatives such as the 1988 price reform and the 'southern tour', Deng's role was essentially that of final arbiter. Having made a substantial delegation of authority to leaders on the 'first front', Deng would give his imprimatur to consensus policies or settle disputes on that 'front', and also entertain the complaints of his fellow elders on the 'second front'. In this, like the Mao of the early post-1949 period, Deng took a relatively centrist position,

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<sup>76</sup> On the 'southern tour', see Teiwes, 'Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition', p. 66. For contrasting accounts, see Baum, *Burying Mao*, Ch. 14; and Suisheng Zhao, 'Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China', *Asian Survey*, August 1993.

<sup>77</sup> In the Maoist period clashing policy preferences and personal aspirations can be seen in the agricultural cooperativization (n. 20, above) and Gao Gang (n. 19, above) cases respectively. An example of bureaucratic conflict concerned the 1956-57 'opposing rash advance' policies; see Teiwes with Sun, *Road to Disaster*, Ch. 1.

involving, as often noted, a strong commitment to economic reform combined with a more cautious attitude to political reform. This was a balancing act to be sure, although not fundamentally a balance of reformist and conservative forces in order to maintain his own power, but instead a balance of the two fists of his own approach—economic innovation and unquestioned Party rule.

Most of this was a normal manifestation of a ‘paramount’ leader who delegated extensively<sup>78</sup>; what was less normal was the role of other members of the ‘second generation’. With their revolutionary status, these elders could interfere in the affairs of the ‘first front’—the main methods being whatever influence they individually might have had with Deng, and through direct contact with individuals on the ‘first front’ whom they had sponsored or otherwise developed close relations with. While ‘first front’ leaders publicly claimed the presence of the elders was a benefit to their work, in fact it introduced a complicating factor beyond simply winning over the ‘boss’. As for the boss, Deng saw the elders’ role as critical in assuring the early success of reform, and Chen Yun played an absolutely central role at that stage, while Deng subsequently wanted them to step back and allow the ‘first front’ to operate as independently as possible. He listened to his generational comrades and acted on their advice in the case of Hu Yaobang when that advice mirrored his own concerns, gathered them for support during the Tiananmen crisis, but largely ignored them when setting out on his ‘southern tour’.<sup>79</sup>

The choice of successors also reflected the drift to normal politics, and a fundamental change from Mao’s pattern. With the likely exception of the selection of Liu Shaoqi,<sup>80</sup> the appointment and discarding of each of Mao’s prospective successors were uniquely personal. Not only were these decisions by Mao alone, they were profoundly judgmental assessments of personal loyalty and ideological correctness based on, apart from Hua Guofeng, decades of close association. In contrast, while the choices of Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang and Jiang Zemin were

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<sup>78</sup> In a non-Chinese, institutionalised setting, Ronald Reagan set general directions and delegated authority on arguably a more extensive basis than Deng.

<sup>79</sup> On the role of the elders generally, see ‘Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition’, pp. 78-82. On the Deng-Chen Yun relationship, see *ibid.*, pp. 72-8.

<sup>80</sup> Liu as Mao’s logical ‘natural successor’ presumably had consensus support, although there is little to indicate the actual process of his choice; see above, n. 43.



undoubtedly Deng's ultimate choice,<sup>81</sup> not only does there appear to have been consultation in these cases but the choices and dismissals were essentially political. While Hu had significant career links to Deng, neither Zhao nor Jiang had such ties. At the time of their respective selections, Hu and Zhao of the 'real second generation' had impressive resumes and significant political support. Hu had gained substantial backing from the 'second generation' for his role in repudiating the Cultural Revolution (especially in 'reversing verdicts' on disgraced officials), and seemingly to some degree due to his significant if junior military role during the revolution. Zhao, an experienced generalist and capable administrator who had become the leading proponent of economic reform policies by the mid-1980s, was the only credible choice available when Hu was ousted in 1987.<sup>82</sup> Both Hu and Zhao were attractive to Deng as reformers, but their broader experience and support were also crucial.

Politics, not injured feelings or paranoia, was also the key to the dismissals of Hu and Zhao. With Deng operating under the principle that 'first front' leaders could be changed if they failed to produce satisfactory results,<sup>83</sup> Hu's fall is best understood as a product of his own deficiencies as a politician. Although his prospects had been significantly compromised both by the difficulty of his task in pushing reform forward and a factor beyond his control, the late 1986 student demonstrations, Hu had also alienated virtually every key constituency within the Party leadership. By the latter part of 1986 the relationship with the most critical

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<sup>81</sup> Deng baldly stated that he had selected Hu and Zhao, while in Jiang's case he indicated that he had talked it over with Chen Yun and Li Xiannian. See *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, pp. 288, 300. In a purported conversation between Yang Shangkun and Jiang Zemin in Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link (eds), *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), p. 279, Yang refers to Jiang as 'handpicked by Comrade Xiaoping'. Cf. n. 87, below.

<sup>82</sup> Although only in his late 20s and early 30s, in Yan'an Hu held a leading post in the army's cadre administration, a position he had been nominated for by Mao himself. He was later attached to Deng's armies and served in the Southwest under Deng in the early 1950s. Zhao had been a leading provincial generalist in Guangdong before the Cultural Revolution under Tao Zhu. Although there was no particularly significant career connection between Deng and Zhao during the Maoist era, Deng was surely well aware of Zhao given the close Deng-Tao relationship, and it may be the case that Zhao's posting to Sichuan in late 1975 was Deng's doing. In any case, Zhao's post-Mao initiatives in Sichuan clearly earned Deng's appreciation, and must be considered a key factor in bringing Zhao to Beijing to become Premier in 1980. As the second-ranking generalist on the 'first front' after Hu, Zhao's 1987 promotion was inevitable, although he tried to avoid it so he could continue as Premier.

<sup>83</sup> See Deng's 1979 comment that 'if ... we've chosen the wrong person, we can always replace him'. *Selected Works of Deng (1975-1982)*, p. 216. While this specific comment may have been said with Hua Guofeng in mind, the principle applied later.

‘constituency’—Deng himself—was clearly under strain. Whether this was largely due to differences over ‘bourgeois liberalization’ as officially claimed, it does appear that Hu had let the relationship wither due to insufficient cultivation. Similarly, Hu alienated Chen Yun, who initially had also been favourably disposed, but who frowned upon Hu’s habit of touring the country and giving repeated on-the-spot directives without undertaking in-depth surveys. Hu also alienated the Party elders as a group by pursuing some of their children during the anti-corruption drive in 1986.

But Hu Yaobang’s difficulties were not limited to the ‘second front’. Apart from his inevitable conflict with the conservatives in the propaganda apparatus (who might have been isolated in other circumstances), Hu’s penchant for issuing directives on a wide variety of matters offended the responsible bureaucracies and their leaders. This was nowhere more important than in the economic realm where state rather than Party organs were supposed to take the lead, with the powerful State Planning Commission’s leader openly criticising Hu. But Hu’s interference in economic matters caused problems with an even more important figure—and a key *reformist* leader—Zhao Ziyang, a tension that led Zhao to complain to Deng. Hu was thus vulnerable to charges of having violated the Party norm of collective leadership and the reform principle of reducing Party interference in government affairs. More broadly, in the words of one of Hu’s Politburo colleagues, his essential shortcoming was an inability ‘to unite the Party’. Given all of this, the view that Hu’s removal was forced upon Deng by a conservative faction has little persuasiveness. It was, instead, a cold-blooded decision that Hu had reached his use by date.<sup>84</sup>

The case of Zhao Ziyang is both more uncertain and more obvious than that of Hu, but it is equally political. The uncertain part of the equation concerns Zhao’s standing after the shift in economic policy in summer 1988, a shift which also saw the bolstering of the authority of Premier Li Peng in this area. While Zhao was a more savvy politician than Hu, this setback was due to a policy failure—the overheated economy which had produced unprecedented inflation. Although this

could be blamed to some degree on Deng's radical price reform initiative, and thus provide a sense of *déjà vu* to Mao's blaming others for his mistakes, in fact a great deal of the culpability lay with Zhao's expansionary policies, and those with more cautious views like Li Peng benefited as a result.<sup>85</sup> While Zhao had suffered a setback, what is unclear is whether or to what degree his position was under threat when the crisis of spring 1989 began.

During the crucial period of the first two weeks of May, Zhao acted as the 'first front' leader in charge, presumably with Deng's blessing.<sup>86</sup> Yet as the crisis escalated, divisions within the leadership intensified. Whatever the linkages to earlier economic or other disputes, it is hardly surprising that, in the face of an unprecedented challenge to the regime, there were major differences over the appropriate response to the student occupation of Tiananmen. Whether this quite amounted to a 'Party split', as later officially claimed, may be a slightly different matter, but there was a clear difference between Zhao, who pursued a conciliatory approach toward the students, and Li Peng and others who advocated a harder line. With Zhao's approach failing to produce acceptable results, Deng decided to declare martial law, setting in train the events which culminated in the tragedy of 4 June. Zhao had again failed in policy, and he guaranteed his removal by declining to back Deng's position on martial law. Yet if Zhao's dismissal was inevitable in the circumstances, like Deng in 1976, he was allowed to retain his Party membership. This was undoubtedly a deliberate act by the ultimate leader—although this time reflecting a more political than personal judgement. For Deng, committed to both a more normal politics and economic reform, political logic required a relatively

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<sup>84</sup> For greater detail on Hu's political inadequacies, see Teiwes, 'Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition', pp. 87-88. The observation of the Politburo member, which was originally made *well before* Hu came under heavy pressure in 1986, was related by an oral source who heard it first hand.

<sup>85</sup> See Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), Ch. 7; and You Ji, 'Zhao Ziyang and the Politics of Inflation', *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 25 (July 1991).

<sup>86</sup> This is my supposition. None of the available evidence, including the *Tiananmen Papers* (see n. 87, below), gives much indication of Deng's views in this crucial period. I cannot imagine Deng not being involved, or Zhao daring to act without at least the 'paramount leader's' tacit support. Such support is implied in an account of a purported meeting of Deng, Zhao and Yang Shangkun on 13 May in *ibid.*, pp. 147-52.

lenient treatment of losers, and a positive signal to reformers in the elite, however much he may have been disappointed with Zhao.<sup>87</sup>

Deng's choice of Jiang Zemin to replace Zhao was also deeply political, as will be examined in detail in the following section. It resembled Mao's selection of Hua Guofeng more than any other choice of successor before or since. In both cases the need for a new successor emerged from unanticipated events. Both were surprise choices, although even more so in the case of Jiang, where there was little personal connection. Both involved a sense of mortality and a need to prepare for the future, while thrusting the chosen successor into uncertain political waters. The fundamental difference, apart from Deng's superior health, was Deng's willingness to commit significant resources to his successor's success.

### **Jiang Zemin: The Core, the Chief Engineer, the Chief Executive Officer<sup>88</sup>**

The terms applied to Jiang Zemin, like Deng before him, are less imposing than those used for his predecessor. As we have seen, 'core' was created for Jiang in an attempt to bolster his authority by making a feeble comparison to the roles of Mao and Deng as 'cores' of their respective generations. 'Chief engineer' is one of Jiang's favourite terms for himself—a term reflecting both his professional training and the

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<sup>87</sup> The evidence is clear that Mao personally protected Deng's Party membership, but it is only my supposition that it was Deng's decision in Zhao's case, although probably supported by Chen Yun and at least some other elders. This is not to suggest that there was no element of anger or even sense of betrayal in Deng's reaction to Zhao's performance, especially his refusal to back martial law (see *Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 217, 218, 257, 260, 359, for purported expressions of Deng's discontent with Zhao on this and other matters), or indeed earlier over Hu Yaobang's September 1986 unwillingness to publicize Deng's remarks on 'bourgeois liberalization' (cf. *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, p. 196). But it is to argue that what was fundamental for Deng was the failed policies pursued by Zhao and Hu, and the need to resolve the political crises created by those failures. With regard to lenient treatment of losers, it is also worth noting that Hu Yaobang not only retained his Party card after resigning as General Secretary, but also his Politburo membership, while earlier, on Deng's stipulation, Hua Guofeng continued to be elected to the Central Committee—an arrangement observed to this day despite Hua's advanced age.

For an overview of the Tiananmen crisis, see Tang Tsou, 'The Tiananmen Tragedy: The State-Society Relationship, Choices, and Mechanisms in Historical Perspective', in Brantly Womack (ed.), *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The recent, highly publicised *Tiananmen Papers* do not provide any fundamentally new insights into the elite politics of the 1989 events. They are credible in large part because they confirm what was already known, but any judgement concerning their authenticity is premature.

<sup>88</sup> Little of a biographical nature has been written about Jiang in English, with Bruce Gilley's insightful *Tiger on the Brink: Jiang Zemin and China's New Elite* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), the only substantial study. Despite vast publicity for Jiang, no comprehensive biography has been published in the PRC. A Chinese-language biography published outside the PRC is Yang Zhongmei, *Jiang Zemin zhuan* [Biography of Jiang Zemin] (Taipei: *China Times* Publishing, 1996).

manifold prosaic tasks facing him and his 'third generation' colleagues in building on the reform edifice Deng had created. The full complexity of Jiang's role, however, is better captured by the Western business term, 'CEO'—the manager with overall responsibility for a vast enterprise.

Like his 'core' predecessors, Jiang emerged at a time of crisis. There the similarity ends. Mao rose to leadership by providing solutions for the Party's severe revolutionary crisis, Deng out of the expectation that he could—and along with others that he did—find ways to extricate the country from the mess Mao left it in. In 1989, in contrast, the crisis was ironically less disruptive of the nation's well being than the chaos of the Maoist era, but more threatening to the rule of the CCP.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, Jiang came to leadership not because he had any solutions or widely recognized abilities, but because there was a vacancy in the top job on the 'first front'. Again, the obvious comparison is with Hua Guofeng who was unfairly dismissed by Deng as someone with 'no ideas of his own' at the very time he appointed Jiang the new 'core'.<sup>90</sup> Outside observers continued to make the comparison for up to half a decade despite indications of both Jiang's political skill and the consolidation of his power on the assumption he too was a mere transitional figure who would surely be toppled. Whatever the differences in the political skills of Hua and Jiang, the crucial differences were, first, that Hua faced a Deng and a 'second generation' still young enough and determined enough after the Cultural Revolution to take charge, while by 1989 this group was in semi-retirement and, however grudgingly, accepting their imminent passing from the stage. And second, superficially further emphasising Jiang's tenuous position but in fact strengthening him, was that in contrast to Hua's leading role in solving the immediate problem of the 'gang of four', Deng dealt with the students in Tiananmen Square with little sign of any input from Jiang.

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<sup>89</sup> Despite the severe economic, political and social problems at the end of the Maoist period, the Party still had substantial legitimacy for a variety of reasons, most importantly the absence of an alternative intellectual framework for the vast majority. For further discussion, see Frederick C. Teiwes, 'The Chinese State During the Maoist Era', in David Shambaugh (ed.), *The Modern Chinese State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 156-9. Thirteen years later, although conditions in all spheres objectively were immeasurably better, the combination of loosened political control under reform with the contradictions and shortcomings of the program had created a potentially explosive situation.

It is easy to underestimate Jiang, in part because of personal foibles such as a compulsion to comb his hair in public, or spouting bits of the Gettysburg address or Shakespeare to demonstrate his English skills. Nor would observers be impressed by the nickname used by at least some Shanghai residents regarding his performance as city leader—‘flowerpot’, i.e. a decorative but ineffectual figure.<sup>91</sup> A more substantial reason to underestimate Jiang was the unremarkable nature of his career. Although joining the CCP in 1946, Jiang’s revolutionary role was marginal in the extreme, involving no leadership role in his student circles, and paling in comparison to those of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, not to mention the ‘second generation’. This, of course, meant that he had no military experience, hardly a plus in a party where battlefield heroism had always been an important credential. After 1949, Jiang’s career had followed his professional training as an engineer, for two decades almost exclusively involving factory management and research institute positions. During the Cultural Revolution he suffered little, taking up a position in the central bureaucracy in 1970. It was only in the post-Mao period, however, that he took on Party leadership roles as Vice Minister and Minister of the Electronics Industry, and as Mayor and then Party Secretary of Shanghai. The positions were significant, and Jiang obtained Politburo status in 1987, but he had no power base in Beijing and there was little to suggest that he had been earmarked for the very top.

The question remains: Why Jiang Zemin? What did Deng and the Party elders he consulted see in Jiang that led them to raise him above his status as an ordinary Politburo member to the top job? The first factor was who he was not. He was not Li Peng, the number two member of the Politburo Standing Committee after Zhao Ziyang, who had advocated a stronger line toward the students in Tiananmen throughout the crisis, and who had become Deng’s public face in the declaration of martial law. Deng understood this made Li a polarizing figure, both within in CCP, with the urban population, and internationally. In his cold-blooded fashion, Deng looked beyond the similarity in the position Li had taken to the one he had arrived at, and Li’s loyalty in carrying out his decisions, to the larger

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<sup>90</sup> See *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, p. 290. In fact, Hua had played a key role in turning China away from failed Maoist policies.

political needs of the situation beyond the crisis. He also, it seems, considered the fact that Li (although arguably unfairly<sup>92</sup>) had a reputation as a conservative when it came to economic reform, so that selecting Li as Party leader would have sent a message at variance with his fundamental reform objective. Deng put the matter baldly when he called in Li in late May to inform him that Jiang would be brought in from Shanghai and promoted over Li as the newly defined 'core': 'in deciding on members of the new leading bodies, the most important consideration is that they should be perceived as reformers, ... [if the people] feel that the leadership is hidebound, conservative or mediocre ..., there will be many more disturbances'.<sup>93</sup>

It was a classic case of lightning striking, and the indications are that Jiang was both understandably surprised and ambivalent about taking up the post.<sup>94</sup> But more was involved than who he was not, or simply reaching for a Politburo member not involved in the Beijing events. Jiang possessed a desirable set of qualities. He fit the profile for future generations of leaders that had been repeatedly emphasized throughout the 1980s—a younger, tertiary educated technocrat.<sup>95</sup> Jiang's technocratic qualifications had, in the reform era, been adapted to a career as a political leader at both the Centre and in the localities. He had also been assigned to some sensitive political tasks, as part of the team dispatched by Hua to pacify Shanghai after the purge of the 'gang of four' in fall 1976, and, in

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<sup>91</sup> For a classic photo of Jiang combing his hair in front of a bemused King Juan Carlos of Spain, see the photo section between pages 178 and 179 in Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*. On the 'flowerpot' nickname, see *ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>92</sup> While there can be little doubt that Li was at the cautious end of the spectrum when it came to economic reform, his basic pro-reform position is not to be doubted. In the post-Tiananmen period when existing economic policy, the climate created by the crackdown, and Li's powers as Premier gave him maximum leverage to obstruct reform, significant economic reform measures were introduced nevertheless. See Nicholas R. Lardy, 'Is China Different? The Fate of Its Economic Reform', in Daniel Chirot (ed.), *The Crisis of Leninism and the Decline of the Left: The Revolutions of 1989* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991).

<sup>93</sup> *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, p. 288. Standing Committee member Yao Yilin, who shared both Li's economic caution and his position on the Tiananmen events, was also called in by Deng on this occasion. According to *The Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 256-64, 308-12, Li Peng's name hardly came up when the elders discussed possible replacements for Zhao Ziyang, and Deng commented that 'we ... must not let emotion sway us' when choosing the new leadership.

<sup>94</sup> See Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 134-5.

<sup>95</sup> The standard account of the transition to technocratic leaders is Hong Yung Lee, *From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). A recent study addressing new trends is Cheng Li [Li Cheng], 'Jiang Zemin's Successors: The Rise of the Fourth Generation of Leaders in the PRC', *The China Quarterly*, No. 161 (2000).

1980, as a leader of the two commissions charged with planning one of the signature features of Deng's reform program—the Special Economic Zones.<sup>96</sup>

Jiang's participation in these events foreshadowed what became the key to his political persona and made him particularly attractive to Deng in 1989. For Deng, as previously suggested, there were two strands to reform, the two fists of bold economic reform and firm Party rule. In the 1980s Jiang consistently took a pro-economic reform stance, but at the same time was sensitive to challenges to political control. Moreover, in handling situations where political control was under threat, Jiang demonstrated a combination of flexibility and necessary toughness that would also have earned Deng's respect. The key cases in Shanghai were his handling of the 1986 student demonstrations that contributed decisively to Hu Yaobang's downfall, and the more threatening demonstrations in spring 1989 at the time of the Tiananmen crisis. In the latter crisis Jiang's handling of the outspoken Shanghai newspaper *World Economic Herald* was especially noteworthy. With liberal journalists preparing critical commentary concerning Hu Yaobang's treatment by the CCP, Jiang negotiated a compromise version with the paper's veteran editor, but when the agreement did not hold Jiang moved against the paper. This suggested some steel in Jiang's make-up that could have only impressed Deng and the 'second generation'.<sup>97</sup>

These qualities would stand Jiang well in the years ahead. His flexible centrist stance placed him in position to build consensus and reduce his vulnerabilities, in contrast to Zhao Ziyang and especially Hu Yaobang who suffered from being too exposed on the cutting edge of reform. The toughness he showed in dealing with the *World Economic Herald* would be useful in repelling the most serious challenge he would face, that of the Yang brothers in 1992 (see below). Another useful trait, implicit in his steady rise but hitherto not discussed, is Jiang's non-threatening

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<sup>96</sup> On Jiang's role in these two operations, see Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 63-4, 67-8.

<sup>97</sup> On the events in Shanghai in 1986 and 1989, see *ibid.*, pp. 85-94, 114ff. Documents in the *Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 143, 261, report the elders' approval of Jiang's handling of the *World Economic Herald* issue.

Fortuitous factors were also at play, notably Jiang's posting in Shanghai. The fact that Shanghai provided a large share of the central budget in the 1980s undoubtedly provided some special appreciation for its leader. That Chen Yun, who, according to a usually reliable oral source, actually nominated Jiang for the top spot, resided in Shanghai and thus had significant contact with Jiang, presumably helped as well. Cf. *Tiananmen Papers*, pp. 143, 260.



personality. As Bruce Gilley has shown, in his rise up the ladder Jiang adapted to survive the ideological campaigns of the Maoist era, including carrying out required purges, but he seemingly always avoided extremes and never engaged in factional retribution.<sup>98</sup> This stood him well in the post-Mao era when revulsion over the brutal politics of the Cultural Revolution quickly set in and ‘stability and unity’ became a dominant theme of elite politics. Much as Deng’s own return to the leadership in 1977 had been facilitated by the desire for stability and unity,<sup>99</sup> Jiang benefited from the same impulse which took on new prominence following the shock of Tiananmen and the elite’s perception that a ‘Party split’ had been a critical factor in the crisis getting out of control. For the leadership as a whole, it was a question of ‘we all hang together or we hang separately’. Jiang’s personal moderation, as well as his policy centrism, suited the times.

If Jiang’s broad profile fit the times, the actual resources he brought to office naturally paled beside those of Deng. Undoubtedly Jiang’s most precious political asset was his very designation as ‘core’. While no one could take the analogy of Jiang to Mao and Deng seriously, ‘core’ status linked Jiang symbolically to the stability of the system, thus providing a basis for the amassing of additional institutional powers. The first such step came in November 1989 when Deng formally retired, giving his last post as CMC Chair to Jiang, while telling the military that tradition notwithstanding, holding the top civilian post as CCP General Secretary was sufficient in itself for leadership over the army.<sup>100</sup> This was one of several efforts on Deng’s part to bolster Jiang’s authority. Another was his promise not to interfere in the affairs of the ‘first front’, a stance meant to apply to other Party elders as well. Yet these moves were hedged. With regard to the ‘first front’, Deng underlined that it was to be a collective leadership without spelling out the powers of the ‘core’ *via-a-vis* the collective. And as for himself, his withdrawal

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<sup>98</sup> See Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 41-43, 47-48, 51ff.

<sup>99</sup> While the 10 months between the arrest of the ‘gang of four’ and Deng’s return to work has conventionally been seen as a period of obstruction and struggle, new research (see n. 60, above) indicates an early consensus on his return in part because it was recognized as essential for Party unity. Ironically, the ‘delay’, short in Chinese terms, was also dictated by the need for ‘stability and unity’ since too abrupt a reversal of Mao’s 1976 verdict on Deng would also have threatened stability.

would only come into effect 'once the new leading group has established its prestige'.<sup>101</sup>

Consolidating Jiang's prestige as 'core' took a number of years. The key steps were his reelection as General Secretary at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1992, taking over the PRC Presidency in 1993, the effective passing of power from Deng about the end of 1994 due to declining health, the expansion of his authority into the economic realm in 1995, and again being elected General Secretary at the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress following Deng's passing in 1997. While the opaqueness of leadership politics in the post-Tiananmen period makes any conclusions tentative, in the pre-14<sup>th</sup> Congress period in particular there appeared to be a division of labour between Jiang and Li Peng, a veritable 'Jiang-Li system', which of course followed the reform principle of separating Party and government affairs. This 'Jiang-Li system', in turn, was rooted in respect for the interests of the PRC's main institutions—no longer could a leader or leaders override these institutions as Mao and, on a more restricted basis, Deng had done.<sup>102</sup> But as 'core', Jiang was in a key position to mediate these institutional interests.

Despite Deng's self-proclaimed intention not to interfere, his own influence and that of the elders more broadly was a clear limitation on the authority of Jiang and the 'third generation'. This was of greater significance for Deng individually than for the elders as a group, and it was seen especially in the military where, despite Jiang's position as CMC Chair, Deng's personal allies and followers—especially PRC President Yang Shangkun, exercised direct operational authority.<sup>103</sup> And as Deng's 'southern tour' at the start of 1992 demonstrated, he could still

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<sup>100</sup> *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, p. 323. The traditional close link of the CMC Chair and the armed revolution as seen in Mao's and Deng's leadership of the body had, of course, been interrupted in 1976-80 when Hua Guofeng held the post.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>102</sup> On the 'Jiang-Li system', see You Ji, 'Jiang Zemin: In Quest of Post-Deng Supremacy', in Maurice Brosseau, Suzanne Pepper and Tsang Shu-ki (eds), *China Review 1996* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1996), pp. 4-7.

<sup>103</sup> Yang, a long standing ally, was the standing vice chair in charge of daily CMC affairs. Another significant figure was Liu Huaqing, an old Second Field Army subordinate, who became a CMC vice chair in 1989 when Deng retired, and who was raised to the Politburo Standing Committee at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress.

While much of the literature on the early 1990s emphasizes the role of 'conservative' elders, especially Chen Yun, this is based on thin evidence relying heavily on dubious Hong Kong sources. While Chen's intellectual influence at a time when cautious economic policies prevailed is undoubted, I believe his and the elders' role more generally has been overstated.

override the ‘first front’ and reorient policy—an act which implicitly, though not explicitly, criticized the leadership of his successor.<sup>104</sup>

Yet if Deng’s actions indicated the limits of Jiang’s power, it was also Deng who shored up his authority and furthered the consolidation process. This was crucially the case later in 1992 in the lead-up to the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress when Jiang faced the most significant challenge during his period as leader from the Yang brothers, Yang Shangkun and his half brother, army political department head Yang Baibing. On the best available evidence, this related to military affairs rather than representing a threat to Jiang’s position as Party leader, but it was a clear impediment to his power in any case. According to well-connected oral sources, the affair was a result of Yang Baibing’s attempt to freeze Jiang out of military affairs on the grounds he was a novice without battlefield experience. It was, these sources report, settled when Jiang’s appealed to Deng on the basis that he could not function in his position as CMC Chair under such circumstances, and Deng intervened decisively on his behalf. As concerning the *World Economic Herald* issue in 1989, Jiang again demonstrated a willingness to act boldly when significant matters are at issue. In the event the affair was settled by Yang Baibing’s dismissal from his army post (but not from the Politburo), and Yang Shangkun’s retirement with less influence than a long time supporter of Deng could have anticipated.<sup>105</sup>

While Deng’s actions, both positive and negative for Jiang’s ability to lead, underline the less than fully normal start to Jiang’s period as ‘core’, the basic feature of his leadership circumstances was a further extension of the ‘normal politics’ of the 1980s. Coping with an enormous range of problems, aggregating diverse interests, riding out unanticipated events such as the 1999 Belgrade bombing, and above all achieving satisfactory results was the order of the day. Compared to Deng and the post-1949 Mao, the situation was fundamentally more difficult for Jiang due

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<sup>104</sup> Although Deng mildly praised ‘the current central leadership’ during the tour, and there are signs of Jiang moderating his position in a more pro-growth direction in the latter part of 1991, Deng’s critique nevertheless called into question Party policies under Jiang’s stewardship over the previous two years. See Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 176-7, 183-7.

<sup>105</sup> Of course, by placing Liu Huaqing on the Standing Committee (see n. 103, above), Deng still limited Jiang’s sway in the military. For a different account of the affair claiming an effort in conjunction with Qiao Shi to unseat Jiang, see Joseph Fewsmith, ‘Institution Building and Democratization in China’, in Howard Handelman and Mark Tessler (eds), *Democracy and Its Limits:*

to a more complex agenda and his decidedly more limited resources than those of his heroic predecessors. As with leaders engaging in 'normal politics' elsewhere, Jiang has often been limited to the power to persuade, even after the mid-1990s full consolidation of his power and Deng's passing. The situation has been succinctly captured in the observation of Li Cheng: 'No faction, no institution, no region, and no individual can really dominate power'.<sup>106</sup>

The issues facing Jiang and the 'third generation' have been and remain daunting. The need to sustain economic growth while at the same time dealing with the dislocation caused by the growth strategy, the effort to sustain viable central government institutions in the context of decentralization where the incentives for lower level obedience are diminished, a complex and rapidly changing socio-political environment where, unlike the 1980s, substantial groups of 'losers' are emerging in society, a recognition of the need for the state to retreat from traditional responsibilities and facilitate the emergence of quasi-autonomous groups from society to assume the discarded functions, the challenge of globalization and the threats it causes for domestic interests, a more plural intellectual environment with the Party subject to criticism from the 'right', 'left', and nationalist sentiments—these and many other challenges form an agenda that would threaten to overwhelm any elite, and certainly one guaranteed to generate serious disputes within the political class.<sup>107</sup> Undoubtedly, such conflicts were what Jiang had in mind in his recent frustrated comment that 'I've fought 100 battles already, I have seen a lot'.<sup>108</sup>

Jiang's task as 'CEO' has been to manage these complex issues, to steer through acceptable outcomes to repeated policy battles, and to satisfy key interests and institutions within the system without becoming their captive. The issues are inherent in reform, reflecting basic contradictions in the program and greater complexity as the economy and society has diversified. In contrast to Deng, the

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*Lessons from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p.100.

<sup>106</sup> Li Cheng, 'China in 1999: Seeking Common Ground at a Time of Tension and Conflict', *Asian Survey*, January/February 2000, p. 117.

<sup>107</sup> There is a large literature on these issues. An excellent recent overview is Joseph Fewsmith, 'Historical Echoes and Chinese Politics: Can China Leave the Twentieth Century Behind?', in Tyrene White (ed.), *China Briefing 2000: The Continuing Transformation* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000).

<sup>108</sup> Jiang's outburst to Hong Kong reporters when questioned on his government's support for the reappointment of Hong Kong's chief executive Tung Chee-hwa, 27 October 2000.

‘political boss’ who set broad directions and largely left the details to lieutenants like Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, and who occasionally fell back on Mao-like methods as in his ‘southern tour’ warning that the leadership should not ‘act like women with bound feet’ when it came to economic development,<sup>109</sup> ‘CEO’ Jiang not only had to broker acceptable policies, he had to regularize and institutionalize the consequences of reform.<sup>110</sup> By the mid-1990s he also had to deal with issues that had been raised at the outset of reform such as subsidies for state-run industries, but which had repeatedly been relegated to the too hard basket. In pushing through state-owned enterprise reform, however flawed, and accession to the World Trade Organization, Jiang demonstrated a capacity to build the necessary consensus against significant institutional opposition and fears of disruptive social consequences.

While a hundred and more battles within the leadership have surely occurred, Jiang Zemin’s period as ‘core’ is notable for its lack of ‘power struggles’, notwithstanding the efforts of outside observers to divine such conflicts. In the cases most widely cited apart from the Yang brothers, the removal of Chen Xitong from the Politburo on corruption charges in 1995, and the seemingly unwilling retirement of Standing Committee member Qiao Shi in 1997, there is no convincing evidence of a challenge to Jiang’s position or sharply divergent policy positions, and both matters were handled well within existing procedures and without major drama.<sup>111</sup> More broadly, the aversion to the elite strife of the Cultural Revolution and the divisions surrounding the Tiananmen crisis has been crucial to the absence of ‘power struggles’. Given the priority to ‘stability and unity’, challenges to Jiang would be a risky business for both the challenger and the system. Since a disruptive fight over the top job has been perceived to threaten everything, ‘core’ status in

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<sup>109</sup> *Selected Works of Deng (1982-1992)*, p. 360. The phrase had been originally used by Mao when calling for an upsurge in agricultural cooperativization in 1955.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Fewsmith, ‘Historical Echoes’, p. 28. Furthermore, as Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 279-82, 286, correctly argues, Jiang was faced with dealing with problems Deng recognized but essentially neglected in his push for economic growth, including corruption, inequitable incomes, regional disparities, weakened central state capacity, agricultural development, poverty, Party building and moral strengthening.

<sup>111</sup> On Chen Xitong, see Fewsmith, ‘Institution Building’, pp.100-101; and You Ji, ‘Jiang Zemin’, pp.14-17. Jiang handled Chen’s case with great sensitivity in order to avoid charges of factional bias, and apparently gained the acquiescence of Li Peng in the removal of Li’s 1989 ally. On Qiao Shi, see

itself served to insulate Jiang from attack, while the powers attached to the specific offices held by the 'core' became the bedrock of his power. Rather than sharp struggles at the top, the high politics of Jiang's period is better understood, in You Ji's terms, as a 'quiet fight for acceptance', where the 'core's' political skills of consensus building, deft power sharing, and tending to key institutional interests produced reasonably successful outcomes in difficult circumstances.<sup>112</sup> Jiang Zemin's ability to sustain his pre-eminence can perhaps be summarized in a simple formula—the powers of office *plus* fear of disunity *plus* tolerable results.

Another factor comes into play, however—the piecemeal institutionalization of the system including the political affairs of the central leadership. Begun in Deng's time, measures were undertaken to introduce various procedures and limits concerning the exercise of power. The results have been considerable: Party and state bodies meet regularly according to constitutional schedules; the role and significance of the National People's Congress (NPC), while still constrained, has significantly expanded; retirement systems to eliminate the Maoist practice of life-long tenure have been introduced which, as we shall see, at least informally affect the very centre of the system; a personnel policy emphasizing youth and education, while not strictly institutionalized, serves to enhance the rotation and diversification of power; and term limits, including the so far observed constitutionally-mandated two term limit for Premier, are a clear manifestation of regular procedures. Of course, institutionalization does not guarantee the attenuation of conflict, and under conditions of normal politics it may in some circumstances intensify division,<sup>113</sup> but overall it forces more power sharing, consultation and consensus building.

But what of the leader himself, the 'core', and the top Party body, the Politburo? Even while Deng lived the system was evolving toward what might be termed managed institutionalism. While many aspects of this process—including

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Fewsmith, 'Institution Building', pp. 101-102. In this case Qiao had passed the generally accepted retirement age of 70.

<sup>112</sup> See You Ji, 'Jiang Zemin', pp. 20-4.

<sup>113</sup> The accession of Li Peng to the Premiership in 1988 under the reform principle of separating the Party and government in fact deepened the struggle over economic policy; see Teiwes, 'Paradoxical Post-Mao Transition', pp. 92-3. A similar tension exists between Zhu Rongji as Premier and Li Peng as head of the NPC with the institutional mandate to oversee the government.

the power of the 'core' relative to the collective, and who has a say in selecting the 'core', the successor to the 'core', or the members of the collective leadership—are obscure, clearly, or not so clearly, current operating principles relate to age, qualifications and tenure. While no absolute rule has apparently been laid down, since the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress an age criterion of sorts has been enforced. By the time of the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1992, leaders past age 70 (with the exception of military figures) were routinely retiring from the Politburo; thus both Yao Yilin and Song Ping left the Standing Committee at the 1992 Congress. Retirement is one explanation for the exit of Qiao Shi at the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress, and military representatives are now observing the principle. Indeed, unverified Hong Kong reports claim there was spirited discussion at the Beidaihe meetings preceding the Congress over a formal retirement system for Politburo members setting an age limit of 70, along with related proposals to limit the number of terms that could be served, e.g., to two for the General Secretary.<sup>114</sup>

The apparent fact that there has been no formal decision along these lines indicates the limits to institutionalization, as does the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress exception for the 71-year old Jiang as 'core', but there do appear to be emerging regular practices which shape behaviour. The exception, I would argue, had less to do with the office than the political situation. As the 'core', and a 'core' only marginally older than his senior peers, Jiang was crucial to the system at that juncture less because of his skills than because competition for the succession (real succession competition if not necessarily 'struggle') would have been deemed a threat to stability. But certainly there is the expectation that Jiang will gracefully step down when the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes in 2002 at the end of his second full term, and he has indicated that he will do so, although there is some ambiguity whether he plans to stay on as CMC Chair while relinquishing his Party and state posts. Whether he attempts such a manoeuvre, and whether it is accepted, will say much about the apparent trend to

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<sup>114</sup> *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, 15 September 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-258; and *Cheng Ming*, 1 September 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-268. As for Jiang's state position as PRC President, a constitutional two-term limit does exist, and presumably will be honoured as the corresponding limit for Premier has been.

institutionalization. For the time being, however, institutionalization as flexibly interpreted has worked to bolster Jiang's position and leadership stability.<sup>115</sup>

More is involved than simply a 70 age limit or a two term limit for the 'core'. If the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress is any indication, a system is in place to bring in younger, better educated leaders into the Politburo who can serve three or four terms and become the basis of future 'generations' of leadership. Military figures aside, all of the newly elected Politburo ranged between 53 and 62 years of age, and had professional credentials. Moreover, in stark contrast to the practice of Mao and Deng, the succession issue has also been subject to managed institutionalism under Jiang. It is quite clear that a successor, the 'core' of the 'fourth generation', has been chosen and already granted the institutional positions to facilitate the transition. Hu Jintao was all but treated as a 'core in waiting' in the official biography issued at the Congress,<sup>116</sup> the following year he was made PRC Vice President with the right of automatic succession should anything happen to Jiang, and in 1999 he was named CMC Vice Chair. Moreover, given the age structure of the Standing Committee, there is little chance of anyone on that body, presumably a must for aspiring to be the 'core', mounting an effective challenge.<sup>117</sup> And at 59 in 2002, Hu will be poised for two terms as 'core'.<sup>118</sup> The real succession issue at the next Congress, I suggest, will be the selection of a 'core in waiting' for the 'fifth generation', or possibly the selection of several prospective candidates, with the definitive choice left to the 17<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2007.

Although there is no way of knowing with assurance, there is little to indicate that Hu was Jiang's personal choice in the way that previous successors were selected by Mao and Deng. Not only were there no previous career links between Jiang and Hu before the latter joined the Standing Committee in 1992, but

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<sup>115</sup> For a somewhat more extensive discussion, see Teiwes, 'Normal Politics with Chinese Characteristics'.

<sup>116</sup> See *Beijing Review*, No.41 (1997), pp.15-16.

<sup>117</sup> Jiang, Li Peng and Zhu Rongji, who will all be well past 70, can be expected to retire, while Li Ruihuan's position appears anomalous. As Li was added to the Standing Committee during the 1989 crisis at age 55, he will be 68 in 2002, but his power can be regarded as suspect given the relative insignificance of his main organization, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The newly appointed Standing Committee members in 1997, Wei Jianxing and Li Lanqing, will have passed 70 when the 16<sup>th</sup> Congress meets.



to the extent there was a personal decision to place Hu in line for the succession, it was undoubtedly Deng's. Hu Jintao was promoted to the Standing Committee at the 14<sup>th</sup> Congress in 1992 at the tender age of 49, by far youngest member of the inner collective. He was raised to these heights directly from the Central Committee, another sign he was earmarked for much greater things. This took place when Deng's authority was still unambiguous, as seen in his support of Jiang against the Yang brothers while still placing the septuagenarian Liu Huaqing on the Standing Committee. Moreover, Hu's attractiveness to Deng (as well as the broader elite) reflected the same set of factors that drew him to Jiang three years earlier—no involvement in the Tiananmen events, an image as a reformist, and acceptability to both the 'conservative' and 'reformist' wings of the CCP.<sup>119</sup> This is not to suggest that Hu then or later was imposed on Jiang against his wishes, although if left entirely to his own devices the 'core' would probably have made a different choice,<sup>120</sup> and the evidence suggests the Jiang-Hu relationship has been a smooth one. But the confirmation of Hu as the successor at the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress was undoubtedly a collective undertaking involving broad consultation, whatever the precise role of Jiang in the process.<sup>121</sup>

While the circumstances facing Jiang, Hu and (if all goes well) future 'cores' have evolved considerably toward 'normal politics' and institutionalization, disconcerting links to the CCP's abnormal past remain. This is not simply a matter

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<sup>118</sup> Hu will be two months short of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday when the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress meets in 2012, thus under current practice still eligible for another term. If the process of insitutionalisation is further embedded, however, a two term limit might then be in place.

<sup>119</sup> I am indebted to Warren Sun concerning the similarity of Hu's and Jiang's political assets as they would have been seen by both Deng and the broader political elite. Regarding Hu's acceptability to both Party 'factions', note that he had worked under the more conservative Song Ping in Gansu in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and that he was promoted by Hu Yaobang to be Youth League secretary in 1982, and then in 1985 to become Party secretary in Guizhou.

<sup>120</sup> While the matter is speculation rather than fact, the alleged failed effort of Jiang to promote Zeng Qinghong to full Politburo status in fall 2000 would suggest favouritism for his long-time subordinate and confidant. Even if true, in the circumstances Jiang arguably was attempting to enhance Zeng's position as a possible counterweight to Hu within the future collective, rather than to promote him as an alternative successor. On the alleged attempt, see Willy Wo Lap Lam's report in the *South China Morning Post*, 25 October 2000. On the Jiang-Zeng relationship, see Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 135-6, 199, 215, 308.

<sup>121</sup> An analogous process of institutionalised leadership replacement, arguably involving a greater individual role within the context of wide consultation, prevailed for 65 years in Mexico before being abandoned at the end of the 1990s. There the presidential succession was determined by the sitting president choosing his successor from members of his cabinet after consultation with an array of

of the 'third generation's' unwillingness or inability to deliver more than tepid political reforms. It also reflects a stunted ability to relate to society, to mitigate the sense of 'them and us' which is palpable. Despite real efforts to develop an effective legal framework, state power remains arbitrary and unpredictable. For all the basic pragmatism and results orientation of the Jiang leadership, key political methods can be traced to the Maoist era. These include the propagation of a (now widely discredited) ideology, the identification of that ideology with the 'core leader', the practice of lower-level leaders clambering to endorse the leader's theoretical efforts as if it were a 1950s campaign, while the population reacts with incomprehension and derision, and a continuing (albeit significantly reduced) mobilizational approach to policy implementation.<sup>122</sup> Until these practices are overcome, it is unlikely that the most important aspect of 'stability and unity'—that between regime and society—can be achieved.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the current situation is not simply that, as in 1989, popular support for the regime is much weaker than in the past despite improved political, social and economic conditions, but also the leadership's palpable lack of political self-confidence in relation to society. As Joseph Fewsmith put it a few years ago, 'There was no sense a decade ago [i.e. in the mid-1980s] that too much reform might bring down the whole system; today, there seems to be a fear that even the current amount of reform presents a danger to political stability'.<sup>123</sup> While clearly a function of objective changes in the polity, the decline in self-confidence is also related to the different generations of leaders. For 'first and second generation' revolutionaries, they had won China on the battlefield, it was theirs by right, and the Party and masses would surely follow their call. Thus Mao, even during the chaotic Cultural Revolution, remained confident that he could control the wildly fluctuating movement. Deng, two decades later in spring 1989, could rely on the 'second generation' to approve military action to protect their

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ruling-party and government leaders during the final third of a mandated single six-year term. See Roderick Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Ch. 5.

<sup>122</sup> On continuities and changes in the PRC approach to governance, see Michel Oksenberg, 'China's Political System: Challenges of the Twenty-first Century', *The China Journal*, No. 45 (2001).

<sup>123</sup> Joseph Fewsmith, 'Chinese Politics on the Eve of the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress', in Maurice Brosseau, Kuan Hsin-chi and Y.Y. Kueh (eds), *China Review 1997* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1997), p. 12.

revolution, even as Zhao Ziyang and younger officials wavered. In contrast, although the 'third generation' repeatedly cracks down on perceived threats, whether they be small democratic parties or the Falungong movement, there is a real skittishness in the reaction. China is not 'theirs' in the same way as for earlier generations. The response of these leaders and future generations in the event of a deep regime crisis is very much open to question.

### **Conclusion: Three 'Core Leaders' in Historical Perspective**

Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin came to power, or in Jiang's case was put on the path to power, at times of crisis, albeit during crises that varied greatly, and by very different processes. Mao had the most difficult task in the 1930s and 1940s—finding a way for a weak revolutionary movement to overcome far more powerful enemies while prevailing within the CCP against other leaders with different ideas and their own resources. That he succeeded through a combination of strategic brilliance, organizational adeptness, the ability to imbue belief in his revolutionary vision, and a shrewd talent for unifying the Party's leadership, placed him in an invulnerable position following the victory of 1949.

In a certain sense, Deng in the late 1970s had the easiest task, that of rebuilding the Party, restoring order and reviving economic development after the disasters of the Cultural revolution, even if it later came to involve dramatic breaks from accepted practice. On the one hand, it was easier in the sense that there were some well-established pre-Cultural Revolution approaches which could be adopted initially, and a Party apparatus, however weakened over the previous decade, that could be relied on to implement a new policy line. It was also easier in that Deng did not have to struggle for power; although there was ambiguity during Hua Guofeng's Chairmanship, authority flowed to Deng on the basis of his revolutionary status, military heroism, broad administrative and political experience under Mao, closeness to the late Chairman, and decisive personality. His authority was fundamentally uncontested. Jiang, in contrast to his predecessors, was thrust into the 'core' role by the Tiananmen crisis, but he was essentially irrelevant to dealing with the crisis itself, and only one player in the early 1990s effort to come to terms with the fallout from the crisis. It was only later, well into

the post-crisis period, that Jiang obtained the authority appropriate, if far short of that of Mao and Deng, to the notion of 'core leader'.

As PRC leaders, Mao, Deng and Jiang also differed enormously. Mao, of course, also changed dramatically during his period of rule. During 1949-76, with 1958 the basic demarcation, Mao degenerated from pragmatic visionary to paranoid ideologue, and his systemic effect shifted from building an orthodox Stalinist socialism to chaotic movements that severely disrupted, but did not destroy the underlying political structure. The shifts in ideology and systemic effect were mirrored by changes in Mao's leadership style. Subject to no political limits except his own self-restraint after 1949, and by 1957-58 psychologically rebelling against the possibility that he could be at fault for policy errors, from the late 1950s on the increasingly unpredictable emperor created a situation where he no longer listened to unpalatable advice, his closest colleagues were unwilling to speak frankly, institutions were crudely overridden, and political conflict at the top was initiated by Mao as he pursued unrealistic goals and blamed others for the inevitable shortcomings.

'Paramount leader' Deng, in contrast, was a consistent pragmatist in policy and especially politics. As the 'political boss' of the reform era, Deng was a decisive leader who provided the muscle to move the reform agenda along, after initially playing a central role in the immediate post-Mao restoration. The systemic effect of this agenda was to transform state socialism to a market-oriented variant, a process producing deep contradictions within state and society along with remarkable successes. From time to time Deng's impatience got the better of him and he ignored advice and institutions, but overall he was rational in the pursuit of practical results. He genuinely consulted and delegated considerable authority. Contradictions in the policies, rather than the leader's dark suspicions, generated elite conflict, and Deng acted as arbiter.

For his part, 'CEO' Jiang has introduced neither fundamentally new strategies nor basic shifts in orientation—because of both his own restricted power and the evolution of the system, he can only build on what Deng created. His task is to manage an increasingly diverse nation and integrate it into an increasingly complex world. To this end Jiang and his 'third generation' colleagues have taken

some hard decisions in the economic realm, and avoided others in the political realm. Jiang's *modus operandi* has been to tend to many constituencies and build consensus, and, together with his powers of office and the elite's fear of disunity, his skill at this has produced sufficient results to sustain his position as 'core' and gradually enhance his real powers.

Another clear contrast is in the management of the succession issue by the three leaders. After the initial choice of Liu Shaoqi in the 1940s, Mao exercised absolute authority in dismissing and selecting successors. By the time he determined to dismiss Liu in 1965-66, his decisions were exceptionally personal and erratic, as seen in the choice of Lin Biao, an ill man with a limited interest in politics, his on again off again attitude to Deng Xiaoping, and his flirtation with younger leaders as different as Wang Hongwen and Hua Guofeng. For his part, Deng clearly consulted on the question, but there can be little doubt that the decisions to chose and remove successors were ultimately his. In both situations the decisions, unlike Mao's, were fundamentally dispassionate, based on assessments of political assets and performance, current political needs, and how the decisions would further his overall program. Once chosen, Deng granted his 'first front' successors more real authority than Mao ever had, but, in the cases of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, it was withdrawn more for palpable failures than perceived disloyalty. In Jiang's case, the evidence is less clear, and he surely has had a role in Hu Jintao's selection as 'core in waiting'. Nevertheless, Hu was placed on the path to future leadership by Deng, and the process has seemingly been collective and quasi-institutional. Hu is undoubtedly acceptable to Jiang, but not a personal protégé nor necessarily his preferred choice.

Ironically, given that Mao twice 'purged'<sup>124</sup> Deng and Deng's reform program marked a fundamental rejection of some of Mao's most cherished values, the Mao-Deng relationship was the closest and most meaningful of those among the three 'core leaders'. Based on long personal interaction, with Mao repeatedly promoting Deng and apparently valuing him above all other colleagues, an intense two-way loyalty existed. Even when cast aside, Deng was never abandoned by

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<sup>124</sup> On neither occasion was it technically a purge since Deng retained his Party membership. Cf. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 28ff.

Mao, his Party membership and physical well being were always protected, and he remained available for recall. As for Deng, he repeatedly emphasized the need to uphold Mao's prestige and the inseparability of Mao and the success of the revolution, even as he dismantled the Chairman's legacy. In this Deng reflected the loyalty of both 'first and second generations' to Mao as the man who made the revolution possible. The double irony is that it was precisely this revolutionary link that gave the surviving 'second generation' the self-confidence to make the break with the Maoist past. China was theirs by revolutionary conquest, it was a legacy of personal power which facilitated the shift to the more institutionalized power of the 'third generation'.

The link between Deng and Jiang was essential for Jiang's success, but there was nothing personal in it. Deng's choice of Jiang was forced by unanticipated circumstances, but while made on the run it reflected a shrewd assessment of those circumstances—the need for someone not tarred by the Tiananmen events, someone who was a committed economic reformer but valued political control, someone who combined technocratic credentials with leadership experience at both central and local levels. That Jiang and his generation had totally different experiences, and thus lacked the kind of self-confidence instinctive to the victors of the revolution, was inherent in the situation. The link between Deng and Jiang, between the 'second and third generations' is policy, the policies of Deng's reforms. Jiang's star is tied to Deng's program, and his task is to manage the contradictions created by this program within the constraints of the political structure Deng bequeathed.

What links are there between Mao and Jiang? Although Jiang, by all evidence, is a committed Party man, he apparently never met Mao, had an extremely limited revolutionary role, and found the extremes of Maoism in the PRC period distasteful. Yet under his leadership there has been a mild refurbishment of Mao's image and selected Maoist traditions,<sup>125</sup> and more importantly the CCP has been unable to escape the ties to its dysfunctional past. Deng relied on parts of that past—Party discipline, mobilizational techniques, repression when required—to push his program forward. Jiang is in a similar position, without the inherent self-

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<sup>125</sup> On the Mao-Jiang affinity, see Gilley, *Tiger on the Brink*, pp. 232-5, 269-70, 286. Gilley's account, I believe, makes far too much of claimed psychological similarities between the two men.

confidence of earlier generations. There are occasional signs of the 'third generation's' awareness of the need to transcend this past and move toward a more democratic future,<sup>126</sup> but whenever a threat is perceived the dominant impulse is to crack down. As events have unfolded under Jiang's leadership, the process of institutionalization within the elite has moved its internal politics far from that of the 'first generation', or even that of the 'second generation'. But while the 'normal politics' which has emerged so far has provided 'stability and unity' in Party politics, much remains abnormal in the larger political system. The jury remains out on whether or to what degree the present or future generations of CCP leaders can extend a similar stability and predictability to the relations between regime and people.

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<sup>126</sup> See Michel Oksenberg, 'Will China Democratize? Confronting a Classic Dilemma', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1998), pp. 29-32.