MAO ZEDONG AND CHINA
IN THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY WORLD
A CONCISE HISTORY

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The corollary to relying on the army for domestic solutions, in the context of potential war, was the naming of Lin Biao—the PLA commander and one of the most respected generals of the anti-Japanese and civil wars—as Mao's successor. Nobody could have predicted that a short year later, Lin was to be accused of sedition and "exposed" as the biggest CCP snake of all.

As the Cultural Revolution was unfolding in China, the 1960s were unfolding across the rest of the world. From Africa, Latin America, and Asia, to the United States and Europe, domestic radicalism and anti-colonial revolutionary nationalism were shaking up the global establishment. These upsurges were met, sooner or later, by forces of national and international order. Corresponding to attempts to beat back the transformative tide was a rise in revolutionary internationalism. This internationalism—in its domestic and global forms—spun a vision of a new world without domination or exploitation.

Revolutionary Internationalism and the Global 1960s

The Chinese Cultural Revolution was an inspiration for many in envisioning this new world. This was not because the movement was well understood. Far from it. The idea and image of a people, apparently set free from constraint to practice mass politics, appealed to those, who were increasingly disaffected from the routines of life. They were tired of political quiescence, and impatient with grinding exploitative, sexist, and racist views and practices. The perceived imaginative and creative exuberance of the Cultural Revolution—particularly in its early days—tapped into burgeoning desires everywhere for common people to seize politics from the dead hands of faraway bureaucrats, technocratic social engineers, and militaristic warmongers and turn it into something of culturally enduring and everyday significance.
INTERLUDE: MAO AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN JAPAN

The following excerpts are from my interview with the Japanese-born, New York-based independent writer Sabu Kohso. Growing up in postwar Japan, Sabu entered high school in the early 1970s, and there came into contact with student radicals and experienced political struggles. It was then that he became aware of the Cultural Revolution, Maoism, and China. 1

Q: When and how did you become aware of Mao and China’s Cultural Revolution?
A: The late 1960s and early 1970s in Japan were exciting; it was an entire decade: you walked the streets of Tokyo, and there were student demonstrations, struggles with the police, cultural experimentations, politics in the streets. Those of us who were just coming of age at that time were excited. . . . I happened to have a friend, whose tutor was one of the founders of DIC—Destruction is Construction—one of the leftist sects at the time. This guy was really critical of the previous New Left line in Japan. . . . He found the real core of revolution in China’s Cultural Revolution: . . . to change the values of everyday life, to undertake social revolution. This was a big deal for us, because, even though we were affected by the atmosphere of revolution all around us, we were after all the children of Americanization—John Ford movies, Coca-Cola—and so to find some new values for everyday life in Chinese things was really different!

. . . My generation faced severe entrance exams; to be socially successful, you had to go to great schools, and our work was to study constantly. Today, students face a more complicated situation; but in our time, climbing the ladder of social success—reproducing ourselves as a class—was accomplished directly through education. We focused, therefore, on “stop the examinations” campaigns, using propaganda and discussions with students and teachers. We formed networks against education as a class reproduction system. . . . I was probably fifteen or so, and was the youngest. Other students participating in this campaign had more experience. . . . We believed in the Maoist line based upon the Cultural Revolutionary idea, which was to transvalue our everyday life through cultural rebellion.

Q: Did you base your actions on Maoist writings?
A: . . . We read Mao’s works every day. We were intent on shifting the values of Japanese society from being based on the United States to China. We were not officially connected to China, not like the Sino-Japanese Friendship Society, but we were convinced that we were the more serious ones and thought we were the ones who should be in Tian’anmen Square meeting with Mao Zedong and Lin Biao.

Our focus was really on the Japanese underclass, the ones who had been left out of the postwar middle-class centered society. . . . We believed Mao’s words that the revolution should start from the countryside; of course, in Japan, this was very unrealistic, as Japan was already mostly one big metropolitan region! But, Okinawa was the last place we could organize. . . . By 1972 or 1973, the core members of DIC became determined; they went to Okinawa to build a revolutionary base. They asked us to choose whether to go with them or not. I didn’t quit high school to go; I couldn’t . . . . . There were lots of events, films from China, even a good bookshop, which still exists, called Toho Shoten [Oriental Books]. Our fashion was different. Back then, most leftists looked like American hippies, with long hair, jeans, and so on. We sought to be different, more humble like Chinese students. The majority of the New Left groups focused on street fights, from militant ones to nonviolent actions; but we thought we needed revolutionary acts in day to day life, so as to depose the educational machine.

Q: What Maoist texts interested you most at the time?
A: It was mostly the short citations from the Little Red Book, as well as the philosophical texts like “On Contradiction” and “On Practice.” . . . We also read Mao’s writings on the war against Japan—“On Protracted War.” My favorite was always his addresses to students, his encouragement to students to rebel and to speak their minds. . . . The Cultural Revolution . . . was encouraging to us; it helped us dare to think we could do something. [Here, Sabu showed me his marked up copies of the Little Red Book and Mao’s Exhortation to Students. On one page, in the margins of the text, Sabu had traced out in Chinese characters: “zaofan you li” — “It is right to rebel”—Mao’s most famous slogan calling students into being as a revolutionary force in 1966.] . . . This was really the beginning of thinking about the world for me . . . the Cultural Revolution helped me think on my own terms. I couldn’t follow my mother’s hopes for me to become a banker; the Cultural Revolution gave me an imagination of what might be possible.

Q: What did you think when Nixon visited China?
A: We didn’t know what to make of it. Some insisted it was necessary for China to confront the USSR. But it was a shock. . . . It was a big disappointment: I even stopped listening to the daily radio broadcasts, “Peking Hoso” [Peking News]: at the beginning of those broadcasts they would sing “The East
is Red” [here, Sabu hummed the first few bars of the tune, which was ubiquitous in China at the time]. When Nixon went to China, I stopped listening to those broadcasts.

The potential of the Cultural Revolution was not fulfilled, either in China or elsewhere. Various forces of order and “normalcy” were able to quash, while co-opting, parts of the 1960s movements. In China, as Mao was declaring victory for the Cultural Revolution in April 1969, it had already become clear to those who had engaged in it with passion and conviction that the promise of mass politics in command had been betrayed. The “victory” turned out to be for the Party alone; it was not a triumph for the masses, who had embraced the movement as theirs to shape and claim.

**Laying “China Cards” on the Table**

At the same time that Maoism was being promoted by many as an exciting alternative to the moribund Soviet variety of socialism, the Chinese were engaging in a showdown with the Soviets on their border. In March 1969, after many minor incidents and wars of words, outright hostilities broke out at the Ussuri River, the boundary between Soviet Siberia and Chinese Manchuria. Whether the Chinese instigated the events or were provoked is the subject of heated historical debate. Whatever the onset, one upshot was the manifest spectacle of the two socialist “fraternal allies” engaged in a hot war. American spy satellites operated by the CIA captured the results, noting “the Chinese side of the [Ussuri] river was so pockmarked by Soviet artillery that it looked like a ‘moonscape.’” The PLA was put on high alert. In China, warnings about full-scale war were issued to great patriotic effect.

Meanwhile, the Soviets attempted to play their “China card” by sounding out Washington about the potential of a surgical strike against Chinese nuclear weapons installations. President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, had by then given up pressuring the Soviets to influence North Vietnam. They decided to play their own “China card” and warned the Soviets not to escalate attacks on China.

The momentous Nixon opening to China germinated. It was now clear that the Cold War bogeyman of a Communist monolith was a postwar fantasy, invented and sustained to whip up American patriotic fervor. Yet, in 1969–70, Chinese newspapers were in full-scale vitriol against American escalations in Vietnam and the “secret” bombing of Cambodia. Editorial after editorial called for “the people of the whole world [to] unite, [to] defeat the U.S. aggressors and all their lackeys.” As Mao wrote in May 1970 for the People's Daily, “U.S. imperialism not only massacres foreigners, it also massacres white and black people in its own country. Nixon’s fascist atrocities have enkindled the raging flames of the revolutionary mass movement in the United States.” In a different venue, Mao went on to proclaim that “imperialism [i.e., the United States] is afraid of the third world;” a category to which China belonged, in Mao’s view. It was hard to imagine two more firm foes than the PRC and the USA in rapprochement.

Throughout 1969 and 1970, the prospect of full-scale war with the Soviets was a major Chinese preoccupation. The Soviets moved battlefield nuclear weapons to the border, even as Mao pressed on with bilateral negotiations. Zhou Enlai was sent to Hanoi for Ho Chi Minh’s funeral, where he met with Soviet Premier Kosygin; a delegation went to the border to hold talks. At the same time, China prepared for extended hostilities. Key economic and research installations, located in large urban areas, were dismantled and concealed inland, to protect them from potential Soviet strikes. Tens of millions of people were moved to rural areas, in anticipation of an urban nuclear holocaust. In mid-October 1969, the CCP leaders—including Mao—were evacuated from Beijing, each to a different location. Mao went to Wuhan.

**Mao in 1970**

In the autumn of 1969, central China experienced unusually cold weather. In Wuhan, Mao refused, as he normally did, to turn on the heat in his residence so early in the season. Now in his late seventies, Mao still believed that enhanced exercise would help him withstand the climate. He was wrong. No matter how much squatting and swimming in the indoor pool he accomplished, he caught cold. It soon turned into severe bronchitis.

In mid-1970, from his base in Wuhan, Mao journeyed to Lushan for a Party conference. It was here that many insiders began to have inklings of a conflict between Mao and his designated successor, Lin Biao. At Lushan, Lin tried to reinstate the post of head of state, as the office had remained empty since Liu Shaoqi’s fall from power. Lin argued it was time to fill it. Mao argued it was best to abolish the post altogether. Lin’s argument seems to have had Mao to conclude that Lin was attempting to seize
state power, in addition to his military command—thus to isolate Mao as Party chairman in an end-run maneuver around him. Things were not resolved.

Mao left Lushan and returned to Wuhan in poor health, experiencing shortness of breath. It turned out that he had contracted pneumonia. Treated for that on top of the recent bronchitis, Mao was physically weakened through the end of 1970. His battle with Lin Biao was to further affect his physical condition. Despite his illnesses, Mao managed to attend the National Day celebrations in Beijing on October 1, when, as usual, he stood atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace.

In December, Mao was well enough to meet his old friend, Edgar Snow, the American journalist who had spent time in Yan’an and written a best-selling account of Chinese Communism in the 1940s for an American audience. Snow had long since been named a “friend of China,” a label used by the Chinese to indicate foreigners not hostile to the PRC. Considered a suspicious figure in the United States because of his “commie” sympathies, Snow nevertheless was used by Mao in late 1970 as a conduit to the American government. In their meeting of December 18, Mao informed Snow he would be delighted to meet with Nixon or any high-level American official willing to come to China. Indeed, Mao stated that it would be best to allow Americans—rightists along with leftists—to visit the PRC, since “right now we must straighten things out with Nixon.” Mao’s urgency was, in part, informed by the festering Taiwan situation, in part, by the American escalations in Vietnam and the fear they would spill over into China, and in part, by Soviet hostilities. His urgency was also spurred by his eagerness to maneuver around his Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he accused of ideological rigidity in formulating foreign policy. Mao was confident that the United States, would sooner or later welcome his initiative; after all, he noted, “we haven’t occupied your Long Island”.

The Fall of Lin Biao

The Party unity proclaimed at the Ninth Congress in April 1969, proved to be short lived. Division seized hold of the CCP’s inner circles, and struggles were re-animated over issues of personnel and policy. The most spectacular of these was the split between Mao and the PLA commander Lin Biao.

One of the more extraordinary developments, the Lin Biao affair remains shrouded in mystery. The ending is mostly known: a little after midnight on September 13, 1971, a Trident jet carrying Lin Biao, his wife, and his son (the commander of the air force) took off from an airfield near Beidaihe, the summer retreat for CCP leaders. Lin Doudou, his daughter, was left behind, and it was she who alerted Zhou Enlai to the event. The jet was headed toward the Soviet Union. After a flight of an hour or so, it crashed in Outer Mongolia, either because of a shortage of fuel (most plausible), or because it was shot down by the Soviets or the Chinese (for which no evidence was ever found). All on board were killed. Lin Biao’s presence on the plane was soon confirmed through his dental records.

What prompted Lin Biao to flee is in dispute. It is said, Lin was preparing to launch a coup against Mao involving the assassination of the Chairman. The coup was discovered by Mao loyalists, but Lin was tipped off in time to flee. It is also said, the alleged coup was a Maoist invention to depose Lin Biao, whose power within and over the PLA had grown too fast and great for Mao to countenance. Rather than a successor, Lin had become a rival. Or it is said, Lin Biao was always a stooge of the Soviets, through an alleged longtime secret connection to Chiang Kaishek. He had bided his time until he could deliver China to the USSR and thence to the GMD. This, it is said, explains why Lin fled toward the Soviet Union just as the Soviets and China were still engaged in a border war. Recently it has been suggested Lin was not power hungry, was indeed a Mao loyalist, and had not hatched a coup conspiracy, but was somehow induced to board the plane and flee by Ye Qun—his power-mongering wife—and his son, both of whom perceived doom on the horizon and wanted to save themselves, and their father, for another day.

While this dispute cannot be resolved, it is quite clear from the Lushan conference in mid-1970 onward that Mao was increasingly uneasy about the role of the military in civilian life. Of course, it had been Mao himself who had called the PLA in to quell the mass movements. Yet, since the Ninth Congress in April 1969, Mao had been trying to rebuild the CCP. The PLA now stood in the way, as it had stepped into the vacuum created by the gutting of the Party. The PLA’s ubiquitous presence now appeared suspicious.

Throughout late 1970 and into 1971, Lin Biao increasingly came under verbal attack. Nevertheless, he continued to be the biggest spokesperson for the Mao cult. In 1970, Lin advocated Mao be proclaimed a “genius” in the state constitution (Mao refused); Lin promoted the little red book and
the ritual devotions it inspired (Mao acquiesced); Lin pronounced Mao above the Party and above the State (Mao objected). All of this has been taken as evidence of Lin's loyalty, as proof that Lin's fall was due to Mao's alleged perversities. It seems more plausible, as a few argue, that Lin's promotion of the Mao cult and the adulation it demanded made Mao extremely suspicious of Lin's motives.7

The final days are impossible to pin down. The coup plot is said to have included an attack with artillery and bazookas on Mao's special train, returning to Beijing on September 12 with Mao aboard; in the event of failure, there was to be a frontal assault by a specially trained commando squad. The subsequent purge of military commanders and, in the Politburo, of military members, speaks to the suspicions harbored about the PLA's loyalty. Yet, details of the coup planning have never been substantiated.

In the two years of intrigue before Lin Biao's death, Mao moved to ensure that the troops, whose loyalty Lin commanded, would obey Mao's orders. Immediately before Lin's demise, Mao had embarked on a tour of the provinces to shore up PLA support. In his talks to military commanders, Mao, as usual, gave a narrative history of the CCP's founding and its improbable rise to power. In this particular version of the story, Mao emphasized various subtle signs (retrospectively discovered) of Lin's treachery, stretching back to 1928, when Lin joined Mao at Jinggangshan. What Mao emphasized were "questions of principle" with which, he implied, Lin fundamentally disagreed. This version of the past demanded that Lin be removed in the present.8

In the early morning of September 13, on Mao's return from the provinces to Beijing, Zhou Enlai informed him of Lin's flight and death; Mao was both shocked and relieved. Explaining this development to the people—who knew Lin as Mao's "closest comrade in arms"—was going to be another story altogether; it would take more than a year before Mao coordinated a minimally plausible line through which to denounce Lin publicly. Ultimately, Lin's supposed disagreements on matters of principle became the building blocks of the denunciation. The thoroughness with which Lin's reputation was tarnished at this time has prevented Lin's status as traitor from ever being overturned or rethought. However, it appears his role in the successes of the pre-1949 rise of the CCP is now being recognized in China. This represents a major reversal of the post-1971 airbrushing of Lin from history.9

Model Revolutionary Culture

Through all the political upheaval, the impetus to create a revolutionary culture proceeded, and once the destruction of the "four olds" had abated, construction of this new culture began in earnest. The Maoist theory of the relationship between revolution and art, elaborated in Yan'an in 1942, was vigorously promoted. This resulted in "model" dramas, soon adapted to Beijing opera and ballet. These were eight well-honed and well-vetted works, whose combination of revolutionary aesthetics and artistic practice exemplified a Maoist revolutionary cultural ideal.

In propaganda posters and dramatic performances, the new revolutionary aesthetic was formulated out of a socialist realism of the Soviet type (in which all representations were outsized) and transformed into a socialist realism brought to the level of the everyday life of the masses. Idealized as they were, representations of socialism as a quotidian politics proved to be emotionally powerful and attractive (as advertising subsequently has been). For in various venues—in print or on stage—art did not just mimic (idealized) life; rather, life was transmuted into aesthetically politicized theatre.

In the 1970s, print art sought to combine realism with folk art in a rediscovery, as it were, of the authentic mass origins of native Chinese drawing. (Many artists by this time had been sent down to the countryside, facilitating this "rediscovery.") The accustomed sharp outlines of revolutionary heroes, rendered in bold primary colors, were blunted with new softer color schemes and less abrupt brush- and pen strokes. In ballet, an obviously imported art, fluid classicism was combined with revolutionary gestures and rigidity postures to produce a recognizable, but defamiliarized form, drawing from apparently opposed traditions of physical movement. New musically hybrid scores were composed for the purpose. In Beijing opera, the accustomed trilling atonality was slightly blunted into more melodic albeit still shrill enunciative form. Lyrics were adapted from revolutionary narratives to accompany new scores, combining Western and Chinese classical traditions with Chinese folk music. Movements—formerly meticulously calibrated—were broadened into gestural revolutionary positions to suggest collective strength alongside individual fortitude.

Revolution was art; art was revolutionary. Artistic creation was to bring to light what was already beautiful in the revolutionary masses, and by stimulating the masses through aesthetics, the artist was to bring his or her capacity and energy into play in the revolution. For Mao, revolution was in
some sense a drama filled with exhilarating spectacle. As he once said to the French writer André Malraux, revolution is "a drama of passion; we did not win the people over by appealing to reason, but by developing hope, trust, and fraternity." These innovations, before they were dogmatized, initially provided creative space for artists, even if the topics were proscribed to a few acceptable ones.

The revolution as a drama of (platonic) passion was perfectly, if rigidly, exemplified in the eight models of revolutionary culture. These models played ceaselessly in China over many years and were practically the only cultural products available to a mass audience. They seeped inexorably into people's consciousness, penetrating their feelings and shaping their judgments. Yet, these were neither dramas to be contemplated from a distance, nor were they commodities to be consumed. (Nobody even had to pay to see them.) These were dramas exhorting audiences to participate, emotionally and physically, in the revolutionary activities they staged and encouraged.

A majority of these model dramas had women as their title characters. Rather than being sexualized objects, these female protagonists generally begin the narratives as victims of class, gender, and imperialist oppression. The stories then revolve around their liberation through a simultaneous discovery of hitherto unsuspected internal strength and of the Communist Party. While the formula was predictable—this predictability in fact had been adapted from 1940s and 1950s Hollywood melodramatic templates—the stories nevertheless packed a punch. However, their depictions of female liberation always hinged upon an enlightened male Party leader, who guided the woman to revolutionary consciousness and action. The frequency with which women had to await liberation by men (in the guise of the Party), and the denial of sexuality and romantic possibilities to these unions (always confined to revolutionary Puritanism), promoted the CCP's version of state feminism, while undercutting any possibility for the development of autonomous feminist principles.

Whatever the dogmatic and formalistic elements—repudiated in the 1980s—parts of this revolutionary cultural ethos persisted long after the demise of the revolution itself.

The Gang of Four

As political infighting proceeded, the "gang of four" flexed its muscles in the cultural and media spheres. They attempted more. The gang label was affixed by Mao only in 1975, in condemnation of their conspiratorial meth-
Chinese team in China. Unenthusiastic when the idea first was presented, Mao became convinced that sports were a great way to push forward diplomacy. On April 10, after a flurry of bewildered communication with the State Department, the U.S. team went to Hong Kong and proceeded across a footbridge to the PRC. From April 11–17, the Americans played ping pong, toured the Great Wall, and attended a performance of a model ballet. Zhou Enlai received them formally, lauding the visit as a harbinger of a new era in China's relations with the United States.

Meanwhile, the top-secret Pakistani-mediated negotiations continued. In July 1971, Kissinger, pleading illness on a trip to Pakistan, slipped away to fly to Beijing to finalize details about the Nixon visit. Several days later, on July 15, it was publicly announced in China and the United States that Nixon would visit China in February 1972.

**Joining the United Nations**

As the world was digesting this news—and as several western European governments were stewing about it—the groundwork the PRC had laid since the Bandung Conference in 1955 finally bore fruit at the United Nations in late 1971.

At the end of the Second World War, the GMD-controlled Republic of China (ROC) had assumed the China seat in the United Nations. One of the five war victors, the ROC also had a seat on the UN's Permanent Council. After the GMD's removal to Taiwan, the ROC continued to hold the China seat, since the CCP was not recognized as the legitimate government of China by the United States and its allies. Every year since, the PRC had petitioned to be seated in the UN in place of the ROC. Every year, the petition had been defeated. Through the 1960s, the defeats had become narrower; as former colonies gained their independence and were seated as sovereign nation-states in the UN. Since Bandung, the PRC had promoted itself vigorously as a "third world" nation. Particularly in the Cultural Revolutionary years, but even well before, the PRC had been one of the loudest global stalwarts rhetorically to support anti-colonial movements around the world (particularly in Africa) and had competed with the United States and the Soviet Union for influence in these countries.

At the annual vote on the PRC's petition to join the UN on October 25, 1971, for the first time, countries sympathetic to the PRC outnumbered those that the United States and the GMD could line up in support of the ROC on Taiwan. The PRC was voted in, and the ROC was banished. This began the long fall from international influence of the GMD and the ROC and the long rise of the PRC from revolutionary internationalist icon to bulwark of the established global order.

**Mao Receives Nixon**

Richard Nixon was to arrive in Beijing on February 21, 1972. Preparations for his visit to Zhongnanhai—Mao's residence and workspace—were feverish. Mao had long since ceded the courtyard house to Jiang Qing and others, whom he no longer wished to see on a daily basis; he had removed himself to the indoor pool area, where a bedroom and a study were installed.

After Lin Biao's flight and death in September 1971, Mao's health had taken a plunge for the worse. Always susceptible, his lung infections accumulated, his breathing became labored, and his heart started to fail. As always, Mao refused treatment until the ailments had become acute. Three weeks before Nixon's arrival, Mao finally agreed to take action. He did, after all, want to be in shape for the triumphal reception in Beijing of the firmest anti-Communist ever to be American president. A good deal of hospital equipment was moved into the indoor pool area and Mao concentrated, on regaining strength. Prior to Nixon's visit, the oxygen tanks and other paraphernalia were disassembled or hidden from view. The hospital bed was moved into a corridor, and the pool was covered over. The area was turned into a reception hall, albeit one that could be transformed instantaneously into an emergency room, if required.

The day of Nixon's arrival, Zhou Enlai met his plane and escorted him to the villa where he would stay. A luncheon was held. After a rest, Nixon boarded a Red Flag limousine to Zhongnanhai and was whisked through the streets of Beijing, which were closed to all bicycle and bus traffic (the only kind of vehicular traffic at the time). Nixon entered the "reception area" with Kissinger and Winston Lord (later ambassador to the PRC). The Secretary of State was excluded by design. As Nixon entered, the tin roof of the pool-cum-reception hall blocked Secret Service radio contact, and panic among the Americans ensued. Chinese security forces assured them Nixon was safe with Mao. The visit proceeded without the American Secret Service.

Mao was not able to talk well, because of his illnesses. He was also quite bloated because of medication and congestive heart failure. Nixon had been alerted to Mao's difficulties, although not in detail. Originally sched-
uled for fifteen minutes, the encounter lasted for sixty-five. A number of photographs were taken by the assembled press, the most famous being one of Mao and Nixon locked in an historic handshake.

Aside from his visit with Mao, Nixon was accompanied in Beijing by Jiang Qing to the model opera, The Red Detachment of Women. Nixon liked the opera well enough, although he apparently did not at all like Jiang—whom he described as "unpleasantly abrasive and aggressive." Then again, Jiang did not like Nixon either, finding him arrogant and insufferable. Moreover, she saw his visit as undermining her position as an unrelenting foe of "American imperialism." Indeed, Nixon’s visit was Zhou Enlai’s coup, and Jiang Qing was at this point already conceiving a plan to sideline Zhou. After leaving Beijing, Nixon was escorted south, to the famous scenic city of Hangzhou, where over the years Mao had spent much time near West Lake. Nixon ended his trip in Shanghai.

Shanghai Communiqué

Negotiations on the content of the joint statement about Nixon’s visit consumed a good deal of Kissinger’s time in China. Again, the State Department was shut out of these discussions. The document was finalized in a series of late-night moves during the last days of the visit. Issued in Shanghai, historians generally have seen the Communiqué as a huge coup for the PRC.

After courteous preliminaries, the Communiqué first contains two separate statements. The American side notes, “No country should claim infallibility and each country should be prepared to reexamine its own attitudes for the common good.” But then, the United States goes on to aver an unwavering belief in “individual freedom and social progress for the peoples of the world.” Further, the United States pledges to find a solution to the Vietnam War, to continue its alliance with South Korea and Japan, and to support the recently negotiated Pakistani-Indian cease-fire. The Chinese statement begins with China’s basic principles: “Wherever there is oppression, there is resistance. Countries want independence, nations want liberation and the people want revolution—this has become the irresistible trend of history.” The Chinese go on to reaffirm their support for the peoples of Indochina, for the peaceful reunification of Korea, and for UN supervision of the Pakistani-Indian cease-fire.

The arenas of agreement include a reworded affirmation of Zhou’s and Mao’s foreign policy doctrine of “peaceful co-existence,” first offered at Bandung in 1955, as a principle of nonalignment in the Cold War. Both sides then pledge to work toward normalization of relations, to reduce the danger of international conflict, not to seek hegemony in Asia, and not to collude with others. Disagreement revolves around Taiwan. While both the USA and the PRC agree that there is only one China, the PRC claims that the Taiwan question is an internal domestic dispute in which the United States has no legitimate interest. By contrast, the United States claims an ongoing, albeit diminishing, interest in the problem. The United States then pledges to withdraw its troops and installations from Taiwan as soon as feasible.

This latter was the poison pill the GMD was forced to swallow, without warning or consultation, so eager was Kissinger to conclude a statement with the PRC. The Chiang Kaishek-aligned “China Lobby” in the United States screamed bloody murder, and it took until 1979 for the United States Congress to overcome its strength and formally establish diplomatic relations under President Carter. Yet, immediately after the Nixon visit, U.S. allies—including Japan, Great Britain, and West Germany—stamped toward China. Within a year, all had broken relations with Taiwan in order to establish relations with the PRC. By the 1990s, the Taiwan government—now no longer even under GMD rule—was recognized diplomatically by only five nations.

The Fading of Mao and the Old Revolutionary Generation

The public appearance with Nixon was one of the last in Mao’s life. His health was quite precariously, and his powers of speech were all but gone by early 1973. His heart was failing, his eyesight hazed, and his extremities trembling. His distrust of medicine continued, however, and he refused treatment, or even proper diagnosis, for all but the most obvious of his symptoms. Because he could no longer see well enough to read, Mao occupied himself with watching movies. He loved the martial arts films from Hong Kong best of all.

With his mind absolutely clear even as his body failed him, Mao continued to attend Party meetings, albeit now surrounded by medical staff and nurses. He also met with a few foreign visitors, including the president of Zambia, with whom he discussed the theory of the “three worlds,” and the former British prime minister, Edward Heath, with whom he discussed the ongoing issue of Hong Kong. His “talks” with them were conducted in writing.
Many of Mao’s generation of revolutionaries were also in poor health. In late 1972, Zhou Enlai was diagnosed with lung cancer; the despised chief of the secret service, Kang Sheng, a staunch Mao loyalist and the object of much distrust among everyone else, learned he had bladder cancer. Others were just too old to work effectively. And yet others had been banished to the countryside, where they languished away from intrigue and far from top-notch medical care.

**Deng Xiaoping Returns**

It is in these circumstances that Mao decided to pluck Deng Xiaoping from the tractor repair factory in Jiangxi and restore him to power. Zhou was slowed due to illness, and by May 1974, hospitalized. The day-to-day administration, over which he normally presided, was grinding to a halt, as the State and Party apparatus were staffed with relative newcomers. If not incompetent, they were untrustworthy. Mao wanted an older-generation revolutionary by his side and in charge. Deng—a decade younger than Mao and a veteran of the Long March and Yan’an—was the man.

Despite Deng’s association with the now-disgraced and deceased Liu Shaoqi, he had never been the object of Mao’s distrust in the same way as Liu. An accomplished administrator, Deng’s restoration through 1973, after an absence of seven years from the halls of power, became the major political story in China. Mao’s and Zhou’s respective declines left the field open. His only rival—and she was a huge one—was Jiang Qing, who regarded Deng as a “rightist” not to be trusted to continue the revolution. As 1973 proceeded, Mao also restored to power a number of formerly disgraced “rightists,” all of whom were associated in some way with the early 1960s economic restoration after the Great Leap disaster. This confirmed to Jiang Qing that the fate of the revolution hung in the balance.

By 1975 and the Fourth National People’s Congress, Deng was elevated to the Politburo’s Standing Committee. He was also appointed the chief of staff of the P.L.A. He was widely recognized as the hand-picked successor to Zhou Enlai. Zhou’s final appearance was at this same National People’s Congress, held in Beijing in mid-January 1975. Zhou’s speech to the 2,800 delegates reaffirmed the goals named at the 1949 founding of the PRC. China was to be a “powerful country with a high degree of socialist industrialization,” and would pursue the modernization “of agriculture, industry, national defense, science and technology” in a context of global peace and stability. This policy—soon honed and championed in the post-Mao period by Deng Xiaoping—came to be called the “four modernizations.”

**Mao’s Final Trip**

With increasingly intractable health issues making it hard for him to speak, eat, or breathe, Mao wanted to go on one last trip, to visit Wuhan and his home province, Hunan. Jiang Qing, whom he could no longer bear to be around, stayed in Beijing. While in Wuhan and in good spirits, Mao received Imelda Marcos from the Philippines.

In September, once the summer heat had abated, Mao, his doctors, nurses, and others in his personal retinue went to Changsha, capital of Hunan, where Mao had begun his political education so many years earlier. In a nostalgic mood, Mao wished to go swimming, for it was in the Xiang River at Changsha, where he had spent so many pleasurable afternoons as a young man. His doctors were alarmed and dissuaded him from swimming in the river; he attempted to swim in a pool instead but his breathing problems made it impossible for him to continue. At eighty-two, Mao finally faced up to the fact that he would never be able to engage in his favorite activity again.

Mao stayed in Changsha through his birthday in December 1974 and into the beginning of 1975. Zhou Enlai traveled to Changsha to see Mao in late December. From afar, Mao helped tip the balance at January’s Fourth National People’s Congress, when he supported Deng Xiaoping’s appointment over any of Jiang Qing’s candidates.

**“Criticize Lin, Criticize Confucius”**

Jiang Qing and her gang’s last effort to re-appropriate the mantle of revolution came in the launching of the most improbable “criticize Lin [Biao], criticize Confucius” campaign. This was an attempt to rally support against the restoration of the bureaucracy represented by Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power.

Begun in August 1973, this campaign attempted to link Lin Biao’s perfidy and treachery to his alleged love of Confucius and Confucianism. Lin was depicted as the heir to a 2,500-year-old tradition of Confucian reaction, as someone who represented himself as a Marxist in order to smuggle the poison of Confucianism into the unsuspecting Chinese body politic. This assault on Lin and Confucius was waged by respected historians and
literary scholars—many of whom were fished back to Beijing from exile in the countryside and shut into a building at Beijing University. There, they were to do the “research” required to substantiate these charges. Many of the arguments adduced for this campaign were abstruse close textual readings, which took passages of Confucius and of Lin Biao out of context, in order to establish an ostensible family resemblance between them.

These charges filled the newspapers from mid-1973 through 1974. They were recognized by almost all readers as total nonsense. Indeed, many students and intellectuals stuck in the countryside correctly read them as the signs of the death throes of the Cultural Revolution (albeit without any knowledge of what would come next). As most correctly surmised, the ultimate target was neither Lin Biao—already dead for two years—nor Confucius—already dead for more than two millennia. The target was Zhou Enlai, and through him, Deng Xiaoping.

By 1974, the “criticize Lin, criticize Confucius” campaign had abated. In its stead were raging ideological debates within the Party over the relationship between revolution and development. These were, of course, old issues that had bedeviled post-1949 Chinese economic and social policy. They were restated in 1975 as a debate between the “bourgeois right” (Deng et al.) and the Maoist left (Jiang Qing et al.). In keeping with Mao’s late-1950s reinterpretations of Marxism for Chinese historical circumstances, Maoists maintained that the transformation of social relations was the only way to properly achieve socialist development. In contrast, Deng and the “rightists” maintained that the building of productive forces (industrial capacity and efficiency) was the only way to achieve development. These were vital issues, and Deng Xiaoping eventually came out on top after Mao’s death and the arrest of the Gang. But the 1975 debate was conducted under the threat of political terror. Factional politics quite overshadowed the actual issues.

Zhou Enlai’s Death and the April 5th Movement

On January 8, 1976, Zhou Enlai died in a Beijing hospital at the age of seventy-eight. His funeral was held on January 15, with a eulogy delivered by Deng Xiaoping. Mao was too ill to attend. Jiang Qing took the opportunity to press her attack on Deng, whom she accused of being “China’s new Krushchev” (an old label) and, in a new twist, “an international capitalist agent.” Her chance to push Deng off the political stage only came in April 1976.

A few days before the traditional tomb sweeping festival, which in 1976 fell on April 5, students, workers, cadres, and common Beijingers from all walks of life began laying wreaths in Tian’anmen Square, at the base of the Monument of People’s Heroes, in honor of Zhou Enlai. This was in clear opposition to ongoing attempts to wipe out old customs now labeled as superstitious. The wreaths accumulated, and soon, so did wall posters, poems, and speeches eulogizing Zhou. Trucks were sent by the Beijing government on April 4 to cart the wreaths and posters away. On April 5, large numbers of people arrived on the Square to protest. They came in the tens of thousands. While most were soon persuaded to leave the Square, some were violently removed.

Deng Xiaoping was blamed for this “counter-revolutionary” mass protest, soon commemorated as the “April 5th Movement.” He was the subject of vitriolic attack, crowned with every political label of which editorialists could avail themselves. In May 1976, he was banished, this time to a pig farm in the south. Meanwhile, workers engaged in deliberate slowdowns, absenteeism, and strikes to protest. Social struggle broke out all over again, this time without even the veneer of ideological substance. People were weary of these struggles, and once again intellectuals were their main target.

Mao lay dying and did not witness the final disintegration of his dreams and lifework.

Mao’s Death

Perhaps the final piece of good news Mao received, before his own death, was that Chiang Kaishek had died in Taiwan on April 5. Mao could take comfort in the knowledge that he had outlived his bitter enemy and Chiang had never been able to take back China, as had been his dream. Bad news overshadowed this, however. For, also in April, one of the oldest revolutionary cadres still living, Dong Biwu, passed away; by December, the reviled secret service chief, Kang Sheng, succumbed to illness. Zhou was dead in early 1976, and by July 1976, Zhu De, the founder of the Red Army and PLA, had also died. A generation was passing on. Their dreams of making China both modern and socialist were dying with them.

On July 28, 1976, a massive earthquake shook northern China. Its epicenter was one hundred miles from Beijing. It flattened the coal and steel city of Tangshan and killed over two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. The area’s survivors were left bereft. International assistance was
rejected, and the PLA was mobilized—quite effectively—to assist survivors and the cleanup. As the social world seemed to be falling apart, the earthquake came to be interpreted by many as an omen of worse to come, as a sign from the natural world that the human world was in great disorder. Much as the CCP tried to tamp down such “superstitious” belief, such an interpretation was nevertheless quite rampant.

Several weeks later, on September 9, 1976, a somber announcement blared over the numerous public loudspeakers in urban and rural areas alike. The announcement stopped the nation in its tracks. Mao was dead. However people had felt about him and his era, the uncertainty of what would come next filled them with both grief and dread.

Reform, Restoration, and the Repudiation of Maoism, 1976–Present

On his deathbed, Mao apparently passed the mantle of leadership to a fellow Hunan native, the colorless vice premier, Hua Guofeng. Hua had been elevated to his position during Deng Xiaoping’s second fall from power in early 1976 but had no independent national-level base of support. In a bid to shore up his position as Mao’s successor, Hua reported Mao had written a note to him just prior to death reputedly saying: “With you in charge, I am at ease.” Despite wide play in the newspapers, few were convinced; indeed, most believed the note to be apocryphal.

The Arrest of the Gang of Four and the Two Whatevers

With Mao lying in state at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, the reaction against Jiang Qing began. Formerly shown much deference, she was now all but ignored. She tried to arm supporters in Shanghai and Beijing and also made an alliance with Mao Yuanxin, Mao’s nephew, the political commissar of the Shenyang Military Region in Manchuria. It appears that Jiang Qing was hoping to seize power through a military coup.

Mao’s funeral was held at 3:00 P.M. on September 18, 1976. Over a million people attended. Early in the morning, they began gathering on Tian’anmen Square to mourn or at least mark the passing of a leader and an era. The Square was filled to capacity with workers, students, cadres, and urban dwellers. There was grief as well as ambivalence. Domestic and international leaders filed past the casket in the Great Hall of the People, abutting the