Revolutionaries have to be optimists as well as believers, and revolutionary leaders have to be able to inspire their followers, convince them that "Yes, we can!" How could they endure years of struggle on a long march towards a seemingly ever-receding promised land without believing, as Mao Zedong put it during the darkest days of the Chinese revolution, that "a single spark can start a prairie fire?" During the anti-Japanese war, Mao laid down that in the aftermath of defeat, a communist should correct his ideas "to make them correspond to the laws of the external world, and thus turn failure into success; this is what is meant by 'failure is the mother of success' and 'a fall into the pit, a gain in your wit.'"

Twenty years later, during the upheaval within international communism brought about by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin and the subsequent Hungarian revolt, Mao remained determinedly optimistic, claiming that bad things can be turned into good things ... In given conditions, a bad thing can lead to good results and a good thing to bad results. More than two thousand years ago Lao Tzu said: "Good fortune lieth within bad, bad fortune lurketh within good."

Alas for Mao, not only was Lao Tzu right, but, more importantly, Mao's countrymen and his successors did not agree with him as to what constituted good and bad things. On his deathbed, Mao claimed that the Cultural Revolution was one of his two major lifetime achievements, the other being the victory that brought the communists to power in 1949. But within the utopian vision of Mao's Cultural Revolution, egalitarian and collectivist though it was, lurked the seeds of its antithesis, the Chairman's bête noire, the helter-
skelter capitalism of the Deng Xiaoping era. For the Chinese people, the bad fortune of Mao's Cultural Revolution led to the good fortune of Deng's "reform" and "opening up." But without Mao, none of this would have happened.

* * *

The state that Mao and his colleagues set up in 1949 had three pillars: the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and Marxism-Leninism, increasingly overshadowed by Mao Zedong Thought. The CCP, with Mao as its Chairman, ran the country; the PLA had won China for the CCP and was the ultimate guarantor of its power; and Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought legitimized CCP rule, by enabling its cadres to claim that their understanding of the forces of history provided them with the knowledge to guide China.

Thus constituted, the People's Republic of China emerged as probably the best run and most tightly disciplined party-state within the Communist bloc. In less than a decade, the CCP had stamped out the rampant inflation it had inherited; restored the Chinese mainland to central control; run campaigns among every section of the population which brutally ensured that everyone knew who was in charge; collectivized or nationalized agriculture, commerce and industry; launched a Soviet-style first Five-Year Plan (FYP); and simultaneously fought the US-led UN forces to a draw in the Korean War. Above all, after a century of foreign invasions and civil wars, the CCP had restored peace and unity within the old imperial frontiers.

But the best was not good enough for Mao. He had risen to power as a guerrilla leader, and the exigencies of that kind of warfare had accentuated his restless personality.
When he studied Soviet development methods, with its concept of rigidly determined economic stages, each coming to a clear-cut conclusion, he shuddered:

'...fully consolidated the collective farm system' it says on page 407. 'Full consolidation—a phrase to make one uneasy. The consolidation of anything is relative ... In the universe, on our globe, all things come into being, develop, and pass away ceaselessly. None of them is ever 'fully consolidated.'

As so often with Mao, his feelings were best expressed through his poetry, and no poem better reflected his restless impatience and his commitment to revolutionary activism than the one quoted by President Nixon in Beijing at Premier Zhou Enlai's welcoming banquet in February 1972:

So many deeds cry out to be done,
And always urgently;
The world rolls on,
Time presses.
Ten thousand years are too long,
Seize the day, seize the hour!
The Four Seas are rising, clouds and waters raging,
The Five Continents are rocking, wind and thunder roaring.
Away with all pests!
Our force is irresistible.

In the early years of the PRC, the CCP's seemingly unending campaigns kept Mao enthused. It was ultimately he who decided when each should start and his writings reveal his intense interest: in land reform, in the urban three-anti--five-anti campaigns against corruption among CCP cadres and private businesses, the campaign against counter-revolutionaries, the thought reform of the intellectuals, the second campaign against counter-revolutionaries, rural collectivization, and the nationalization of industry and commerce. According to Marxist-Leninist standards, by 1956 China was a socialist country. It only remained to actualise the popular slogan: "The Soviet Union's today is our tomorrow" with the use of Stalinist economic methods. But here Mao began to part
company with his senior colleagues. Mao's heir apparent Liu Shaoqi and Premier Zhou were both superb organization men whom he had used to good effect: Liu had reconstructed the party in the 1940s after Mao became its Chairman, and had bolstered the Mao cult, while Zhou had set up the new government in the 1950s after the conquest of power. With them at his beck and call, Mao had no need or desire to emulate the painstaking bureaucratic work-style of a Stalin.⁷

On the other hand, Mao could see that, after the struggle phase of the Communist revolution, Liu and Zhou were preeminently qualified to oversee the discipline, order and routine needed for Soviet-style development. Since he confessedly did not understand much about economics, his role would be confined to kibitzing. He would no longer set the agenda. So he bullied Zhou and suborned Liu into abandoning the Soviet approach in favor of an attempt to gain the same ends by another campaign: mass mobilization of the nation in a "Great Leap Forward (GLF)."

As is well known, the GLF--an attempt to overtake in short order the Soviet Union and even the USA economically--was a catastrophe, resulting in the worst man-made famine in history, with a death toll upwards of 30 million.⁸ But the party-state that Mao, Liu, Zhou and their colleagues had created was resilient and powerful enough to survive the catastrophe. And while Mao had been the prime mover, few of his colleagues were bold enough to call him to account. Defence Minister Peng Dehuai, a revolutionary hero and commander of the Chinese forces in the Korean War, voiced criticism at the height of the GLF, but Mao retaliated viciously and the marshal and his sympathisers were summarily disgraced.
Mao never took another major economic initiative, but he did not abandon the utopian social vision which infused the GLF, the concept of a nation of renaissance men and women, organized into egalitarian communes, each person competent to play any role as required: peasant, worker, soldier, teacher, trader. Ideally, their energies would be unleashed rather than organized. Increasingly, Mao saw the elaborate structures and standard operating procedures of the party-state as straitjackets inhibiting his efforts to arouse the spontaneous revolutionary ardor of the "broad masses." He saw the necessity of a CCP, but it should be greatly slimmed down and act more like a cheerleader than a coach. The most important guidance for the masses would be provided by the principles of Mao Zedong Thought.

In a sense, Mao became like any longtime American senator running for the presidency "against Washington." By the early 1960s he was attributing most of the ills afflicting the Chinese body politic to the party-state which he had done so much to help set up. His evolving attitude was much influenced by his analysis of developments in the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU). He regarded the detente foreign policy of Khrushchev and his successor Brezhnev as a revisionist betrayal of the stem anti-imperialism of Lenin. Khrushchev's argument that peaceful coexistence was needed to avert the danger of a nuclear holocaust was seen by the Chairman as a pusillanimous cop-out, a cowardly unwillingness to face down the US. Moscow's neutrality in the Sino-Indian border clashes was a betrayal of fraternal communist ties.

Mao attributed this treachery to corrupt leadership. Khrushchev's "revisionism" was a manifestation of an intention to restore capitalism in the motherland of Communist
revolution. No matter that Marx held that it was the economic base that determined the
nature of the political superstructure. In Mao's view, the political superstructure could
transform the economic base, and he worried that the CCP might degenerate like the
CPSU. He became obsessed with the notion that the fate of the Chinese revolution
depended on the rearing of a younger generation of truly revolutionary leaders. The
question that then arose was: How do you train young Chinese to be revolutionaries in a
non-revolutionary situation? After all, one only learnt to make revolution by making
revolution. And the prior question was: How do you persuade the older generation of lapsed
revolutionaries, bureaucrats who were potentially revisionist, to cede power? Mao's answer
was the Cultural Revolution.

As an old guerrilla leader, Mao knew the importance of concealment and surprise,
and the inadvisability of confronting superior forces head on. While the CCP's factionalised
leadership had never united to derail any of his more disastrous policy proposals, the
Chairman did not want to take the risk that they might get together if they realised that he
was about to subject them all simultaneously to a revolution from below. So during the first
year of the Cultural Revolution Mao schemed against long-time colleagues, trumping up
charges against them so that he appeared to be acting according to party norms as he
threw them one after the other on the dust bin of history. By the end of 1966, state
president Liu Shaoqi and CCP general secretary Deng Xiaoping had both been purged along
with other key leaders. The way was clear for the student Red Guards—encouraged by
Mao's injunction to 'bombard the HQ' and his assurance that to rebel was justified—to learn
revolution by overturning lesser leaders up and down the country.
During the two years of Red Guard terror, a few leaders were killed, others committed suicide, many were tortured, virtually all were humiliated at public rallies and purged. Liu Shaoqi died in anonymous ignominy. Deng Xiaoping's son was crippled. Among Mao's senior-most Long March colleagues, he protected only the loyal and obedient Zhou Enlai who was needed to try to hold the country together. The CCP effectively ceased to function, and the experience was traumatic for those leaders like Deng Xiaoping who suffered but survived.

But after the Red Guards had learned how to make revolution, they fell to internecine power struggles, causing massive disruption across urban China. When Mao finally sent a propaganda team to quell disturbances at Beijing's Tsinghua University, students attacked it, killing some of its members. Fearing a military backlash to restore peace and order, Mao ordered the Red Guards to be disbanded and despatched to the countryside. Mao had led them to expect to inherit the earth, but they ended up tilling it.

At this point, Mao faced a nightmare situation of his own devising. He had disgraced a large proportion of the old CCP leadership. He had tried to rear a new generation to take their place, but they had failed him. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) was the only national institution still fully functioning. As a result of the first party congress after the Red Guard tumult, PLA officers formed the dominant component of the CCP Politburo and Central Committee, and were in charge of most of China's provinces. Moreover, at the congress, Mao had taken the unprecedented step of writing the name of his favorite marshal, Lin Biao, into the party constitution as his successor. Since Lin had no constituency in the party, he would have to rely on the PLA, exemplifying Mao's long-held belief that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." The prospect was the reversal
of a another fundamental Maoist tenet: "Our principle is that the party commands the gun; the gun shall never be allowed to command the party."\textsuperscript{11}

The full enormity of the potential disaster struck Mao on October 18, 1969, only six months after Lin Biao's apotheosis at the party congress. On that day, the PLA Chief-of-Staff issued "Vice Chairman Lin's Order No. 1," which moved large numbers of military units, naval vessels and air force squadrons into defensive positions in preparation for a potential Soviet surprise attack. As the leader in day-to-day charge of the PLA, Lin was acting on Mao's repeated and apocalyptic warnings of a Pearl Harbor type strike by the Russians on Beijing. But Mao was furious, presumably because the incident revealed that the PLA, always the ultimate guarantor of his position, would respond to another's orders. Lin Biao had his hands on the barrel of the gun. Since Mao seems always to have suspected that his subordinates would be as ruthless in dealing with him as he with them--his paranoia was revealed by his doctor\textsuperscript{12}--the prospect was not just a PLA-ruled China post-Mao, but conceivably a PLA coup against the living Mao.

Once he had awoken to these potential disasters, Mao launched another political guerrilla campaign, but this time against his "closest comrade-in-arms" and personally chosen heir apparent. As at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, his technique was to give Lin Biao enough rope to hang himself. Contrary to any fears Mao may have had, it seems clear that Lin Biao did not try to rally his trusted generals for a coup d'état. Whether, instead, he ordered his son, an air force officer, to arrange Mao's assassination--as officially alleged--is uncertain. At the end of the two-year struggle between the Chairman and his Vice Chairman, on September 13, 1971, Lin Biao, his wife and son
commandeered a plane and fled to the Soviet Union but died when the plane crashed in Mongolia.¹³

The Lin Biao "incident" had a profound effect on politically literate Chinese. How could the omniscient Chairman have chosen a counter-revolutionary as his heir apparent? Were the high-flown ideals of the Cultural Revolution simply a sham to disguise a naked power struggle? Equally undermining of Mao's radical goals was his decision to invite President Nixon, the leader of imperialism worldwide, to visit China in February 1972. Had the Chairman not flayed Nikita Khrushchev's detente with the U.S. on the grounds that he was appeasing imperialism? The justification was that Mao was playing the American card to avert the danger of a Soviet attack. But was not the Cultural Revolution about absolute revolutionary purity not expediency?

In fact Mao had considered the Cultural Revolution over by the 9th party congress in 1969. His hope had then been to construct a more revolutionary CCP on the ashes of the old. The Lin Biao debacle derailed this plan. Mao started looking for a suitably revolutionary successor to take Lin's place. But after Zhou Enlai had been diagnosed with cancer in May 1972, Mao's had also to find somebody to keep the country running as Zhou had done. He reinstated the disgraced Deng Xiaoping as the only old official who had the prestige and ability to do the job.

For the previous three and a half years, the former general secretary and his family had been exiled in the southern province of Jiangsu, where Deng had worked part-time in a factory.¹⁴ On returning to Beijing, Deng found a snake pit. As Mao had grown more feeble, three rival factions jockeyed for power: the rump of the Cultural Revolution radicals, the
“Gang of Four” led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing; the beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution, officials who had risen up as their bosses fell, notably Hua Guofeng who would become Mao's last choice for heir; and the survivors, like the dying Zhou Enlai and his ally Marshal Ye Jianying, who had taken over Lin Biao's role in day-to-day charge of the PLA, plus a number of senior officials rehabilitated after the death of Lin Biao. Deng's sympathies clearly lay with the survivors and when he took over the running of the country as senior vice premier in the fall of 1974, he ruthlessly set about restoring order to the chaotic political and economic situation, to the fury of the Gang of Four.

Eventually Mao was convinced by his radical supporters that, contrary to Deng's avowals on being rehabilitated, the senior vice premier had not belatedly embraced the principles of the Cultural Revolution. When Zhou died in January 1976, Mao named Hua Guofeng not Deng Xiaoping to take his place. In the spring, mourners for Zhou Enlai began placing wreaths in Tiananmen Square in his memory; many of them carried messages, some praising him, some denouncing the Gang of Four. After Hua, the Gang of Four and their supporters in the Politburo ordered the removal of the wreaths in the middle of the night of April 4, Beijing residents demonstrated in large numbers, demanding their restoration, and police and militia had to be called in to clear the Square by main force. In the aftermath, Mao purged Deng for the second time.

As the year continued, the superstitious could tot up the grim portents of a disjunction in human affairs: the death of Zhou on January 8; on April 5, the Tiananmen demonstration; on July 6, the death of Mao's military alter ego during the revolution, Marshal Zhu De; on July 28, a massive earthquake which obliterated much of the north
China city of Tangshan and resulted in 242,000 deaths. Finally, the death of Mao Zedong on September 9, 1976.

Officials in Beijing and Shanghai, alarmed by the riot in Tiananmen Square in April, had been preparing for Mao's demise by drawing up plans to deal with any counter-revolutionary political incidents, though the two cities probably had different ideas as to who might provoke them. But the only incident was a quiet coup d'état, the arrest of the Gang of Four, on the orders of Hua Guofeng and Ye Jianying. The Beijing leaders headed off any uprising in the Gang's base, Shanghai, by duping local officials long enough for any thought of resistance to fizzle out. Now the Cultural Revolution was truly over.¹⁵

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There was no indication that the end of the Cultural Revolution would signal radical shifts in Chinese economic policy, no hint of the boom that was to come. Hua Guofeng, the one out of Mao's succession of heirs who managed to succeed him, seems to have had a conventional economic outlook: back to the future with a return to centralized planning and control with priority to heavy industry, Soviet-style. But after the depredations of the Cultural Revolution that did not prove possible. The one disastrous innovation contemplated was what some called the great leap outwards, a grandiose Ten Year Plan which envisaged the purchase of cutting edge foreign technology, but for which China had neither the resources nor the know-how.¹⁶

Hua might have survived the post-Mao economic crisis. He deserved credit for helping to organize the arrest of the Gang of Four, and he occupied seemingly powerful posts as CCP Chairman, Premier, and Chairman of the CCP's key Military Affairs Commission (MAC), thus combining the roles of Mao and Zhou. Had he taken Zhou as his
model, all might have been well, but he was too conscious that he owed his eminence solely to Mao. Wearing the Maoist mantle, he worked to ensure that the Chairman was not forgotten. A mausoleum was built for him in Tiananmen Square. A new volume of Mao’s selected works was published under his editorship. He espoused what was soon ridiculed as the ‘two whatevers’ doctrine: “Whatever policy Chairman Mao decided upon, we shall resolutely defend; whatever directives Chairman Mao issued, we shall steadfastly obey.”

Most disastrously, he copied the Chairman in insisting that “Political revolutions in the nature of the Cultural Revolution will take place many times in the future,” disastrous because if the members of the CCP old guard who had survived the previous decade had any watchword, it was surely: Never again.

Moreover, Hua lacked the authority that should have adhered to the posts he held. He could not prevent the return to power of the Cultural Revolution survivors of the Long March generation. In July 1977, Deng was restored to his positions as a vice chairman of the CCP and member of the Politburo Standing Committee, vice premier, vice chairman of the MAC, and PLA chief of staff. Other senior leaders returned to the Politburo to bolster Deng’s position. After the third plenary session of the CCP’s 11th Central Committee in December 1978, now lauded in China as heralding the start of the reform era, Deng emerged as the paramount leader. He was free of guilt for the Cultural Revolution, and Mao’s summons to him when Zhou was dying was proof that even the Chairman thought Deng was the best man to run China. So it was Deng not Hua who went to America in January 1979 to celebrate the normalization of Sino-US diplomatic relations. Within three years, Hua had ceded his CCP chairmanship and his premiership to two Deng trusties, and his MAC chairmanship to Deng himself.
But even with Deng and his old comrades assuming the CCP leadership, there was still no hint that the Chinese economic mega-miracle was about to begin. On the eve of reform (gaige) and opening up (kaifang) to the outside world, Deng’s economic czar, Chen Yun, seemed bent on readjusting the economy by returning to his glory days in the mid-1950s, boosting agriculture and light industry over heavy industry. The third plenum’s contribution was to raise agricultural procurement prices, decrease the prices of agricultural inputs, and increase investment and credit for the sector. But the most significant change that quickly resulted from these measures—an abandonment of collective farming and a return to family farming—was specifically forbidden.\(^{17}\) No New Deal was contemplated. As Deng later said, in economic policy they were crossing the river by feeling for the stones.

But this is not the place to discuss the economic policies of the reform era and how they developed into what some call market Leninism; that is the job of other contributors to this volume. This is the place to spell out why bad things turned into good things, enabling Deng and his colleagues to paddle their way to success.

During the Cultural Revolution, Mao had unleashed society, in the form of the Red Guards, against the party-state. As he encouraged the humiliation and tolerated the torture of his party colleagues, he undermined the hitherto unquestioned legitimacy, authority and prestige of the CCP, one of the three pillars of the regime. Simultaneously, he encouraged people to believe they had a right to stand up to the CCP, to dare to think, dare to speak, and dare to act, and to bombard the HQ, and the tens of thousands of demonstrations and riots against bureaucratic injustices that now take place each year in China, along with the courage of rights lawyers and aids activists, and, very importantly, the peasants who defied
the ban on family farming to kick start the reform era, are among the fruits of that empowerment.

Deng Xiaoping can also take credit for liberating the people, for he freed them from the tyranny of ideology. True he laid down that Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought was one of the four cardinal principles of the party state, but it was left on the shelf. Practice was to be the sole criterion of truth. The ideological pillar was in ruins. After two decades of leftist disasters under Mao and his Thought, China could no longer be in thrall to doctrine. Opening up meant that new ideas, from home or abroad, were welcome if they contributed to the prosperity of the people and the state. As Deng said during the dark days of the GLF famine, it doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white, as long as it catches the mice. “To get rich is glorious” was the reform motto, another phrase that would have made Mao “uneasy.”

But perhaps the most important liberation was of Deng himself. He had been a loyal follower of Mao from the early 1930s. He almost certainly owed gaining the position of CCP general secretary in 1956 to Mao’s appreciation of his devotion and his high estimation of Deng’s talents. But there was no indication at the end of the Cultural Revolution that he had it in him to preside over a Chinese revolution far more profound than Mao’s victory over the Nationalists in 1949.

Deng has left no autobiography, and his daughter has not written about his post-Cultural Revolution career, so one must speculate about his motives. “To get rich is glorious” harked back to the search for “wealth and power” that obsessed Chinese patriots from the end of the 19th century: How to end foreign depradations and restore China to a place in the world to which its long history and glorious culture entitled it. Joining the CCP
was one way of continuing that search and transforming an ancient society. But by the end of the Cultural Revolution, Deng was aware of how far Mao had led China astray from that search.

At the time of the communist revolution, Asia was in ruins or backward: Japan had endured nuclear attack and was under American occupation; South Korea had just emerged from Japanese colonial rule and was about to be devastated by the Korean War; Taiwan, the last refuge of the beaten Chinese Nationalists, was principally agrarian; and Hong Kong and Singapore were sleepy entrepots. On the eve of the Cultural Revolution, when China had recovered from the GLF and should have been embarking on its Third Five-Year Plan, there were strong signs that Japan’s economy was on the rise, but little else to raise doubts about China’s ability to emerge as the power house of Asia. But by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the economic miracles of Japan and the smaller Asian tigers were plain for all to see, whereas China had torn itself apart at the behest of a tyrannical leader with utopian fantasies. Chinese had to face the prospect that if they did not reform drastically they might end up as a semi-colony again. Deng’s achievement was not so much that he understood China’s diminished condition, but that he had the courage to take considerable political risks to transform the “bad thing” of the Cultural Revolution into the “good thing” of the reform era, setting China finally on the road to wealth and power. Mao had liberated the masses to make revolution. Deng liberated them to make money.

NOTES

1 From "On practice" (July, 1937), quoted in the "little red book," Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung (Peking Foreign Languages Press, 1972), p. 211.


5 Chinese Literature, No. 5, 1966. The poem was written in January 1963 as Mao was gearing up for his polemics against the Soviet Union and its allies. For the background and the original version of the poem, see Pang & Jin, op.cit., 2, pp. 1265-66.

6 See the early volumes of Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong wengao (Mao Zedong's papers since the founding of the state) (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 13 vols. 1987-98.)

7 For a comparison of the work-styles of the major 20th century dictators, see MacFarquhar, Origins, 3, pp. 331-33.

8 Ibid., 2, passim; 3, pp. 1-8.

9 Mao did push through the relocation of industry into China's interior provinces in the mid-1960s, but this was for reasons of national security during the Vietnam War; ibid., 3, pp. 369-70.

10 His ideas were spelled out in the 9th polemic against the Soviet Union published in July 1964; see Origins, 3, pp. 362-64.


13 See Roderick MacFarquhar & Michael Schoenhals, Mao's Last Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Harvard, 2006), pp. 308-36; Frederick C. Teiwes & Warren Sun, The Tragedy of Lin Biao (London: Hurst, 1996); Jin Qiu, The Culture of Power: The Lin Biao Incident in the Cultural Revolution (Stanford University Press, 1999)--this author is the daughter of one of the senior generals who was arrested as a Lin Biao loyalist after Lin's flight.

14 See his daughter's account in Deng Rong, Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2002).

15 MacFarquhar & Schoenhals, Mao's Last Revolution, pp. 436-49.


18 This was the burden of a memorandum to the top leadership from a senior official; private communication to this writer.