

# BOOKS

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**ZHOU ENLAI: A BIOGRAPHY**

by Dick Wilson

(Viking Press; 330 pp.; \$17.95)

**THE WHITE-BONED DEMON:  
A BIOGRAPHY OF MADAME MAO ZEDONG**

by Ross Terrill

(William Morrow; 446 pp.; \$18.95)

**VERDICT IN PEKING:  
THE TRIAL OF THE GANG OF FOUR**

by David Bonavia

(G. P. Putnam's Sons; 225 pp.; \$17.95)

**THE MAKING OF A PREMIER:  
ZHAO ZIYANG'S PROVINCIAL CAREER**

by David L. Shambaugh

(Westview Press; 157 pp.; \$16.00)

Ralph Buultjens

Modern China is extravagant political theatre. The stage and props are splendid. The play affects a quarter of humankind and concerns many more. The main cast, a handful of characters, is more colorful than any in Hollywood film history. Unfortunately for the Chinese, this is not just the greatest show on earth. It is—many hope was—the gross reality of politics in the People's Republic.

Recently, thousands of works on China—literary, statistical, polemical, and others—have cascaded onto an avid reading public. Most have sought to explain the new China in terms of its history, politics, philosophy, and social structure, and some have succeeded very well. Yet something seems missing. The waywardness of events in the People's Republic appears to elude effective analysis. Now come four books which finally draw us closer to the central truth about contemporary China: It can best be understood through the ambitions, goals, and personalities within its power elite. Though ideas and systems and material trends matter, they are frequently subordinate to the hatreds, affections, drives, and idiosyncracies of key figures. Order and rationality may attempt to govern; personal emotions can swiftly reduce these to shambles.

These books—about three extraordinary, determined, and highly skilled political personalities—reach beyond their subjects to provide insightful historical images of modern China. All converge on the Cultural

Revolution, the galactic clash that smashed people, property, and large parts of the socio-political system between 1966 and 1976, and whose reverberations, though muted, are not yet stilled.

It is really about a "gang of five" that these authors write. There are, of course, the obvious antagonists. Zhou Enlai, the smooth and ruthless administrator, provides the glue that cements communism to China and holds China together. Always deflecting, rarely confronting, Zhou remained the arch-survivor until his death in 1976. He was loyal to his friends but, as he put it, was always "ready to play the prostitute for the Revolution." Then there is Jiang Qing (Madame Mao), the catalyst and consort who would be empress. She was Mao's dog, she claimed; "When he said bite, I bit." When the commander died, the biter was terminally bitten. Also there is Zhao Ziyang, a powerful provincial leader, humiliated during the Cultural Revolution and today prime minister of China. The eventual legatee of all this, Zhao is a master of self-rehabilitation—the partial architect and key implementer of the revisionist economic policies that now dominate.

Behind these three powerful figures, often manipulating them, stand two gigantic protagonists: the legendary and lapidary Mao Zedong and his longtime anti-Christ, the dybbuk-like, irrepressible, long-suspect "capitalist roader" Deng Xiaoping. As old age debilitates Mao, his ideological arteries harden and he becomes more determined to

weed out antiradicalism, regardless of human cost. As political disasters engulf Deng, he becomes more determined to fight back. He truly believes that "it matters not if a cat is white or black. As long as it catches rats, it's a good cat." The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, Mao's last big leap, was the final battleground. The stakes were enormous: the future of China and the political, if not physical, lives of the participants. All four books describe these climactic events. Mao won the immediate battle; he also probably lost the war.

Each author creates the drama in his own way. *Zhou Enlai* is conventional biography. Along with the known highlights of Zhou's personality and career, it makes four important points. First, Zhou's very unhappy childhood had an impact on his political life. Second, while a great practitioner of stability, Zhou was also a true believer, as far left as any of them. He approached his goals in a more orderly way, but there is little evidence that he would have fully agreed with the current economic policies of his protégé Deng. Third, the Cultural Revolution was a devastating experience for Zhou. All his energies were drained as he struggled to prevent total collapse and civil war. And then, like Cardinal Richelieu, whom he so resembles, a loyal but not fully trusted Zhou was fending off, from his deathbed, plots against his sovereign lord and himself. Fourth, Zhou, with well-concealed ruthlessness, would do anything for his cause. He did it with style, but he did it. Effectively, too. History records few instances of such sagacity, political power, and personal charm lodged in a single individual. Author Dick Wilson, a prolific writer on China, has captured the essence of a remarkable man, who was also highly dangerous to those who were not on his side.

*The White-Boned Demon*, Australian scholar Ross Terrill's biography of Madame Mao, is "based on unique Chinese sources." But Terrill, also the author of several China books, fails either to inform or to grip. He writes in technicolor prose, often expressing what Jiang Qing felt on deeply personal matters throughout her life, things which neither Terrill nor anyone else can possibly know. Much of the book appears based on hearsay and gossip. Its better sections draw heavily on Roxane Witke's classic *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing*; its worse sections are trivial and trashy. Overall Terrill sheds little light on one of the more fascinating figures of our era.

Fascinating Madame Mao certainly was. Daughter of a prostitute, contentious and

pushy from childhood, Jiang Qing left home at an early age. Attracted to radical causes from her teens, she moved upward via men and movies. Finally there was her thirty-eight-year association with Mao: long years simply as his wife, the last decade as the cutting edge of his Cultural Revolution strike force, and then as the semi-independent leader of the far Left faction. Many of the excesses of the Cultural Revolution are attributed to her and to her desire for blood vengeance. Eventually, just within reach of the throne, she was arrested, put on trial, and now endures prolonged imprisonment. Without education, money, grace, much talent, or good health, she dragged herself upward—her ascent fueled by the dynamics of bitterness. Alarming, Jiang Qing almost succeeded in becoming paramount ruler of China.

It is the trial of Madame Mao and her principal supporters that David Bonavia, a journalist who lived in China for ten years, chronicles in *Verdict in Peking*. This was perhaps the most dramatic and revealing of all the show trials of the twentieth century. Bonavia successfully interweaves portions of court testimony with background on both pretrial happenings and personalities. There is a flavor of reality in this. A chilling chapter on the fate of three important victims of the Cultural Revolution rounds off this impressive book. For those whose China interests lie in crime and punishment at the highest level, this is the best possible work. And, as usual, Jiang Qing is at center stage whenever she appears.

From Bonavia's book two conclusions emerge. First, the trial itself put the system in the dock. What was supposed to be an orchestrated confessional scene was turned by Jiang Qing into an indictment of her accusers. Why were they silent during events they later found criminal? Was she and she alone responsible for all the wickedness of the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath? Without defense counsel, without the right to question witnesses or call any of her own, with judges acting as prosecutors, Jiang Qing displayed two interesting qualities: her bravery and her unyielding radical commitment. The glimpses we get—and much of the record is not publicly available—indicate that she was able to prevent the trial from achieving its purpose. Perhaps she was even able to regain a little esteem. This trial tells us much about China today. It remains a very authoritarian state; and despite economic liberalization, this is not the place to look for the rule of law or the right to dissent. What, indeed, is justice in the People's Republic?

A second observation: The trial of the Gang of Four was the apotheosis of Madame Mao's political career. By her unflinching dedication to Maoism, when all around were recanting, she proved in adversity what had once been challenged: She, above all, is truly Mao's heir. Yet, as Jiang Qing has learned, heirs do not always inherit the estates of their benefactors.

Who, then, does? The career of Zhao Ziyang, prime minister of the People's Republic, gives us clues about the attributes needed to prevail in Chinese politics. David Shambaugh, from the University of Michigan, has compiled a carefully researched book on *The Making of a Premier—Zhao Ziyang's Provincial Career*. Shambaugh details the rise of Zhao from membership in the Communist Youth League at the age of thirteen in 1932 to his appointment as premier in September, 1980. Zhao was a pragmatic provincial administrator with special expertise in agricultural development and Party organization. In fifty years of Party work he has run two of China's most important provinces (Guandong-Kwangtung and Sichuan with a combined population of almost 200 million), was victimized for five years during the Cultural Revolution, led the successful new economic experiments in Sichuan from 1976 to 1980, and at sixty-five is now one of the top leaders of the People's Republic.

How did Zhao, long antagonistic to Mao's economic ideas, survive and, in a way, inherit the estate? Shambaugh's book provides part of the answer. Zhao is a cagey operator who speaks out only when the tide is with him. At other times he mouths supportive-sounding but meaningless rhetoric. He castigates even political allies, although minimally, when they are in trouble. (No doubt he explains this to them privately.) He cultivates important patrons but has few clients. He has a wide range of contacts in the institutional bastions of power: the Party, the bureaucracy, the military, even the techno-scientific establishment. He is meticulous in attending a variety of local and regional functions. When he fears disfavor, he finds reason to disappear from public view for weeks on end—keeping a low profile in a high wind. He is superb at winning goodwill from ordinary workers, attentive to their needs and questions. He is also a talented administrator. All this did not save him from the Cultural Revolution, but it facilitated his restoration and subsequent climb.

Zhao is not, however, all operator. He firmly believes that "socialism is public ownership of the means of production, and paying each according to his work. As long

as those two principles are safeguarded we should feel free to adopt [anything]...which can promote the development of production." To an extent, these are his own ideas. They have been influenced and favored by the more moderate power barons in the Chinese political system—especially Deng and economic planner Chen Yun. When they captured power in post-Mao Beijing, Zhao's career prospered. And they made him the chief conductor of the economic antistrophe now playing in China.

This is the new breed of Chinese leader—men who have seen little revolutionary action and are mostly regional administrators. Like Zhao, they have done almost exclusively Party work. They come to Beijing later in their career, sharing a determination to prevent another Cultural Revolution. They are the future hope of the older moderate leaders, who see them as agents of continuity. If Maoism is *not* to revive, these new men will have to deliver more economic successes and preempt potential threats from radicalism. Their real test will come when Deng (now eighty) and his octogenarian cohort pass away.

There is a larger question here. If most second-generation Communist leaders have their entire work experience only in Party activities, are they equipped with the perspective, knowledge, and skills necessary for leadership of an important modern nation? Whatever its flaws, the democratic process usually exposes its power holders to various earlier nonpolitical employments—a valuable asset in national policy-making and public administration. In future, will Communist nations suffer from the problems inherent in there being even more Zhaos, however able, and fewer generalists and/or internationalists?

While Shambaugh's research on Zhao's job record is considerable, we need to know more about Zhao the man. Personality is so important in Chinese politics, and Zhao is no ordinary person. What makes him run and run so well through this minefield? Part of the problem is not, of course, Shambaugh's; the Chinese disclose so little about their leaders. Still, Zhao has had sufficient exposure and met enough foreigners to make their impressions of him worth more than a footnote. Such information should be well within the scope of Shambaugh's diligent reach. It would be a valuable supplement to this factually useful book.

Taken together, these four books tell us a great deal about life at the top in Chinese politics. This realm is peopled by extremely able, tenacious, and treacherous individuals—leaders who publicly hurl vulgar, hateful imprecations at each other (Jiang: "Deng

is a fascist dwarf"; Deng: "whore, daughter of a whore... she monopolizes the toilet, but cannot shit."). Much of their energies have been spent on advancing personal ambitions instead of nation-building, characteristics that probably still endure in a less amplified way.

However, to advance, skill and determination are not enough. As these books make very clear, the winners have inevitably been those with commanding personalities and historical stature, like Mao, or those with extensive constituencies in the national and regional institutional networks. Lacking both, Madame Mao and others failed. The system may govern poorly, but it protects its own very well—so well, in fact, that while Deng, Zhao, and their allies have Maoists in retreat today, they, most of all, must fear for tomorrow.

### **PANAMA ODYSSEY by William J. Jorden**

(University of Texas Press; xi + 746 pp.; \$24.50)

*Jorge I. Domínguez*

"It is the right, the fair, the decent thing to do. And the American people are fair and decent." So Jimmy Carter explained to General Omar Torrijos why he had committed his government to the ratification of the Panama Canal treaties on the solemn occasion of their signing in Washington, D.C. Torrijos, in turn, described what he felt: "It's like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute." These two sentences, spoken by the key actors in a historic drama, summarize much about them personally and about the events that led to a major change in the relationship between their two countries. Jimmy Carter invested enormous political capital in the ratification of the treaties, primarily for the reasons he gave; but the process of ratification was captured best by Torrijos's apt phrase.

William Jorden, a White House staffer during the second Nixon presidency and U.S. ambassador to Panama (1974-78) during the crucial years of treaty negotiation and ratification, has written what will surely become the definitive account of the process of formulation and ratification of the Panama Canal treaties. The book is also a pleasure to read. Although most readers know the outcome in advance, Jorden has managed to build suspense and to convey the joy and frustration of the participants, their insights and their foibles, with a keen at-

tention to detail that is both enlightening and attention-grabbing. His skillful biographical vignettes of most of the significant participants—presidents, cabinet ministers, negotiators, and members of Congress—is hard to match. His canvas is grand, spanning the decade-and-a-half of intensive discussions over the new treaties and involving a great many significant leaders in both countries. Most helpful of all, Jorden has given a fascinating and instructive account of the process of diplomatic negotiation and of the relationship between president and Congress over a major foreign policy issue. This is, in short, an outstanding book.

It is, however, a very long book, and many readers may find that they will learn more about the process of treaty-making and ratification than they care to. The very length has also made it difficult for Jorden to remind readers clearly what the fuss was all about. The Senate completed ratification of the treaties over six years ago. That is a remarkably short time, and yet the Canal and its fate—so passion-inspiring and so dramatic in the months before ratification—has virtually disappeared from public discussion in the United States. Ronald Reagan, who vigorously opposed ratification and made the draft Canal treaties a major issue in his campaign for the 1976 Republican presidential nomination, has to implement the treaties—albeit with greater difficulty than his predecessor. Public obscurity and routine implementation mean that the treaties have succeeded in their essential purposes.

The Canal treaties sought to keep the Canal open and secure for ships of all nations. They also sought to terminate an outmoded colonial enclave in the heart of Panama. The first goal could be achieved only if the second goal was also reached. The main threat to the security of the Canal was violence in Panama itself. Such violence was a recurring feature of the Canal's history, and the tragic riots in Panama in 1964 provided the impetus for serious negotiations.

The termination of the colonial enclave has meant that Panama is enlisted as a partner of the United States in keeping the Canal open and secure for the balance of this century. Panama's economic stake in the Canal has also risen, providing additional incentives for its government, armed forces, and people to behave in ways that serve the joint interests they share with the United States. The Canal treaties provide that in the twenty-first century both Panama and the United States will have the right and obligation to defend the Canal and to counter any aggression directed against it or against the peace-

ful transit of vessels through it. The treaties also provide that, in an emergency, warships of the United States and Panama have the right to go to the head of the line. The Canal Zone is no more. The United States has already returned most of that territory to Panama. And in the twenty-first century the Canal itself will pass to Panama.

Jorden's book tells the story of how the leaders of both countries came gradually to the realization that these provisions were, in Jimmy Carter's words, right, fair, and decent. But it took a very long time, and the treaties were nearly lost, for reasons that range from the sublime to the ridiculous—cause enough for General Torrijos to feel as if he were jumping out of an airplane without a parachute. The treaties have already worked better than their opponents and even many of their supporters had expected. They have served well the interests of the United States and Panama. As the winds of war and revolution ravage northern Central America, it is all the more important that Panama and the United States continue to work constructively to implement the treaties in the decades ahead.

For scholarly purposes, Jorden's book is a major achievement. Three disappointments, however, bear mentioning. There are no footnotes; indeed there is no presentation of sources. To be sure, much of the story had to come from interviews and private papers. Jorden has deposited "most of the documents and background materials" at the LBJ Library of the University of Texas, Austin. He explains to academic "purists" that such notes would have added too many pages to an already long book. For the purpose of historical scholarship, debate, refutation, and refinement, however, Jorden's decision is a major loss.

A second weakness is Jorden's peculiar though understandable partisanship. It is not garden-variety partisanship. He is generous in his praise of Republicans and Democrats, of liberals and conservatives, of U.S. and Panamanian leaders. But I do not believe his treatment of treaty opponents is fair-minded. Jorden's kindest words for Strom Thurmond are that he is "elderly but still vigorous," and for Orrin Hatch that he is at least "bright." Jorden judges the caliber of everyone associated with the treaty process solely according to their position on the Canal question. He ignores the possibility that many conservative members of Congress who opposed ratification also served the Republic well (at least on other occasions).

The third weakness is Jorden's systematic commitment to telling the whole story, which makes it difficult to understand why