
• I N T R O D U C T I O N •

The Age of Deng Xiaoping

[We] announce with deepest grief . . . Comrade Mao Zedong,
our esteemed and beloved great leader . . .
passed away at 00:10 hours.

—*Xinhua, September 9, 1976*

SIC TRANSIT Mao Zedong: peasant, revolutionary, philosopher-king. Mao's life had been deeply paradoxical and self-contradictory. His millennialist vision of a world without egotism and greed, without mandarins, landlords, or bureaucrats, had inspired legendary feats of revolutionary heroism and endurance. Yet the very radicalism of Mao's vision, and the draconian means used to implement it, had visited great suffering upon the Chinese people.

Mao's death, following a long struggle with Lou Gehrig's disease compounded by assorted respiratory, heart, and kidney ailments, came a few short months after the passing of Premier Zhou Enlai, who succumbed to bladder cancer in January 1976.¹ The demise of China's two top leaders left the country rudderless and adrift. Widespread dismay over the cruelty and chaos of the Cultural Revolution had spawned a deep "crisis of faith" among the people. Reacting to two decades of economic stagnation and political repression, ordinary Chinese openly questioned the benefits conferred on them by a rigid, aloof, and seemingly insensitive Communist Party.

Superimposed upon this societywide crisis of faith were a series of intense political rivalries and personal antagonisms that split the Chinese Communist leadership into a number of contending factions. At one level, these intraparty cleavages centered on such issues as the extent of Mao Zedong's personal responsibility for the Cultural Revolution and the overall quality of Mao's leadership during his declining years. At another level they concerned more primitive, rudimentary questions of political power: Who would win the struggle to succeed Mao? Who would lose? And equally important, what would the winners do with—or *to*—the losers?

The post-Mao succession crisis lasted more than three years. At first a group of loyalists, led by Acting Premier Hua Guofeng, laid claim to the Chairman's mantle on the basis of Mao's purported deathbed bequest: "With you in charge, I'm at ease." This put them on a collision course with a small group of left-wing Cultural Revolution ideologues led by Mao's widow, Jiang Qing, who sought to claim Mao's legacy as her own. With a struggle for power imminent, the loyalists struck first. Less than a month after Mao's

death, they preemptively arrested Mme. Mao and her three top lieutenants—pejoratively known as the Gang of Four—on charges of conspiring to usurp party and state power.

Notwithstanding their triumph over Jiang Qing and her radical clique, the loyalists had a sizable skeleton in their own closet, one that eventually precluded them from consolidating power. A few months before Mao's death, in April 1976, Hua Guofeng and his lieutenants had collaborated with the Gang of Four to effect the removal of a rival claimant to power, former CCP general secretary Deng Xiaoping, whom they falsely accused of stirring up a “counter-revolutionary incident” at Tiananmen Square. Refusing to take his removal lying down, however, the tenacious Deng rallied supporters on the party Central Committee (CC) to fight for his exoneration, setting the stage for a show-down with the loyalists.

Toward the end of 1978 Deng, relying on an extensive network of personal ties to an influential group of senior party and military leaders, gained the upper hand. The verdict on the Tiananmen incident was reversed, and Deng was formally cleared of all charges of wrongdoing. Over the next two years, Hua Guofeng and his supporters, now cynically referred to as the “whatever faction” because of their unswerving public devotion to whatever Mao said or did, were gradually eased out of power.

With Deng at the helm and Chen Yun as principal economic strategist, China's new leaders, sensing the great magnitude and urgency of the crisis confronting the country, began to think the unthinkable. Many had only recently been rehabilitated after suffering prolonged personal humiliation and abuse during the Cultural Revolution. Constituting a strong force for institutional change, leading members of this reform group began forthrightly to jettison key components of Mao Zedong's legacy. They repudiated Mao's Cultural Revolution, renounced most of his economic theories, and reinstated virtually all of his purged opponents. In place of Mao's insistence on austerity, egalitarianism, self-sacrifice, self-reliance, and perpetual class struggle, they advocated incentive-driven production responsibility systems, decentralized state administration, expanded use of market mechanisms (euphemistically known as “economic methods”), and sharply increased international economic and technological involvement.

Although members of the reform coalition could agree among themselves, in principle, on the need for economic modernization and “opening up” to the outside world, they lacked a coherent plan or blueprint for reform. Within the coalition there were frequent debates over how much (or how little) tampering with the basic structures of socialism was needed to raise economic efficiency and promote political/administrative rationality. In these debates, middle-aged intellectuals and technocrats (including China's new premier, Zhao Ziyang, and the new Communist Party chief, Hu Yaobang) tended to support relatively bold, aggressive structural reforms, while members of the older generation of Marxist revolutionaries (including such notables as Peng Zhen, Chen Yun, Wang Zhen, Bo Yibo, and Hu Qiaomu) generally proved more

cautious and conservative. Perhaps most important, members of the reform coalition differed among themselves over just how much “bourgeois liberalization”—if any—could be tolerated in a country that continued to call itself Marxist-Leninist.

Sometimes disagreement took the form of esoteric academic debates over such issues as the nature and special characteristics of China’s “socialist spiritual civilization,” or the relevance to China of such foreign concepts as “universal humanism” and “alienation.” More often than not, however, academic debates served to mask highly contentious policy disputes, such as those over the tolerable limits of free-market activity and private accumulation of wealth, the severity of the problem of “spiritual pollution” posed by the influx of Western ideas and influences, and the proper boundaries of free expression for artists, writers, and other creative intellectuals whose contributions were deemed essential to the success of China’s modernization drive.

CYCLES OF REFORM: THE “FANG/SHOU” FLUX

Just beneath the surface of these debates lay the potent issue of stability versus chaos. Throughout the initial decade of post-Mao reform, China’s new leaders repeatedly tempered their desire for modernization and change with a deep concern for maintaining political order and discipline. Wanting the benefits of modernity without the destabilizing effects of spontaneous, uncontrolled social mobilization, they tended to follow each new round of liberalizing reform with an attempt to retain—or regain—control. Letting go (*fang*) with one hand, they instinctively tightened up (*shou*) with the other. Over time, the conflicting pressures and imperatives associated with *fang* and *shou* produced an oscillating pattern of policy initiative and response, as phases of reform and relaxation alternated with phases of relative restriction and retrenchment. The fluid ebb and flow of this recursive “fang/shou cycle” lent the process of political and economic reform a discontinuous, pulsating quality.²

Chinese economists were among the first to recognize the existence of a recurrent pattern of reform and retrenchment. By 1982 they had identified four stages in a sequential reform cycle: “On many occasions . . . we have witnessed the spectacle of ‘flexibility immediately followed by disorder, disorder immediately followed by control, control immediately followed by rigidity, and rigidity again followed by flexibility,’ in a ‘flexibility-disorder-control-rigidity’ cycle.”³

Elaborating upon the concept of cyclical flux, early in 1987 Chinese Communist theoretician Deng Liqun posited the existence of a biennial relaxation/contraction cycle spanning the ten years 1978–1987. According to this model, proactive pressures for “bourgeois liberalization” were strongest in even-numbered years, while conservative counterpressures peaked in odd-numbered years. The basic contours of Deng Liqun’s model are presented in the accompanying table.

Deng Liqun's Ten-Year Cyclical Model

<i>Year/Phase</i>	<i>Key Events</i>
First Round: 1978–79	
1978 (fang)	“Criterion of truth” debate Democracy Wall Third Plenum of Eleventh Central Committee
1979 (shou)	Wei Jingsheng arrested Four cardinal principles
Second Round: 1980–81	
1980 (fang)	Gengshen reforms Local elections
1981 (shou)	Economic readjustment Bai Hua criticized
Third Round: 1982–83	
1982 (fang)	Constitution revised “Humanism” and “alienation” debated
1983 (shou)	Anti-spiritual pollution campaign
Fourth Round: 1984–85	
1984 (fang)	Urban reform and “open cities” Cultural and artistic freedom
1985 (shou)	Economic retrenchment Critique of bourgeois liberalization
Fifth Round: 1986–87	
1986: (fang)	Revival of Gengshen reforms Student demonstrations
1987: (shou)	Hu Yaobang dismissed Campaign against “bourgeois liberalization”
Sixth Round: 1988–89 ^a	
1988: (fang)	Neo-authoritarianism (late 1987) Administrative reform
1989: (shou)	Economic reform frozen (late 1988) Tiananmen crackdown

Source: Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping diguo*, 168–71.

^a The sixth round represents the author's extrapolation from Deng Liqun's 1987 model.

Insofar as observed phase changes in the fang/shou cycle were neither so neatly symmetrical nor so precisely biennial in periodicity as suggested by Deng Liqun's model, the model was clearly oversimplified. Moreover, the model demonstrably lacked a dynamic engine, or motive force, driving its cyclical fluctuations. Addressing these deficiencies, Susan Shirk elaborated a more sophisticated cyclical schema.⁴ According to Shirk's conception, with the introduction of partial economic reforms in the late 1970s China's econ-

omy began to lurch erratically between alternating phases of expansion and contraction. Backlash from these “boom and bust” economic oscillations served to amplify preexisting political and ideological cleavages among rival elite factions. The intensification of factional conflict, in turn, necessitated periodic personal intervention by “paramount leader” Deng Xiaoping, who, to mollify conservative party elders and relieve the buildup of antireform pressures, was compelled to follow each new surge of economic reform with an ideological swing back in the direction of Leninist orthodoxy.⁵ In Shirk’s schema, the engine driving the entire fang/shou flux was the jerky rhythm of heating and cooling displayed by China’s semireformed, semiplanned economy.

Charting the course of China’s first decade of post-Mao economic reform, Shirk found (not unlike Deng Liqun) that expansion (fang) predominated in 1979–80, 1984, 1986–87, and 1988, while contraction (shou) predominated in 1981, 1985–86, 1987, and 1988–89. As anticipated, she also found that these economic fluctuations closely paralleled policy shifts in other areas, such as ideological relaxation/control and administrative decentralization/recentralization. For this reason, she described the pattern of alternating political and economic cycles as essentially “synchronous” in nature.⁶

While accepting the underlying logic of Shirk’s model, my own understanding of the nature and dynamics of reform cycles differs somewhat. For one thing, the observed pattern of cyclical flux in post-Mao China has sometimes been quite irregular and asynchronous, involving partially crosscutting (or noncongruent) forces and phase changes. Political, economic, and ideological currents have not always neatly coincided or covaried. At times, their effects have been highly turbulent and cross-pressured, rather than mutually reinforcing. For example, the anti-bourgeois-liberal ideological backlash of spring 1987, which followed close on the heels of prodemocracy demonstrations on Chinese college campuses, was not accompanied by any significant contraction of economic reforms. As a result, conflicting signals of fang and shou were simultaneously generated in different policy arenas, lending an element of incoherence to the reform cycle—akin to a riptide effect in fluid dynamics.⁷

In addition to turbulence produced by noncongruent or asynchronous policy fluxes, a second source of irregularity in the fang/shou cycles were the unforeseen exogenous forces and events—that is, occurrences unrelated to the internal dynamics of the reform process itself—that periodically impinged upon that process, altering its course and its contours. Examples of such external influences include the Polish Solidarność crisis of 1980–81 (which triggered a strong antireform backlash among CCP conservatives); the sudden death of liberal reform leader Hu Yaobang in April 1989 (which touched off a firestorm of student protest, culminating in the Tiananmen crisis); and the 1991 collapse of communism in the Soviet Union (which prompted Chinese hard-liners to attempt sharply to curtail China’s economic reforms and “open policy”). While ostensibly idiosyncratic and exogenous in origin, each of

these events exerted a powerful impact upon the dynamics of reform in China, exacerbating existing strains and tensions and visibly affecting the rhythms and oscillations of the fang/shou cycle.

Periodic crises of leadership succession constituted a third source of significant variability. Twice since the mid-1970s China experienced prolonged, bitterly divisive succession struggles, as first Mao Zedong and then Deng Xiaoping prepared to “meet Marx.” On both occasions, the intensification of factional infighting significantly affected the momentum and trajectory of reform. In the first instance, Mao’s approaching death in 1976 triggered a powerful popular backlash against the Cultural Revolution, which translated into broad opposition to the Gang of Four and broad support for the return to power of Deng Xiaoping and his “rehabilitated cadres faction.” Utilizing this anti-Cultural Revolution backlash to maximum advantage, Deng ultimately succeeded both in undermining the legitimacy of Hua Guofeng’s “whatever faction” and in generating strong political momentum behind his own reform program.⁸

In roughly equal (but opposite) Newtonian fashion, as Deng Xiaoping neared the end of his political career in the late 1980s and early 1990s, competition among rival Communist Party factions intensified once again. This time, however, it was the reformers who were on the defensive, as a strong conservative backlash from the 1989 Tiananmen upheaval, coupled with Deng Xiaoping’s visibly declining physical vitality, served to drain the reform movement of much of its previous energy and inspiration. For a considerable period of time, and to a rather harrowing degree, the future of reform after June 1989 seemed to hang on a thread as delicate as the state of Deng’s health, and on the related question of who would die first, Deng (who turned eighty-five in August 1989) or his more conservative octogenarian copatriarch, Chen Yun. In the event, Deng’s marginally superior physical stamina—demonstrated in his dramatic one-man proreform pilgrimage to the special economic zones (SEZs) of South China in January 1992—helped rescue China’s market reforms at their point of maximum peril following the shocking political collapse of the USSR.

A fourth, closely related source of cyclical variation was intergenerational leadership change. During the first decade and a half of reform, many of the aging first- and second-generation revolutionaries who had been most deeply involved in policy making at the outset of the post-Mao period either died or became inactive. In most cases, their places were taken by middle-aged technocrats of the “third echelon” (*disan tidui*), whose educational level was higher and whose outlook (with some notable exceptions) was distinctly more cosmopolitan and pragmatic. Over time, the rejuvenation of party leadership had the effect of reducing the strength of conservative resistance to reform. Although party old-timers periodically dug in their heels, as in the anti-spiritual pollution campaign of 1983 and the anti-bourgeois liberalization campaign of 1987, in the long run not even the Beijing massacre of June 1989 or the ensuing “red terror” could permanently forestall the rise of new leaders

who favored fundamental structural change. In this respect, the eventual triumph of reform was ensured as much by actuarial laws as by the sagacity of the reformers themselves.

Reinforcing the secular impact of generational change was the gradual enculturation of China's on-again, off-again market reforms. With each new relaxation phase in the reform cycle, social mobility increased while systemic barriers to the free flow of ideas, information, money, goods, and people were lowered. Disposable income grew, as did personal consumption. Notwithstanding periodic conservative policy contractions, the long-term effect was of a progressive shift in the direction of greater societal openness, affluence, and competitiveness. After a decade and a half of sporadic, halting, halfway reforms, by the mid-1990s it thus appeared that Deng Xiaoping's "second Chinese revolution" had become more or less irreversibly entrained.⁹

THE FLUIDITY OF FACTIONAL ALIGNMENTS

A final source of significant irregularity in reform cycles were the perturbations produced by shifting factional alignments. "Factions" (*zongpai*) in Chinese politics are informal networks of interdependent personal relationships. Neither fixed in membership nor immutable in ideology and policy preference, factions wax and wane, change shape, shift focus, divide, and recombine in fluid, protean fashion. Moreover, their common group identity—often encoded in such arcane symbolic precepts as the "two whatevers" or "practice is the sole criterion for testing truth"—may mask considerable internal dissonance, divisiveness, and disarray.¹⁰

To give one obvious example of factional fluidity and instability, in the late 1970s the "rehabilitated cadres faction" led by Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun was composed of a number of individuals whose most vital common characteristic was their intense opposition to the Cultural Revolution, its leaders, and its legacy. With members as diverse in orientation as Zhao Ziyang and Wan Li (economic pragmatists), Hu Yaobang (political liberal), Chen Yun and Bo Yibo (economic neotraditionalists), Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun (ideological conservatives), and Wang Zhen (political reactionary), the coalition displayed little internal political or ideological coherence. What held the coalition together were (a) its members' common experience of having been humiliated during the Cultural Revolution and (b) the existence of a powerful and ambitious rival faction—Hua Guofeng's "whateverists."

In the struggle between these two contending camps, a handful of lesser factions—including a "survivors faction" (made up of senior party and military leaders who had avoided purgation during the Cultural Revolution) and a "petroleum clique" (comprised of leading advocates of centralized planning, deficit spending, and an economic strategy of energy-based, export-led development)—played important roles as power balancers and tactical allies of the two major factions. The more evenly matched the principal contenders, the

more important the role played by these minor factions. Indeed, throughout much of 1978 and 1979, the “survivors,” led by Ye Jianying and Li Xiannian, played a pivotal power-balancing role as swing voters in a Politburo divided more or less evenly between supporters of Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng.¹¹

By 1979 virtually all high-level purge victims of the Cultural Revolution had been cleared of charges and restored to positions of power and influence. As the balance thus shifted in favor of Deng’s rehabilitated cadres (now renamed the “practice faction” because of their rejection of the rigid dogmas of the Left) and away from Hua’s “whateverists,” the “survivors” lost some of their political clout. By the same token, however, once Hua Guofeng was successfully shouldered aside, Deng’s broad proreform coalition—which included leaders whose views on specific policy issues were quite diverse and wide-ranging—also became susceptible to centrifugal stress. Indeed, the fragmentation of Deng’s victorious coalition into a number of divergent opinion groups and subfactions was a major feature of the Chinese political landscape in the 1980s.¹²

Not only was Deng’s reform coalition extremely diverse in composition and orientation, its members could not be neatly arrayed along a single, constant left-to-right ideological continuum. In the economic realm, for example, patriarch Chen Yun and Deng protégé Premier Zhao Ziyang, who initially shared a common concern for maintaining central administrative control over the reform process, began to diverge appreciably in 1983–84. Where Chen remained cautious and risk-averse, Zhao became increasingly bold and experimental. At the same time, however, Chen—a moderate conservative on economic matters—was considerably more permissive *politically* than many of his peers within the reform coalition, including Zhao’s own mentor, Deng Xiaoping. On the key issue of how to deal with student demonstrators and political dissidents, for example, Chen repeatedly displayed greater tolerance and forbearance than Deng. In 1979 Chen openly questioned Deng’s decision to incarcerate human rights activist Wei Jingsheng; and in the aftermath of the 1989 Beijing massacre, Chen pointed the finger of blame squarely at Deng for issuing the controversial order to use deadly force in the army’s assault on Tiananmen Square. Under these circumstances, to label Chen Yun a “hard-liner” based solely on his relatively conservative economic views, as some have done without qualification or caveat, is clearly misleading.¹³

It is evident from the above that conventional ideological labels such as “liberal,” “hard-liner,” “moderate,” “pragmatist,” “radical,” and “conservative,” often prove highly problematical in the Chinese political context; to complicate matters further, the factions, opinion clusters, and individual leaders upon whom such labels are affixed may alter their personal views and partisan affiliations over time. For example, in the early to mid-1980s, at around the same time that Chen Yun’s economic views began to diverge from those of Zhao Ziyang and Deng Xiaoping, Chen began to attract some of Deng’s disillusioned followers to his own camp. A prominent example was

Deng Liqun. In the late 1970s Deng Liqun (no relation to Deng Xiaoping), a party theoretician who had once been Liu Shaoqi's political secretary, became embroiled in an intense rivalry with Hu Yaobang for the political favor of Deng Xiaoping. When the elder Deng selected Hu Yaobang to succeed Hua Guofeng as head of the party apparatus, Deng Liqun reportedly felt bitterly disappointed; he subsequently expressed his displeasure by shifting his primary allegiance from Deng Xiaoping to Chen Yun. Thenceforward, Deng Liqun proved to be a constant thorn in the side of Hu Yaobang and his mentor, Deng Xiaoping, sparing no effort to criticize and humiliate the former while (more subtly) sniping at the programs and policies of the latter. Thereafter, too, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun began to go their separate ways until, by the time of the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, they had become, in effect, acting heads of rival gerontocratic factions.

A similar pattern of shifting personal loyalties and political alignments characterized the complex relationship between Deng's two principal reformist protégés, Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Although both men belonged to the liberal wing of Deng's "practice faction," they frequently failed to see eye to eye. In the early and mid-1980s, Hu was clearly the more free-spirited and populist of the two, being more inclined to take political risks in pursuit of fundamental structural reform; Zhao, on the other hand, tended, at least initially, to hew more closely to the established conventions of reform socialism. Where Zhao, for example, generally backed Chen Yun's strategy of cautious, centrally controlled economic reform (at least until 1984), Hu showed a greater willingness radically to empower local authorities and enterprise managers, allowing them to assume substantial operational autonomy—generally at the expense of central planners. Hu also displayed greater capacity than Zhao for tolerating periodic outbursts of free, unfettered expression on the part of Chinese journalists, writers, and artists.

To a considerable extent, the differences between Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang could be attributed to their growing competition as rival claimants to inherit Deng Xiaoping's leadership mantle. Through the early and mid-1980s, Deng's two protégés jockeyed for political position, sometimes directly opposing each other (as in the 1982–83 debate over how to apportion enterprise revenues), while at other times collaborating to repel conservative challenges to reform policies (as in the 1983 anti-spiritual pollution campaign). At one point, Zhao openly complained that he could no longer work with Hu.¹⁴

When Hu Yaobang was removed from office at the insistence of angry party elders in January 1987 (for the alleged offense of being soft on "bourgeois liberalism" and for having the audacity to suggest that the offspring of certain senior party conservatives should be criminally indicted on charges of corruption), Zhao Ziyang carefully distanced himself from the general secretary, speaking out in support of Hu's removal. Zhao's discretion did not go unrewarded by party elders: shortly after Hu's forced resignation, Zhao was named to succeed him as general secretary. In light of the past rivalry between the two, there is no small irony in the fact that two years later, at the height of

the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, Zhao Ziyang himself fell victim to the wrath of the very same elderly conservatives who had scuttled his predecessor—and for some of the very same reasons, including his excessive indulgence of bourgeois liberalism and his insistence on fully exposing corruption on the part of the offspring of senior party leaders.¹⁵

THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE

With the dynamics of factional composition, coherence, and conflict subject to such frequently shifting vicissitudes and idiosyncracies, the task of identifying, tracking, and labeling factions in Chinese politics is extremely challenging.¹⁶ In such a situation, one key to unraveling the complexities of factional alignment lies in the analysis of terminological shifts and distinctions that periodically creep into the language of political discourse in China. As Lucian Pye has convincingly demonstrated, in a society where real power is almost always masked, where personal influence is seldom exercised through formally institutionalized channels and chains of command, and where rival leaders vie for factional advantage behind closed doors, the external signs of factional conflict and cleavage are often quite subtle and may be difficult for outsiders (and sometimes even for insiders) to detect and decipher.¹⁷ Typically, emergent Chinese factional disputes first appear publicly in the form of subtle rhetorical distinctions. While often intended to mask the underlying sources of conflict, shifts in the language or terminology of political discourse convey vital information to Chinese political actors, for example, portending changes in the prevailing party line, signaling shifts in the alignment of factional forces, or providing other important behavioral cues to members of a particular factional constituency.

Ever sensitive to the potential ramifications of even the most innocuous-sounding terminological distinctions, Chinese leaders and followers alike place great emphasis on defining and interpreting the “correct” political line—and rejecting (at times mercilessly attacking) all other lines, which are by definition “incorrect” or even heretical. When even seemingly minor changes in phraseology can signal important shifts in factional fortunes, words matter a great deal. During the Cultural Revolution, the widely noted Maoist penchant for stereotyped linguistic hyperbole (the CCP was “great, glorious, and correct”; Liu Shaoqi was a “renegade, traitor, and scab”) led some observers to view the party’s compulsive attention to line-orientation as some sort of ultra-Leftist aberration or idiosyncrasy. In fact, however, Mao Zedong’s “pragmatic” successors have continued to pay extraordinarily close attention to minute terminological distinctions in matters pertaining to party line.¹⁸

During Hua Guofeng’s brief interregnum in the late 1970s, an intense debate raged for many months over the arcane question of whether the Communist Party’s “fine tradition and style” should be “restored” (*hui fu*) or merely “upheld” (*jian chi*). When the Central Committee endorsed the former inter-

pretation in 1978, it was the first clear sign of Deng Xiaoping's impending triumph over Hua Guofeng. More recently, in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown, a linguistic dispute simmered between Deng and China's hard-line vice-president, Wang Zhen, over how to define the essential "core" (*hexin*) of the party's new leadership. Where Deng called for a one-man leadership core in the person of newly promoted CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin, Wang, distrustful of Jiang's centrist tendencies, sought to enlarge the definition of the core by including within it the entire "third-echelon" group of younger Politburo Standing Committee members, most notably hard-line Premier Li Peng.

Similarly, in the course of a 1979 intraparty debate between pragmatic reformers such as Hu Yaobang and more orthodox theoreticians such as Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun, the question arose as to whether "feudal influences" or "bourgeois influences" posed the greater danger to the party and the country. This dispute preoccupied a small army of theoreticians and propagandists for the better part of a year before Deng Xiaoping—apparently acting as much out of sheer exasperation as out of firm conviction—rendered the point moot by declaring that there could be "no single answer" that was valid at all times and under all circumstances. With increasing difficulty, Deng hewed to this ambivalent position throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s, tacking first one way and then the other in the face of brisk, frequently shifting political and ideological winds.

Closely related to the ongoing dispute over the relative dangers of Leftism and Rightism was the nagging question of what kind of terminology to employ in describing the Tiananmen crisis. For almost three years after the June 1989 crackdown, a debate raged between hard-liners and moderates over whether the crisis had been a full-scale "counterrevolutionary rebellion" (*fan'geming baoluan*), a more limited "turmoil" (*dongluan*), or merely an "event" (*shijian*). Upon the outcome of this rhetorical debate hinged such weighty matters as the future rehabilitation of the disgraced General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, the political future of Premier Li Peng, and the fate of dozens (perhaps hundreds) of imprisoned political dissidents. In a country like China, where the rigid discipline of democratic centralism has been superimposed upon strong Confucian traditions of patriarchal authority and group conformity, party members and cadres are constantly—indeed compulsively—constrained to look to higher levels for cues as to what is necessary, appropriate, or even permissible language. Under such circumstances, even seemingly minor shifts in prevailing terminology may prove extremely important.¹⁹

As a final example of the importance of terminology, consider the controversy that raged in the early 1990s between Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun (and their respective supporters) over the question of how to define the central task of the CCP in the age of reform. According to Deng's "theory of one center," economic construction was the country's categorical imperative, the ultimate yardstick against which all programs and policies had to be measured. For Chen Yun, on the other hand, economic construction, while ex-

tremely important, had to be pursued in tandem with “another center,” namely, *ideological* construction, which involved giving coequal status to the “four cardinal principles”—the CCP’s benchmark political commandments, first articulated in 1979, mandating unwavering allegiance to socialism, the people’s democratic dictatorship, Communist Party leadership, and Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought. For almost two years, the Deng and Chen camps traded verbal salvos on the linguistic battlefield, employing such devices as photo-opportunity sessions, inspection visits, and media commentaries to score points. The issue was not resolved until the winter of 1992, when Deng trumped his rival by undertaking a spectacular four-week southern tour, visiting China’s free-wheeling SEZs to drum up support for his program of accelerated economic reform and “opening up.” Thereafter, a bandwagon effect quickly took shape, as a number of erstwhile CCP conservatives and fence-straddlers, including Li Peng, fell into line and declared their undying allegiance to Deng’s “theory of one center,” thus shifting the balance of power decisively in Deng’s favor.²⁰

THE HAZARDS OF LABELING

As indicated earlier, due to the highly complex, fluid interplay of linguistic, factional, and cyclical phenomena it is extremely hazardous to attempt to apply constant, unchanging ideological labels to individuals and groups in Chinese politics. While there have always existed left-wing, centrist, and right-wing tendencies within the CCP, these terms have varied widely in their meanings and referents, depending on time, place, and policy context. To give one salient example of such variability, Deng Xiaoping’s twin proposals to introduce managerial responsibility systems and expand acquisition of foreign technology were widely denounced as “Rightist” in 1976; two years later they were officially incorporated into the government’s ten-year plan for economic development.

Compounding the difficulty posed by changing policy contexts is the fact that individual party leaders have been known to shift from one position to another along the ideological/economic spectrum. For example, senior party theorist Hu Qiaomu was a vocal advocate of economic modernization in the late 1970s; by 1980, however, his endorsement of structural reform was tempered by a mounting concern for the dangers posed by a rising tide of political dissent and instability. Over the next decade, Hu acquired a reputation as one of China’s leading ideological conservatives. Just before his death in 1992, however, Hu Qiaomu recanted his hard-line views and once again embraced the goal of fundamental economic reform.

A final source of confusion surrounding the use of ideological labels is the fact that in China the policy orientations indicated by the terms “Left” and “Right” are generally the reverse of their conventional Western referents. Since the advent of post-Mao reforms in 1978–79, Leftism in China has gen-

erally stood for *conservatism*, that is, devotion to traditional CCP institutions and values, while Rightism has connoted *liberalism*, meaning support for market reforms and/or democratic institutions and values.²¹

Since individual leaders can and do alter their opinions and allegiances over time, and since they sometimes hold noncongruent (and even mutually inconsistent) views on different issues at the same time, it is obviously hazardous to attempt to divide Chinese political elites into clear, constant categories such as pragmatists versus hard-liners, liberals versus conservatives, or moderates versus Leftists (or some similar cross-pairing of dichotomous labels). The relative fluidity of the ideological spectrum, in turn, further complicates the understanding of the oscillations of the reform process, which, as I have noted, are most commonly described as alternating phases of “liberal” relaxation and “conservative” contraction.

The difficulty of categorization is compounded still further by the problem of China’s “floating fulcrum.” Since 1979 Deng Xiaoping has sought to occupy the strategic middle ground between contending “liberal” and “conservative” wings of his reform coalition. Shifting his stance periodically in order to retain (or restore) overall balance within the discontinuous policy flux of the fang/shou cycle, Deng by his actions has continually redefined the operational center of the policy spectrum; that is, at any given time, the terms “Left,” “Right,” “liberal,” and “conservative” (among others) derive their meaning in relation to Deng’s floating center.

Having said all this, it can be argued that conventional ideological labels, though far from precise or constant, may, if used with a modicum of contextual discretion and care, have considerable utility as indicators of the relative location of individual leaders in ideological/political/economic space, with respect to particular issues at particular points in time. Provided that the policy context is well established and understood, it thus makes good sense to describe *some* Chinese leaders, on *some* issues, *some* of the time (indeed, on many issues much of the time), as reformers or conservatives or Leftists or liberals or neo-Maoists or moderates or hard-liners. Recognizing the risk of oversimplification inherent in such stereotypy, I have freely employed these (and a few other) labeling conventions whenever it appeared that doing so added clarity to the descriptions and analyses of particular events, individuals, or processes. Where labels (or individuals) changed their identities or alignments over time, I have endeavored to make clear the nature of such alterations.

DENG’S ELUSIVE QUEST

Throughout the entire post-Mao epoch, from 1976 to 1993, the dynamics of faction formation, competition, and recombination interacted with the dynamics of fang/shou fluctuations and the vicissitudes of leadership succession to produce an extremely complex pattern of Chinese political development.

Standing at the epicenter of this richly marbled developmental mosaic, personifying its manifold political convolutions and complexities, was the diminutive figure of China's "paramount leader," Deng Xiaoping. Delicately maneuvering his way through successive economic cycles, ideological struggles, terminological disputes, and political wind shifts, Deng came to encompass and embody virtually all the complex antinomies of fang and shou. Seeking to contain and manage the deep personal rivalries and political antagonisms that periodically threatened to shatter the delicate unity and stability of his reform coalition, Deng became, of necessity, a consummate improviser and balancer.

Lacking a coherent, integrated blueprint or theory of reform, Deng initially sought to fashion a hybrid, syncretic model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." He apparently believed that China could develop robust, competitive markets under noncompetitive Leninist institutional auspices; he believed that a vigorous, creative intelligentsia could thrive under the four cardinal principles; he believed that special economic zones could be infused with the values of "socialist spiritual civilization." Yet as the decade of the 1980s wore on, and these various goals began to collide rather than converge, Deng found it increasingly difficult to steer a balanced course. He—and China—began to swerve, first one way and then the other, as he searched, in vain, for a coherent, viable center.²²

For the better part of a decade, Deng tried to overhaul China's inefficient command economy, create a rationalized structure of governance, and effect the orderly empowerment of a younger generation of leaders. Four times—in 1980, 1984, 1986, and 1988—he either personally initiated or endorsed major efforts to overhaul China's overcentralized, ossified leadership system; in all four instances intense factional strife, combined with mounting economic difficulties, compelled him to abort the project. Twice, in 1982 and again in 1987, Deng tried to leave the political stage, designating pragmatic, reform-oriented heirs apparent to succeed him; both times his choices were eventually rejected, as first Hu Yaobang and then Zhao Ziyang ran afoul of party hardliners. Three times—in 1979, 1984, and 1988—Deng backed the introduction of wide-ranging structural and/or price reforms in China's urban economy; all three times a rising tide of inflation, corruption, and resultant social unrest forced him to back down.

With the middle path of orderly, institutionalized reform becoming ever more elusive, Deng was repeatedly forced to rely upon his personal prestige and authority to preserve a semblance of political stability and unity. Unable to create a viable structure of authority that reconciled fang and shou, and unable to locate a successor acceptable to all major political groups and factions, he was unable to retire from active duty. Each time he retreated to the "second line" of party leadership, leaving the initiative for policy making in the hands of younger cadres, veteran conservatives, finding new cause for complaint, pressured Deng to return to the front line. As a result, Deng was unable to transfer power successfully to the third echelon. Over time, his per-

sonal authority thus became more, rather than less, critical to the coherence—perhaps the very survival—of the regime. Yet the more he intervened in the decision process *ex cathedra*, the more elusive became his quest for a routinized, rationalized political order. Therein, perhaps, lay the supreme paradox of Deng's political stewardship; for in his quest to lead China out of the "feudal autocracy" of the Maoist era toward a more highly developed, institutionalized political-legal system, Deng increasingly resorted to highly personalized instruments of control—instruments that were in many ways the very antithesis of the system he sought to create.²³ By the early 1990s, a little more than a decade after he first criticized Mao Zedong's cult of personality as a "feudal remnant," Deng had begun to cloak himself in a personality cult all his own. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.

Lacking a viable blueprint for systematic institutional reform, Deng was compelled to "cross the river by groping for stepping stones" (*mozhe shitou guohe*). Improvising as he went along, he introduced a series of ad hoc, piecemeal measures designed to facilitate smooth, orderly change. In the early 1980s, when elderly party cadres proved reluctant to retire and turn power over to younger leaders, Deng gave the old-timers their very own Central Advisory Committee (CAC) to help ease them into inactivity. Yet many still refused to leave the stage voluntarily; and Deng could not (or would not) force them off. Consequently, the temporary became permanent: the CAC became a virtual shadow cabinet, parallel and powerful. Still active until the early 1990s, this "sitting committee," as it was sometimes derisively known, played a key role in fashioning the June 1989 military crackdown at Tiananmen Square.²⁴

Over time, some of Deng's stepping stones became millstones. As part of his campaign to modernize and professionalize China's outmoded military establishment, Deng tried to move the People's Liberation Army (PLA) out from under the command of a few dozen superannuated Long March veterans by placing the army directly under the jurisdiction of the central government. But since outright abolition of the party's powerful Central Military Affairs Commission (MAC) would have alienated China's conservative old guard, Deng improvised once again. He created a governmental MAC alongside the existing party MAC, allowing the latter to remain wholly intact. He then proceeded to staff the new body with virtually the same elderly veterans who controlled the old one, thereby ensuring both the redundancy and the irrelevancy of the new governmental commission. Although Deng repeatedly expressed a personal wish to retire from his chairmanship of the two MACs, his inability to locate a successor acceptable to elderly conservatives in the PLA high command prevented him from doing so. Thus, when PLA troops were called in to Beijing to put down student protests in May–June 1989, it was the old-timers on the party MAC—led by Deng himself—who gave the order.

When China's urban consumers balked at the prospect of reform-induced commodity price hikes in the late 1980s, Deng once again offered an expedient compromise: he slowed down the decontrol of prices and granted city

dwellers a series of temporary food and housing subsidies to help ease the painful transition to market-regulated pricing. Shortly thereafter, a combination of consumer panic and conservative criticism forced the government to halt price decontrol altogether; as a result, another temporary expedient was frozen in place, and China was forced to limp along for two more years with a semireformed, two-tiered price structure that retained many of the worst irrationalities of the old system while perpetuating the costly transitional subsidies of the new one. More than one observer likened the government's indecisive, start-and-stop approach toward price reform to an attempt to leap over the Grand Canyon in a series of small jumps.

In each of the above examples, an ad hoc policy improvisation, originally intended to serve as a temporary bridge, or stepping stone, en route to more fundamental structural reform was frozen in place due to conservative backlash, becoming in the process an impediment to further systemic change. Cumulatively, the effect was to exacerbate existing structural tensions and stresses, rather than to resolve them.²⁵

Notwithstanding the frequent policy improvisations and increasing turbulence of the 1980s, for a brief period in 1987–88 it appeared that a viable developmental path might, after all, be found. Under Zhao Ziyang's leadership, a new formula for China's political development was devised, one that was neither totalitarian nor libertarian, but which contained the first ideological and institutional sprouts of emergent pluralism. This was the "new authoritarianism" (*xin quanweizhuyi*), a hybrid system that sought to combine the economic openness and market vitality of fang with the centralized political authority of shou. The proposed system was characterized by continued one-party tutelage and a consultative structure of limited political participation by non-Communist groups, on the one hand, and a state-induced shift toward market regulation of the economy and the recognition of diverse, pluralistic societal interests and aspirations, on the other.²⁶

Unhappily for China, the new formula was never adequately tested. Mounting urban anxiety over surging inflation, made worse by rumors of impending price decontrol and rendered politically volatile by deepening public resentment over flagrant official profiteering, triggered a wave of consumer panic in the summer of 1988. Communist Party conservatives, afraid of incipient political instability, reacted instinctively by halting price deregulation, freezing structural reform, and attempting—with only limited success—to reassert central control over local economic activity.

THE TIANANMEN CRISIS

By the spring of 1989, reform-related stresses had reached critical levels. With economy and society seemingly stalled midway between plan and market, between bureaucrats and entrepreneurs, between shou and fang, China contin-

ued to suffer from some of the worst distortions of the old system without enjoying the full fruits of the new. It was truly a “crisis of incomplete reform.”²⁷ Following the unexpected death of Hu Yaobang in mid-April 1989, the political center began to crumble, as a student-led, inflation-bred, corruption-fed protest movement in Beijing brought the Chinese capital to the very brink of governmental paralysis. Faced with a mounting urban revolt against a government whose authority was being openly defied—even ridiculed—by its own citizens, in early June a group of elderly, semiretired party conservatives, supported now by a clearly exasperated Deng Xiaoping, reentered the political arena with a vengeance and played their trump card, the PLA.

The bloody crackdown and repression that followed put an end, temporarily, to the developmental dynamism of the 1980s. With the massacre of several hundred—perhaps more than a thousand—civilians in the streets of Beijing in early June, the fang/shou cycle ceased oscillating. Under the cumulative stresses engendered by a decade of reform-induced sociopolitical mobilization, Deng Xiaoping’s carefully crafted coalition came unglued. The center dissolved. Zhao Ziyang was dismissed and placed under house arrest for aiding and abetting a “counterrevolutionary rebellion”; a number of his more liberal supporters were sacked, arrested, or driven into exile; and a new wave of repression, recrimination, and regimentation spread throughout China. Though party leaders made energetic efforts to keep up the appearance of political unity and consensus, the extreme rigidity of government policy bespoke the existence of deep, painful political wounds that mere words of self-congratulation and self-assurance could not assuage. By the late spring of 1989, Deng appeared on the verge of losing his biggest gamble, namely, that socioeconomic reform and modernization could be achieved without fatally undermining the country’s political stability.

The 1980s, which began in China amid great optimism and high hopes for reform and renewal, thus ended on a bitter, discordant note. Far from being acclaimed as China’s savior, Deng Xiaoping was now widely reviled as the “Butcher of Beijing.” Yet for all China’s national agony and distress, the country did not disintegrate politically, as some had predicted at the time of the June massacre; nor did China go the way of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where communism was overwhelmingly repudiated in the cascading “gentle revolution” that began in 1989.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to identify several factors that were instrumental in preventing the post-Tiananmen collapse of China’s Communist regime. These included: (1) the cumulative effects of a decade of reform-induced economic growth, which—despite numerous gaps and inequities, and despite widespread urban alarm over rising inflation and corruption—gave most Chinese, producers and consumers alike, a visible if uneven stake in the survival of the system; (2) the forceful assertion of party discipline after June 4, which gave a strong (if somewhat misleading) impression of elite solidarity at the top; (3) the loyalty and obedience to civilian command dis-

played by the Chinese armed forces throughout the spring crisis, which, notwithstanding severe military morale problems, reinforced the prevailing public impression of harmony between the PLA and the Communist Party; (4) the absence of such viable institutions of “civil society” as autonomous trade unions, newspapers, and professional associations capable of serving as focal points for ongoing political debate and dissent in the aftermath of the government crackdown; (5) the existence of significant schisms within the student movement, over the means as well as the ends of political action; (6) an elitist attitude on the part of student leaders, many of whom refused to engage in joint action with factory workers and other urban groups and strata until the very end, thus fragmenting the movement and limiting its overall effectiveness; and (7) a widespread fear of chaos, summed up in Deng Xiaoping’s classic paraphrase of the warning issued by Mme. de Pompadour after the defeat of the French Army at the Battle of Rossbach: “Après moi le déluge.” Mindful of the devastating social disorder of the Cultural Revolution, and intensely fearful of any new descent into uncontrolled anarchy, after June 4 the citizens of Beijing and other major Chinese cities backed away from the brink of civil war.²⁸

CHANGING THE GUARD: THE POST-DENG ORDER

As China regained its balance politically and economically in the early 1990s, Deng Xiaoping, now nearing ninety, made one final, concerted effort to overcome hard-line resistance and to forge a new, progressive ruling coalition capable of holding the country on the path of modernization and reform after his passing. In the course of his well-publicized tour of China’s coastal SEZs early in 1992, Deng insisted that any party leaders or cadres who could not wholeheartedly support the policies of accelerated reform and opening up should “go to sleep”—that is, resign from office. Pressing his point, Deng abandoned his decade-long neutral stance on the question of which was worse, Leftism or Rightism, declaring that Leftist obstruction was the principal threat to the commonweal. With the fang/shou flux having lost most of its forward thrust after June 4, and with party conservatives taking advantage of the collapse of the USSR to spread fears of bourgeois liberalism, Deng felt it necessary to jump-start the reform process.

Even as Deng stepped up his support for accelerated market reforms, a series of deaths began to deplete the ranks of China’s elderly hard-liners. In the twelve months surrounding the Fourteenth Party Congress, from March 1992 to March 1993, four of the most influential conservatives on the CAC—Deng Yingchao (eighty-eight), Li Xiannian (eighty-six), Hu Qiaomu (eighty), and Wang Zhen (eighty-five)—died of natural causes, as did the left-wing former director of party propaganda, Wang Renzhong (seventy-five). In addition, Deng’s rivalrous copatriarch Chen Yun (eighty-eight) was reported to be

in seriously failing health. This sequence of events lent added impetus to the new relaxation phase of the fang/shou cycle, helping to push the prevailing balance of political forces farther in the direction of accelerated reform. Although Deng's health had also deteriorated, to the point where he could not walk or talk without assistance, and though he was unable to take part in his customary twice-weekly bridge game for more than one hour at a sitting (down from his usual four hours), he remained, at eighty-eight years of age, relatively alert.

At the Fourteenth Party Congress in October 1992, Deng's policies appeared to carry the day: economic reform was declared to be the principal focus of party policy for the next one hundred years; the "theory of one center" was formally endorsed; the remaining conservative gerontocrats retired from active political life; the CAC was finally and formally abolished; and the way was cleared for a younger group of third-echelon technocrats to assume the reins of power.

Combining a general preference for rapid economic reform with a strong dose of political authoritarianism, the new leadership coalition, much like Deng himself, was a hybrid composed of contradictory elements. Centrist CCP General Secretary Jiang Zemin (who also assumed the presidency of the PRC following Yang Shangkun's March 1993 retirement) and hard-line Premier Li Peng—arguably the two greatest beneficiaries of the Tiananmen crackdown—now presided over a Politburo Standing Committee whose majority strongly favored accelerated market reform of the economy and renewed commitment to China's global economic engagement.

Although Premier Li remained highly unpopular in Beijing (it was he who had imposed martial law in May 1989), Deng Xiaoping's strong commitment to stability and unity and his continued deference to his elderly comrades precluded Li Peng's early removal from office, just as it also precluded Zhao Ziyang's political rehabilitation. In this connection, on the eve of the Fourteenth Party Congress Deng reportedly began to exert great pressure on his comrades to refrain from undertaking an official reassessment of the events of spring 1989. Said to be deeply concerned about preserving for posterity his reputation as principal architect of China's post-Mao reforms, Deng in the last few months of 1992 consented to the fashioning of a new personality cult, centering around the canonization of his own theories.

Deng's concern with preserving his posterity reportedly played a key role in his belated decision to part company with his long-time friend and colleague, PRC President and Deputy Military Commission Chairman Yang Shangkun. Yang had apparently boasted that he was in possession of documents proving that it was Deng, and not he, who had given the order for the PLA to open fire on civilians on the night of June 3–4, 1989. Responding to the peril implicit in Yang's claim, an obviously alarmed Deng Xiaoping moved, during and after the Fourteenth Congress, to have President Yang, his family members, and their supporters ousted from key party, state, and mili-

tary leadership posts. At the same time, Deng firmly instructed his own supporters that there was to be absolutely no “reversal of verdicts” on the June 1989 massacre—posthumously or otherwise.

TIANANMEN REVISITED: DENG’S DÉJÀ VU

There was no small irony in the fact that Deng should feel compelled, three years after the Tiananmen debacle, to exert intense political pressure to prevent any reconsideration of the 1989 disturbance. Thirteen years earlier, in the aftermath of the first Tiananmen incident of April 1976, Deng had strongly lobbied his colleagues to *remove* the “counterrevolutionary” label. Now he lobbied, with equal vigor, to *retain* it.

Although Deng’s role in the second Tiananmen incident was virtually the reverse of his role in the first, the two events were strikingly similar. Each began as a peaceful display of mourning for a recently deceased, highly popular Chinese leader; each became inflamed when party hard-liners, seeking to delegitimize the demonstrations, impugned the patriotic motives of participants; and each culminated in the purge of a popular, proreform leader who was blamed for inciting a “counterrevolutionary riot.”

The irony is striking: having defeated Hua Guofeng and ascended to power on the strength of his own belated vindication in the first Tiananmen verdict reversal, Deng now stood to have his reputation tarnished forever through a similar reversal, à la Hua Guofeng. It was to forestall such an ironic denouement—and to avoid being hoist by his own petard—that Deng took the calculated risk of shattering his reform coalition in the winter of 1992–93, putting the brakes on the anti-Leftist campaign and moving to restrict the political authority of those party and military leaders who advocated a reassessment of June 1989. It was also for this reason that China’s patriarch belatedly sanctioned the eleventh-hour campaign to canonize his theoretical contributions to socialist modernization.

Although Deng’s posterity thus remained uncertain, many of the most significant reforms enacted under his stewardship seemed, finally, to have become essentially irreversible. By 1995 Beijing had relinquished so much control over the economic life of the country that no amount of periodic tough talk from central government leaders—about the need to curtail new investment, regulate financial markets, restrict the money supply, and control inflation—seemed significantly to affect economic behavior in the provinces, where *enrichissez-vous* had clearly become the prevailing social ethic. This was particularly true along China’s southeastern seaboard, where the vibrant, pulsating rhythms of the marketplace threatened totally to overwhelm the dull, droning voices of socialist caution, and where the four cardinal principles went increasingly unenforced or, even worse, unnoticed. With China’s doors to the outside world open wide, with economic power devolved to the provinces and localities, and with elderly conservatives no longer able to exert a significant

braking influence, Mao Zedong's warning, issued some thirty years earlier, now seemed prophetic: "If socialism doesn't occupy the battlefield, capitalism surely will." Though capitalism, Chinese style, differed in important respects from its Western prototype, the 1993 constitutional enshrinement of market principles appeared to put an end to a decade and a half of fang/shou fluctuations. For better or worse, China had opted to become the next East Asian "little dragon." For better or worse, Mao's revolution had come to an end.