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Death and Transfiguration: Liu Shaoqi's Rehabilitation and Contemporary Chinese Politics

LOWELL DITTMER

Liu Shaoqi's most recent debut is only the last in a kaleidoscopic series of changing appearances, ranging from the early hagiographical memoirs to the demonologies of the Cultural Revolution back to his posthumous apotheosis. Each phase has brought fresh information to light. The current reassessment is however likely to be the last in which the interpretation of Liu's life will be of major political significance, and the verdict may be expected to persist for some time without alteration due to the impact of new disclosures. Inasmuch as this most recent reevaluation was conducted in an atmosphere of free inquiry and objectivity unprecedented since the early 1950s, amid a riot of interesting new publications,¹ the time and resources now seem ripe to attempt a definitive portrayal.

I will begin by pursuing his personal biography to its conclusion, filling in the various gaps and adding an account of the related experiences of his wife and family. This will be followed by an analysis of Liu as a public symbol and its vicissitudes in the media over the past decade. The third section consists of a comparison of Liu's record as represented in the Cultural Revolution accusations with the information disclosed in the rehabilitation materials. In conclusion, the reasons for Liu's rehabilitation and its significance in terms of the contemporary contest for power and legitimacy will be explored.

Mortification of the Flesh

We now know that Liu was born in 1898, in Huaminglou village, Ningxiang County, Hunan, located midway between Changsha and Xiangtan (Mao's hometown). He was the youngest in a family of four boys and two girls; his father and grandfather were rich peasants (not landlords, as alleged by Red Guards, but certainly not poor peasants either). Liu's ancestral home had a hundred-year history, during which it was gradually expanded to its final twelve-room size. In 1958 it was designated an

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¹ The official media of the People's Republic of

China (PRC) (*People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, *Guangming Ribao*, the revived *Wen Hui Bao*, etc.) I have taken to be definitive on matters of fact in this study. Of the Hong Kong publications, *Ming Pao Yueh Kan* and *Qishi Niandai* seem to be most reliable. *Zheng Ming*, *Dongxiang*, and *Guang Jiao Jing* I have found for the most part to be accurate, although they do report hearsay and even rumor of uncertain reliability. Thus I have attempted to corroborate their claims against other sources whenever possible.

important historical site and the house opened as a museum, with the original furniture and particularly the room in which Liu was born preserved intact. When Liu discovered this on a return visit to his hometown in 1961, however, he asked the secretary of the local Party branch to rescind these arrangements and allow poor peasants to live in the house.² Only because this was done was the house spared from marauding Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution; local villagers also took care to conceal the location of Liu's ancestors' graves.³ By March 1980 the local commune had received documents confirming the latest reversal of Liu's verdict and was engaged in repairing the house and access road for expected tourists.

Contrary to some previous reports, Mao and Liu apparently never met before both had left Hunan.⁴ After completing primary school locally, Liu entered Wangluyuan Middle School of Ningxiang County, located in Changsha, in 1913. In 1915, at the age of 17, he attended *Changsha yucai xuexiao* (high school), graduating the following year. Like Mao and many others in his generation, Liu seems to have experienced something of an "identity crisis" on completing school. In 1917 he entered the Hunan Military Academy (Hunan shengjiang wutang) but remained only two months before withdrawing. In 1919 he went to Beijing and entered a German class, intending to pursue studies in Western Europe. But the following year he again for undetermined reasons withdrew and went to Shanghai, where he had contacts with the Comintern and studied Russian for eight months preparatory to a study tour in Moscow arranged by Soviet advisors.⁵

The picture of Liu's nascent personality that emerges from these materials seems altogether consistent with previous impressions.⁶ Although the photo exhibits that accompanied his rehabilitation depicted a warmer and more human character than the forbidding "iron Bolshevik" previously envisaged, Liu still appears as a cautious, methodical organization man, perhaps "cool-headed and keen-minded," with a "strong sense of principle . . . serious and conscientious, invariably well-prepared,"⁷ but not prepossessing. One who knew him in Shanghai in 1920 remembers "a person who always wore plain clothes, acted moderately . . . and never made jokes."⁸ At least before liberation, contact between Liu, Zhou, and Mao seems to have been frequent and informal: Liu had the habit of working deep into the night, and Mao would often call him up or convene a meeting; Liu left word that he should be notified if Mao called no matter what the time or circumstances.⁹ If Liu's life before the Cultural Revolution was a matter of controversy, his life since that time has been a mystery. Heretofore there had only been spates of rumors—the first in 1972, the

² Cao Shengsan, "Mao Liu jiaxiang zhuan fang tuo" (A visit to the hometowns of Mao and Liu), *Zheng Ming*, April 1980, no. 30, pp. 22–26.

³ Wu Zhenying and Liu Zhengde, "Gensui Shaoqi tongzhi shijiu nian—jiyao mishu huiyi" (Following Comrade Shaoqi for nineteen years—the recollections of his confidential secretaries), in *Hongqi piaopian*, vol. 20 (Beijing: China Youth, 1980), pp. 164–224 (hereafter cited as *HQPP*; all citations refer to vol. 20).

⁴ Jörg-Michael Luther, *Liu Shao-qi's umstrittenes Konzept zur Erziehung von Parteimitgliedern* (Liu Shaoqi's Controversial Concept of the Cultivation of Party Members) (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde, Mitteilung nr. 100, 1978.)

⁵ Chen Xin (interviewing Cao Shengsan) "Liu

Shaoqi jiaxiang jian ting" (What I heard and saw in Liu Shaoqi's hometown), *Dongxiang*, March 1980, no. 18, pp. 14–17.

⁶ See Chang Kuo-t'ao's introduction to the *Collected Works of Liu Shao-ch'i*, 3 vols. (Hong Kong: Union Research Inst., 1968).

⁷ Yang Shangkun, "Huiyi Liu Shaoqi tongzhi" (In memory of comrade Liu Shaoqi), *Hongqi* (Red Flag), April 16, 1980, pp. 2–9 (hereafter cited as *RF*).

⁸ Xiao Jingguang, "Yi zaoqi hu sulian xuexi shi di Shaoqi tongzhi" (Recalling comrade Shaoqi when he went to Russia to study in the early period), in *HQPP*, pp. 1–10.

⁹ See n. 3.

second in 1975, the third as recently as 1978—to the effect that Liu had died. Each time these rumors appeared they were officially denied, however—perhaps owing to the difficulty of allowing someone to die when his symbol remains alive as a causal force and polemical target.¹⁰

Although I had previously discounted conspiracy theories of the origin of the Cultural Revolution (of either “Maoist” or “Liuist” provenance), according to the most recent revelations Liu appears to have been entrapped in a Maoist conspiracy. Nie Yuanzi's initial “revolutionary big-character poster” was given favorable nationwide publicity without her endorsement by Kang Sheng and Chen Boda, who had informal links with the rebels and by May 1966 controlled the pacemaking media in Beijing. The situation thereafter quickly became chaotic. Liu telegraphed Mao in Hangzhou, but never received a clear response. In July, Liu and Deng Xiaoping flew to Hangzhou to consult with Mao and asked him to come back to handle the situation, but Mao authorized Liu to handle it. Then on July 19 Mao came back to Beijing and quickly decided that Liu had bungled things badly. On July 24 he held a meeting in which he criticized Liu and Deng; on August 5 he wrote a big-character poster publicly lambasting them.¹¹

According to Wang Guangmei, she and Liu often went out together during the early phase of the Cultural Revolution to read big-character posters, and at least initially he reacted favorably: the criticisms being made were of a sort he had not seen for many years, he told her; although strongly worded and a bit too heated, he felt that they could help improve Party work and bring the Party closer to the people if what was constructive in them were absorbed. At this point, recalled Wang, he really wanted to be criticized. But as the controversy escalated he came to feel that what began as criticisms lapsed into rumors, slanders, and a series of false charges. “The Kuomintang vilified me for years but never used such language,” he complained. He found that whatever he said was heavily discounted, and that anyone he sought to defend thereby became tainted. For example, in summer 1966 he praised the Shanghai Municipal Committee, noting that they had not yet been criticized and therefore must have been doing good work. This then became the basis for the “indictment” of the committee as Liu's “lackeys.”¹²

Liu was criticized or “struggled” against many times in the course of the Cultural Revolution, as was his wife. Liu delivered his first self-criticism in a closed session of the Central Work Conference in October 1966, and Mao commented favorably. But members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group then leaked its contents to the Red Guard press while withholding Mao's comments; in consequence, the self-criticism was promptly attacked as inadequate and “insincere.” Following the January 1967 “movement to seize power,” when cadre targets proliferated, Red Guards broke into Liu's residence at Zhongnanhai and posted big-character posters all over the walls. This was followed by a public accusation meeting in the courtyard, where

¹⁰ *Hsing-tao Jib-pao*, Hong Kong, Dec. 5, 1969; Rene Flipo, Agence France Presse (Hong Kong), Feb. 4, 1975, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (Hong Kong: U.S. Consulate General), Feb. 4, 1975, p. E1 (hereafter cited as *FBIS*). George Biannic, AFP, Oct. 22, 1978, in *FBIS*, Oct. 23, 1978, p. E2, issued perhaps the last report (based on “a reliable source in Peking”) maintaining that Liu was still alive.

¹¹ Yang Miao, “Zhonggong ping Mao zai qing qing ji ji” (The quietly deepening criticism of Mao), *Zheng Ming*, Jan. 1981, no. 39, pp. 38–40.

¹² Guo Zhikun and Gao Wenhai, “The Good Thing is that History is Written by the People: Wang Guangmei Talks about Comrade Liu Shaoqi,” *Wen Hui Bao*, Shanghai, March 8, 1980, p. 2, as trans. in *FBIS*, March 28, 1980, pp. L6–L13.

Liu was denounced for failing to quote a specific passage from the “little red book” of quotations. After this, Liu had what was to be his last chance to see Chairman Mao. This was at midnight on January 13, when Mao sent his secretary to fetch Liu for a talk in the Great Hall of the People. Liu raised two points: (1) he was personally responsible for what was called “the reactionary bourgeois line” (i.e., sending work teams to grassroots units earlier to handle the movement): most of the cadres involved were good and should be set free to minimize losses to the Party; (2) he wished to resign as chief of state, member of the Central Committee, and chairman of the editorial committee for the *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, and settle in Yanan or his hometown with his family to work in a commune. Mao remained silent, smoking a cigarette. After awhile he suggested that Liu do some serious reading, mentioning books by Haeckel and LaMettrie. As he saw Liu to the door, he added laconically: “Study well and keep fit.”¹³

Liu’s first request was in effect granted following the February “adverse current,” when the radical majority decided to turn the brunt of criticism against Liu and protect lesser cadres from attack, but the second request conflicted with the functional requirements of the first (i.e., that Liu remain a credible target) and could not be honored. When Liu saw the article by Qi Benyu that opened the official press campaign on April 1, 1967, “Patriotism or National Betrayal?” he was so furious he threw the paper on the floor. “This is not fact,” he said. “I have never seen a Party struggle as serious as this. I am not a counterrevolutionary. I never opposed Mao. I was the first to have advocated Mao’s Thought.” For the next several months Liu lived in a sea of accusing wall posters: slogans, cartoons, and big characters festooned his bedroom, yard, and the road to the canteen; he was not even permitted to post his own posters in self-defense. The struggle meetings at which he appeared functioned as rallies to bolster the fighting spirit of the masses, not as forums for him to make an articulate response. For example, on the evening of July 18, several hundred thousand rebels (with Jiang Qing’s approval) surrounded Zhongnanhai, creating a carnival atmosphere with their tents, banners, and campfires; with about one hundred loudspeakers they shouted into the compound from different angles, demanding that Liu be “dragged out.” Liu was forced to stand in bowed contrition for two hours while answering questions, but he did present two documents in his defense: Mao’s (cautious) endorsement of his October self-criticism, and Mao’s approval of the “Taoyuan Experience.” A similar scene occurred about three weeks later, when a bigger accusation rally was held at which Liu, Wang Guangmei, Deng Xiaoping, and Tao Zhu were struggled against separately at their homes while the assembled masses listened to the proceedings through loudspeakers mounted in Tiananmen Square.

This was the last time Wang was to see her husband alive. She was thereafter arrested and imprisoned—not for being Liu’s wife, not even for her role in the Taoyuan investigation, but for allegedly working for American, Nationalist, and Japanese intelligence agencies during World War II.¹⁴ For the next twelve years she

¹³ See Shou Wenyuan, “Yiding yao zuo renmin ti hao erzi” [We must be the good children of the people] (The recollections of Liu Pingping, Liu Yuanyuan, and Liu Tingting), *Zhongguo Qingnian* (Chinese Youth) 4 (1980): 4–10. During one of the Tiananmen reviews of Red Guards in fall 1966, Liu spoke to Mao when he passed before him: “The Cultural Revolution has now begun. I also

want to go and practice among the masses.” But Mao replied: “You are old now, don’t go” (Ni nianji dale, jiu buyao qule). Geng Dezhang, “Ta xinzhong zhi yu renmin—yiwu renyuan di huiyi” (Only the people are in his heart—the recollection of the medical personnel), in *HQPP*, pp. 246–50.

¹⁴ The case against her became so notorious that an aspiring author even used the background

lived in Qincheng Prison, located to the north of Beijing, a relatively well-equipped facility used to accommodate high-level political criminals.¹⁵ Their four younger children were also taken from Liu in September 1967 and temporarily housed in a dormitory belonging to the State Council.¹⁶

During 1968 Liu remained alone under house arrest in his official quarters in Zhongnanhai, exempted from further appearances at struggle meetings by the fears of the radical leadership that overenthusiastic “rebels” might resort to physical violence. The intensity of the criticism campaign against him waxed and waned with the tide of the movement, but the prolific and comprehensive political charges against him must have lacked a certain plausibility, for a special investigating committee was formed in December 1966 to prepare a new and more damning indictment. This committee included Kang Sheng and Xie Fuzhi (replaced by Wang Dongxing upon his death) and was chaired by Jiang Qing, as she recently admitted during her trial. The committee reportedly assigned 400,000 people to search through four million files covering the period of Japanese occupation in order to find “black materials” on Liu (see n. 12). Based on the report of this special committee, which presented evidence of Liu’s multiple treasons, capitulations, and betrayals, Liu was divested of all Party and government positions and evicted from the Party at the Twelfth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee in October 1968.

Liu contracted pneumonia in summer 1968, aggravated by diabetes. Because he was still needed as a “living target” for the Ninth Party Congress, he received emergency medical treatment at that time, but thereafter treatment was discontinued. Liu was unable to rise to go to the toilet, so bedsores grew all over his body; because his hair was not cut, it grew extremely long. Because he could not ingest food orally he had to depend on nasal feeding tubes.¹⁷ When in October 1969 Lin Biao issued his “order number one” to evaluate supernumerary inhabitants of China’s exposed northern cities (including Xian, Mudanjiang, Lanzhou, Baotou et al., as well as Beijing) in preparation for anticipated hostilities with the Soviet Union,¹⁸ Liu’s guard simply removed his pants, which were in any case disintegrating, wrapped him in his bedsheet and put him on a stretcher. He was then loaded aboard a military plane which flew him to Kaifeng, Henan.¹⁹ On his arrival the head guard, who had been dispatched by Wang Dongxing in his capacity as vice chairman of the special investigation committee, had Liu transported directly from the airport to detention in a vacant room in the courtyard of the Kaifeng Municipal Revolutionary Committee, where many soldiers had been told to await a “big capitalist roader.” Guards and staff were cautioned not to leave, meet people, write letters or telephone; they should

material to write a popular spy story, “Plum Blossom Clique” (*Meihua dang*), which was later compiled into a booklet of underground literature entitled “A Pair of Embroidered Shoes.” Later, this booklet was denounced as pornographic, and the author pursued by authorities. Liu Peng, “Wang Guangmei hai zai yu zhong” (Wang Guangmei is still in prison), *Zheng Ming*, Jan. 1979, no. 15, pp. 38–40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Xinhua News Agency, March 12, 1980, in *FBIS*, March 22, 1980, p. L1.

¹⁷ Shou Wenyuan, “Yiding yao,” pp. 4–10; also see the poem, “Zhong gui qu—xiangxin Liu Shaoqi tongzhi” (Song of the loyal spirit—remember comrade Liu Shaoqi), in *Renmin Wenxue* (People’s

literature), 1980, no. 3; and Liu Ying, “You guan Liu Shaoqi huida duzhe” (Response to readers’ questions about Liu Shaoqi), *Zheng Ming*, May 1, 1980, no. 31, pp. 18–19.

¹⁸ According to visitors and contemporary newspaper accounts, China was “pervaded by a war atmosphere” during summer and fall 1969, involving extensive troop movements as well as population evacuations to counter the perceived Soviet threat. Tokyo *Shimbun*, Feb. 5, 1970, p. 8, in *FBIS*, Feb. 9, 1970, pp. B1–B3; Asahi *Shimbun*, April 22, 1970, p. 1, in *FBIS*, April 22, 1970, pp. B1–B2; *China News Analysis* (Taipei), Feb. 23, 1970, in *FBIS*, Feb. 25, 1970, p. B1.

¹⁹ See n. 17.

keep everything secret, even from their families. Outside the gate were posted two armed squads manning four machine guns; the guards were told not to enter the courtyard, and did not know who they were guarding. When the physicians sent to treat him requested better medicine, they were instructed by higher levels to work according to normal conditions. Liu died at 6:45 A.M. on November 12, 1969, just shy of his seventy-first birthday.²⁰

Still wrapped in a sheet, Liu's corpse was now sent under heavy guard to the crematorium. To obtain permission for Liu's corpse to be brought in and disposed of by dark of night, workers there were told that a person with a highly contagious disease had died. In the early morning of November 14th, the corpse was loaded aboard a "69" model jeep (the feet protruded from the small vehicle) and carried to the Kaifeng Crematorium. The special investigation committee contributed RMB 30 to purchase a box to contain his ashes and paid a total of sixteen years' rental fees (through 1985) for the crematorium to store the box. The card for his ash storage read as follows:

Bone ash number: 123
 Name of applicant for storage: Liu Yuan
 Present address: Brigade
 Relationship of deceased: Liu Weihuang (a homonym for characters meaning "defender of the emperor")
 Age: 71
 Sex: Male²¹

By 1972, in the thaw following the fall of Lin Biao many children of purged cadres were permitted to visit their parents, and Liu's children wrote a letter to Mao requesting the same privilege. Mao responded that their father had died but that they might visit their mother; this was the first notification of Liu's death that his family received, and they were instructed to keep it to themselves.²² Upon her release from prison, Wang Guangmei made persistent efforts to recover the ashes. Finally on May 14, 1980, in Zhengzhou, in a transmission ceremony attended by 1,500 people, Henan Party Committee Chairman Liu Yuan (who had reportedly been keeping the ashes in his office) formally presented them to her.²³

Liu had a large family, and intrafamily relationships became quite "complicated" (*fuza*) during and after the Cultural Revolution. He had been married four times: to Ho Baozhen (from 1924–1932, when she was executed by the KMT); Xie Fei (1935–1939, when they divorced); Wang Qian (1939–1947, divorced); and Wang Guangmei (1948–1969). He sired at least nine children. His first wife, Ho Baozhen, was teaching the workers at Anyuan when Liu was sent by the Central Committee to

²⁰ Liu Ying, "Liu Shaoqi cang si Kaifeng qianhou" (Before and after Liu Shaoqi bitterly dies in Kaifeng), *Zheng Ming*, April 1980, no. 30, pp. 16–20.

²¹ *Henan Shida Xuebao* (Journal of the Honan Normal University), reprinted in *Huainian Liu Shaoqi tongzhi ziliao zhuanjì* (Special collection of materials commemorating comrade Liu Shaoqi) (Beijing: Chinese People's University, 1980), pp. 2–4 (hereafter cited as *Special Collection*).

²² The children were hence permitted to visit Wang a total of five times between 1972 and her

release in late 1978. Luo Bing, "Zhonggong gaoceng nei liang an mang" (The CCP supreme leadership is busy with two cases), *Zheng Ming*, Feb. 1980, no. 28, pp. 5–7.

²³ Liu Ying, "You guan Liu Shaoqi wenti huida duzhe," *Zheng Ming*, May 1, 1980, no. 31, pp. 18–19; see also n. 20; and Chen Yang, "Liu Shaoqi guhui zai Zhengzhou di yingsong yishi" (The transmission ceremony of Liu Shaoqi's ashes in Zhengzhou), *Ming Pao Yueh Kan* (Ming Pao Monthly), July 1980, no. 175, pp. 26–28.

lead the movement; they married and had three children, Aiqing (female), Yunbing (male), and Yunruo (male). Because of unsettled conditions in the 1930s (e.g., police suppression, frequent moves, the death of their mother), they were placed in the homes of sympathetic families among the masses and endured numerous hardships before being rediscovered and sent back to live with Liu in Yanan. Yunbing and Yunruo were both sent to the Soviet Union to study in the 1950s, and both pursued successful technical careers: Yunbing as an engineer engaged in nuclear research, Yunruo as a specialist in aircraft radio instrumentation. Yunruo did not get on well with his classmates and requested permission to transfer to politics or literature but Liu opposed this and eventually dissuaded him, arguing that: "He has never made the mistake of treating enemies as friends, but always makes the mistake of treating comrades and friends as enemies. For this reason I do not allow him to involve himself in the study of politics and literature, but agree to let him study technique [jishu]." Both Yunruo and Yunbing died during (and reportedly because of) the Cultural Revolution, but Aiqing survived to write her reminiscences.²⁴

His marriage to Xie Fei was brief, mysterious, and apparently childless.

Liu's marriage to Wang Qian ended bitterly, and the two offspring of that union, son Yongzhen and daughter Tao, achieved some notoriety during the Cultural Revolution by publicly repudiating their father and returning to live with their mother. After her divorce from Liu in 1947, Wang Qian married one Nie Zhen, a brother of Nie Yuanzi, the Beida Philosophy Department instructor who authored the famous "first Marxist-Leninist big-character poster" in May 1966 that triggered the attacks on Party work teams (after Kang Sheng brought it to Mao's attention and Chen Boda published it). When Wang Guangmei was rehabilitated, there was negotiation with Tao and Yongzhen about a reconciliation, but Yongzhen expressed no interest, and although Tao wished to return she refused to apologize for her previous actions (saying only that these had been caused by objective conditions) and a full reunification of the family remained in abeyance.²⁵

Wang Guangmei's family background was unquestionably elite, if not precisely "bourgeois," and she was well-educated, good-looking, and considerably younger than Liu. Together they had four children: Pingping (female), now about twenty-nine years of age; Yuanyuan (male), twenty-seven years old; Tingting (female), twenty-six years old; and Xiaoxiao (female), twenty years old. Pingping, who during the Cultural Revolution had been kidnapped by Red Guards as a way of luring her mother out for "struggle," was arrested in March 1968 on allegations that she was engaged in a plot with other high cadre children to rescue Liu. After a year's investigation, she was released for lack of evidence and sent to a military horse breeding farm in Jinan, Shandong. Yuanyuan was also sent to the countryside in Shanxi when he graduated from middle school in 1968, remaining there for eight years. Tingting worked in a nylon factory near Beijing from 1969 to 1978. Xiaoxiao, only six years old at the time the Cultural Revolution commenced, was deemed too young to work and thus permitted to continue her studies in Beijing.²⁶ Pingping

²⁴ Liu Ying, "Shaoqi tongzhi jiao zier" (How comrade Shaoqi taught his son), in *HQPP*, pp. 127–38; Liu Aiqing, "Nüer ti huainian" (Daughter's reminiscences), *Jiefangjūn bao* (Liberation army daily), April 27, 1980, p. 4; reprinted in *Special Collection*.

²⁵ Liu Ying, "You guan Liu Shaoqi," pp. 18–19;

Cuo Bing, "Zemma zuo panduan Liu Shaoqi" (How should we judge Liu Shaoqi), *Zheng Ming*, Nov. 1978, no. 13, pp. 20–21.

²⁶ "Liu Shaoqi tongzhi dui haizi zhi rende" (Liu Shaoqi's virtuous love for his children), *Geming Wenyu* (Revolutionary personages) (Beijing), May 30, 1980, no. 3, pp. 8–11.

managed to acquire some linguistic competence in Jinan and now works as a translator in the information office of a Beijing research institute. Yuanyuan, Tingting, and Xiaoxiao all passed the university entrance exam and are at this time attending college.²⁷

This story has been recounted at some length because its overall impact seems to derive from the cumulative empirical detail. Though an intimately personal account, Liu's former status and power gives it broad moral and political significance, which must have been one of the reasons it was made public. Its central moral thrust is of course that Liu suffered greatly and died abjectly. This in itself tends to persuade people that he was a noble character for, although one might argue that he was trapped in a passive position that precluded heroism and allowed only pathos, he did meet his fate with dignity and courage, remaining true to the ideals to which he had devoted his life. The political implication is that the Cultural Revolution was an unfortunate, indeed a terrible, thing to have occurred: that those responsible for it were irresponsible if not malicious, and that certainly it should never be allowed to recur. It seems probable that the story will prove of factional utility to those who were criticized and purged during the Cultural Revolution and have since been rehabilitated, enabling them to legitimate their current predominance over the majority of cadres who began their climb up the bureaucratic career ladder during or after the Cultural Revolution.

Odyssey of the Spirit

While all traces of Liu's personal history vanished from 1968 until his rehabilitation more than a decade later, his "spirit" remained very much alive as a target of "mass criticism." The criticisms that provided the basis for his purge from all leadership positions and (in distinction to Deng) from the Party itself at the Twelfth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee in 1968 had to do with his alleged collaboration with enemy warlord or Guomindang forces in the 1925–1929 period, but these alleged crimes were apparently selected more for their adequacy in justifying the severe punishment decided upon than to represent the nub of the Maoist grievances, for the criticisms voiced most frequently and most volubly during the Cultural Revolution itself had to do with the accusation that Liu consistently tended to favor policies that would, unless otherwise thwarted, lead away from the socialist path of development and back to a "capitalist road." Liu was said to be "China's Krushchev," the leader of the "revisionist" forces who wished to extinguish class struggle, permit new classes to form on the basis of differential allocation of material incentives, and establish a hierarchically organized society in which revolutionary values were obsolescent and ultimately doomed.

And in the criticisms of Liu that continued to reverberate from the media with gradually decreasing frequency over the next eight years, this central core of meaning was retained. Characterized perhaps most concisely as the "theory of productive forces," it portended a capitulation of proletarian revolution to the need to "develop productive forces as quickly as possible," leading ultimately to the reintroduction of capital and labor markets, unplanned prices, and free competition among autono-

²⁷ Ru Ni, "Liu Shaoqi zhi zi shang daxue" (Liu Shaoqi's children go to college), *Zheng Ming*, Sept. 1978, no. 11, p. 13.

mous enterprises. The theory of productive forces implied that historical change was economically determined (indeed, by the “forces of production”) and that ideology should play a derivative role, leading to an adverse verdict about the need for Jiang Qing’s reform of Beijing opera or for a revolutionization of the cultural and political superstructure. Repudiation of the theory of productive forces implied that the laws of economic development per se could not be relied upon to lead in an ideologically correct direction, and that therefore “politics” (viz., doctrine, Mao Zedong Thought) must remain “in command” of the economy. An economic and social system under correct revolutionary guidance would result not only in the achievement of such political desiderata as greater equality and a more militant and altruistic public ethos, but in greater economic productivity as well. The future of socialism, argued the radicals, hinged on proper leadership: not narrow-minded specialists, but ideologically dedicated generalists would remain close to the masses and preserve the correct order of priorities.²⁸

Although the symbol of Liu retained this core meaning during the entire Cultural Revolution decade (1966–1976), its surface appearance was modified periodically to accord with current political exigencies. For example, as the period of spontaneous mass mobilization drew to a close in 1968, there were frequent criticisms of Liu’s Party-building strategy—primarily his theory of “inner-Party peace,” which allegedly permitted the recruitment of new members from heterodox class backgrounds and for the sake of “harmony” foreswore any principled struggle with them.²⁹

After the fall of Lin Biao these criticisms abruptly dwindled, either because the Party had indeed been successfully reconstructed by summer of 1971 or (more likely) because it was reconstructed along generally “Liuist” lines (and with many rehabilitated Liuist cadres) amid so much continuing factional bitterness that it was considered the better part of valor to stop denouncing “inner-Party peace.” From the time of Lin Biao’s death until he was first explicitly repudiated at the Tenth Party Congress in summer 1973, “swindlers like Liu Shaoqi” became Lin’s *nom de guerre*, with the result that Liuist revisionism and Lin Biao’s deviations uneasily commingled. Thus in the course of the criticize-Lin campaign the following allegation made its appearance, evidently based upon Lin’s attempt to promote an advanced weapons industry:

The renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shaoqi and other sham Marxists and political swindlers . . . dished up the theory of taking the electronics industry as the center. . . . They also said, “The development of a modern electronics industry will bring about a leap forward in our industry, and it will be a starting point for a new industrial revolution in the history of China.” This is a reactionary principle for opposing the principle of taking steel as the key link. . . . Only the iron and steel industry should play a leading role.³⁰

As the attack on Liu expanded to include various manifestations of “ultra-leftism,” fueled now by the growing rehabilitation of cadres whose comeback Lin had

²⁸ The Writing Group of Yinggou Municipal CCP Committee, Liaoning, “The Aim of Socialist Revolution Is to Emancipate Productive Forces,” *Guangming Ribao*, May 17, 1971, p. 2; and Zhi Zhengwen, “Class Struggle Is the Direct Motive Power Behind the Development of History,” loc. cit., May 10, 1971, p. 3.

²⁹ An Xuejiang, “Rely on the Masses to Carry Out an Open-Door Party Consolidation Campaign,”

Renmin Ribao, Oct. 12, 1969, in *FBIS*, Oct. 14, 1969, pp. B5–9; see also Gao Jinwen, “What is So Good about a Good Old Man?” loc. cit., Jan. 27, 1970, in *FBIS*, Jan. 29, 1970, pp. B3–6.

³⁰ Revolutionary Criticism Writing Group of the Electronics Industry, “A Criticism of the Theory of Making the Electronics Industry the Center,” *Renmin Ribao*, Aug. 12, 1971, in *FBIS*, Aug. 18, 1971, pp. B8–13.

previously frustrated, the symbol of Liu Shaoqi came to serve double duty. Complaining about the deteriorating quality of student essays in the revolutionized school system, one article attributed this to two factors: "One is the poison of revisionism spread by swindlers like Liu Shaoqi. The other is the ultra-'left' thoughts promoted by these swindlers, which have so influenced some of the teachers that they find it dangerous to pay too much attention to the students' academic study but not so to pay too much attention to politics."³¹ Obviously this was a shotgun marriage, but on some points the covert attacks against Lin could be successfully assimilated to the ongoing criticism of Liu. Liu's "idealist apriorism," for example, according to which innovative ideas were engendered not by "social practice," but by mental cultivation and intellectual maturity, implying an elitist conception of culture, became linked to the Lin Biao–Chen Boda notion that certain "special geniuses" (such as Mao) played a key role in history—an idea that in turn could be linked with some plausibility to remnant Confucian tendencies.³²

Although criticisms of Liu gradually declined in frequency and salience as they were adulterated by attacks on other unrelated figures and as time put greater distance between him and the younger generation being socialized into the mass criticism movement, his core meaning remained fairly consistent. Indeed, he had become so institutionalized as the antithesis of all that Chinese Communism stood for that even the Gang of Four, upon their ouster, were initially grouped with their old nemesis by way of establishing guilt by association. From September 1976 until the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping the following summer, the Gang was identified as apparently "left" but really right, "capitalist-roaders in the Party" like Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi. For a long time it was assumed by most Western China watchers (myself included) that just as the positive image of Mao must be preserved to maintain the legitimacy of the system, so must the negative counterpole of Liu Shaoqi. Consistent with this assumption was the Chinese tendency gradually to transform everything that these two master-symbols stood for but to try to leave the symbols themselves intact as touchstones of good and evil. Thus the theory of productive forces, the legitimacy of material incentives, free rural markets, cost accounting and good management, intellectual cultivation, and many other ideas were rehabilitated long before Liu himself was, as were most of Liu's surviving political associates. Mao's pre-Cultural Revolution writings were scoured for evidence that he too supported such moderate policies, placing Mao and Liu back in a sort of unwitting alliance against the Gang of Four.

Apparently it began to occasion a certain amount of cognitive strain to continue to hold Liu in disrepute while his policies were being resuscitated, however, for when big-character posters once again proliferated in fall 1978 in support of the proposition that "Practice is the sole criterion of truth," some of them called for the rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi. Pointing out that the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee then in session had resolved that "All wrong cases must be corrected," a big-character poster appeared on Beijing's "Democracy Wall" in December 1978 alleging that since so many of his policies had made their reappearance "What did Liu do wrong?"³³ In the official media, while criticism of Lin Biao and the Gang

³¹ Gou Yushan, "Wipe Out the Remnant Poison and Do Better in Composition," *Guangming Ribao*, Aug. 30, 1972, p. 2.

³² Jing Yansheng, "Workers, Peasants and Sol-

diers Are Masters of Literature and Art," *Renmin Ribao*, May 16, 1972, p. 4.

³³ Agence France Presse (Hong Kong), Dec. 4, 1978, in *FBIS*, Dec. 5, 1978, p. E1.

continued unabated, they were repositioned on the "ultra-left" of the ideological spectrum, and Liu's name was no longer mentioned. Two letters written by Mao in the 1940s to two of his sons and to Liu's eldest son, all studying in the Soviet Union, were published in *Zhongguo Qingnian* (China Youth) in December 1978. According to the subtle but scrupulously observed Chinese rules of protocol, if one's parents are out of favor one's name cannot appear in the newspaper, much less in the same paper as does Mao's name; this clearly constituted a step in the restoration of "face."³⁴ Liu's case apparently did figure in the Third Plenum discussion of Cultural Revolution purge victims potentially eligible for rehabilitation, but precipitated heated opposition from those still determined to defend Mao's reputation. Although the latter were outmaneuvered politically (Wang Dongxing lost his posts as director of the General Office of the Central Committee, first vice-principal of the Party School, and director of the Central Committee's Propaganda Department; and Xiong Fu lost his post as editor-in-chief of *Hongqi*), the delicate question of Liu Shaoqi was deferred pending further investigation. A 100-man Commission for Inspecting (Party) Discipline was however concurrently established under the chairmanship of Chen Yun, who during the Central Work Conference preparatory to the Third Plenum had raised three pointed questions: Is Mao Zedong man or god? Is Peng Dehuai a good man or a bad man? Is Kang Sheng man or devil?³⁵ It could be assumed that the Commission for Inspecting Discipline, which accepted the Central Committee's assignment to reevaluate Liu's case in February 1979, was stacked in Liu's favor every bit as much as the Special Examination Group set up under the auspices of the Eighth Central Committee to investigate Liu's "crimes" had been stacked against him.

Following the decision of the Third Plenum to reverse all "unjust" verdicts, the rehabilitation of senior (and often "Liuist") cadres proceeded apace. In accord with the decision to postpone consideration of Liu's case pending the findings of the commission, and due to the sensitivity of Mao's image (which still played a major role in legitimating the Hua regime) to any precipitous or bluntly phrased vindication of Liu, various regime spokesmen began to withhold comment or circumnavigate the issue. Asked by an Agence France Presse reporter about the rehabilitation of Liu, Li Xiannian said it would take place "later"; Deng avoided making any reply when foreign visitors asked him the same question.³⁶ Occasional posters (often explicitly anti-Maoist) calling for Liu's rehabilitation nevertheless continued to appear on the Democracy Wall at Xidan.

Meanwhile, Liu's wife Wang Guangmei was rehabilitated, and while the legal implications of this were limited to Wang's own case the political implications were much broader. Her rehabilitation was arranged to take place very gradually. The Hong Kong media first disclosed that Wang was still alive in September 1978; she was released from prison on December 12, 1978, and officially cleared of all implications of criminal wrongdoing by March 1979.³⁷ She was first photographed in public at a Lunar New Year party held in late January at the Great Hall of the People, and reappeared at a celebration of International Women's Day in early March. She was subsequently named a delegate to the Fifth National Committee of the Chinese

³⁴ *Xin Wan Bao* (Hong Kong), Dec. 12, 1978, p. 1.

³⁵ David Lan, Agence France Presse, Jan. 10, 1979, in *FBIS*, Jan. 10, 1979, p. E1.

³⁶ Agence France Presse, Jan. 28, 1979, in

FBIS, Jan. 29, 1979, p. E15; see also fn. 34.

³⁷ Liu Peng, "Wang Guangmei chu yu zhi hou" (After Wang Guangmei was released from prison), *Zheng Ming*, March 1979, no. 17, pp. 18-19.

People's Political Consultative Conference (chaired by Deng) and director of the Foreign Affairs Bureau of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In June she appeared for the first time on Chinese television in an interview, in which she discussed her twelve years in prison and the fate of her children. At no time did she refer to her deceased husband. But in an interview with Wang that appeared in the January 1980 issue of *China Sport* (in which she attributed her survival in prison to regular exercise), she was referred to as the widow of "former chief of state Liu Shaoqi," the first time this title had been used in the official Chinese media since 1966.³⁸

Although the authorities avoided the issue, Liu Shaoqi's name did not entirely disappear from the public during the period when the commission was still conducting its investigations, no doubt partly due to the efforts of those lobbying for a favorable verdict. In the Party history exhibit erected in Beijing over National Day in 1979 to celebrate the decennial of the Chinese revolution, for instance, he appears in a photograph standing behind Mao and next to Zhou Enlai and Zhu De, and a reprint of the text of his Report on the Revision of the Constitution for the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 (in which Mao's Thought was incorporated into the official Party belief system) was reprinted. In February the article "What is Wrong with the Term 'Cultivation'" appeared in the second issue of *Hongqi*, which attempted to exonerate Liu's most famous book. The forces of Deng Xiaoping suffered a setback in spring 1979 as the residual "radical" forces in the Politburo, now known as the "small gang of four" (viz., Wang Dongxing, Ji Denggui, Wu De, and Chen Yonggui), seized the opportunity presented by Dengist policy errors (e.g., the imbalance of trade created by uncoordinated purchases of turnkey plants and capital equipment, the less-than-satisfactory results of the "war of self-defensive counterattack," and the increasingly disorderly "democracy movement") to launch a counterattack. "Are we taking the socialist or the capitalist road after all?" asked Wang Dongxing at an April Central Work Conference.³⁹ But the "radical" forces were unwilling to pursue such arguments to their logical conclusion, in view of their own involvement with the arrest of the Gang of Four, and their mass constituency was weak and demoralized and could not be mobilized. By summer 1979 Deng had regained the initiative.

On August 29, 1979, Yu Qiuli responded to an inquiring Japanese delegation that: "The Chinese people have not forgotten Liu Shaoqi, who was the state chairman. He will first be discussed in the Central Committee, where we will reevaluate him according to the facts."⁴⁰ At a Politburo conference preparatory to the Fourth Plenum, Wang Dongxing and his followers submitted self-criticisms and Wang even reportedly submitted his resignation (which was at this point declined). The Plenum itself was held on September 25–28, primarily to discuss the speech Ye Jianying was to deliver on behalf of the Central Committee, the NPC Standing Committee, and the State Council on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the PRC (a speech that had however been drafted by Deng protegee Hu Yaobang). The speech affirmed that the "line of the Eighth Congress" (Liu had drafted the report, for which he had previously been criticized for disserving Mao Zedong Thought) was correct, and that every major Maoist initiative since then (viz., the anti-rightist

³⁸ Agence France Presse (Hong Kong), Jan. 23, 1980, in *FBIS*, Jan. 30, 1980. p. L1.

³⁹ Cf. Lowell Dittmer, "China in 1980: Mod-

ernization and Its Discontents," *Asian Survey* 21, 1 (1981): 31–50.

⁴⁰ *Wen Hui Bao* (Hong Kong), Aug. 31, 1979.

movement, the Great Leap, the Twenty-three Articles, and the Cultural Revolution) had been mistaken. The first draft of the speech included a detailed account of Mao's alleged struggle against the Gang of Four, noting for example that Mao had originated the epithet, that he had called Jiang Qing "ambitious," etc., that he had predicted that if the problem of the Four could not be solved sooner it would be solved later. But others attending the meeting (probably Deng's people) remained skeptical of the Mao-Gang cleavage, pointing out that Mao did not postpone Deng's "problem" for even half a year but solved it as soon as Zhou Enlai's death permitted; that his remarks concerning Jiang's ambitions were very polite in their context; and that, although Mao reversed many wrong verdicts and rehabilitated veteran cadres, he also encouraged mass criticism of those same cadres during the 1975–1976 campaign against the right reversal of verdicts. Finally a much more abbreviated account of the struggle between Mao and the Gang was included.⁴¹ Although there was also a proposal to include Liu's name in a draft reference to the PRC's "great revolutionaries," Deng himself demurred, arguing that Liu's case must first be formally reversed, which required the preparation of evidentiary documents refuting those prepared for his purge. The issue of the Cultural Revolution could not be considered closed until Liu had been rehabilitated and the Gang of Four brought to trial.⁴²

By early 1980 the power of Deng Xiaoping waxed greater than ever before, and the Commission had completed its investigation, so the Liu Shaoqi case was brought forward at the Fifth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee. Despite auspicious circumstances, debate was so heated that a meeting planned to last from February 23 to 26 was not adjourned until February 29.⁴³ The disputes culminated in the "resignations" of the "small gang of four"—who were however permitted to retain their Central Committee posts. Liu's family had been notified in advance, and Wang Guangmei was in attendance. When she noticed that the "Draft Decision for the Reversal of Verdicts on Liu Shaoqi" mentioned that Liu had committed mistakes, Wang objected: it is all right to mention his mistakes, for no one is perfect, but if they are mentioned they should be described precisely and in the context of the objective conditions prevailing at the time. This created such difficulties that the draft ultimately adopted avoided mentioning Liu's mistakes altogether.⁴⁴ The investigation report published by the Central Commission for Inspecting Discipline was quite definitive in refuting the Twelfth Plenum indictment, calling the latter "the biggest frameup the Communist Party of China has ever known in its history, which had been created out of thin air by fabricating materials, forging evidence, extorting confessions, withholding testimony."⁴⁵

These decisions provided the stimulus for a nationwide campaign in 1980 to transform the popular twelve-year perception of Liu as a capitalist-roader to that of a proletarian revolutionary of "boundless rectitude, awe-inspiring righteousness." As early as February many units in Beijing received documents from the Center instructing them to reverse all cases related to Liu as quickly as possible; by early June 1980, the CCP had exonerated and financially compensated thousands who had suffered death,

⁴¹ Luo Bing, "Zhonggong gaoceng nei liang an mang" (The CCP supreme leadership is busy with two cases), *Zheng Ming*, Feb. 1980, no. 28, pp. 5–7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Song Tianzhang, "Lun Liu Shaoqi" (On Liu Shaoqi), *Guang Jiao Jing* (Wide Angle) March 16,

1980, no. 90, pp. 32–41.

⁴⁴ Liu Ying, "Liu Shaoqi zhuidao hui qianhou" (Before and after the Liu Shaoqi memorial meeting), *Zheng Ming*, June 1980, no. 32, pp. 1–11.

⁴⁵ Xinhua News Agency, March 12, 1980, in *FBIS*, March 22, 1980, p. L1.

imprisonment, and other penalties for supporting Liu, responding positively to 19,464 of a total of 22,053 suits for redress.⁴⁶ Three of Liu's works—*On Inner-Party Struggle*, *How to Be a Good Communist*, and *Be a Good Party Member and Build a Good Party*—were declared “Marxist works of great significance” and republished; they sold briskly. A major campaign was launched to popularize *How to Be a Good Communist* as a teaching manual for Party cadres; excerpts from this and other writings and speeches received front-page coverage in various national newspapers. At time of writing, three eulogistic anthologies had been published (or republished) commemorating Liu; in the most recent of these, Xu Xiangqian wrote the inscription: “The glorious achievements of Comrade Liu Shaoqi remain a model for everyone to learn from.”⁴⁷ At the Qingming Festival in April, which four years earlier had provided the pretext for the first public protest against Liu's enemies, more than one hundred wreaths and flower baskets were placed around the monument to the people's heroes in Tiananmen Square in honor of various deceased revolutionaries (including Mao, of course), but according to reporters the wreath addressed to Liu was easily the most prominent. Presented by the class of 1977 of the Beijing Teachers' College History Department, it read:

He may be rated as an outstanding personality of the Chinese nation, for his devotion to the good of the country may have even won the commendation of the Yellow Emperor [*sic!*]. His tremendous contribution in the 1950s will forever remain in the annals of history, winning universal praise from all. However, he failed to escape the onslaught of waves and filthy sludge. Thanks to the communique, the insults he suffered for over ten years are now redressed, and his soul has thus been consoled. Wiping away our tears, we now hold a memorial ceremony for him.⁴⁸

Yet ambiguous suggestions of reservation or even opposition to the verdict reversal continued to appear, some from high sources. Although memorial ceremonies had followed the posthumous rehabilitations of Peng Dehuai and Tao Zhu on the next day, Liu's memorial meeting was not held until nearly three months later, on May 17, 1980. “The rehabilitation of comrade Liu Shaoqi is bound to cause a certain amount of shock and misinterpretation,” admitted the *People's Daily* editorial at the time. “Enemies may create rumors, and, in the Party and out, speculation of every kind may arise.” While Deng's speech restored Liu posthumously to his position as chief of state, he did not recover his Party positions. Ye Jianying and Li Xiannian both absented themselves from the memorial ceremony—Ye was said to have been ill, but he spent many days in May traveling in Guangdong province and visited Zhejiang and Jiangsu in June. The small gang of four, on the other hand, were all present. Finally, although the communique rehabilitated Liu without qualification, Deng's memorial speech and the concurrent editorial both delicately raised the “mistakes question,” contending apologetically that these had been made quite faithfully executing Central policies and had been corrected by the Central Committee through the process of democratic centralism. Yet this was the only major memorial statement of the many delivered in the past three years to refer to mistakes. The reason his mistakes were alluded to, and the reason they were nevertheless not

⁴⁶ Luo Bing, “Zhonggong gaoceng,” pp. 5–7; Xinhua (Beijing), June 4, 1980, in *FBIS*, June 5, 1980, p. L6.

⁴⁷ Xinhua (Beijing), April 22, 1980, in *FBIS*.

April 23, 1980, pp. L2–3.

⁴⁸ *Beijing Ribao*, March 4, 1980, p. 1, in *FBIS*, March 4, 1980, p. L3; Xinhua (Beijing), April 5, 1980, in *FBIS*, April 7, 1980, p. L1.

specified, is that the question of Liu's guilt is inextricably linked to that of the integrity of Mao's judgment. Mao had so clearly endorsed the process that destroyed Liu that a reversal of verdicts inevitably reflected adversely on him, and, although Deng's forces were surely not oblivious of this effect and may even have intended it, not even they could risk pressing their case against Mao too hard at this stage.

The rehabilitation ceremony was nationally televised and gave added impetus to the campaign to reconvert public opinion. An exhibition honoring the "glorious life of the great Marxist and proletarian revolutionary comrade Liu Shaoqi" was opened to the public at the Museum of the Chinese Revolution in Tiananmen Square the same month. It contained more than six hundred books, papers, photos, and other items recalling Liu's career and personality. The last and perhaps most revealing section contained mementoes and copies of his writings that people had retained at great risk to themselves when Liu and his policies were under attack; it also displayed a large number of letters that people wrote to the Central Committee during this period pleading for his rehabilitation.⁴⁹ Spring visitors to China's major cities (Shanghai, Hangzhou, Guilin, Guangzhou) saw similar photographic exhibits prominently displayed. The Anyuan Railroad and Mining Workers Memorial Hall in Pingxiang, Jiangsi, reopened to public display an additional eighty pieces of historical relics and photos: although Mao's historical contribution to the Anyuan workers' movement was fully affirmed, Liu Shaoqi, Li Lisan, and others regained their proper places as well.⁵⁰ Liu and other subsequently ostracized supporters of Mao were restored to a place of honor at an exhibit commemorating the forty-fifth anniversary of the Zunyi Conference as well. Liu's cave residence next to Mao's in Zaoyuan village, Yanan, where he spent much of his time after arriving in northern Shaanxi in October 1935 following the Long March, was opened to visitors. Pilgrims began making their way to his village and ancestral home in Huaminglou village near Changsha. As a sort of crowning touch, a picture of Liu was even inserted in Mao's memorial hall in Shaoshan.⁵¹

Who could have foretold, when Liu was consigned to the scrap heap of history in October 1968, that in less than twelve years he would be elevated to a position of virtual martyrdom? And how long will this political resurrection endure?

Final Verdict

In a previous assessment of the truth value of the bill of attainder made against Liu during the 1966-1968 period, the various charges were evaluated in terms of three criteria: sincerity, accuracy, and validity.⁵² *Sincerity* refers to the good-faith intentions of the critic to reverse the error criticized and is of little help to us here—not because it is not employed, but rather because it is used so ubiquitously: the radicals are never granted even a misguided intention to improve the situation but are invariably assumed to be acting from political (*qua* factional) considerations.

⁴⁹ Xinhua (Beijing), May 21, 1980, in *FBIS*, May 21, 1980, pp. L1-2.

⁵⁰ *Beijing Ribao*, March 1, 1980, in *FBIS*, March 3, 1980, pp. L5-6.

⁵¹ Cao Shengsan, "Mao, Liu jiaxiang zhuan fang tuo" (A visit to the hometowns of Mao and Liu), *Zheng Ming*, April 1980, no. 30, pp. 22-26. Cao noted several changes at Shaoshan during his visit:

all pictures concerning the Cultural Revolution were removed from the exhibition hall, and most quotations from Mao around the field and beside the road had disappeared, for example.

⁵² Lowell Dittmer, *Liu Shao-ch'i and the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Politics of Mass Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 214-97.

Accuracy refers to whether the empirical act in question actually took place; if it did not, the current apologists of that act are not obliged to reverse the previous evaluation. *Validity* refers to whether the act in question was considered good or bad in the context in which it occurred. If it was indeed deemed good or expedient at the time (e.g., if Mao and the rest of the Politburo concurred), the Chinese tendency to assume that the same moral rules should apply to all times and situations makes it possible to use this justified precedent to legislate current morality in the process of reversing the previous verdict. Thus validity has much broader political implications than the essentially historical criterion of accuracy.

From a legal perspective, the most damning criticisms of Liu were those made by the Special Case Examination Group, for these were the charges that formed the basis for his sentence. These charges of treason and espionage focused on three escapades in Liu's early career and are for the most part inaccurate. (1) In 1925, Liu was indeed arrested in Changsha, but not at this point because of serious involvement but rather because of his association with known CCP members (Liu was at the time better known as vice chairman of the Chinese National General Workers Union, organized under Nationalist auspices). As soon as he was arrested, the Hunan regime (Zhao Hengti) received telegrams from trade unions and other organizations across the country demanding his immediate release, the number of such messages sometimes reaching as many as forty a day. Ho Baozhen was apparently well connected, and she traveled widely to plead with relatives, friends, and townfolk, including high officials, to help save her husband; such utilization of "guanxi," when available, was common practice at the time. It was for these reasons rather than because he betrayed anyone that he was released.⁵³ When expelling him from Hunan, Zhao gave him an edition of the four books and five classics and admonished him to study them conscientiously.⁵⁴ (2) The accusation that in 1927 Liu disarmed the labor pickets in Wuhan, thus setting them up for slaughter when the KMT turned on them, is deflected to Chen Duxiu, then chairman of the Central Committee, who issued an order to this effect on June 30, 1927, "in order to avoid political conflict and misunderstanding."⁵⁵ The allegation that Liu colluded with Wang Jingwei and the left KMT to secure release from Wuhan is false, for Liu was never arrested in Wuhan; Ding Juejun was induced to bear false witness by the Examination Group. (3) The allegation that Liu authorized An Ziwen and numerous other White area cadres to sign confessions in return for release from prison (the "sixty-one traitors" issue) is essentially accurate—indeed, the confessions are part of the public record. But the testimony of Meng Yongqian, which provided the basis for allegations that these were part of a treasonous exchange, was recanted: "A fabrication is a fabrication. It deserves no credence," he wrote to the Central Committee. "This shows there are serious problems in the investigation of the case and the work of interrogation involved."⁵⁶ At that time, the Beiping Twenty-ninth Army imprisoned Communists without killing them in order to enhance their bargaining position vis-à-vis Chiang

⁵³ Lu Zhongjian, "Liu Shaoqi wenti taolun" (A discussion of the Liu Shaoqi question), *Zheng Ming*, March 1979, no. 17, pp. 9–14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ On June 30, 1927, Chen Duxiu, in his "Decision Concerning the Relations Between the CCP and the KMT," wrote that: "There are armed pickets in Wuhan, but in order to avoid political

conflict and misunderstanding, we can either reduce the number of pickets or form them into the army (the KMT army)." Quoted in Lu Zhongjian, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Meng Yongqian, "Shaoqi tongzhi zai Fengtian beibu qianhou" (Before and after Comrade Shaoqi was arrested in Fengtian), in *HQPP*, pp. 54–65.

Kai-shek. After prolonged negotiations with the CCP's Northern Bureau, they agreed to release the sixty-one if the latter published an anti-Communist statement. Liu considered this innocuous enough (he was after all the leading undercover organizer during this period and must have practiced dissimulation as a matter of course) and recommended to Central Committee General Secretary Zhang Wentian that these terms be accepted; Zhang signed a document allowing the statement to be issued. In the Yanan Zhengfeng movement held subsequently for the rectification of cadres, although many "prison cadres" participated, no one raised the issue of "treason" at the time nor did it hinder the cadres so stigmatized from rising to eminent positions in the Party, though the prison episode was surely part of their files.⁵⁷ Thus while the first two "treason" allegations are inaccurate, the third is essentially accurate but invalid.

The policy criticisms of Liu that the current regime has gone to great lengths to refute so far are by no means representative of all criticisms articulated in 1966–1968, so the selection may be said to betray the regime's set of priorities. The primary focus has been on organizational and economic questions, with relatively little attention to abstract ideology or to the "cultural" issues (i.e., literature, art, health, education) over which the Cultural Revolution was waged in the first place—the "superstructure" may have lower priority for the Deng-Hua regime (or perhaps they consider the battle already won). Only one prominent article has appeared concerning Liu's cultural preferences, a critique of Qi Benyu's famous article, "Patriotism or National Betrayal?" (Aiguozhuyi huoshi maiguozhuyi), which inaugurated the official press campaign against Liu in late March 1967. And the thrust of this argument was really not aesthetic, but rather to reappraise (favorably) the reform movement of 1898, the 1911 "bourgeois democratic" revolution, and the May Fourth Movement—all with obvious implications for the regime's Western-oriented modernization program.⁵⁸

The verdict on the "two-line struggle" argument—that Liu consistently opposed "Maoist" policies and led a faction within the Politburo that often succeeded in thwarting those who "held high" Mao's Thought as a standard in their quest for power and mass constituencies—was empirically qualified but essentially accurate, though invalid. Consistent with a theme that has been articulated fairly frequently since the public campaign against Lin Biao began in 1972, it is freely conceded that Liu opposed the personality cult, that he had no superstitious belief in the "red sun" or in "supreme directives" or that "every sentence is as good as ten thousand sentences," but that he preferred a more organizationally based leadership.⁵⁹ At the Eighth Party Congress it was Peng Dehuai and not Liu who suggested that "Mao Zedong Thought" be omitted from the Party Constitution, but Liu certainly supported that suggestion: "It is better to cancel it" (haishi shanqu hao ba). Even in the midst of the Cultural Revolution, when Liu and Deng reviewed the July 1, 1966, editorial in *People's Daily*, they deleted the sentence: "Comrade Mao Zedong enjoys the highest esteem of Chinese people and of the people of the world" (Mao Zedong tongzhi zai wo guo renmin zhong xianyou zui weixin, zai chuan shijie renmin zhong xianyou zui gao

⁵⁷ Guan Na, "Da pantu, hai lao ganbu" (Big traitors or old cadres), *Zheng Ming*, Dec. 1978, no. 14, pp. 10–13.

⁵⁸ Chen Xulu, "The Question of Patriotism vs. National Betrayal in China's Modern History," *Guangming Ribao*, Jan. 8, 1980, p. 4; at this still

early stage in the rehabilitation, Liu's name was not mentioned.

⁵⁹ Zhou Yuzhou, "The 'Adviser's' Three False Charges," *Renmin Ribao*, March 27, 1980, p. 5; in *FBIS*, April 2, 1980, pp. L6–7.

weixin), and also opposed Lin's attempt to write into the editorial the notion that Mao's Thought was a "new stage" higher than that of Marx and Lenin. He clearly opposed the Cultural Revolution, and although he attempted to implement it following Mao's rebukes in July and August 1966, he did so with obvious bewilderment and misgivings.⁶⁰ In this respect he most clearly distinguished himself from Zhou Enlai, who also opposed the Cultural Revolution during the "One Hundred Days," but avoided committing himself irrevocably and then made a more convincing about-face.

By implication, it is now conceded that, at least since the Great Leap Forward, Liu and Deng opposed Mao's policies from a consistently rightist perspective (though in the Socialist Education Movement, Liu's errors were "leftist"). There seems to be a degree of embarrassment about this (e.g., "Liu made mistakes"), mixed with the clear implication that for the most part it was Liu who was right and Mao wrong. For example, one front-page "commentator" article in *People's Daily* infers that the major deviation that jeopardized the revolutionary cause in the pre-1966 period was not "so-called right revisionism" but "leftist" adventurism, approvingly quoting this passage from Liu's February 1962 speech to the seven thousand:

During the second five-year plan period, socialist transformation in our country had basically been completed, the Party's work focus has shifted to socialist construction and we have gained some experience in construction. . . . At that time, however, we did not have enough experience and many of our leading comrades were not modest and prudent enough, becoming arrogant and complacent; they ran counter to the traditions of seeking truth from facts and following the mass line. To a certain extent, they weakened the principle of democratic centralism in inner-Party line, the state life and regular mass activities.⁶¹

Yet this evidence of an increasingly acute confrontation on policy issues is not incompatible with the interpretation that the conflict was not perceived as a personal one, and that Liu at least did not engage in any of the conspiratorial tactics generally associated with the concept of a "two-line struggle." As Liu put it in his January self-criticism, "I have never opposed Mao Zedong Thought, I only failed to observe it; I have never opposed Chairman Mao, I only had different opinions in work." According to Yang Shangkun, if Liu differed with someone he always addressed him directly.⁶² Contrary to Red Guard allegations, the editing of Liu's works prior to their republication in the early 1960s involved no covert anti-Mao animus: actually, the editorial work was done by the same committee in charge of editing Mao's *Selected Works*, chaired by Kang Sheng, and the person who actually revised and updated *How to Be a Good Communist* was none other than Chen Boda. After Lushan, many central leaders suggested that Liu assume all of Mao's functions, but he refused.⁶³ During the crucial period in the early 1960s when Mao played a less active role in the policy process, Liu always kept him informed: "We have expressed our views during this discussion," he would say at the end of a meeting, "Comrade Xiaoping and I will

⁶⁰ Liu once asked his physician what he thought of the Cultural Revolution, receiving this reply: "I don't understand why we should kick away the Party committee to do revolution. Doesn't that mean we don't need the Party?" Liu was silent for several minutes, then said: "Think it over for yourself" (*ziji kaolu kaolu ba*). Geng Dezhang, "Ta

xinzhong zhi yu renmin," *HQPP*, p. 247.

⁶¹ Commentator, "The Distinction between Marxism and Revisionism Should Not Be Blurred," *Renmin Ribao*, April 3, 1980, in *FBIS*, April 4, 1980, pp. L1-7.

⁶² See n. 7.

⁶³ Song Tianzhang, "Lun Liu Shaoqi," pp. 32-41.

report them to Chairman Mao. If Chairman Mao agrees, we will begin to implement them. If there are any different views we will discuss them next time." Thus Liu continued to hope for Mao's clemency during the Cultural Revolution; his repeated offers to resign (in fall 1966, in January 1967, and again in August 1967) were in effect attempts to abandon himself to Mao's mercy. As Wang Guangmei told their children at one point: "Chairman Mao is good to your father. [He will] seriously criticize your father's thought, but deal generously with him organizationally."⁶⁴ However, considerations of ideological purity (or political expediency) took precedence in Mao's mind over whatever personal feelings he may have had, and he did not accord Liu generous treatment.

Regarding the allegation that Liu was a "capitalist-roader," the defense was one that did not so much place the facts in dispute as challenge the validity of the charges by reaffirming policies formerly condemned. One manifestation of Liu's capitalist proclivities was his tendency to impose strict discipline on labor while bending over backward to avoid offending industrialists, but this is now considered praiseworthy.⁶⁵ For example, at Anyuan the workers were so well-disciplined during the strike he led that even the soldiers sent to suppress them were impressed; the Shanghai *Shen Bao* of September 28, 1922, is approvingly quoted:

The workers behaved in an extremely civilized way. They had twenty pickets who, holding a white banner in their hands, patrolled the whole place. The workers obeyed the pickets as soldiers obey their commanding officers. . . . Even those soldiers who were sent to suppress them were touched and sympathized with them.⁶⁶

And in his notorious March 1949 Tianjin speeches, Liu discouraged excessive labor demands as the "workers' suicide policy" and advised the latter to abide by factory regulations, do their jobs well, make factory operations profitable for the capitalists and help them earn more in order to sustain production. At the same time, capitalists should make changes in their factory regulations, respect the dignity and rights of the workers, and improve production and management under the principle of benefiting both capitalists and workers.

"For a fairly long period after the victory of the revolution, we will still need to make the best possible use of the enthusiasm of urban and rural capitalism to facilitate the development of our national economy," Mao Zedong had stated in his report to the Second Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee in March 1949. "During this period, we should allow all elements of urban and rural capitalism to exist and develop as long as they are beneficial, instead of harmful, to the national economy." The Tianjin Municipal Party committee had imposed too many restrictions on privately owned enterprises after liberating the city, capitalists were frightened and sometimes fled the country with their capital; workers made excessive demands for wage and welfare benefits, failed to observe labor discipline, and some wanted to "divide the enterprises up among the workers." In impromptu speeches intended only for a limited audience, Liu admittedly overreacted. Although he said that "the only people the Party can rely on in the revolution are the working class," it was

⁶⁴ Cf. Liu Ying, "Liu Shaoqi zhuidao hui," pp. 10–11.

⁶⁵ According to an Anyuan colleague, Liu's ability to take into consideration the interests of capital as well as labor was responsible for the fact that the Anyuan Union survived while most other unions

were suppressed. Xiao Jingguang, "Yi zaoqi hu sulian," *HQPP*, pp. 1–10.

⁶⁶ Shen Qinglin, "Comrade Liu Shaoqi and the Anyuan Strike," *Renmin Ribao*, March 10, 1980, p. 5, in *FBIS*, April 3, 1980, pp. L2–7.

“inappropriate” for him to say that “some members of the working class are also unreliable.” Liu said nothing of giving capitalism “unlimited opportunities to develop on a large scale,” but he did say: “It is necessary to give capitalism the chance to grow to some extent”—and indeed it did. Following his visit (according to statistics provided by the Tianjin Municipal Industries and Commerce Bureau) the number of newly launched private industrial or commercial enterprises, which stood at 292 in April 1949, increased to 3,800 by September 1949, and by the end of that year passed the 5,000 mark (on the other hand, state-owned industries had also increased their production by 20 to 30 percent by November 1949). In “On Coalition Government,” moreover, Mao too had said: “Indeed, we have too little capitalism today.” It was likewise inappropriate for Liu to say that “today capitalist exploitation is not a crime but a contribution,” although Liu also pointed out that “exploitation is bad.” For these various incorrect statements, Liu made an inner-Party self-criticism in February 1954: “At that time I talked a lot about the work in Tianjin and criticized certain leftist sentiment against the bourgeoisie. While in principle those remarks were not incorrect, some things that I said were improper.” In the end, Liu is commended for emphasizing three points: First, the future for capitalists would be socialism. Second, the mode of transition to socialism would be through peaceful means, by an “order” of the state or through state “purchase.” Third, the policy concerning capitalists as individuals was admirably broad-minded. In this context, Liu is approvingly quoted telling the capitalist Song Feiqing:

Now you own only one factory, but in the future you can own one, two, three . . . or even eight. When socialism is at hand and the state issues an order, you hand them over or the state purchases them from you. . . . Then the state will place these factories back under your management. You will remain the manager, but the factories will be state-owned. We may increase the number of factories under your supervision to sixteen, for you are a capable manager. Your salary will increase instead of being slashed. But you have to do a very good job. If that happens, will you say yes to the offer?” Mr. Song replied: “I will, of course!” “Therefore, I believe that in the future when everyone is called to a meeting to discuss how to move into socialism, no one is going to knit his eyebrows and there will be smiling faces all around.”⁶⁷

The other major case allegedly demonstrating Liu’s sympathy for capitalism occurred in 1960–1962, when he presided over the retrenchment from the Great Leap Forward and thereby gave greater scope to material incentives and to profit and the market mechanism. Many of these laissez-faire policies are summarized under the slogan, “three self one guarantee” (*san zi yi bao*), which refers to the extension of private plots, free markets, and enterprises with sole responsibility for their own profits and losses; and the fixing of output quotas on a household basis. In fact, the first three “selfs,” it is now alleged, were decided upon in accord with Party policy, in meetings Mao presided over or approved, in order to cope with the serious economic setbacks precipitated by the failure of the Leap (now attributed primarily to “shortcomings and mistakes in work,” incidentally, rather than to “natural disasters”). Mao

⁶⁷ Theoretical Research Office of the Propaganda Department of Tianjin Municipal CCP Committee, “Reread Comrade Liu Shaoqi’s ‘Speeches in Tianjin,’” *Renmin Ribao*, April 21, 1980, p. 5; the verbatim transcript of one of the speeches is

available in *Liu Shaoqi wenti ziliao zhuanji* (A special collection of materials on Liu Shaoqi) (Taiwan): Chinese Communist Study Center, 1970), pp. 200–207.

presided over formulation of the "sixty-article" regulation of the work of the People's Communes in March 1961, and the Tenth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (over which Mao also presided) revised and approved this regulation in September 1961. The sixty articles provided for the extension of private plots and free markets and designated the production team as "an independent accounting unit with sole responsibility for its own profits or losses." The "one guarantee" permitted some localities to experiment with fixing output quotas on a household basis in order to overcome temporary difficulties, and was also approved by the Central Committee and not by Liu alone.

Not only were these allegedly revisionist policies adopted in accord with correct Party procedure and with Mao's approval, they were fully warranted by the nation's desperate economic plight, and in any case such policies are more effective in spurring productivity, combatting egalitarianism and the "communist wind" and reinforcing the socialist principle, "to each according to his work." Ownership is defined narrowly in terms of legal title, not in terms of the political "line" or the dialectic of class struggle, as Mao sometimes tended to do: thus it is noted in the case of private plots and the fixing of output quotas on a household basis that formal ownership of land remains with the collective. Somehow the rural free market is no longer capitalist because it is a component part of the "unified socialist market."⁶⁸ In this instance, Liu's exoneration is somewhat overjustified.

Although an admittedly subtle distinction, the "revisionist" accusation is perhaps slightly less damning than the "capitalist" allegations, since a revisionist is at least a type of Marxist, albeit a deviant one. Here again there is a complete reversal of verdicts (*pingfan*) based on questions of validity rather than disputation of the facts of the case. "Under the slogan of anti-revisionism, Marxism was called revisionism." Liu's statements to the effect that class struggle was essentially extinguished and "the major task of the Party is to expand the productive forces as quickly as possible" are now affirmed: "These are important theses which were and still are correct. These are Marxist theses." The radicals who attacked Liu for "running the economy by economic methods" erroneously supposed that economic construction could be furthered by promoting class struggle, but it is now averred that "Grasp revolution and promote production" is "not Marxist." Politics should indeed be "in command," but what is politics? "At the present time, politics is nothing but the realization of the Four Modernizations." One can not help but notice that Liu's "theory of productive forces" has been implicitly adopted; whereas political *cum* ideological objectives previously held sway, ideology is now to play a supporting role to modernization, which has its own "objective economic laws." "The point is that in carrying out economic construction work, if the ideological and political work does not serve economic construction but is used to negate objective economic law, this kind of political and ideological work would be but empty talk and could not promote economic construction."⁶⁹

The final but by no means the least important set of reversed verdicts to be considered here have to do with Liu's theories of organization and Party building. Liu

⁶⁸ Jin Guang and Xiong Yan, "A Correct Analysis Should Be Made of 'San zi yi bao,'" *Renmin ribao*, May 12, 1980.

⁶⁹ Wu Lian and Su Lian, "Is a Party Which Leads Economic Construction a 'Production Party?'"

Renmin Ribao, March 27, 1980, p. 5, in *FBIS*, April 9, 1980, pp. L13-16; Shi Ying, "The Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Self-Cultivation of Communists," *Guangming Ribao*, March 14, 1980, p. 3, in *FBIS*, April 22, 1980, pp. L13-L17.

was known during his life as a quintessential organization man, and he devoted most of his career and writing to organizational and procedural questions—in contrast to Mao, who focused on more substantive concerns. At the Sixth Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee, Liu drafted the formative “resolutions concerning the regulations and discipline of work at various levels of the Party and its department,” setting forth detailed inner-Party rules for the realization of democratic centralism and summing up the CCP’s experience of Party building. *How to Be a Good Communist* was largely concerned with the role of the individual member in the organization, while *On Inner-Party Struggle* set forth rules for decision making and the conduct of disputes.⁷⁰ Discipline has been a problem within the fissure-prone Communist movement since the First Communist International was established in 1847. Lenin’s contribution was of course seminal (though perhaps somewhat discredited by its later development into Stalinism), but neither Lenin nor Stalin contributed much systematic discussion to the education of the Party member, where it may be said that Liu made an original contribution with his famous notion of “self-cultivation.”⁷¹ Self-cultivation was attacked in 1966–1968 because it tended to evoke images of Confucian self-cultivation, which was idealist and self-centered (“self-cultivation behind closed doors”). Relying on a literal interpretation, these criticisms are now confidently refuted: Liu’s discussion stated explicitly that cultivation could not be isolated from revolutionary practice.⁷²

But the aspect of Liu’s Party-building theory that the rehabilitation literature seemed most eager to countenance was the charge that it sanctioned “inner-Party peace.” While the charge that Liu neglected “dictatorship of the proletariat” could be dismissed as anachronistic (dictatorship of the proletariat did not exist in 1939), any serious examination of his complex essay on inner-Party struggle would have to concede that, although he may have opposed right as well as “left” deviations, his primary concern was with ultra-left, “excessive” or “unprincipled” inner-Party struggles, which he felt tended to foster both factionalism and patriarchal tendencies.⁷³ Yet this opposition to struggle and emphasis on ideological unanimity is now condoned. Thus one article, while denying that Liu’s conception of inner-Party struggle led to “unprincipled peace,” endorsed an ideal of “principled peace, the inner-Party unity based on complete unanimity on matters of principle and Party line.”⁷⁴

Conclusions

Why was Liu Shaoqi rehabilitated, when he is after all deceased and no longer able to play any active role? Why is his rehabilitation considered a matter of such importance as to warrant a nationwide media campaign and to have apparently occasioned such vehement controversy as to contribute to the purge of four Politburo members? What does his rehabilitation signify for the legitimacy and policy “line” of the Deng-Hua regime?

⁷⁰ See n. 7.

⁷¹ See n. 43.

⁷² Lu Zhong, “Liu Shaoqi di cuo dui jiu yi kai” (Liu Shaoqi’s achievements and mistakes are nine to one), *Zheng Ming*, Feb. 1980, no. 28, pp. 8–13.

⁷³ Jin Wen, “Weapons for Combating the Left-

ist Line in Inner-Party Struggle: Re-Reading ‘How to Be a Good Communist,’” *Guangming Ribao*, April 11, 1980, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Wen Zhu, “Uphold Principled Peace, Abandon Unprincipled Struggle,” *Guangming Ribao*, April 21, 1980.

First of all, it seems that symbols generally tend to have longer life expectancies in Chinese political culture than in other political systems. The practice of ancestor worship is in a sense testimony to the ability of symbols to survive their empirical referents.⁷⁵ Intellectuals in many countries tend periodically to reevaluate the roles of various historical figures in their traditions, but not only do such historical controversies seem to play a more dominant role among Chinese intellectuals than elsewhere, in China alone do such disputes transcend the limited intellectual community and engage the masses at large. That China possesses a great and glorious historical tradition is of course by now a cliché, but that historical controversies should continue to play so large a role in the contemporary political arena after half a century of political and cultural revolution seems somewhat ironical, to say the least. It seems to have been particularly galling to Mao Zedong, deeply steeped in Chinese history though he was. Hence his initiative in the campaigns against Hai Rui, Confucius, and other “dead targets”—which paradoxically helped revive the ghosts he sought to ban.

But the longevity of Chinese symbols is based only partly on the dominance of history. In part it is also based on the reluctance of Chinese political figures to talk about one another explicitly in public if there is any possibility that a face-risking difference of opinion might surface. Thus there is a tendency to resort to historical analogies as an “Aesopian” subterfuge if one is presenting an idea that might encounter controversy, and then to become more explicit only after that idea has won unanimous endorsement: to “point at the mulberry while cursing the ash” (*zhi ma kan hua*). Who or what, according to this line of reasoning, might be beneficiaries of Liu’s rehabilitation? Certainly it would include all those veteran political cadres, Deng Xiaoping foremost among them, who were deeply involved in policy making and administration in the 1950s and 1960s, criticized and purged during the Cultural Revolution, and subjected to humiliation of varying intensity and duration before being rehabilitated to public service. Despite his obvious power Deng (*inter alia*) still rankles from the political aftereffects of this degradation, but it would be awkward for Deng to attempt to refurbish his own public image, for that would appear blatantly self-serving and would contravene the current emphasis on democratic centralism and collective leadership (which Deng himself has helped to promote). By the rules of Chinese political discourse it is more acceptable to eulogize Liu than his political survivors, for Liu is dead and no longer in a position to benefit. And by the same token, Liu’s rehabilitation poses a threat to those involved in his degradation: most directly to Wang Dongxing, Xie Fuzhi’s successor as vice-chairman of the investigation committee that concocted the “frameup”; Kang Sheng, a veteran member of the same committee (who was posthumously denounced at the Third Plenum of the Fifth National Party Congress); and Hua Guofeng himself, who served as Kang Sheng’s assistant during the mid-1970s, and who in 1976–1977 edited the fifth volume of Mao’s *Selected Works* to discredit Liu.⁷⁶

But Liu is not merely a proxy for Deng in Beijing’s perpetual game of musical chairs. Liu symbolizes a coherently organized policy “line” that is much more consistent with the current leadership’s preferred direction of movement than the

⁷⁵ Cf. Francis L. K. Hsu, *Under the Ancestor's Shadow: Kinship, Personality and Social Mobility in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

⁷⁶ Lu Shi, “‘Mao ji’ wu zhuan yingdang chong cha chong bian” (The fifth volume of Mao’s Works should be reexamined and reedited), *Zheng Ming*, Oct. 1979, no. 24, pp. 16–17.

Thought of Mao Zedong, however skillfully reinterpreted. Liu is best able to symbolize this line because he brought it to a higher level of theoretical elaboration than the pragmatic Deng, articulated in a set of besmirched classics. It is not coincidental that Liu's rehabilitation coincides with the adoption by the Fifth Plenum of "Guiding Principles for Inner-Party Political Life," which echo his own organizational precepts.

Still, that Liu should be resurrected after a decade in political oblivion, his image subjected to a politically hazardous and necessarily difficult relaunching, testifies not only to the viability of symbols in Chinese political culture, but to their limited adaptability. In a methodologically innovative analysis of Chinese cognitive behavior conducted just prior to the Cultural Revolution, it was found that there seemed to be a much weaker sense of "cognitive dissonance" in Chinese political culture than in the American; i.e., Chinese tend to feel less need for close correlation between public rhetoric and operational personal commitment.⁷⁷ It is of course impossible to generalize from a single case, but the drift of policy change and ideological adjustment since Mao's death throws this conclusion open to question. Hua's initial inclination was to attempt to retain Mao as the regime's fundamental legitimating symbol while at the same time radically (i.e., "moderately") reinterpreting what he stood for at the policy level, a strategy that betokened an extremely optimistic assessment of the Chinese tolerance for cognitive dissonance. Yet this strategy seems to have been unsuccessful, for there was a slow but steady decline in Mao's charisma and in Hua's own prestige in the period following Mao's death, jeopardizing the legitimacy of the successor regime. This decline no doubt had many causes—opposition to Mao that had never been permitted to surface during his lifetime now made its appearance, and even those among the leadership who hoped to use his name to shore up their own authority often felt ambivalent because of their personal experiences—certainly Hua possessed few of the personal attributes to inherit Mao's charisma. But perhaps the most important reason for Mao's waning reputation was the cognitive difficulty of maintaining fealty to a symbol while overturning one after another the programs he had promoted during the last ten years of his life.

The sense of cognitive dissonance that resulted attempted to resolve itself in two different ways. One was to bring policy back more into line with its legitimating symbol, a solution evidently supported by such Cultural Revolution upward-mobiles as Wang Dongxing, Wu De, Ji Dengkui and Chen Xilian. These "Maoists" were however unwilling to sponsor mass mobilization on behalf of their policy line, as had the Gang of Four, making rather a rigid, doctrinaire conservative defense of Mao's waning reputation that Deng lampooned as "whateverism" (*fanshi zhuyi*) and "superstition" (*mixin*). The other solution, supported by Deng and others, was to march further in the direction of policy pragmatism, "seeking truth from facts" (*shi shi qui shi*), while retaining only nominal links with Mao's Thought. Although more adaptive and politically victorious in the short term, this solution opened the way for much more bold experiments in "liberating the mind" than the new leadership was prepared to permit, particularly the "excessive" democratic tendencies at Xidan and elsewhere. Hence the ultimate resort was to the Thought of Liu Shaoqi as a source of more substantive moral homilies, at the same time cognitively consonant with the pragmatic policy line the regime wishes to pursue.

⁷⁷ Paul Hiniker, "Chinese Reactions to Forced Compliance: Dissonance Reduction and National Character," *Journal of Social Psychology* 77 (April 1969): 157–77.

What then is the substantive content of the symbol of Liu Shaoqi, and what does his rehabilitation portend for the future? Liu's rehabilitation, together with the rehabilitation of such similar cases as Peng Dehuai, Tao Zhu, Luo Ruiqing, and Peng Zhen, has the effect of rehabilitating the notion of the "clean official" (*qing guan*): an ideal dating from imperial times of the loyal subordinate who was nevertheless prepared to sacrifice all, including life itself, in principled opposition to a mistaken policy. Thus a quotation from Liu's article "Be a Good Communist and Build a Good Party" is approvingly cited: "You may be misunderstood or suspected for one or two years or decades or until your last, but you will be understood in the end if you are a good Communist."⁷⁸ The good official is loyal not to a leader but to a set of principles, and in defense of those principles may achieve "revolutionary immortality." This implies somewhat greater discretionary power for the subordinate official in his or her attempt to assert certain "rights" in the face of superior pressure to conform. The consistent emphasis on correct organizational procedure that Liu maintained throughout his life would tend to reinforce such discretion by making discipline more predictable and structured. In sum, perhaps the most important effect of the rehabilitation of Liu Shaoqi is to enhance the prestige and integrity of the Communist party bureaucracy—an outcome with which he would no doubt have been well pleased.

⁷⁸ Xinhua (Beijing), March 12, 1980, in *FBIS*, March 22, 1980, p. L1.