Deng Xiaoping

and the Transformation of China
To my wife, Charlotte Ikels,

and to my Chinese friends determined to help a foreigner understand
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Preface: In Search of Deng

In the summer of 2000, relaxing after a leisurely outdoor supper on Cheju Island, South Korea, I told my friend Don Oberdorfer, one of America’s greatest twentieth-century reporters on East Asia, that I was retiring from teaching and wanted to write a book to help Americans understand key developments in Asia. Many people said that my 1979 book, Japan as Number One, helped prepare some U.S. leaders in business and government for Japan’s rise in the 1980s, which had shocked many in the West. What would best help Americans understand coming developments in Asia at the start of the twenty-first century? Without hesitation, Don, who had covered Asia for half a century, said, “You should write about Deng Xiaoping.” After some weeks of reflection, I decided he was right. The biggest issue in Asia was China, and the man who most influenced China’s modern trajectory is Deng Xiaoping. Moreover, a rich analysis of Deng’s life and career could illuminate the underlying forces that have shaped recent social and economic developments in China.

Writing about Deng Xiaoping would not be easy. When carrying on underground activities in Paris and Shanghai in the 1920s, Deng had learned to rely entirely on his memory—he left no notes behind. During the Cultural Revolution, critics trying to compile a record of his errors found no paper trail. Speeches prepared for formal meetings were written by assistants and recorded, but most other talks or meetings required no notes, for Deng could give a well-organized lecture for an hour or more drawing only on his memory. In addition, like other high-level party leaders, Deng strictly observed party discipline. Even when exiled with his wife and some of his children to Jiangxi during the Cultural Revolution, he never talked with them about high-level party business, even though they were also party members.
Deng criticized autobiographies in which authors lavished praise on themselves. He chose not to write an autobiography and insisted that any evaluation of him by others “should not be too exaggerated or too high.” 1 In fact, Deng rarely reminisced in public about past experiences. He was known for not talking very much (bu ai shuohua) and for being discreet about what he said. Writing about Deng and his era thus poses more than the usual challenges in studying a national leader.

I regret that I never had the chance to meet and talk with Deng personally. When I first went to Beijing in May 1973, as part of a delegation sponsored by the National Academy of Sciences, we met Zhou Enlai and other high officials, but we did not meet Deng. One of my strongest impressions from the trip was the buzz in high circles about the recent return of Deng to Beijing from his exile during the Cultural Revolution and the high expectation that he would play some important role that would bring great changes. What role? What changes? We Westerners speculated, but none of us could have predicted the sea change in China that was to occur over the next two decades, and how much China’s future would be advanced by the efforts of this singular leader.

The closest I ever came to Deng was a few feet away at a reception at the National Gallery in Washington in January 1979. The reception was a grand gathering of American China specialists from government, academia, the media, and the business world to celebrate the formal establishment of U.S.-China relations. Many of us at the reception had known each other for years. We had often met in Hong Kong—the great gathering spot for China watchers when China was closed to most Westerners—where we would share the latest news or rumors in our efforts to penetrate the bamboo curtain. It had been a long time since some of us had last seen each other, however, and we were eager to catch up. Further, the National Gallery, where the reception was held, was not meant for speeches: the acoustics were terrible. Unable to hear a thing that Deng and his interpreter were saying through the loudspeaker, we, the gathered throng, continued talking with our fellow China watcher friends. Those close to Deng said he was upset about the noisy, inattentive crowd, but most of us watching were impressed with how he read his speech as if delivering it to a disciplined Chinese audience sitting in reverential silence.

I have therefore come to know about Deng as a historian knows his subject, by poring over the written word. And there are many accounts of various parts of Deng’s life. Despite Deng’s admonitions to writers not to lavish praise, the tradition of writing an official or semi-official history to glorify
one hero and downplay the role of others remains alive and well in China. Since other officials have been glorified by their secretaries or family members, the careful reader can compare these different accounts. And among party historians, there are some who have, out of a professional sense of responsibility, written about events as they actually occurred.

There will be more books about Deng written in the years ahead as additional party archives become available to the public. But I believe there will never be a better time than now for a scholar to study Deng. Many of the basic chronologies have now been compiled and released, many reminiscences have been published, and I have had an opportunity that will not be available to later historians: I met and spoke with Deng’s family members, colleagues, and family members of these colleagues, who gave me insights and details not necessarily found in the written records. In all, I spent roughly twelve months in China (over several years), interviewing in Chinese those who had knowledge about Deng and his era.

The single most basic resource for studying the objective record of Deng’s activities is *Deng Xiaoping nianpu* (A Chronology of Deng Xiaoping). The first publication, a two-volume, 1,383-page official summary of Deng’s almost-daily meetings from 1975 until his death in 1997, was released in 2004; the second, a three-volume, 2,079-page description of his life from 1904 to 1974, was published in 2009. The teams of party historians who worked on these volumes had access to many party archives and were conscientious in reporting accurately. The chronology does not provide explanations, does not criticize or praise Deng, does not speculate, does not mention some of the most sensitive topics, and does not refer to political rivalries. Yet it is very helpful for determining whom Deng saw and when and, in many cases, what they talked about.

Many of Deng’s major speeches have been compiled, edited, and published in the official *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*. The three-volume work provides a useful account of many of his major policies, although it is critical to interpret them in the context of national and world events at the time. Chronologies about and key speeches and writings by Chen Yun, Ye Jianying, Zhou Enlai, and others are similarly useful.

The books that offer the most in-depth understanding of Deng’s personal thinking are the two by Deng Rong (Maomao), his youngest daughter, about the period before he came to power. The books draw on her own recollections, her visits with people who knew Deng, and party archives. After 1989, when Deng’s health began to deteriorate after the Tiananmen incident, Deng Rong usually accompanied her father whenever he went outside of his
home. Although Deng Xiaoping did not talk with members of his family about high-level politics, they knew both him and the country’s situation well enough to perceive and understand his concerns and perspectives, some of which only they could see. One volume (My Father, Deng Xiaoping) is about Deng’s life before 1949, and the other (Deng Xiaoping and the Cultural Revolution) describes the time when Deng Rong accompanied her parents in exile away from Beijing in Jiangxi province from 1969 to 1973. She displays obvious affection and respect for her father and presents a highly positive picture, but she also provides details that reveal much about his personal qualities and attitudes. In fact, considering the constraints of party policy and her efforts to paint a positive picture, she is remarkably frank, open, and concrete. In writing these volumes, Deng Rong was assisted by party historians, who have checked the dates, names, and events. She is continuing to write about some of Deng’s activities in the early post-1949 period, but she has not written about the years after 1973, which are still more controversial. She has kindly granted me several long interviews supplementing what she has written.

There are several works in English that provided me with a good start for studying the Deng Xiaoping era before I plunged into the Chinese sources, but with the exception of Sun and Teiwes they were written before the chronologies and the reminiscences on the hundredth anniversary of his birth became available. I found especially useful the works by Richard Baum, Richard Evans, Joseph Fewsmith, Merle Goldman, Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, Maurice Meisner, Qian Qichen, Robert Ross, Ruan Ming, Harrison Salisbury, Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun, and Yu Guangyuan.

Ambassador Richard Evans, a wise and seasoned British diplomat and ambassador to Beijing from 1984 to 1988, drew on his own meetings with Deng and the resources of the British government to write Deng Xiaoping and the Making of Modern China, a highly literate, brief overview for the educated public that is mostly about Deng’s years prior to 1973. Among Western political scientists, Richard Baum has done the most detailed study of the politics of the Deng era, which he reports in Burying Mao. He draws on materials from China available before his book’s publication in 1994 as well as works by Hong Kong analysts. He uses Hong Kong reports with discretion, but I have chosen to rely even less on these Hong Kong sources because it is hard to trace the origins of their information and therefore to assess their reliability. In The Deng Xiaoping Era, Maurice Meisner, a thoughtful scholar deeply knowledgeable about Marxist theory, presents Deng in the context of Marx-
ist theoretical issues. In preparing *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era*, my longtime Fairbank Center colleague Merle Goldman traces the changing intellectual currents during the Deng era, drawing not only on publications but also on discussions with many of the intellectuals, especially dissidents, about whom she writes. Ruan Ming, author of *Deng Xiaoping: Chronicle of an Empire*, was a researcher at the Chinese Communist Central Party School until he was removed by party conservatives in 1983. Finding refuge in the United States, Ruan Ming presents a passionate critique of the conservative ideologues who dragged their feet on reforms.

Qian Qichen, author of *Ten Episodes in China’s Diplomacy*, was foreign minister and vice premier during much of Deng’s era and has written a balanced, informative work on the foreign policies of the era. Yu Guangyuan, who helped Deng prepare the text of his speech for the Third Plenum, describes this historical turning point in *Deng Xiaoping Shakes the World*. Because I helped edit the English translation of these two volumes, I had the opportunity to have supplementary discussions with the authors, both of whom, as former officials, had worked closely with Deng.

The late Harrison Salisbury, a journalist and the author of *The New Emperors: China in the Era of Mao and Deng*, was given access to several key leaders soon after Mao’s death. Although some of his descriptions, such as those of Deng’s relation to third-front industries, show serious misunderstandings, he was given much better access than most journalists and he relates fresh views that were not available to others at the time.

David Shambaugh, editor of *The China Quarterly* when Deng came to power, brought together a group of scholars to assess Deng and his era shortly after Deng withdrew from power in 1992. The articles were reprinted in the book *Deng Xiaoping*, edited by Shambaugh.

Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun have done the most exhaustive reading of Chinese sources of any Western scholars for the period from 1974 to 1982 in preparation for a projected three volumes. They have published the first, spanning the years 1974 to 1976. They aim to get the basic facts straight in a highly detailed way, by carefully evaluating different interpretations of various events. Warren Sun, who has been more persistent for two decades in tracing every important fact about the era than anyone I know, later spent more than two months checking through various drafts of my manuscript, correcting errors and suggesting supplementary interpretations and key works.

Joseph Fewsmith has written the best book in English on the economic
debates of the era: *The Dilemmas of Reform in China*. Robert Ross has written excellent works that examine the foreign relations issues during the period. Roderick MacFarquhar, who has spent several decades studying Chinese elite politics and the Cultural Revolution, has written a three-volume set on *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* and, with Michael Schoenhals, *Mao’s Last Revolution*, about the Cultural Revolution. I have known all these authors and talked with all of them about Deng and his era. They have been generous in supplementing what is in their publications and giving me a clearer sense of some of the important issues about which they write.

In Chinese so much has been released that even the best Chinese scholars have not been able to read all of it. Beginning in the 1990s an explosion of information became available on the Chinese Internet. I have been assisted by many research assistants, but particularly by Ren Yi and Dou Xinyuan. Ren Yi’s grandfather, first party secretary of Guangdong province Ren Zhongyi, was the great reform leader of Guangdong. Dou Xinyuan, who served for many years in the Economic Commission of Guangdong, combines personal experience with a scholar’s determination to get at deeper truths within historical documents. Ren and Dou each spent over a year working full-time to help me cover vast amounts of material and to try to think through how Chinese people in various positions felt and acted. Yao Jianfu, an official in the Rural Development Institute under Zhao Ziyang, also spent several weeks going over my drafts of the chapters on economics.

The Chinese Internet is an extraordinary source for tracing names, dates, and the like, but beyond these specific issues it is often difficult to distinguish fact from fantasy or interesting storytelling. When articles on the Internet present important information without detailing the source, I have tried to track down the original sources, or at least compare them with other sources before using them. In doing so, I have found that *China Vitae* in particular is a very useful English-language website on Chinese officials who are still alive.

There are a great many reminiscences by officials who worked with Deng. The three-volume collection *Huiyi Deng Xiaoping* (Remembering Deng Xiaoping) is one of the best, though a similar series is the three-volume collection *Deng Xiaoping: Rensheng jishi* (Record of the Actual Events in the Life of Deng Xiaoping). Two excellent journals that contain many articles by those who worked with Deng are *Yanhuang chunqiu* and *Bainianchao*. *Yanhuang chunqiu* is edited by former high-level officials who are knowledgeable and reform-minded. A different view can be found in the book *Shierge chunqiu, 1975–1987* (Twelve Springs and Autumns, 1975–1987), written by the con-
servative official Deng Liqun and published in Hong Kong, as well as in Deng Liqun’s unpublished talks at the Contemporary China Research Institute (Dangdai Zhongguo Yanjiusuo), the research center he founded that has paved the way for many of the histories on post-1949 events.

There are also many accounts, often written by able Chinese journalists, of all the key figures of the era, including Chen Yun, Gu Mu, Hu Yaobang, Wan Li, Ye Jianying, and Zhao Ziyang, that provide varying perspectives. The best journalist’s account of Deng is Yang Jisheng, Deng Xiaoping shidai: Zhongguo gaige kaifang ershinian jishi (The Age of Deng Xiaoping: A Record of Twenty Years of China’s Reform and Opening). Official histories, like Chen Yun zhuan (Biography of Chen Yun), are carefully edited and based on documentary sources. Zhu Jiamu’s book on Chen Yun (Zhu Jiamu, Chi Aiping, and Zhao Shigang, Chen Yun), although brief, benefits from Zhu’s five years’ service as an assistant to Chen as well as careful research. In addition to the Deng Xiaoping nianpu, there are also official chronologies (nianpu) for Chen Yun, Zhou Enlai, Ye Jianying, and a number of other officials who worked closely with Deng.

Another valuable resource is the national history (Guoshi) of China since 1949, seven volumes of which have already appeared, with three more forthcoming. Written by mainland scholars, including Gao Hua, Han Gang, Shen Zhihua, and Xiao Donglian, among others, this monumental work is being published by the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The volumes set a new standard of objective overall scholarship for the era.

The Chinese government has greatly increased the scope of what people can write about, but some works by well-informed insiders on the mainland are still considered too controversial to be published in Beijing. Hong Kong publishing, however, is much more open, so many of these books have been published in Hong Kong. Some of the most informative are those by Deng Liqun, Hu Jiwei, Yang Jisheng, Zhao Ziyang, and Zong Fengming. Among the reformers who have written their reminiscences is Hu Jiwei, former editor of the Renmin ribao (People’s Daily), who authored Cong Hua Guofeng xiatai dao Hu Yaobang xiatai (From the Fall of Hua Guofeng to the Fall of Hu Yaobang).

Although chronologies of Hu Yaobang have not been published in the mainland, his mainland friends have published two lengthy two-volume chronologies in Hong Kong. One, edited by Sheng Ping, is Hu Yaobang si-xiang nianpu (A Chronology of Hu Yaobang’s Thought) and a second, edited by Zheng Zhongbing, is Hu Yaobang ziliao changbian (Materials for a Chron-
ological Record of Hu Yaobang’s Life). There is also a three-volume biography by Zhang Liqun and others—*Hu Yaobang zhuo* (A Biography of Hu Yaobang)—that remains unpublished. Hu’s friends have collected four volumes of recollections, *Huainian Yaobang* (Remembering Yaobang), which have been edited by Zhang Liqun and others and published in Hong Kong. And on the mainland, Hu’s daughter, under the name Man Mei, published *Sinian yiran wujin: Huiyi fuqin Hu Yaobang* (Longing without End: Memoires of My Father, Hu Yaobang).

Zhao Ziyang, while under house arrest after 1989, found a way to record in his own words an account of his history and personal views, a work that has been translated into English as *Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, and edited by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang, and Adi Ignatius. After 1989, the outside person with whom Zhao spoke the most is Zong Fengming, who wrote *Zhao Ziyang, Ruanjinzhong de tanhua* (Conversations with Zhao Ziyang while under House Arrest). Zhao did not authorize the reminiscences by Zong, but he authorized and personally reviewed three recorded, highly focused conversations with journalist Yang Jisheng, published in *Zhongguo gaige niandai zhengzhi douzheng* (Political Struggle in the Period of Chinese Reform). These works, including some very critical of some of Deng’s activities, offer valuable alternative perspectives to those given in the mainland publications.

I have also viewed Chinese documentaries showing Deng giving speeches, meeting people, visiting various sites, and relaxing with his family. At my direction, research assistants translated materials from the Russian. In addition to general works on much of the Deng era, I have made use of many more specialized materials on specific subjects covered in this volume (see materials in English, Chinese, and Japanese that are included in the online bibliography and glossary at http://scholar.harvard.edu//ezrvogel).

Apart from various short trips to China, when I was in Beijing for longer periods—five months in 2006, one month in 2007, several weeks in 2008, one month in 2009, and several weeks in 2010—I had an opportunity to interview in particular three categories of knowledgeable people: party historians, children of top officials, and officials who worked under Deng. Except for several English-speaking Chinese who preferred to speak in English, the interviews were conducted in Chinese without an interpreter. In particular, I have benefited from extensive interviews with Zhu Jiamu, Cheng Zhongyuan, Chen Donglin, and Han Gang, all outstanding historians specializing in party history. I also conducted interviews with two children of Deng
Xiaoping (Deng Rong and Deng Lin), two children of Chen Yun (Chen Yuan and Chen Weili), and two children of Hu Yaobang (Hu Deping and Hu Dehua). In addition, I have interviewed children of Chen Yi, Ji Dengkui, Song Renqiong, Wan Li, Ye Jianying, Yu Qiuli, and Zhao Ziyang. They are all bright, thoughtful people. Discreet and filial, they shared concrete reminiscences that gave a flavor of their parents and their parents’ colleagues. The former officials I interviewed range from those who are great admirers of Deng Xiaoping to severe critics who feel both that Deng did not fully support Hu Yaobang and the intellectuals and that he tragically missed opportunities to push for political reform. Some are well-known officials who had worked with and under Deng, including former foreign minister Huang Hua, former president Jiang Zemin, former deputy head of the Organization Department of the party Li Rui, former vice premier Qian Qichen, and former first party secretary of Guangdong Ren Zhongyi. All of these officials had retired, allowing us to have a more leisurely conversation than would have been possible while they were still working.

I also benefited from interviews with a talented group of retired officials who worked under Deng, some of whom now write articles for the journal Yanhuang chunqiu, including Du Daozheng, Feng Lanrui, Sun Changjiang, Wu Mengyu, Yang Jisheng, and the late Zhu Houze. Some are occasionally criticized or warned for their outspoken comments, but generally they have been given freedom to express their views. In addition, I had a chance to interview scholars at research centers and universities in China. Scholars tend to be not as well informed on inner-party workings as those who served in the government and party under Deng, even if they are party members, but they often have had opportunities to know key people and some have read broadly and researched available documents with great care.

Although there are several institutions where specialists are doing research on party history, including the Central Party School, several universities, and the Contemporary China Research Institute, the institution with the greatest number of researchers, the greatest resources, and the best access to party materials is the Central Party Literature Research Center (Zhonggong Zhongyang Wenxian Yanjiushi), which is operated under the purview of the Central Committee. Some fifteen people at this center worked on compiling Deng Xiaoping nianpu. In addition, about fifteen are now working on an official biography of Deng that they hope to complete within the next several years.

At Harvard, I have had the opportunity over the years to exchange views with many visiting Chinese officials and scholars, some of whom are very fa-
miliar with the politics of Beijing. A number are prominent political dissidents—very able, dedicated, and idealistic people who ran afoul of party orthodoxy in the 1980s. I particularly benefited from talks with Chen Yizi, Dai Qing, Gao Wenquan, the late Liu Binyan, Ruan Ming, and the late Wang Ruoshui. I have talked with Wang Dan, a student leader during the Tiananmen incident, and Wei Jingsheng, whose famous 1978 wall poster on Democracy Wall, “On the Fifth Modernization,” led to a sentence of fifteen years’ imprisonment. I have also talked with younger former officials such as Wu Guoguang, Wu Jiaxiang (who has since returned to Beijing), and Yu Qihong, all of whom worked in central party organs. And I have learned from economic specialists whom I knew in Beijing and at Harvard, particularly Fan Gang, Lu Mai, and Qian Yingyi.


To get a better sense of the environment that Deng experienced, I spent several days each in locations that were important to Deng during his lifetime: his birthplace in Guang’an county in Sichuan; the Taihang Mountains
in Shanxi where Deng spent eight years as a guerrilla fighter; Chongqing and Chengdu, Deng’s base when he was in charge of the Southwest Bureau from 1949 to 1952; and Ruijin, Jiangxi, where he lived for several years during the early 1930s. I also visited Chen Yun’s birth site in Qingpu, on the outskirts of Shanghai. In each of these places, local scholars and officials were helpful in supplementing the materials in museums, giving me a sense of Deng’s role in the local setting.

I traveled to Singapore to talk with former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, who perhaps knew Deng Xiaoping as well as any foreign leader, former prime minister Goh Chok Tong, former adviser on the Chinese coastal areas Goh Keng Swee, President S. R. Nathan, and other officials. I also had long discussions with scholars, especially Wang Gungwu, John Wong, and Zheng Yongnian. In Hong Kong I met Yang Zhenning and Edgar Cheng, who met Deng many times when traveling with his father-in-law, Y. K. Pao, the leading Hong Kong shipping magnate who had more meetings with Deng than anyone else living outside mainland China.

In Australia, I had a chance to talk with former prime minister Robert Hawke, former ambassador to Beijing Ross Garnaut, former foreign ministry official Richard Rigby, Roger Uren, and others. In addition, I traveled to Moscow, where I met Lev Deliusin who spent many years in China, headed the Oriental Institute in Moscow, and wrote a book on Deng. I have benefited especially from discussions with Alexander Pantsov, a meticulous scholar now teaching in the United States, who is knowledgeable about Russian sources on Mao and Deng, and Sergei Tikhvinsky.

My visits to England in search of greater insights on Deng led to discussions with former ambassador Sir Alan Donald, former ambassador Richard Evans, and former Hong Kong governor David Wilson—and while in Beijing, I met former British ambassador Sir Anthony Galsworthy. I also talked with former Hong Kong chief executive Tung Chee Hwa and spent many sessions with Sin Por Shiu, a member of the Hong Kong negotiating team with Beijing.

While in Japan, I talked with former prime minister Nakasone Yasuhiro; former ambassadors to Beijing, including Anami Koreshige, Kunihiro Michihiko, and Tanino Sakutaro; other former China specialists in the Japanese Foreign Ministry such as Hatakenaka Atsushi, Kato Koichi, and Shimokouji Shuji; and generalists who know a great deal about Japanese foreign policy, including Kawashima Yutaka, Togo Katsuhiko, and Watanabe Koji. I have also talked with Japanese scholars who specialize in China’s relations with
other countries, particularly Hirano Ken’ichiro, Kawashima Shin, Kokubun Ryosei, Mori Kazuko, Soeya Yoshihide, Takagi Seichiro, Takahara Akio, Tanaka Akihiko, Tsuji Kogo, Yabuki Susumu, and Yamada Tatsuo. I am indebted especially to two Japanese scholars of China, Masuo Chisako and Sugimoto Takashi, who are translating this book into Japanese. Masuo, who wrote an excellent book on Deng’s foreign policy, assisted me in collecting Japanese materials, including some that have been declassified by the Japanese government.

I have had the chance to talk with a number of American officials who met Deng, including former president Jimmy Carter and former vice president Walter Mondale, who had key visits with Deng in 1979; as well as Henry Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft. I also talked with Zbigniew Brzezinski and the late Michel Oksenberg, who were the key White House officials who managed the normalization talks. Edward Cox, a son-in-law of President Richard Nixon who visited Deng with the president, shared his recollections with me. I talked with several former U.S. ambassadors to Beijing, including the late Arthur Hummel, the late Jim Lilley, Winston Lord, Joe Prueher, Sandy Randt, Stapleton Roy, Jim Sasser, and the late Leonard Woodcock. Ambassador Woodcock’s widow, Sharon Woodcock, kindly shared with me her husband’s papers. I have also had an opportunity to talk with other China specialists who served in the White House, the State Department, or other parts of the U.S. government, particularly Mike Armacost, Chris Clarke, Richard Fisher, Chas Freeman, David Gries, Charles Hill, Don Keyser, Paul Kreisberg, Herb Levin, Ken Lieberthal, Bill McCahill, Doug Paal, Nick Platt, Alan Romberg, Stapleton Roy, Richard Solomon, Doug Spelman, Robert Suettinger, Roger Sullivan, Robert Sutter, Harry Thayer, and John Thomson. Two former students, Susan Lawrence and Melinda Liu, who spent many years reporting from Beijing, have been extraordinarily generous with their time and insights. Jan Berris of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations has been a wonderful source of information about people and events. I have also interviewed four of Deng’s interpreters: Ji Chaozhu, Shi Yanhua, Nancy Tang, and the late Zhang Hanzhi.

I have benefited from the careful reading of drafts of the entire manuscript by Paul Cohen, Joseph Fewsmith, Merle Goldman, Charlotte Ikels, Don Keyser, Andrew Nathan, Tony Saich, and David Shambaugh. I have also been fortunate to have had parts of the manuscript read carefully by John Berninghausen, Ashley Esarey, Mel Goldstein, Arthur Kleinman, Mike Lampton, Diana Lary, Susan Lawrence, Cheng Li, Edwin and Cyril Lim, Perry Link,
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Bill McCahill, Lawrence Reardon, Robert Ross, Stapleton Roy, Richard Samuels, Richard Solomon, Mike Szonyi, Martin Whyte, Dalena Wright, and Ye Nan. (Those who read Chapter 18 are listed in the notes to that chapter.) A number of party historians in China were kind enough to read through an earlier draft of this manuscript that had been translated into Chinese to help correct errors and misunderstandings: Chen Donglin, Cheng Zhongyuan, Han Gang, Qi Weiping, Shen Zhihua, Xiao Yanzhong, Yang Kuisong, and Zhu Jiamu. Only I, however, can be held responsible for any errors not corrected and for those that have crept in since they read the manuscript.

I have benefited greatly from discussions with colleagues at Harvard, including William Alford, Peter Bol, Julian Chang, Paul Cohen, Tim Colton, Nara Dillon, Mark Elliott, Joe Fewsmith, Merle Goldman, Steve Goldstein, Rowena He, Sebastian Heilmann, William Hsiao, Iain Johnston, Bill Kirby, Arthur Kleinman, Rod MacFarquhar, Suzanne Ogden, Bill Overholt, Dwight Perkins, Liz Perry, Robert Ross, Tony Saich, Mike Szonyi, Tam Tai, Tu Weiming, Ning Wang, James L. Watson, John and Anne Watt, Martin Whyte, Jeff Williams, Endymion Wilkinson, and David Wolff. I have discussed issues with scholars elsewhere including John Berninghausen, Tom Bernstein, Chen Guangzhe, Deborah Davis, John Dolfin, Tom Gold, Mel Goldstein, Gui Benqing, Mike Lampton, Perry Link, Richard Madsen, Jean Oi, Jonathan Pollack, the late Lucian Pye, Dick Samuels, David Shambaugh, Susan Shirk, Dorie Solinger, Ed Steinfield, and Andrew Walder.

I have also been assisted by Holly Angell, Deirdre Chetham, Jorge Espada, Shenpeng Gao, Elizabeth Gilbert, Anna Laura Rosow, Kate Sauer, Shi Wenying, and Zhang Ye. Like all other scholars working on post-1949 Chinese materials at Harvard, I am greatly indebted to the Fairbank Center librarian in the Fung Library, Nancy Hearst, who combines an intimate knowledge of source materials with a seemingly boundless passion to help scholars locate the information they need. She corrected my notes and proofread the manuscript several times. As China grows increasingly important in the twenty-first century, we are privileged at Harvard to have access to a special collection of materials in the Fairbank Collection of the Fung Library that are an invaluable resource for research on contemporary China. Not only are many of these materials unavailable in other Western libraries, they are inaccessible in Chinese libraries as well.

I am also indebted to Jean Hung, who has, with equal passion to help scholars, assembled and creatively organized the most complete collection of materials on this period outside mainland China, at the Universities Service
Centre of The Chinese University of Hong Kong. I was also fortunate to receive assistance from the librarians at the Carter Library in Atlanta, who helped me find and use documents from the Carter administration. My conscientious editor Earl Harbert worked line by line to make the manuscript clear to those who are not China specialists. Julie Carlson, my copyeditor, has been creative, thorough, and tireless in helping me shape the manuscript. Kathleen McDermott, editor at Harvard University Press, has been the creative, diligent, enthusiastic manager who oversaw every aspect of the publication.

My wife, Charlotte Ikels, a specialist on the anthropology of China, has been a constant intellectual companion at all stages of this work. She patiently tried her best to provide balance and spiritual support to a driven workaholic.

Although I served as a U.S. national intelligence officer for East Asia from 1993 to 1995, I have not had access to classified materials in the course of this research. All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the author. The materials presented here do not reflect the official positions or views of the CIA or any other U.S. government agency. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. government authentication of information or endorsement of the author’s views. This material has been reviewed by the CIA to prevent the disclosure of classified information.
In March 1979 Sir Murray MacLehose, the widely respected Chinese-speaking British governor of Hong Kong, flew to Beijing to explain Hong Kong’s problems. Told in advance only that he would meet a high official, MacLehose was delighted to learn after he arrived that he would be meeting Deng Xiaoping, who had just been named China’s preeminent leader. During an intimate meeting in the Great Hall of the People, MacLehose told Deng about the growing difficulties confronting Hong Kong. As both men well knew, the British had ruled the colony of Hong Kong since the Opium War, but the lease from China for most of the land that was now part of Hong Kong would expire in 1997. Governor MacLehose was measured and diplomatic as he talked of the need to reassure Hong Kong people deeply worried about what might happen after 1997. Deng listened attentively to Governor MacLehose’s concerns and then, as they rose after their talk and moved toward the door, he beckoned to MacLehose. The governor, well over six feet tall, leaned over to hear the words of his five-foot host: “If you think governing Hong Kong is hard, you ought to try governing China.”

Deng was acutely aware that China was in a disastrous state. At the beginning of the previous decade, during the Great Leap Forward, more than thirty million people had died. The country was still reeling from the Cultural Revolution in which young people had been mobilized to attack high-level officials and, with Mao’s support, push them aside as the country of almost one billion people was plunged into chaos. The average per capita income of Chinese peasants, who made up 80 percent of the population, was then only US$40 per year. The amount of grain produced per person had fallen below what it had been in 1957.
Military officials and revolutionary rebels had been moved in to replace the senior party officials who had been forced out, but they were unprepared and unqualified for the positions they had assumed. The military had become bloated and was neglecting the military tasks, while military officers in civilian jobs were enjoying the perquisites of offices without performing the work. The transportation and communication infrastructure was in disarray. The bigger factories were still operating with technology imported from the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and the equipment was in a state of disrepair.

Universities had been basically closed down for almost a decade. Educated youth had been forcibly sent to the countryside and it was becoming harder to make them stay. Yet in the cities there were no jobs for them, nor for the tens of millions of peasants wanting to migrate there. Further, the people who were already living in the cities, fearing for their jobs, were not ready to welcome newcomers.

Some officials were bold enough to suggest that the real cause of the problems China was facing was Mao Zedong himself, but Deng believed that a single person should not be held responsible for the failures of the previous two decades. “We are all to blame,” he said. Mao had made huge mistakes, certainly, but in Deng’s view the larger problem was the faulty system that had given rise to those mistakes. The effort to gain control of the political system down to the household had overreached, creating fear and lack of initiative. The effort to gain control of the economic system had also overreached, causing rigidities that stymied dynamism. How could China’s leaders loosen things up while keeping the country stable?

For more than a decade before the Cultural Revolution, no one had greater responsibility for building and administering the old system than Deng Xiaoping. During his three and a half years in the countryside from 1969 to 1973, no one who had held high positions had thought more deeply about what went wrong with China’s old system and what needed to be done than Deng Xiaoping.

In 1978, Deng did not have a clear blueprint about how to bring wealth to the people and power to the country; instead, as he confessed, repeating a widely used saying—he “groped for the stepping stones as he crossed the river.” But he did have a framework for thinking about how to proceed.

He would open the country wide to science, technology, and management systems, and to new ideas from anywhere in the world, regardless of the country’s political system. He was aware that the new dynamos of Asia—Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—were growing faster than
any countries ever had. But Deng realized he could not simply import an entire system from abroad, for no alien system could fit the unique needs of China—which had a rich cultural heritage but was also huge, diverse, and poor. He realized what some free-market economists did not, that one could not solve problems simply by opening markets; one had to build institutions gradually. He would encourage other officials to expand their horizons, to go everywhere to learn what brings success, to bring back promising technology and management practices, and to experiment to see what would work at home. He would help pave the way by developing good relations with other countries so they would be receptive to working with China.

To provide order during this rebuilding, he believed there was only one organization that could manage the process—the Communist Party. The most experienced leaders available in China in 1978 were the party leaders who had risen to levels of responsibility in the 1950s and early 1960s. They needed to be brought back and young people had to be trained overseas and bring back the best ideas, the best science, the best technology, from anywhere. Bringing in new ways would be terribly disruptive. Even the Communist Party would have to change fundamentally its goals and its methods of operation.

As the paramount leader, Deng did not see his role as coming up with new ideas. He saw his job as managing the disruptive process of devising and implementing a new system. He would have the ultimate responsibility and he needed to make sound judgment calls. He would need to select a core of co-workers who could share responsibility for guiding the system and he would have to set up quickly an organization so they could work together effectively. He needed the best information he could get about what was actually going on in the country and what was happening abroad. He needed to provide hope without raising expectations that were unrealistic, as Mao had done in 1958. He would have to explain the situation to his officials and to the public and pace the changes so that people could accept them and the country would not split apart. Although he had considerable power, he knew he had to be sensitive to the political atmosphere among his colleagues if they were to implement what he directed. He needed to allow a measure of stability in employment and daily life even as the system underwent fundamental changes. In short, Deng faced a tall order, and an unprecedented one: at the time, no other Communist country had succeeded in reforming its economic system and bringing sustained rapid growth, let alone one with one billion people in a state of disorder.
Introduction: The Man and His Mission

The Man: Deng Xiaoping

Despite Deng’s diminutive stature, once he became the preeminent leader, when he appeared in a room he had a commanding presence that made him a natural center of attention. More than one observer commented that it was as if the electricity in the room flowed to him. He had the concentrated intensity of someone determined to resolve important matters. He possessed the natural poise of a former wartime military commander as well as the self-assurance that came from half a century of dealing with life-and-death issues near the center of power. Having faced ups and downs, and been given time to recover with support from his wife, children, and close colleagues, he had become comfortable with who he was. When he did not know something, he readily admitted it. President Jimmy Carter commented that Deng, unlike Soviet leaders, had an inner confidence that allowed one to get directly into substantive issues. He did not dwell on what might have been or who was at fault for past errors; as in bridge, which he played regularly, he was ready to play the hand he was dealt. He could recognize and accept power realities and operate within the boundaries of what seemed possible. Once Mao was no longer alive to look over his shoulder, Deng was sufficiently sure of himself and his authority that with guests he could be relaxed, spontaneous, direct, witty, and disarmingly frank. At a state banquet in Washington in January 1979, when told by Shirley MacLaine about a Chinese intellectual who was so grateful for what he had learned about life after being sent to the countryside to raise tomatoes during the Cultural Revolution, Deng’s patience was soon exhausted. He interrupted her to say, “He was lying” and went on to tell her how horrible the Cultural Revolution had been.

For someone who turned seventy-four in 1978, Deng was still vigorous and alert. He still took his morning break with a fast-paced half-hour walk around the garden of his home where he also kept his office. Many Chinese leaders, when seated next to their guest in comfortable chairs that were placed aside each other, would look straight ahead when they talked, but Deng liked to turn and look directly at the person he was talking with. He had an inquisitive mind and was a good listener. When he objected to the policies of foreign nations, foreign officials described him as feisty and “tough as nails.” Having observed nations pursuing their self-interest through imperialism, colonialism, and the use of military force abroad, Deng was never naïve about what to expect from foreign leaders professing goodwill. But even when they did not like what he had to say, foreign visitors, from different social positions and different parties, from large countries and small, ended up feeling
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