Review Essays

Power, Policy and Elite Politics under Zhao Ziyang

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Gaige licheng (The Journey of Reform)
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Prisoner of the State: The Secret Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang
Translated and edited by Bao Pu, Renee Chiang and Adi Ignatius
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009
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Heir apparent to Deng Xiaoping but illegally deposed as general secretary, Zhao Ziyang was held under house arrest after the Tiananmen events of 1989 until his death at 85 in 2005. A three-year special investigation to prove that Zhao "supported turmoil and split the party" simply fizzled out. In 2000, after many failed attempts to regain his freedom and to reverse the verdicts against the students and himself, he secretly recorded his memoirs for posterity. *Gaige licheng*, a transcript of about 30 cassette-tapes, was smuggled out of China and, together with an English translation entitled *Prisoner of the State: The Journal of Premier Zhao Ziyang*, published on the eve of the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen crackdown in June 2009.

Since his dismissal Zhao has been treated as a non-person. All discussion of his role in history has become a taboo to be erased or glossed over in PRC publications. Zhao's aim in recording his memoirs was to defend his record by recounting the critical events in the 1980s during which China experimented with the circuitous transition from a Maoist command economy into a Leninist market economy. This aim of recovering buried history is shared by the editors which include the husband-and-wife team Bao Pu and Renee Chiang.[1] As authenticity is a paramount issue, considering the recent publications of Chinese "secret" documents of dubious provenance, the editors have forthrightly pledged to make the tapes readily available for open scrutiny, and

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1 Bao Pu is the son of Bao Tong, a former aide to Zhao and an important player of high politics in the 1980s who is now a persecuted and harassed political dissident.

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clips of these can now be heard on the internet. Final authentication, however, must await voice/speech expert confirmation.[2]

Outside China, the politics during the Deng Xiaoping era is covered by a large body of studies, academic[3] or otherwise,[4] and several volumes of conversations with Zhao have been published.[5] Nevertheless, Zhao's secret journal is candid, uncensored and devoid of official rhetoric. If genuine, it may well be the most authoritative account by a former insider of the highest rank. Not only does it fill important gaps in our knowledge of informal politics and power relations at the apex of power, but it also challenges some of the established assumptions of Chinese political studies.

Leadership Cleavages

By all accounts, the reform decade of the 1980s was a period of intense competition and struggle over ideology, policy, power and political succession cumulating in the explosive meltdown at Tiananmen. Not surprisingly, Zhao stated baldly that Chinese elite politics on *economic reform and construction* (italicized words are not translated into the English version) at this time was fundamentally divided into two conflicting camps (he wisely refrained from using the term faction) brought together by ideology and self-interests. The more "liberal" camp, headed by Deng Xiaoping, supported accelerated economic development, market economy and opening up to the world, and welcomed large foreign investment and the Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The other camp, often labelled "conservative," was headed by Chen Yun, an admirer of Soviet domestic and international experiences, who revered the planned and proportional developmental strategy deployed during the first Five-Year Plan, and held reservations regarding market reform and opening up. Other members of this conservative group included Li Xiannian, deemed more extreme and stubborn than Chen Yun.

2 One such set of documents is *The Tiananmen Papers: The Chinese Leadership's Decision to Use Force Against Their Own People* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001) edited by Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, one of the most comprehensive and potentially valuable collections of materials on the fateful events of 1989. See Alfred L. Chan, with a rejoinder by Andrew J. Nathan, "The Tiananmen Papers Revisited," *The China Quarterly*, No. 177 (2004), pp. 190–214. The stilted and artificial language used in those secret documents contrasts with the vivid, natural and unrehearsed style of Zhao's tapes.

3 For instance, Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1994). More theoretical treatments are Joseph Fewsmith, *Elite Politics in Contemporary China* (Boulder: M. E. Sharpe, 2001); Jonathan Unger (ed.), *The Nature of Chinese Politics: From Mao to Jiang* (Boulder: M. E. Sharpe, 2002).

4 Important memoirs include Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping diguo* (*Deng Xiaoping's Empire*) (Taibei: Shibao wenhua chuban qiye youxian gongsi, 1992), translated as *Deng Xiaoping: Chronicle of an Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992). Deng Liqun, *Shierge chunqiu, 1975–1987: Deng Liqun zishu* (*Deng Liqun's Twelve-Year memoirs*, 1975–1987) (Hong Kong: Bozhi chubanshe, 2006).

5 Zong Fengming, *Zhao Ziyang ruanjinzhong de tanhua* (*Zhao Ziyang: Captive Conversations*)(Hong Kong: Kaifang chubanshe, 2007); Zong Fengming, *Lixiang, xinnian, zhuiqiu: wode rensheng huigu yu fansi jianhe Zhao Ziyang tanhua de yixue huiyi* (*My Quest for Faith and Ideals: A Recollection and Reflection of my Life and Reminiscences of Conversations with Zhao Ziyang*)(Hong Kong: Huanqiu shiye gongsi, 2005); Yang Jisheng, *Zhongguo gaige niandai de zhengzhi douzheng* (*The Political Struggles in China's Reform Era*) (Hong Kong: Excellent Culture Press, 2004).

These "conservatives" were joined by leftist ideologues and theoreticians Deng Liqun (propaganda chief) and Hu Qiaomu (former secretary to Mao), who resorted to Cultural Revolution-style witch hunts to preserve ideological purity.

Zhao states that SEZs were approved by Deng, but Chen suspected them to be slippery slopes back to capitalism. Chen wanted to restrict the expansion of SEZs and strictly forbade their setup in Shanghai and Zhejiang, where he thought people there were too familiar with speculative capitalism. Chen wished to impose his mantra "planned economy as primary, market adjustments as auxiliary" on SEZs, and steadfastly refused to set foot in any of them. Deng Liqun sided with Chen Yun by collecting materials to demonstrate that SEZs would eventually degenerate into colonial enclaves for foreign domination and exploitation.

Chen Yun mistrusted large-scale foreign investment and joint ventures, believing that they would yield super-profits for foreigners and exploitation for Chinese. His policy clout and ideological inclination can be demonstrated by the 1982 "strike hard" campaign against economic crimes which he initiated and pushed through. It branded smuggling, speculation, embezzlement and even minor work shortcomings as class struggle and sabotage by class enemies, leading to severe punishments for many cadres. Decentralized powers granted to Guangdong and Fujian were rescinded, and the disciplinary and organizational bureaucracies were emboldened to tighten their control, bringing a halt to many reform programmes.

Nonetheless, the cleavage between the "liberals" and the "conservatives" was not the only obstacle to reform and did not extend to all policy areas. Zhao took credit for initiating the coastal development strategy, which, he said, was scrapped not only because of opposition from the conservatives but also from economists worried about an overheated economy and lack of market, and by nationalists fearing the loss of national pride if China was to export labour-intensive products. With other significant issues, such as expansion of enterprise power, decentralization and government simplification, Chen seemed congenial. (This point was not translated into the English version.) In fact, the controversial household responsibility system was pushed through smoothly, and no leaders were ever criticized or punished for making errors. However, Zhao is silent on other pertinent issues such as military reform, relations with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and foreign relations in general.

At one point Zhao judged that Chen was ultimately opposed to reform and opening up (this point was not translated) but on the whole Zhao does not regard the difference between Deng and Chen as irreconcilable or hostile. Both Deng Xiaoping and Zhao maintained a grudging respect and even deference for Chen Yun as an economic decision maker. For instance, Chen Yun and Li Xiannian's initiation of the economic retrenchment policy in 1981 was not to Deng's liking, but Deng deferred to it anyway. While Deng was closer to the liberal reformers by inclination, he also acted as a balancer among divergent opinion groups so that mutual accommodations and silent toleration were possible. Deng shared with the conservatives some hostility toward liberalization and

intellectual dissent and his relation with Chen seemed cordial overall. It was their subordinates who fought constant proxy wars against one another, with the Chen camp aiming for a winners-take-all outcome and the Deng camp more inclined towards defensive compromises. According to Zhao, after he was weakened by the fiasco of the 1988 price reform the "conservatives" launched a concerted campaign to oust him.

In Zhao's view, the Chen camp was more cohesive while the Deng camp was more divided; its disintegration began in earnest when Hu Yaobang fell out with Zhao and Deng. Hu was ideologically liberal and sympathetic to intellectual dissent, but he was afflicted by the "old (read Maoist storming) methods"[6] of provoking mass fervour when it came to raising production targets and speedily increasing outputs ahead of schedule. Impulsiveness got the better of Hu when he ordered the application of the rural contract system to urban areas. The flamboyant Hu was fond of large-scale infrastructural projects, and interfered with economic work even though Deng had decided that the economy should be the preserve of the State Council and the Financial and Economic Leadership Group. Hu's inclination to pull stunts irked the more circumspect Zhao, who claimed to be more concerned with economic efficiency. However, the main reason for Deng's withdrawal of support was Hu's non-conformist attitude toward his demands for curbing liberalization. Hu's fallout with Deng occurred over several years. In contrast, Deng expressed confidence in Zhao many times. Despite the price reform fiasco and the ensuing campaign to oust Zhao, as late as 19 April 1989, when the two met, Deng wanted Zhao to serve a total of two terms as general secretary. The Tiananmen events changed that.

The Tiananmen Events

Zhao's fairly detailed account of the Tiananmen events suggests that Deng was impressionable, easily swayed and angered, and hence susceptible to manipulations.[7] Zhao calculated that after the mourning of Hu Yaobang's death, student sentiment would subside, and the crisis would abate. To deal with the student demonstrations, Zhao proposed multi-channel dialogue and communication to persuade the students to return to classes, and the avoidance of bloodshed at all cost. This was endorsed by Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng and the Politburo standing committee (PBSC). But on 24 April, just one day after Zhao left for North Korea, Li Peng manoeuvred to convene a PBSC meeting that exaggerated the severity of the student movement, branding it an "organized and carefully plotted political struggle" against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and socialism. The hardliners briefed this to Deng the next day, adding that the national student movement was spearheaded at Deng himself. Devastated by evidence of students'

6 Zhao probably learned a tough lesson by his own practice of the Maoist-style "blind command" during the Great Leap Forward. See Alfred L. Chan, *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chap. 5, pp. 212–15 and passim.

7 Similar observations can be found in Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping*.

personal attacks on him presented by the hardliners, Deng agreed to brand the student movement "an anti-party and anti-socialist turmoil," and proposed a summary solution. Manipulating again, Li Peng transmitted a record of Deng's internal talk throughout the Party and its content was duly repeated in the infamous *People's Daily* editorial of 26 April. The editorial, intended to terrify the students into giving up the demonstrations, backfired by greatly exacerbating the contradictions and pushing the students into a corner. Students were antagonized by the branding – considering it to be a repressive Cultural Revolution practice – and feared they would eventually be *qingsuan* (an ominous ritual settling of accounts whereby the offender is denounced and punished). It pushed even the moderate students into a fighting mood, and also antagonized many government and mass organizations, democratic parties and intellectuals. Li Peng was not unaware that the editorial had spoiled the situation, but he insisted on toughing it out, and forced Zhao to go along.

Again, in Zhao's view, even after the harsh 26 April editorial, the volatile situation could have been diffused if Deng had accepted Zhao's advice to step back, signal that the student issue was not that serious after all, and promise no retaliatory measures. Then Zhao could have taken responsibility for the offending editorial and pacified the students. Zhao's account of his efforts in conciliation and compromise with the students is largely consistent with that reported in the *Tiananmen Papers*.[8] But Zhao also reveals that upon his return from North Korea on 30 April he failed to secure an audience with Deng, who was in ill health. Zhao was advised not to bother Deng so that Deng could conserve strength for the meeting with Gorbachev (which eventually occurred on 16 May). Meanwhile, Zhao and the Party centre were told by Deng's secretary and children to deal with the students as they saw fit. When Zhao finally got to meet Deng on 13 May he obtained Deng's blessing for his plan for opening dialogue, tackling corruption and increasing transparency. This last opportunity to simultaneously resolve the student crisis and to deepen reforms, Zhao argues, was lost when the hardliners sabotaged his initiatives and convinced the wavering Deng that martial law was the only alternative.

In retrospect, Zhao claims that of all the elders Deng was the most enamoured with the method of dictatorship (of the proletariat) and the use of highly concentrated power to ensure stability and perpetuate communist party rule. Deng loathed those who took to the streets to make demands, and advocated summary and coercive methods to suppress such unrests. This played into the hands of hardliners such as Li Peng and Yao Yilin.

Zhao adamantly asserts that Deng called the shots in imposing martial law and denies the rumour that there was a three-versus-two vote for it in the PBSC, although if the views of Deng and Yang Shangkun, who were not PBSC members, were counted, there was a majority.[9] Maintaining that the student

8 See *The Tiananmen Papers*, chapters three and four.
9 Zhao was said to have been outvoted in *The Tiananmen Papers* (p. 175).

demonstrations could have been resolved by "democracy and law," Zhao refused to be the "general secretary who mobilized the military to crack down on students" and it was on this issue that Deng finally broke with him. In the end Zhao was convinced that the participants in the Tiananmen events did not want to overthrow the political system, only to ask the CCP to correct its flaws and that the students were pro-reform, orderly and even came to the defence of the People's Liberation Army.

Power, Informal Politics, Factional Dynamics and Personal Connections

It is generally understood that Chinese politics in the 1980s was barely institutionalized, with rules, division of power and responsibility fluid and ill-defined. Power was personalized to the extent that it was vested with the person rather than with the office, and informal personal relationships were a more potent basis of power. The preponderance of informal politics over institutional rules gave free play to patron–client relations and personal connections, and no insider better than Zhao can provide more insights.

Deng Xiaoping's exercise of personalized power

Patriarch Deng Xiaoping never formally ranked higher than second or third in the formal party hierarchy and after 1987 at 83, held nothing except for the chairmanship of the Military Affairs Commission. However, he maintained final and authoritative say in all important decisions, formalized by a secret resolution at the 13th Party Congress. Zhao shows how a nod from Deng was sufficient to override all opposition and decide a major issue, such as the introduction of the household contract system. As core of the system, Deng enjoyed the highest status, followed by the elders, and Hu Yaobang and Zhao could never deal with Deng on equal terms. Important PBSC meetings were held at Deng's home, and senior personnel appointments were the preserve of Deng and the elders. As General Gecretary, Zhao states, he had to put up with Director of Propaganda Wang Renzhi, whom he loathed, but Wang had background support from the elder Chen's camp.

Hu's and Zhao's authority was entirely sustained by Deng, and once Deng revealed his decision that Hu had to go at Beidaihe in the summer of 1986 (rather than in December as commonly thought), Hu became a lame duck general secretary, treated by others with derision and scorn.

Not that Deng was omnipotent – he acted as a balancer among various opinion groups and had to pay heed to other elders. Zhao's accounts show that Deng Xiaoping was more interested in the big picture than the details, that he was largely dependent on subordinate briefings for information and analyses of current situations. Foreign media sometimes played a part in his decisions. According to Zhao, Deng was concerned that if Chen Yun and Li Xiannian did not retire at the 13th Party Congress it would give the foreign media an excuse to declare a "victory of conservatives," an option that should

be avoided at all cost. Indeed, an alternative interpretation that Deng was using foreign opinion to pressure the elders to resign is just as plausible.

There are no hard and fast rules that explain why one elder prevailed at a particular time, because power is situational and relational, but specific cases of Deng's calling the shots include:

- During the 1984 visit of Soviet advisor Ivan Arkhipov to Chen Yun, Deng, fearing that Chen might confuse foreign opinion, prescribed specific parameters (*koujing*, inappropriately translated as talking points) on what Chen could say. Chen reluctantly complied.
- When Hu Yaobang drafted a resolution for the Sixth Plenum on building a "Spiritual Civilization," conservative ideologues Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun – with the consent of Chen Yun – wanted to further their agenda by adding the words "training people to have a communist conscience," which would have implied a nation-wide (rather than CCP-only) programme of communist education. Deng vetoed the proposed additions.
- After Hu Yaobang's forced resignation was accepted in January 1987, Deng appointed a committee of four (expanded to five according to Zhao Ziyang's recommendation; of the five only Zhao was a PBSC member) to take over the daily affairs of the PBSC until the 13th Party Congress.
- Deng approved Zhao's proposal to remove Deng Liqun from theoretical and ideological work in the Secretariat. Deng Liqun's patrons Chen Yun and Li Xiannian reluctantly acceded. Perhaps as compensation, Deng Liqun was promised membership in the forthcoming Politburo but failed to be elected into the Central Committee.
- Before Hu Yaobang's resignation, Deng Xiaoping tightened his control over personnel selections for the 13th Party Congress by appointing a seven-member group directly accountable to him. This contrasted with the more regular practice followed at the 12th Party Congress where Hu and the Secretariat took charge of personnel selections before reporting to the elders.
- When Li Peng was selected as Premier, Deng, fearing that he was inexperienced in economic management and reform, decided that Zhao, after becoming general secretary, would still manage economic affairs.
- Deng wanted Chen Yun, Li Xiannian and Peng Zhen to accept retirement or semi-retirement at the 13th Party Congress but all were opposed. Deng asked Bo Yibo to intercede and, after much wrangling, Chen Yun finally conceded, followed by the others.

The Cultural Dimension of Informal Politics

Ideology and policy aside, Chinese elite politics has been played out in a cultural milieu of hierarchy of status, respect for age and experience, and reliance on particularistic connections. Superior and subordinates, patrons and clients are joined together, or driven apart, with reference to rules of proper conduct. Superiors expected loyalty, deference and respect, while keeping the prerogative to judge if

this rendering of respect is adequate, sincere or appropriate. Zhao's memoirs show explicitly how these rules impacted behaviour. The "big picture" for Deng's subordinates, Zhao included, was to toe the line of Deng's preferences unquestioningly, but Hu Yaobang erred by not complying. For instance, even though Deng realized that the campaign against spiritual pollution in 1983 was unpopular and authorized its termination after 28 days, Hu's continuing carping on the notion of eliminating spiritual pollution greatly incurred Deng's displeasure.

Moreover, subordinates were expected to read and decipher a superior's intentions and act accordingly. If the subordinates failed to do so, their superiors would not stoop to clarify what they wanted. At most, the superior would employ an indirect mode of communication by sending an intermediary to warn or to intercede. Between 1980 and 1986, Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang were split on the issue of anti-liberalization on which Deng brooked no compromise, while Hu was deemed to be too lackadaisical. Deng tried several times to warn Hu through intermediaries and finally gave up on Hu when he did not respond. Similarly, when Zhao repeatedly sent drafts of his political report to the 13th Party Congress featuring the notion "the state intervenes in the market, and the market drives the enterprises" to Chen Yun, Chen refused to comment, but he got up and left the room when Zhao started to report, signalling to all his disapproval. The refusal of a superior to clarify his dissatisfaction, causing communication lapses and misunderstanding, is a recurrent pattern, as the similar cases between Mao and Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao attest. The pervasive use of intermediaries described by Zhao was driven presumably by a cultural propensity for conflict avoidance and the mutual saving of face.

Another informal rule was the deference and respect for the elders. An insider gets almost to the heart of the matter: "Those old folks need to be respected and what they fear the most is to be ignored (*sic*). Once you understand that mentality and frequently seek their advice and opinions, it's much easier to get things done."[10] What mattered was not that the elders had substantive ideas or wisdom about specific issues, but that "once you propose an agenda and report it to them, they will see you as a subordinate and will agree with you."[11] Zhao was attuned to these conventions, and described how when he first moved to Beijing he got along with both Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun by frequently visiting them to seek guidance and to pay respect, so that he was able to "mediate and ease communication" between the two. Another example is when Deng intended to appoint Wan Li to become chair of the National People's Congress, China's top legislator. Fearing that some elders might disapprove of his appointment because Wan Li had offended them in the past, Deng suggested Li visit the elders one by one to offer self-criticism in order to obtain their forgiveness, and Wan duly obliged.

In contrast, Hu Yaobang repeatedly failed to show such proper respect, and the offended elders remembered. For instance, Li Xiannian felt slighted that

10 Ruan Ming, *Deng Xiaoping*, pp. 206–207.
11 *Ibid*.

his request for a meeting with Hu was declined when both of them were in Shanghai, and he bore a grudge against Hu. According to Zhao, he incurred Chen Yun and Li Xiannian's displeasure when his policy initiatives criticized implicitly the first Five-Year Plan and the Cultural Revolution periods, when Chen Yun and Li Xiannian were in charge, respectively. Li also bore grudges against Zhao because he was thought to have catered too much to Deng's ideas of reform and less to those of the elders. Li even sent an intermediary to demand that Zhao pay more heed to other elders.

The mutual exchanges of favours cement patron–client relationships, and in Zhao's view this was the case with Deng Liqun. Deng Liqun actively promoted Chen Yun's economic thought, worked as an aide under Li Xiannian and drafted his documents, and headed a group to publish Li's selected works. Deng Liqun's even deeper relationship with Wang Zhen can be traced back into the 1950s when he worked with and stood by Wang in Xinjiang when Wang was in trouble. In 1987 Wang attempted to persuade Zhao to decline the post of general secretary so that he could nominate Deng Liqun instead. When Deng Liqun failed election to the Central Committee and the Central Advisory Commission, the elders held Zhao responsible and never forgave him. To protect Deng, Chen Yun ordered that Deng's party privileges and salary remain unchanged.

Subordinates are expected to tactfully avoid sensitive or taboo subjects that might embarrass or bring disrepute to their superiors, but Hu Yaobang was deemed insufficiently prudent or discreet. During his 1986 European tour, he tactlessly engaged journalists on whether Deng and other elders would retire. In an interview with a Hong Kong journalist, Hu disavowed any thoughts of succeeding Deng as chair of the Central Military Commission, but the mere fact that the matter was raised incurred Deng's suspicion and this was a catalyst in Deng's determination to remove Hu. On the other hand, Zhao wisely avoided questions about the retirement of elders, but faltered by confirming to Gorbachev the open secret that a Central Committee decision had granted Deng Xiaoping final say on all important matters. Deng chose to interpret the faux pas as breaking a taboo and/or as a disloyal attempt to push him onto the forefront, even though Zhao said his intention was exactly the opposite – to show that the Central Committee decision was a collective one and not evidence of a Deng power grab. After Zhao's purge, Deng would never communicate with him again.

Zhao as a Politician

A most remarkable revelation in the memoirs is Zhao's admission that he was more interested in practical work and was indifferent to and unschooled in ideology (*yishi xingtai*, erroneously translated as metaphysics). Like Hu Yaobang, he was unwilling to become the general secretary and he even sent Wang Zhen as an intermediary to dissuade Deng from nominating him. Ultimately he acceded out of a sense of responsibility and a consideration that he could control future harmful anti-liberalization drives of Deng Liqun and the elders. Although Zhao

laments that he was not as connected as those who built their careers at the centre, overall he was attuned to the operations of the communist power structure and was a deft player who manipulated ideology, symbols and situations to further his agenda.

As acting general secretary, Zhao claims that he effected a 180-degree turnaround of the campaign against bourgeois liberalization of 1987 by deflecting the attack on liberal reformers onto the leftist conservatives. He abolished two leftist strongholds: the theoretical journal *Red Flag* and the Research Office of the Secretariat, which was dominated by Deng Liqun. To lessen the brunt of Deng Xiaoping's Four Cardinal Principles (fidelity to Marxist-Leninism, Mao Zedong thought, dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism and communist party leadership) he resurrected an old slogan "primary stage of socialism" and formulated the notion "one central focus and two basic points." These he enshrined into the party constitution to further release reform from the shackles of leftist ideological interference. The "primary stage of socialism," alleged to last for a hundred years, provided a new theoretical basis to justify intensification of market reform and further dismantlement of the central planning system. The notion of "one central focus (economic development) and two basic points (upholding the Four Cardinal Principles and reform and opening up)" legitimized reform by placing economic reforms at least at the same level as the Four Cardinal Principles.

Zhao countered Deng's instruction to blacklist "liberals" and to punish/dismiss them one by one by stalling. He held infrequent meetings of the Secretariat that handled a small number of cases at a time so that few were punished and others were eventually forgotten. After Hu Yaobang's dismissal, some of his detractors wanted to investigate whether he had disproportionately promoted members of the Communist Youth League, Hu's former work unit, to form a Communist League faction. This guilt by association would have seen many cadres punished because of their association with Hu, but Zhao was able to persuade Deng to veto such an investigation.

In a draft speech intended for a 1985 party conference, Chen Yun again advocated the principle of "planned economy as primary, market adjustments as auxiliary" which might restrict the number of commodities that could be produced according to market forces. Since Chen had put this point on paper it was unthinkable to persuade him to rescind it, so Zhao visited Chen and proposed to add a couple of qualifying sentences which, in Zhao's interpretation, could justify half of all commodities to be produced according to market forces. By paying due respect and tribute to Chen's views, Zhao claims that he won Chen over with a game of semantics.

Conclusion

Space limits preclude broader considerations of other issues such as Zhao's legacy. Was he a frustrated political reformer with social democrat inclinations,

as some see him, or was his vision essentially soft-authoritarian, as others claim?[12] No doubt a courageous man, Zhao put political reform on the agenda in the 1980s and in the end concluded that it is the Western parliamentary democratic system that "demonstrated the most vitality," and is "currently the best one available." On the other hand, Zhao was also enamoured with the neo-authoritarianism of centralized technical leadership, and hoped that the Chinese Communist Party would remain in power for a long time, and that it should compete for power, presumably in a multi-party system.

Zhao Ziyang's account of behind-the-scenes elite politics, if credible, is at once more complicated and simplistic than existing studies, and one yearns for more. It confirms much that is already known about ideological and policy conflicts, and highlights the misunderstandings, contingencies, bungling and unspoken rules of the game at the highest level, but above all it contributes to our understanding of the informal and cultural dimension of Chinese politics. These subjects are insufficiently investigated in scholarly studies because of a lack of reliable material and the general suspicion of culture as an explanatory variable. What Zhao gives us is a one-person perspective, an authoritative and insider one despite being recollected in disillusionment after losing power. It is ironic that Zhao repeatedly appeals to the party constitution and law to demonstrate the illegality of his ousting and incarceration, and the imposition of martial law, since he thrived and participated in a system where the "rule of man" was the *modus operandi*.

The pervasiveness of informal politics described by Zhao may lend support to Lucian Pye's view that the "informal" is "nearly the sum total" of Chinese politics, at least until recently. It may be inconsistent with analyses narrowly guided by realist or rational choice theories and their power maximization assumptions, or by the institutional approaches that stress how formal structures and rules shape behaviour. Cultural explanations, with their ambiguities, contradictions and non sequiturs, may be closer to the heart of Chinese elite politics and Zhao's experiences.

Overall, the multi-layered and nuanced exposition contained in the memoirs should provide ample raw materials for further scholarly research. The translation is adequate for general readers but inexplicably some of the Chinese texts are not translated, and there are passages in English that cannot be located in the Chinese version. Technical terms are translated in inconsistent and general ways, and neither edition includes an index.

12 Guoguang Wu and Helen Lansdowne, *Zhao Ziyang and China's Political Future* (London: Routledge, 2008).