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CHINESE POLITICS AND THE SUCCESSION TO MAO

John Gardner

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For my mother and the memory of my father

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Abbreviations

- CQ* *The China Quarterly*, (London), the leading scholarly journal on modern and contemporary China.
- FE* British Broadcasting Corporation, *Summary of World Broadcasts*, Part 3, *The Far East*, (Caversham, Berkshire). This excellent service provides summaries of translations of Chinese radio broadcasts, many of them from local stations, and also reproduces reports of *Xinhua*, the official Chinese news agency.
- I & S* *Issues and Studies*, (Taipei, Taiwan). Although its articles are unfailingly hostile to the leaders of the People's Republic and their policies, this monthly journal is renowned for acquiring and translating confidential intra-Party documents and leadership speeches which the People's Republic of China has made publicly available.
- PD* *People's Daily*, (*Renmin Ribao*). The national newspaper of the Communist Party of China.
- PLA* People's Liberation Army. The PLA includes naval and air forces.
- PR/BR* *Peking Review*, to December 1978, *Beijing Review* thereafter. English-language weekly published by the People's Republic of China. It contains translations of leadership speeches, Congress proceedings, policy statements, etc.
- RF* *Red Flag* (*Hongqi*). The theoretical journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Originally monthly, now fortnightly.

Romanisation

The People's Republic of China uses the *pinyin* system of romanisation and, since 1979, has virtually eradicated all other forms, even in the case of the most common place-names. Thus, 'Peking' is now 'Beijing', 'Tientsin' is 'Tianjin'. Western publications are rapidly following suit and I have, therefore, used *pinyin* throughout, with minor exceptions. Where a personal name is both widely known in a traditional form and is almost unrecognisable in *pinyin*, I have retained the conventional spelling: thus, 'Chiang Kai-shek' and 'Confucius'.

I have also cited books and articles by the exact title. However, when quoting from translations or texts I have taken the liberty of substituting *pinyin* for the original romanisation in which a name appeared.

The Leader and His Passing

. . . Comrade Mao Zedong, the esteemed and beloved great leader of our Party, our army and the people of all nationalities in our country, the great teacher of the international proletariat and the oppressed nations and oppressed peoples, Chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Chairman of the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, and Honorary Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, passed away at 00.10 hours on 9 September 1976 in Beijing as a result of the worsening of his illness . . .

. . . Chairman Mao Zedong was the founder and wise leader of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese People's Liberation Army and the People's Republic of China . . .

. . . Chairman Mao Zedong was the greatest Marxist of the contemporary era . . .

. . . The passing away of Chairman Mao Zedong is an inestimable loss . . .

(from the official communiqué announcing Mao's death)

One View of the Succession Problem

The historical experience of all revolutionary movements shows that the death of the great leader of a revolution always means very serious difficulties for the revolutionary classes and revolutionary movement. As for the enemies of the revolution, it is always a very good opportunity to pounce upon the revolution and strangle it by making use of these difficulties. Under this situation, it is of the utmost

importance to the success or failure of the revolutionary cause whether the revolutionary classes and their political party have their successor, and whether their succeeding leader can carry on the behest of the great leader, raise high the revolutionary banner and triumph over the frenzied attacks launched by all the enemies, particularly the inside enemies.

(*Xinhua News Agency*, 16 December 1976)

The Successor

At this grave historical juncture, the Party Central Committee headed by Comrade Hua Guofeng, with the boldness and vision of proletarian revolutionaries, shattered at one stroke the criminal plot of the 'Gang of Four' to usurp Party and state power . . . By leading our Party from danger to safety through tempestuous storms, Comrade Hua Guofeng averted a major retrogression in Chinese history and a great disaster for our people, thereby winning the complete trust and wholehearted affection of the whole Party, the whole army and the people . . . Comrade Hua Guofeng is indeed a worthy successor selected by Chairman Mao himself, a worthy helmsman to steer Chairman Mao's cause forward, and a worthy wise leader of the Communist Party of China founded by Chairman Mao.

(from a *Jiefangjun Bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*] article, 29 October 1976, in *Peking Review*, no. 45, 1976, p. 5)

And yet . . .

At a meeting of the Politbureau held from late November to early December 1980, Hua offered his resignation as Party Chairman and it was agreed that this proposition should be submitted to the sixth plenum of the eleventh Central Committee.

(*Zhengming* [*Contend*], a well-informed Hong Kong journal, February 1981, pp. 7–8)