

On the eve of nationwide victory in the Chinese Revolution, Comrade Mao Zedong called on the whole party to start learning afresh. We did that pretty well, and consequently, after entering the cities, we were able to rehabilitate the economy very quickly and then to accomplish the socialist transformation. But we must admit that we have not learned well enough in the subsequent years. Expending our main efforts on political campaigns, we did not master the skills needed to build our country. Our socialist construction failed to progress satisfactorily, and we experienced grave setbacks politically. Now that our task is to achieve modernization, our lack of the necessary knowledge is even more obvious. So, the whole party must start learning again. We should learn in different ways, through practice, from books, and from the experience, both positive and negative of others, as well as our own. Conservatism and book worship should be overcome. So long as we unite as one, work in concert, emancipate our minds, use our heads, and try to learn what we did not know before, there is no doubt that we will be able to quicken the pace of our new long march. Under the leadership of the Central Committee and the State Council,

let us advance courageously to change the backward condition of our country and turn it into a modern and powerful socialist state. So, Tom Holland, that was Deng Xiaoping on the 13th of December 1978, the man who was to transform China so radically that Tom, I think, is reasonable to argue, isn't it? That he is one of the two or three most significant figures in our lifetime, maybe of the last century, you could argue. I think you could certainly argue that, and it's evident, just from reading the newspapers every day, just how profound the transformation that China has affected. Basically, since the death of Chairman Mao, who was alluded to in the passage you read, because the incredible country trick that the Chinese Communist Party has done is to affect all kinds of capitalist wheezes and maneuvers while remaining overtly communist. And so the question of just how capitalist is modern China, just how communist is it? What is the inheritance from the communist past? What is the inheritance from the deeper past? It's such a fascinating, fascinating question, and not dominate. I think we should put our hands up and admit not questions that we are ideally qualified to answer, although,

of course, everybody is fascinated by that question. But we have the ideal person to answer those questions for us, who's very much friend of the show, Rana Mitter, who currently is Professor of the History and Politics of Modern China at Oxford, but is about to head Harvard Woods. So, Oxford's loss is, well, the new Cambridge's gain. And author of two wonderful books on China's experience in the Second World War, China's War with Japan and China's Good War, and we did those two incredibly harrowing and powerful episodes with Rana on China in the Second World War. But Rana, welcome back to the show. The book that's probably more relevant to this is one that you wrote maybe 20 years ago, is it? A Better Revolution, China's Struggle with the Modern World. And I'm guessing you wrote that when it was less evident just how successful the process of China's transformation was. It was a very different China at that time, Tom. That's right. It's great to be back on with you and with Dominic. And I have to say, yes, that book, A Better Revolution, China's Struggle with the Modern World, was written at a time when I had a bit more hair and my stomach was probably a little flatter. You've got loads of hair, Rana. Oh, there was even more then. And it's not gray. Of course, if I were the tiny Chinese top Politburo leader, I'd point out that might be because I have my own hair dye supplier. Since, of course, it's a side of great virility amongst the Chinese leadership that your hair must remain as black

as possible for as long as possible to show that you've got it. You've still got it. But what exception, actually, interestingly being Xi Jinping, who's led a little bit of gray show, and many people think who are doing the Kremlinology of Beijing, that that shows that he's confident enough that he doesn't really need to do the hair dye shuffle. But I promise you, everything here is natural. But back at the start of the 21st century, the early 2000s, you're actually right. China itself was going through, and it might sound odd to say this, but it's very relevant to our discussion today about Deng Xiaoping and how contemporary China was made, that in some ways, it was a more liberal China. Now, it was the China that was just a decade or so out of Tiananmen Square, and I'm sure we'll talk about 1989 and that horrific year quite soon. But it was a time when it looked as if not, I think, that China was going to become a democracy. I always thought that that was very unlikely. And most China analysts would actually share that view. But the view that China might be developing more of a civil society, might be developing a freer press, might be trying out ideas that would essentially be judged on the idea of pragmatism rather than ideology. All of that seemed very possible in the early 2000s. In my book, *A Better Revolution* looks back an earlier period of Chinese history, the so-called May 4th movement, one of the great reform movements of the early 20th century, and tried to find the

legacy of that more liberal China in the China of 20 years or so ago. As we may end up discussing, today's China does look much less liberal, much more constrained, much more buttoned down. So the real pivot that people often see in Chinese history runs from the end of the 1970s to Deng's retirement in the 1990s. So to put this into context, for those of our listeners, not super familiar with Chinese history, there had been the Great Revolution at the end of the 1940s. There have been Mao's experiments, often very bloody experiments, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and so on, which we've talked about with you. And then Mao dies in 1976, that's right, isn't it? And there is a power struggle to succeed him. So there's the Gang of Four involving his widow. There are other, perhaps more pragmatic sort of conservative figures in the party. There is this chap called Deng Jiao Ping, who we're going to talk about, who is in, he's slightly in exile, isn't he, at this point? He's being brought back, but he's semi-detached. So give us a sort of sense of the constellation of forces in the 1970s where Mao dies.

Yes, the 1970s, Dominic, is an absolutely fascinating period. And actually, it's one of the ones that's of most interest today to historians who are trying to open up the next frontier of academic research on Chinese history. They call it the Long 1970s because it starts really during the middle of the famous Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. And the three of us have talked about that on an earlier issue of addition of the rest is history. And it goes probably some way actually into the early 1980s. There's a great new book actually forthcoming from the two historians Chen Jian and Odd Arnavestad called *The Great Transformation*, which is exactly about this period. Briefly to say why it's important, it's essentially the moment when China tries a succession of economic as well as social experiments. And we're going to keep it as untechnical as possible, but economics will come into our discussion today because it's one of the things that reshapes not just China, but the world during this period.

So essentially up to 19, let's say about 1966, the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, China has what you might call a conventional Soviet style economy in many ways. It's command economy top down Stalin would have recognized it. And that's not surprising because when Mao and his

friends decided that they were going to found a new economy, who better to consult than Joseph Stalin himself? We wrote a short textbook on economics. I'm sure it's the kind of thing which would today find a place only in a very, very small number of places, possibly North Korea, or possibly a few UK senior commoners. But beyond that, it was important to Mao in terms of reshaping

the economy Soviet style. Then in the 1960s to early 70s, the Cultural Revolution itself, the economy turns almost inwards. China really breaks off lots of its trade with the outside world. It doesn't bring in outside ideas, doesn't renew itself. The intellectual property of China, you might say, is really run down because, of course, they split up with the Soviets in the early 1960s. So the one source of technology which they have, the Soviet Union is no longer talking to them. And that brings us up to where you've started our story in the mid 1970s. Chairman Mao dies finally at the age of 83 in 1976, a pretty horrible death actually from ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease is sometimes known. And the leadership is split between two factions, the hard left, sometimes known later known as the gang of four, including Mao's wife, but essentially four very radical left figures. And then a relatively more moderate faction, Prime Minister Joe Enlai, who's probably the leader of that relatively moderate factions, just died a few months beforehand in April 1976. And in fact, his funeral leads to demonstration by ordinary people who regard him as a decent figure in the leadership. But left behind, as you say, is Deng Xiaoping. These are figures who, of course, amongst other things, encouraged the visit of Richard Nixon to China. That had happened just four years before in 1972. So that American visit is also one of the signs of how a relatively more internationalist, more moderate faction was trying to make itself heard. But in 1976, when Mao died, the battle was not yet won. It was very much radicals versus reformers. And one of the things that Mao was worrying about in his final years and months was that the fate of Stalin would be visited on him. Stalin was posthumously condemned. Mao in the end is not condemned, is he? So is there a sense in which the faction fight is not just to seize the commanding heights of China, but to present themselves as the authentic heirs of Mao? That's absolutely right, Tom. First of all, it's fair to say that Mao was never and has never been officially condemned. He's too big a figure, in a sense, in the long march to power, to use part of the phrase from Deng Xiaoping's statement. He's too big a figure simply to throw out the revolutionary pantheon. He's Lenin and Stalin and all the other major figures of the Soviet Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, combined together in one person. But having said that, a few years later, just a fast forward for a moment, in 1981, there is an official resolution of the party, which does say that the Cultural Revolution, which is Mao's own personal invention and decision, is a disaster to be condemned. And that is essentially a pretty clear statement that the party was repudiating one of his major policy decisions. But there's still a turmoil in 1976, 77, because we think of this as the era of Deng Xiaoping. We've mentioned his name, we're going to talk a lot about him. But it's worth remembering that Deng Xiaoping was not the man who took over at this time. The man who now essentially tapped on the shoulder, you know, pretty much almost literally from his deathbed, was a now almost forgotten figure called Hua Guofeng. He was, in fact, the only other person after Mao to have the title Chairman. So from Chairman Mao, they went to Chairman Hua. Now, on the one hand, he was someone who openly said that he would follow all of the policies of Mao. He was nicknamed the whateverist on the grounds that he said that whatever Mao has put forward, we will follow. But actually,

he was no fool. And very, very quickly afterwards, after coming to power, he launched a purge against the Gang of Four and the hard left. And the reason that Hua Guofeng and not the Gang of Four were clearly tapped on the shoulder by Mao was that Mao himself was worried that his legacy of the Cultural Revolution wouldn't carry on. That was clearly in his mind. But he was also pragmatic enough to realize that the people who actually were behind the most radical policies probably could not sustain power and in the end, would fall under the weight of their own contradictions. They would collapse. And for that reason, his very, very last act was to tap someone a bit more pragmatic in the shape of Hua Guofeng. And that's why the trajectory of Chinese politics began to move in a more moderate direction. So he gives, he scrolls a few lines on a scrap of paper Mao does to Hua Guofeng. Go slowly, don't rush, act according to past directions. He did. He added another line, or was supposed to sort of mutter the line, which I quite often use when making administrative decisions in the college here in Oxford, which is if you're in charge of doing this, I'm at ease with it. I'm fine with it. And what he meant by that in this case, which I hasten to add is not what I mean when I'm doing this in my college, is you need to go out now and arrest a whole bunch of people who are following the wrong policy. In other words, he was basically giving the blessing to Hua Guofeng that he, along with various people, a man named Wang Dongxin, who was essentially head of security apparatus amongst the top leadership, should go and essentially launch the next phase of Chinese history, which would involve the deposing and arrest of the Gang of Four and the move instead to a relatively more moderate set of policies, which would quite soon lead to the rise of Deng Xiaoping. Well, now that you've mentioned him, let's bring him on to centre stage. So Deng Xiaoping, he has been, I mean, he's already quite an old man. I mean, this is quite a gerontocratic system, isn't it? And he has been there, he's born in Sichuan, and he has been there at all the key moments, often at Maosai, I think, Rana, that's right, isn't it? Give us some sense of him as a personality and his background and his record up to this point, because it's a fascinating story. Well, first of all, Dominic put numbers on it. He was, well, in 1977, when this, you know, 76, 77, when the story really begins to take off, he was 73 years old. So compared, let's say, to the President of the United States, he was just a strip playing, it's fair to say. But although he was 73 years old, rather like the President of the United States, he appeared to have lost none of his energy. He'd been born in Sichuan province. Now, many people will know Sichuan by name, at least because of the fantastic fiery food that comes from that area. But it's worth noting that it's also an area that's known for the fireiness of its politics. It's always been quite a radical part of China. It's down in the far southwest, and it's always been a bit separated from the big capital cities of the eastern seaboard or the eastern region, Beijing, Nanjing, and so forth, which has let people get on a bit with their own type of politics and society there. Don Xiaoping was not born into poverty. He was born into a peasant family in a broad sense group. It was quite a rich peasant family. I think his family house had 17 rooms. I don't know what kind of mansions you guys live in, but I have to say, if I had 17 rooms, I'd be doing extremely well. I'd love 17 rooms. Yes, indeed. I think, to be fair, probably, the mortgage rates in early 20th century China were a little more reasonable than they are in late 21st century Britain. But he basically found himself as part of this traditional rich peasant background. And actually, he got an education learning both the Chinese classics, but also the new

modern subjects that were becoming very widespread. Remember, the year that he was born, 1904, was exactly the same year that China's Qing dynasty, the last dynasty, finally abolished the traditional imperial exams, which for about 1,000 years had been taken as the gateway to rising up in the bureaucracy. And after 1,000 years, that whole system was basically swept away with the stroke of a pen. So Don Xiaoping is literally born in the first generation of students who were in the next generation who would study modern studies, languages, science and so forth. And he was inspired enough, actually, by 1920 to head out to France, where he took part in a work study program. He became very interested in radical politics, which is also buzzing in a big way in much of China at that time. Bearing them in 1921 is the founding year of the Chinese Communist Party. So it's all happening at this time. Does he learn French? Not very well. Not very well. He has a go, but in the end, Don Xiaoping had many skills as well as many flaws, but learning foreign languages wasn't really one of them. He did, while he was in France, develop a deep love for croissant. And it has to be said, fast forwarding just for a moment, when he finally gets back to Europe as top leader in the 70s and 80s, he makes sure that the croissant supply is restarted so that he can keep up with those. So he does learn something from French. He also learns about what he saw as the horrific conditions of ordinary workers in Europe. And this inspires him yet further, again, under Communist Party and common turn influence, to develop his knowledge. So he ends up at, I think, the university with the most magnificent name in the history of universities, the Moscow-based University of the Toilers of the East. I mean, it's a great name. As someone pointed out, I think it was actually the historian Philip Snow, if you call it the Central University of the Toilers of the East, you can abbreviate it to Qt. So he attended Qt. It wasn't a very Qt place, I have to say, pretty hard line. But all of this meant that overseas experience, which Mao never had, of course, Mao only ever traveled overseas twice to visit Stalin, as it happened. He read widely, but he never went to France, never went to Britain. So Don had that European experience. But he also found himself really learning Marxism in a hardcore sort of way in Moscow in the 1920s. That brings him back to China. And then at that point, he becomes part of the extraordinary underground Communist movement. He was on the Long March in the 1930s, 1934 to 1935, that journey that meant that under essentially persecution from the nationalist government of China at the time, under Chiang Kai-shek, they're forced to march to the interior of China. Remember, this is the Long March that really sorts the absolute hardcore diamond hard center of the Communist Revolutionary Movement. The people who survive that, you know, thousands and thousands of miles of marching through internal China are really the purest of the pure in terms of the revolutionary hierarchy. And then he essentially becomes part of that movement. He is a major military figure. It's often forgotten that he was actually a military strategist of some skill in the Civil War against the Nationalists in the late 1940s. Mao, of course, conquers the mainland along with his Communist allies, his Communist comrades, 1949. And in the years following that, Deng is a big, big right-hand man to Mao in terms of his period and power. This gives you an indication of what happens later. In the 1950s, as they undertake land reform, which is basically the redistribution of land and the brutal killing of many, you know, hundreds of thousands of landlords in China, Mao has to tell Deng Xiaoping in the 1950s to stop killing so many people because he's killing so many. So the idea that Mao is the sort of supremely violent character

compared to Deng, you know, that the story is a bit different if you look at the wider trajectory. And then finally, taking it through the Cultural Revolution period, Deng's 1960s, taking us up to, you know, the death of Mao, is a period of up and down. He is at the beginning an absolutely hardline supporter of the Cultural Revolution, the idea that he was, you know, some sort of dissenter as it was never the case. But he was under suspicion because in the early 1960s, he had been involved along with another top leader, Liu Xiaogi, in bringing back a form of limited capitalism to China after the disaster of the Great Leap Forward. 1958 to 62, a horrific famine caused by a deeply misjudged and frankly delusional economic policy about growing grain that had gone horribly wrong and starved, you know, tens of millions of peasants to death. So Deng Xiaoping and Liu Xiaogi become the moderates at this point. A little like Lenin, with the new economic policy of the 20s, they bring in a bit more capitalism. It does revive the economy, but Mao never entirely forgave him for having abandoned socialism. And so when it comes to the middle of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping is persecuted by Mao. His son, Deng Pufang, is famously captured by red guards and thrown out of a window and crippled for life, is in a wheelchair for the rest of his rest of his life. And Deng Xiaoping becomes a persona non grata, essentially purged from the leadership by the midpoint of the Cultural Revolution. He's briefly brought back in the early 1970s, but then is purged again in 1976. And so he's a figure who is very much an absolute servant of the Chinese Communist Party. He's often said that the only emotion he ever showed, the only real love he showed at the most deep level was for the revolution, not for his family. But at the same time, someone willing to experiment, willing to be pragmatic in a way that Mao really wasn't in quite the same sort of way, so a deeply enigmatic character.

But, Rana, presumably the death of Mao, even if you're not condemning Mao personally, does offer scope for experimentation, because you can blame the people who've been purged and cast them as the equivalent of the king's evil advisors. So you can do things differently to Mao by saying Mao would have wanted to do this. It was the Gang of Four, whatever, who prevented us from doing it.

Absolutely right. And if you think about the long piece from Deng that Dominic read out at the beginning of the conversation, there's one particular phrase in there that struck me, as you said it, which is the phrase, opposed book worship. Now, this is a direct translation of one of Mao's most famous essays, Fandui Bunbundrui, literally opposed bookism. So in other words, opposed the idea that you can learn everything you need to know from books. And this is brilliant on Deng Xiaoping's part as a piece of propaganda, because what he does is take one of Mao's most famous sayings, so you couldn't in any way stand against the hierarchy or the origins of that particular statement. But Deng is using it in a very different way. When he says you can't just have book worship, Mao almost meant that you had to sort of abandon the idea of books altogether, because the Cultural Revolution obviously was about being read rather than being expert. Instead, what Deng Xiaoping means is that actually you have to be pragmatic. You can't just read, for instance, books of Marxism, Leninism, and expect you will know everything that comes from those. Instead, maybe you need books, but they have to be books about science, technology, foreign languages, or economics, or economics, absolutely. And that is the way in which he could constantly take Mao's sayings and turn them towards a very different sort of communism that he would, of course,

be associated with. How does he go from being on the fringes, having just been purged yet again, to overcoming Hua and becoming the paramount leader? So, I mean, there's only two years between Mao's death and that speech that I read out at the beginning, which was 1978. So how does this person who's always been a servant become the master? Between 1975 and 1977, you see one of the most astonishing turnarounds that has ever happened in global politics or modern history, I would say,

and that is Deng Xiaoping moving from being essentially a man who has been cast into, well, not out of darkness, but certainly the far reaches of the Chinese countryside by his political enemies, by the Gang of Four, the radical left, Madame Mao, Jiang Qing, and the other three, to someone who essentially is the ruler of all China. And essentially, it comes from a strange sort of dynamic that happens between the interim leader, Wang Guofeng, who of course didn't think of himself as the interim leader, but rapidly became so, and Deng Xiaoping's wider connections.

Because essentially, Wang Guofeng did what Deng and the other moderates in the leadership needed

him to do, which was to get rid of the most radical elements, the cultural revolution elements of the Gang of Four. But then Deng started to use his very, very deep web of connection within the Chinese Communist Party to actually start to ease Hua out of office. The army was one of the points of connection that Deng had, but it was just one. So remember I said briefly before that Deng Xiaoping

was actually a brilliant military commander in the Civil War of 1946 to 1949. And that gave him credibility. Someone who was actually, we know from our own societies, when someone has actually had deep and important experience in strategy and combat and has actually risked their own lives on the frontline, they are taken seriously by the armed forces. And Deng Xiaoping, going to those military leaders and saying, look, actually, I think we need to move on, was very powerful in terms of being able to pressure someone like Wang Guofeng, who didn't quite come from that sort of background. In addition, I mean, the Chinese Communist Party is many things. But I think over the course of its entire century of existence, you have to think of it as a network. In that sense, it's no different from, oh, I don't know, British politicians going to Oxford, let's say, you know, in other words, a set of understandings, a sort of anthropology that goes beyond just what's on a piece of paper. And in this case, of course, there are many people who were members of the Chinese Communist Party, millions and millions of them really.

But only very few like Deng Xiaoping had had the long standing connections with the Soviet Union, with other comrades who had shivered, you know, in being sort of aerated by the Japanese or by the Nationalists. In other words, have the kind of experience of being socialized into what it meant to be a revolutionary. And that proved to be a very powerful set of levers to pull in 1975, 1976, 77, when Deng was looking to rise to the top again. Essentially, what happened was that Hua Guofeng, having got to the top leadership because Mao had tapped him on the shoulder, once Mao had died, found that actually Deng Xiaoping's people were all around him. He was surrounded by people who weren't on his side. And in some ways, very wisely, unlike some other top leaders we could name, he decided that discretion would be a better part of valor.

He essentially stepped back, not entirely willingly, but fairly peacefully. He didn't try and launch a counter coup. And actually, it paid off because Deng Xiaoping, and again, it was a sign of how politics were going to change at least for a while, didn't kill him, didn't purge him, didn't arrest him, didn't send them out to the countryside, gave him a nice sort

of syndicate job. And actually, all the way into the early 2000s, he was alive and well, he used to come to the Politburo, basically sit at the back and have a bit of a nap. And he was allowed to go into a gentle retirement, which is not something that Chinese communist leaders had really allowed to happen during the previous 50 years.

So it was also a sign on Deng Xiaoping's part that he would be ruthless about getting power, but he would not be ruthless with the victims of his power as long as they played the game. Okay, well, that's brilliant, Rana. So Deng is now essentially the ruler of China. And in the second half, we will see what he does with his power. And maybe for the first time on the Restless History, wham, will feature. So we'll be back in a few minutes.

Hello, welcome back to the Restless History. We are looking at the opening of China, the recovery of China from the time of Mao, and we are looking at Deng Xiaoping in particular, this incredibly decisive figure who, in the first half, our guest, Rana Mitter, described how he effectively became the ruler of China. And, Rana, what does Deng do with this power that he has accrued?

Put it as most simple, Tom. Deng Xiaoping used the power that took him to become China's paramount

leader, really essentially from 1977-78 onwards, to undertake the biggest economic experiment that I think has ever been taken in history, essentially for the quarter of the population of the globe, that's the population of China, of course, to essentially turn it from being a socialist command economy to becoming a country that combined the authoritarian top-down politics of a socialist

country with a remarkable experiment in actually very free market capitalism. And in doing that, as it turned out, because of course it's an experiment they could have known at the time, they launched one of the biggest economic booms that has ever been seen in history and set China on the path to where it is today, the world's second biggest economy with at least some chance potentially becoming the biggest in the world in the next 10 years or so. So that was really the path that Deng Xiaoping set China on.

We did a podcast about Mikhail Gorbachev when we were talking about how much Gorbachev was influenced by Lenin and his belief that you had to get back to the original principles of the revolution, he had volumes of Lenin by his bedside, all this kind of thing. How much is Deng doing the same thing? Because obviously there's some similarities with Lenin's new economic policy or perceived similarities. How much is he trying to get back to what he sees as an original sort of authentic spirit of true communism without the corruption and the feuding and the factionalism of the intervening decades?

Deng Xiaoping, I think, is trying to do two things simultaneously during this period.

One is to make sure that the absolute rule of the Chinese Communist Party is not in any way challenged. So any idea that he was trying to move China towards a more liberal, pluralist democratic system in the sense that you get in Germany or Japan or somewhere like that is not the case. But I think that he was much, much more pragmatic when it came to the idea of what economics might mean. And first of all, he was always very frank, at least in the conversations that have been transcribed that have come to us, that he himself did not claim to be an economic expert. He left it to others, he knew what was going on. And I think actually you can see the range of economic thinking that influenced Deng and the other top leaders during this period by the range of people who were invited to come and talk about it. And the best source for this

is the fantastic book *Unlikely Partners* by Julian DeWerts, who is a historian who has looked at the different economic models that Deng and also his fellow Politburo members, such as Charles Young, experimented with. So yes, they did look a great deal at what socialist economics might mean. But they invited Milton Friedman to visit China. And actually, I have to say that what he said to the party school, the Communist Party School was so outrageous from their point of view that they actually marched to his hotel room and besieged him and rose Friedman there and kind of read them a lecture on socialist economics and what it meant. Also British social democratic figures like Alec Cancross were invited as well. But probably the most influential figure, or at least amongst the most influential figures, were the ones who are a bit forgotten now, who were the people who were trying to reform Eastern European communist economics, people like Janusz Kornai from Hungary. You might remember there was a phrase in the late Cold War,

goulash communism, which was very much about trying to combine aspects of market economics with a continued communist authority. Because of course, at that point, people still didn't realize that 1989 would mean the fall of the Berlin Wall and the complete destruction of that system. So the Chinese, don't forget, in the late Cold War, were playing with a system where they could look at America, fairly capitalist in red and tooth and claw, a Soviet Union which they knew perfectly well seemed to be decaying in all sorts of ways, even while Gorbachev was trying to revive it. And that sort of middle way, which for them was a sort of Eastern European reformist communism,

and that I think is the set of mixtures that Deng Xiaoping and those around him were trying to juggle and balance. Tom said right at the beginning of the show, we're looking at how much, where this comes from, how much it's rooted in Chinese deep history. Is Deng conscious of being the heir to a pre-communist past, first of all, or is he still completely trapped by the communist way of thinking that the revolution was kind of year zero, as it were? And secondly, how much are they conscious of China being this vast reservoir of untapped potential, which is obviously not the case, even when you're looking at a country that turns out to be reasonably successful, like Hungary or Poland or some other, and China is a completely different order. So how much is he conscious of that? He's very conscious of it, because one of the things that we know was happening even in the last years of the Cultural Revolution was economic experimentation with new markets, but also new incentives for the labor force. And there is a combination here, as it turns out for China, a very helpful one, of changes in state direction in terms of what the markets are allowed to do and what has to be handed over under the state command economy, and also the incentives given to peasants, to workers, to small enterprises, in terms of being able to create a new sort of private sector-driven economy as well.

And in doing that, he and the other members of the leadership are very much aware that the size of China's labor force is immensely important as part of that. It's worth noting that one of the elements of that, which again has slightly been underplayed, is of course the importance of women workers, because if you think about one of the images that perhaps you associate more than anything

else with China's economic experimentation during that period, what sometimes we call the economic

miracle, the building of factories which then become a workshop to the world, the made in China phenomenon, when you look at pictures of who's working in those factories in the 70s and 80s,

it's very frequently young women in their late teens, early 20s, they're coming out from the countryside. They are part of that vast, not exactly untapped, but undertapped workforce that finds new opportunities. On the one hand, the conditions that they find are deeply, deeply exploitative. Even today, Chinese factories are not always particularly pleasant places to work and can be very dangerous, but they also provide a new phenomenon of women who are able to actually earn in their own right, become part of the labor force in their own right. And you can see the origins there of something which actually is now very noticeable in China, which is a distinct female labor force. And that of course has also been part of that wider communist and socialist tradition. Although it's honored as much in the breach as in the observance, it's clear that the emancipation of women, which means in the labor market as much as anywhere else, was always part of the Chinese communist agenda. And you could argue that the women being brought into the factories at that time were one aspect of that communist legacy, which was being put into actual operation at that time. Rana, you mentioned how China becomes the workshop of the world. To be the workshop of the world, you have to be open to the world, which of course, in the 60s, under the Contravolution, China absolutely hadn't been. I guess the paradigmatic image of that process of opening up is down going to America, going to a radio, wearing a Stetson. But am I right that actually one of the kind of the key figures in this process, I mentioned Wham. This is the man who invites Wham, George Michael and Andrew Ridgely, to tour China. He's a guy called Zhao Jiang, and he's very important culturally, but also economically in liberalizing and opening up China. So how important do you think he is to this story? Zhao Jiang is almost the missing element to the story of China's economic modernization and globalization in the 1980s. He was essentially, you might almost call him the prime minister of China during the middle of the 1980s, 87 to 89. He was the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, and that's a more accurate way to put it. But he was the most radical economic liberalizer, and to some extent political liberalizer during that period as well. He was very, very close to Deng Xiaoping, because Deng Xiaoping, like Mao, had to deal with different factions within the party at that time. And there was, it's worth noting, a very considerable, more conservative economic faction, conservative in the terms of not wanting to move away from the command economy too much. Figures like Chen Yun sat in that particular position. So it's not as if Deng Xiaoping had everything his own way. And he needed relative liberals, both politically and economically, like Hu Yabang, who was the general secretary at the beginning of the 1980s, and he fell from power and then was replaced by Zhao Jiang. Zhao Jiang essentially sat there as the figure who perhaps more than any other wanted to move towards marketization and privatization of large parts of the Chinese economy, as well as also opening up a politics which was not democratic in the sense that we'd understand it in the western world, but nonetheless wanted a more open civil society, more freedom to criticize the government and the press, and also allowed more devolution of power to localities as well. So that legacy became tremendously central to the way in which

the Chinese economic reforms happened during that time. And again, I refer you to the historian Julian Goertz, whose most recent book, *Never Turn Back*, is a biography of Zhao Jiang, essentially putting him back into the Deng Xiaoping story. So don't get me wrong. Without Deng Xiaoping, he, we would not have had the overall reforms. He was definitely the man in charge. He was definitely the guy who set the direction of travel. But Zhao Jiang is the implementer, the person who actually until 1989 was putting his foot on the accelerator of economic reform and opening up to markets in America and elsewhere, as well as actually looking at areas like the civilian and military sections of the Chinese economy could interact with each other more successfully, another element which of course has some relevance in the present day. So the obvious contrast is with what happens in the Soviet Union, where the reform doesn't work and actually destroys the state. I've seen it argued that one reason that it works in China and not in the Soviet Union is that in China, often the reforms are from the bottom up, as it were. They're not just being driven by people sitting around a kind of committee table in the capital city, dictating to the provinces or surprising local elites with reforms that may actually dissipate the local elites, power the local elites don't like them. Is that right? Are some of these reforms being driven out by what's going on out in the countryside and individual localities or provinces or towns or whatever? Yes, absolutely. One of the lifeless debates at the moment in this particular field of academic research on China is how much the economic growth of that period was essentially a grassroots phenomenon and how much was directed by the state. And I think it's clear that you have to give some level of credit to both on one hand. It's clear that the Chinese peasants had in the countryside a level of entrepreneurship in terms of wanting to grow crops and sell it on the market that was quite different from what seemed to be going on in most of Russia at that time, where the social system had operated for a much longer basis in a sense. But also, it's fair to say that Deng Xiaoping and the other leaders who essentially implemented major reforms in terms of creating, for instance, the ability for those markets to operate, markets, despite what some neoliberals might tell you, don't simply emerge out of nowhere. As I think one of the great reformers of Hong Kong, John Cooper Thwait, I think, put it, it takes an awful lot of government effort to create *laissez-faire*. And in this case, that was clearly the case that the government spent a great deal of time working out how to change everything from tax incentives to essentially creating marketing networks, transport infrastructure and so forth that would allow marketing to take place. So both absolutely had a role. But I think it might be notable to, again, take a Chinese term, which was still used today, but very common at the time, to describe how the Chinese themselves thought of entrepreneurship at this time. They called it *Xia Hai*. That literally means jumping into the sea. And I think that's a very powerful metaphor because it suggests both something that's exhilarating and potentially, you know, could lead to all sorts of opportunities, but it's also dangerous. And I think the understanding that this actual experiment was not something that was guaranteed success was understood at the time. That metaphor actually expresses that quite well. But nonetheless, as it turned out, a combination of everything from the government implementing so-called special economic zones where lots of people flocked because they knew that the conditions for actually doing this kind of

entrepreneurship work were much better, to the government basically also sort of getting back and basically saying, well, technically, you know, these people are breaking this tax law or they're probably violating this regulation. But look, let's just leave it for the moment. It's sometimes slightly jokingly pointed out as one of the reasons why India didn't take off at the same time because the same size of market, huge entrepreneurship. But sometimes people say that essentially India had too much red tape on the economy and China had maybe not enough. But the short-term effect certainly in China was to let the economy essentially go rip. And in the 1980s, we saw the effect of that in terms of the rapid growth that was seen in China's domestic market and all sorts of capacity to export to the rest of the world. Rana, you mentioned this idea of jumping into the sea as an important metaphor in this period. It's also the theme, isn't it, of an incredibly influential TV series in English River Elegy, which casts Chinese civilization, which had grown up around the Yellow River, as the Yellow River itself is, what is it? The phrase, it's kind of seven parts mud and one part water. And that this is clogged up, that it's polluted, that the vital thing is to get out into the blue open oceans that lie beyond the Yellow River, in other words, to join the western world almost. And I mean, it's incredible that this should be put on TV. And I guess the very fact that this is screened, testifies to the way in which you can't really have economic well, or can you? I mean, this is a great question about China. But the presumption is in the 80s that if you're having economic liberalization, you have to have cultural liberalization as well. Absolutely. I have written, actually, in my book, A Better Revolution, which you kindly mentioned, and would stick by it, that this maybe is the most important television series that's ever been broadcast in any country. It was seen by possibly 100 million or more viewers. It's only ever shown twice in the summer of 1988. And it's a very odd thing. It's sort of a documentary, but it's also a commentary. It brought together some of China's brightest liberal intellectuals talking about how they had to essentially abandon the shibboleths of the past. It was very daring. They talked about casting out the false peasant emperor. And that was Mao. I mean, to talk about that on national Chinese TV in 1988 was astonishing. And instead, talked about embracing the blue ocean, meaning, of course, the United States, which of course, at that point, was essentially a tacit ally. And also Hong Kong? Yes, there was also an interest in Hong Kong as a sort of intraplural place as well. And, you know, but the wider world and more generally, in other words, China opening up to embrace the outside world, the metaphor that was used was that the river, the Yellow River, which was a violent, inward looking force, had to be abandoned in favor of jumping into the sea of the deep blue ocean. And we should say that Zhao Ziyang, the prime minister, the general secretary of the party who we mentioned, the liberalizer in economics, appears in episode six, not for very long, but you do see him, which was an indication that he had essentially given tacit support. We now know that he and other allies argued very hard in the Politburo for a repeat showing of this TV series, whereas the more conservative members were deeply against it. And a couple of years later, for reasons we'll discuss, of course, in 1989, it was banned. Right, because that comes out in 1988. And of course, what happens in 1989 is the great crisis point for Deng's experiment, which is the series of events that culminates in the terrible massacre in Tiananmen Square. So do you see the confrontation that happens there? I mean, most vividly and famously exemplified by the unknown man with his shopping bag standing in front of the line of tanks in Tiananmen Square. Do you see that as something that had to happen

that was kind of hard-baked into the process of reforms being carried out in China in the 80s? No, I don't think there was anything inevitable about 1989. And the fact that you had relative liberals in the leadership, Hu Yabang, I've mentioned, he was eventually kicked out, and Zhang Ziyang shows that there were alternative pathways that were available. Just briefly, it's worth noting that the background to 1989, of course, was partly about the desire for greater political openness, inspired, of course, by the visit of Gorbachev, who Dominic has mentioned a couple of times, he was visiting Beijing in the spring of that year. And that was one of the triggers for the demonstrations. But in addition, actually, the economic situation, I've mentioned the kind of go-go economy. Well, one of the products was inflation. And huge inflation, which basically was making it harder to live on official salaries, was a reason that many of those middle-class protesters, the students and others, came out onto the streets because they actually literally couldn't afford to keep their day-to-day lives going. And all of that came together with essentially an attempt to mediate on the part of the more liberal parts of the leadership, including Zhang Ziyang. Li Peng, who became the prime minister and much more hard-line, wanted to basically shut down these demonstrations. But it's worth noting that different parts of China had different reactions. Shanghai, along with other cities, also had major demonstrations. But the mayor of Shanghai, the party chief at the time, a man named Jiang Zemin, who would go on the

course to become China's president, actually managed to calm the demonstrations down without a violent confrontation. So clearly, it could be done. One of the reasons in the end that Beijing suffered the tragedy of the massacre of the workers and students in June 1989, June the 3rd and 4th, was that the battles, the quarrels within the top leadership, became almost insoluble. And essentially, Deng Xiaoping, in the end, came down on the side of saying he was going to back the hardliners, and they would send in tanks, they would send in soldiers, and they would bring these demonstrations to an end. And as a result, Zhang Ziyang, the more liberal general secretary, was arrested and basically spent the next 16 years of his life until he died playing golf in exile, never allowed to hold a political post again. So Deng Xiaoping had his choices and made them, but they were not inevitable. And how much has Deng influenced the fact that he ends up siding

with the hardliners? And he says, okay, shut this thing down no matter what it takes in Beijing. How much has he influenced by what's happening in Eastern Europe? And what he can see is clearly going to unfold in the Soviet Union. So how much is he thinking, well, they've completely lost control of the political process there. I'm not going to make the same mistake.

He's not entirely influenced by that, because we just remember the sequencing.

The fourth of June 1989, the day that the tanks moved into central Beijing and the civilians were killed, is the same date as the first mostly free elections in Poland, which then would go on to become part of a wave of changes over the summer and autumn of 1989. But that wasn't seen at the

time. The time Poland was seen as a slightly daring experiment in Eastern Europe. And at that point, East Germans and others didn't think that they were vulnerable. So there wasn't awareness, certainly we now know in the Politburo, awareness of Gorbachev and these reforms, whether they were really going to work out. But the vast majority of the discussion was internal. It was much more to do with actually the memory of the Cultural Revolution. This was the leadership group who just 15 years before had been coming out of the aftermath of the greatest turmoil they

had ever seen. Remember Deng Xiaoping's son, as I said, was crippled for life as a result. And seeing these demonstrators in the street made them think we cannot allow that chaos to happen again. Completely misleading interpretation, but nonetheless, their interpretation. Because it's happening in Tiananmen Square, which had been the great kind of place where people would come and wave mouths with a red book and everything. I mean, is that one of the reasons

why it happens in Tiananmen Square in Beijing in a way that it doesn't happen elsewhere, because of the centrality of the location? Yes. Tiananmen Square is the absolute symbolic and political center of China with the Forbidden City, of course, there. Don't forget, also, it was the only place that had all those foreign television crews and reporters, which is why demonstrators remained there in a way that they didn't in other cities.

But it's also worth remembering that the height of the demonstrations in about May, April May, of up to a million people had dwindled. We're talking about a few thousands were still in the square by that stage, but that was the final group that in the end didn't want to move on.

And that was the group against whom Deng Xiaoping sent the tanks.

And so in the aftermath of that, is it fair to say that Deng becomes a slightly more conservative figure, more wary of reform? Or is there a basic continuity between Deng in the late 70s and early 80s, right through to the end of his tenure as the paramount leader?

I think it's more interesting than that in a sense, Dominic, because what you see in the last years of Deng Xiaoping's rule is a combination absolutely of a more hard-line political stance.

And he moves certainly in the early 90s towards more liberalism and openness are frozen, not least because conservatives and leadership, people like Chen Yun and Li Peng said, she go to Deng Xiaoping

and say, look what you did. We had a near death experience in the party. But what it also does, although he has to keep a bit quiet about it for a couple of years, is make Deng Xiaoping absolutely determined that the economic liberalization is not going to be derailed. In other words, he sacrifices the freedom at that time to have any major political changes, which are not tenable at that point from his point of view, to saying, but I'm not going to let the economic reforms die. And in 1992, just three years later, he undertakes what becomes known as the Nanxun, the Southern tour. It's a term that's used in classical Chinese to mean the tour of the emperor, to the south of China, to the special economic zones where the free market zones have been set up, where economic growth is once again pumping, where the exports are being produced for the rest of the world and makes it clear using his last sort of credit and its huge credit with the wider public, as well as with the Politburo, to say, we may crack down politically, but the economic changes are not going to end. And basically the downturn in economic liberalization, which had happened between about 1989 and 1992, it returns to forward gear. And then again, we see what we now know

was an astonishing period of growth in the 1990s and 2000s, in which various points China posted something like a 10% economic growth rate every year. So that was Deng Xiaoping's last legacy to the Chinese economy, that tour of the south of China in 1992.

So, Rana, in Tiananmen Square, Xiaoyang, who then gets Persian taken off to play golf, his last appearance, he meets with some students and he has this famous line,

unlike you, he tells the students, we are already old and do not matter. And then he bows before them

and the students begin to applaud. And then that's the last time he's kind of seen in public, as a Chinese official. When you look at Deng, Deng was an old, old man. I mean, he was, he's about 130 by the time he dies. I mean, he kind of looks like Yoda by the very kind of wizened old man. Indeed. I think he clocked him about a healthy 94 anyway, so privatized style, 94. But you could argue that he is a profoundly revolutionary figure. And so he really does matter. Absolutely. One of Deng Xiaoping's nicknames in life was the steel mill. In other words, people said that he was an unbounded source of, in his case, political energy and harder nails. He was someone who knew what he wanted and just would not stop going. And in the end, what he wanted was actually what all Chinese leaders, communists and non-communists have wanted, which is China to be a kind of powerful state in the world, to have a prosperous society that can keep its people going. And the way that he chose to exemplify that was through taking a whole variety of political strands, something from the socialist tradition, which he absolutely adhered to to his last days, something from the capitalist world that he felt could be effective, leading to that famous statement. We should put it in there that, you know, he was talking about different types of economic system. And it's supposed to have said, it doesn't matter if a cat is a black cat or a white cat. As long as it catches mice, it's a good cat. You know, that is a statement of a very pragmatic sort of ideological figure. And that has to be contrasted with the fact that when it came to anything that might look like the downfall of the system, he was not Gorbachev. He was the man who in the end decided that he would use coercive violence and did use coercive violence whenever he felt the system was threatened. And 1989 is one example of that. There's just one brief one that it's worth mentioning because people tend to remember it less. It happened earlier in 1975 when during one of his brief periods in power and the Cultural Revolution, a little village called them Shadyan. And there was basically a siege there. And he sent in troops, which actually led to the deaths of 1600 people, including 300 children and elderly people were basically killed during that confrontation. And he did that in that case, because the motivation was the same, the idea that anyone who stands against the Chinese Communist Party has to essentially pay the price. So for those who are willing to pay the price like Huaguo Feng, he could be quite merciful. But his economic willingness to be pragmatic was never matched with the idea that that pragmatism could allow the Chinese Communist system in any way to fall apart or be eroded. And that, I think, sums up Deng Xiaoping. Well, Rana, that was absolutely wonderful, dare I say, a tour de force. Tom and I often debate on this podcast how much individual politicians, how much individual leaders matter. But I think even I, because I normally poo poo them, I think you have to concede sometimes that single individuals can make a massive difference. And Deng is certainly one of them. And you are one of them on this podcast, Rana. Isn't he, Tom? Yes. Bucking our trend to Marxist history. I will, in this particular case, point out that as long as the two of you are in charge, my heart is definitely at ease. Oh, that's good. Well, we see ourselves very much as the kind of great structural forces, Rana, in this podcast. We're the helmsmen of the revolution. Right. But you're the Xiaoyang, who we're not going to get rid of and retire. Well, in that case, I will say that this counts as a perfect example of a Maoist

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non-antagonistic contradiction. Wonderful. Splendid.

The lessons of history. Rana, thank you so much. And thank you, everyone, for listening.

And we'll be back very soon, whether it will be Marxist history or whether it will be Dominic's

Newfound Enthusiasm for Great Man history, we will see. But we will be back. Bye-bye.

Goodbye and thanks.