

Interview with Fred Engst in late December, 2022 on Key Lessons of the Cultural Revolution

*Fred Engst talks in December 2022 about some key topics about the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, starting with a description of the factional struggle in the Shanghai Diesel Generator Factory in 1966 to 1967 that is recounted in detail in Li Xun's book, *Wenge zaofan niandai: Shanghai wenge yundong shigao* 文革造反年代: 上海文革运动史稿 (The age of revolutionary rebellion: A history of Shanghai's Cultural Revolution movement), 2 vols. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2015, a book of great value to understanding the GPCR though not as of yet translated. For inquiries about the interview, please contact Wengetranslators@protonmail.com.*

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The Diesel Factory Struggle in Shanghai

Abbie Moses 00:15

Fred was nicely describing the background of the Shanghai struggle and the Wuhan struggle and many details. And I hope he'll engage us and be generous to repeat some of them here. And I'm sure people who listen to this will appreciate it too. So we're starting off back in Shanghai, and the nature of

the Shanghai struggle, maybe we should start with the factory, the diesel generator factory. And talk about that.

Fred Engst 00:53

Well, the factional struggle in that diesel factory has a lot to do with the composition of the workers in there. They're the majority faction, tend to be mostly Shanghainese, and the minority faction tend to be more people from outside Shanghai, and also, the majority faction tend to have local technicians, intellectuals, and things like that. Whereas the minority faction tend to be people who left the Army or the Navy and came to the factory [to] become shop, party secretaries, things like that, political appointees, and less technical. This cannot be absolute. But that's sort of the beginning differences [that lay behind] their opinion about the old party manager, who is no longer in the factory, who left in late '65.

Abbie Moses 02:49

So even before the Cultural Revolution he left.

Fred Engst 02:53

Yeah, and this guy used to be underground before liberation, but then he left the party, left the party for whatever reason, and then after the revolution, he joined the party again

Abbie Moses 03:11

Well, that happens a lot with members of the underground they lose contact...

Fred Engst 03:15

or whatever reason. So this is [a] mark [on] his history and so some people dissatisfied with his leadership tend to grab this as something [to] hold him accountable ... making a fuss about it. But whereas this guy seems to be a very down to earth manager, always on the shop, never in the office and is always down to earth. Like he knows every shop, every place and he's really a very good manager in that sense ... he always is working with the workers solving the problems and doing whatever so

Abbie Moses 04:06

He did work alongside the workers?.

Fred Engst 04:08

Well, he's a manager so he cannot be always be working, he has to go to different places. He would be called at different places. There's a problem here, there's a problem there. He's very busy alright, but he devoted his time. This is like a workaholic. He's like a workaholic. Okay. So the Cultural Revolution began, and people always can find some reasons for good or for bad. So there's how the faction started. But then they start escalating. And eventually, the majority faction using violence, and fistfights, kicked the minority out of the factory.

Abbie Moses 04:51

They occupied the factory.

Fred Engst 04:56

Kicked the minority out of the factory, the majority, right, the majority kick them out. already, it's like, one faction is close to 4000 the other faction is a little bit over 3000. It's like, half the factory is gone [laughs]. And so then the city sent the local police unarmed, like two dozen police went to the factory, reasoned with them not to do this stuff. And these police got locked up in the basement (laughs). And they're there for for a few days. And then the Red Guards and people from the country everywhere people all know about this factional fighting going on in the diesel factory. So they investigate and find out, talk to different factions [about] what's going on, write reports...

Abbie Moses 05:58

There were newspapers, like Red Guard newspapers, talking about it?

Fred Engst 06:01

Yes. It's all over the country. And then the neighbouring factory in the summer sent a group of people to try to stop the violence in that diesel factory. And during the argument one guy got killed.

Abbie Moses 06:17

by the way in the reports on the situation. Did the reports mention the merits of the old manager? Were they objective, do they talk about both sides of the struggle? Do you recall?

Fred Engst 06:29

all the people who during the Cultural Revolution, the people who went to the factory, felt that actually the minority are the real rebels, the majority you are defending the old party leadership. And so you should be the conservatives, but they call themselves rebels. And so, there was that kind of confusion.

Abbie Moses 06:53

So what I understand is that there was mass attention kind of on the side of the minority faction,

Fred: right. because they said you guys were trying to oppose the old management, right.

Abbie: How dialectical [were] the discussions in these reports, did it give some time to the other side to say, well, this faction believes this guy

Fred Engst 07:22

The Red Guards and the people outside were split. some support the minority some support a majority, it just like, like the whole Cultural Revolution it's split,

And so when the worker got killed who went there trying to stop the violence, the city revolutionary committee held a mass meeting in summer of '67, August 4, August 5.

Abbie Moses 08:07

The revolution committees were established when was it?

Fred Engst 08:09

January Storm ['67].

Abbie Moses 08:11

January Storm was first, then the Shanghai Commune and then was it February, March, they started the Revolutionary Committee?

Fred Engst 08:17

20 days later, 20 days later. They just changed the title. Still the same group of people just changed the name. Yeah. So alright, so throughout that spring and the summer, there are many campaigns, sending people there saying you got to stop this violence and everything, but it has no results. And so they become more and more violent.

Abbie Moses 08:50

So this was before the worker was killed or after

Fred Engst 08:53

Before. There were people going during March, February... May,

Abbie Moses 09:02

just to say, "hey you kicked out 3,000 people violently, this isn't how it's done.

Fred Engst 09:05

yes. That's not right (laughs). You cannot do this.

Abbie Moses 09:09

Even [just alone] to lose half their workforce...

Fred Engst 09:12

right. I mean there's no production going on. it just slowly keeps on crawling (laughs). And so. Then, the city finally had a mass meeting denouncing the violence in that diesel factory. That was the night of August 14, I think it was the night of August 4 or August 5, I can't remember. And so because the summer is so hot, they had the meeting at 10 o'clock at night. And then after people came giving speeches and denunciations and then the meetings over

Abbie Moses 09:50

Where did the meeting happen?

Fred Engst 09:52

I think the People's Square. Yeah, People's Square in Shanghai. And then in lots of factories, workers just didn't go home. The workers went to the diesel factory, tried to reason with them... 1000s of people Because the guy got killed they had this mass meeting. Right? So after the meeting people didn't just go home.

Abbie: They said "We got to resolve this."

Fred: "We got to find the killer. Who's the killer,? You gotta turn the killer to us." Yeah, so they just-- 1000s of people marched down to the diesel factory, and the diesel factory were holed-out and they prepared for a whole week or two weeks, I forgot I have to read the book a week or two weeks, they prepared enough diesel, fuel, enough grain, all the things, they were ready for a blockade for two

weeks or something like that. And so when all these workers marched to the diesel factory the workers holed-out in the diesel factory, they stand atop the building, they have these huge bolts from these ships, each one weighs about a half pound.

Abbie Moses 11:23

It's kind of a miracle, another guy didn't get killed, right?

Fred Engst 11:26

I know. I mean, really. They have these bolts, and they just throw it down into the people in the bottom who are totally unarmed. And so, so they couldn't get in, the gate was locked, they cannot get in. So then the workers from the neighbouring factory drove a big crane, these are all heavy industry, they throw a big crane over there and grab the gate and pull it over. And then a whole 1000 people marched in, and these holdouts end up in each building separately, and they fight their way. And finally on the rooftop, they surrendered. And by four or five o'clock in the morning, they surrendered. And so on the way out of the factory, they got the shit beat out of them, but nobody got killed.

Abbie Moses 12:20

Did the majority faction believe that they were carrying forth a revolutionary line were they trying to make connections with other factions elsewhere,

Fred Engst 12:35

the leader of the majority confessed later on. They know this is getting big. So there's no halfway we have to either go all the way or win. Or we could end up in jail.

Abbie Moses 12:52

So they're gonna have a path of no return.

Fred Engst 12:55

that is that is. So they just have to do that. And these leaders are graduates of Tsinghua University,

Abbie Moses 13:09

Were they rank and file workers? Or engineers?

Fred Engst 13:13

technicians.

Abbie Moses 13:15

And so they were putting that forward the same thing as the Tsinghua struggle at that point.

The Situation in Beijing Compared to Shanghai

Fred Engst 13:19

I know. Yeah, it's just like that. Yeah, it's so interesting. So interesting. And yeah. So that's what I find to be the most colourful, interesting chapter of the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai, just like anybody who have a theory about how to have a working class in control--how do you deal with a situation like this?

Abbie Moses 13:47

And you were saying that the wounds are not resolved easily, especially as someone gets killed, you said production was ended for about a year.

Fred Engst 13:55

Production stopped for almost a whole year and the anger and the wound is deep. And you can organise production, but you can just say, "Oh, you're from that faction. I remember. So I'm never gonna cooperate with you." So that it's really tough. It's really hard to heal that wound. Just like former Yugoslavia after that kind of war. The ratio of the ethnic tension. Today, Ukraine and the Russians, how are you going to mend that wound? It's going to be long lasting. So I mean, that's one story for the Cultural Revolution in Shanghai. Whereas Beijing is typically known for the student movement, and the student movement at the beginning is a very revolutionary, very uplifting, but then they end up in factional fighting. By '67 '68 cities Tsinghua split into two factions, each faction occupy one building and this engineering school. First they are just writing big character posters denouncing each other as revisionist, reactionary whatever. And they kidnap each other, put them in the basement as hostages and then start making homemade bombs and missiles, shooting at each other.

So Mao had to send 1000s of workers to dismantle their armed struggle. And same thing with Beijing University and other universities, practically all universities except the Aeronautical University never had a factional struggle. But the others all had a factional struggle.

Abbie Moses 16:14

Was it to some extent a tribute to the workers' ability to reason with the students and resolve that struggle?

Fred Engst 16:22

Beijing got resolved because of Mao and the leadership. So what I thought is that Shanghai is most interesting because of how the working class spontaneously formed the Workers' Headquarters, and that became the leader leading the Cultural Revolution--the workers do that. And in their spontaneous [struggle], they fought against economism, and where the [overthrown conservative] Shanghai leadership just disbanded the responsibility leading the whole chaos, and the workers just organised production, organised shipping organised trains, and so restored production, restored, ordered in Shanghai, and then [followed by] the January Storm, and then how they spontaneously overcome the factionalism. "If you do factional struggle, we take over you" (laughs). I mean, so in all these you can see Shanghai workers in their spontaneous way of doing things. It's not a vanguard party, telling them do something but they in their spontaneous way, the working class illustrates the consciousness and understanding of the working class.

Abbie Moses 17:57

As Lenin said there is spontaneity and then there is spontaneity, there is relative consciousness within spontaneity.

The Revolutionary Approach of Organising the Masses

Fred Engst 18:02

Right right. And how they fought against factionalism, because the tendency is once you become a rebel leader, and you want to keep it pure, and so when in the end of '66 when Mao supports the Workers' Headquarters, then all these people who are in this *chiwei dui* (Scarlet Guards) got dissolved, and they want to join the rebels, and a lot of people in the rebels say "no, you [must not] dilute our revolutionary fervour..." And Wang Hongwen fought with those leaders. I mean they argued and argued and banged on the tables and finally they come to consensus, "we have to let them in." See, that just shows you this understanding of "you don't fight just just make yourself pure, you want to unite." And that's so smart. It's not like they have been scheming. By doing that, the rebels have no opposition. So they were able to manage the city so much better, and then how they resolve the factions within the rebels. And because in the Anting Incident, there were three groups of workers one group when leaving Shanghai [the train] did not leave, one group in which the train ended up in Anting, [one group] the train took them to Suzhou, and so three groups, and they all had their own

leaders, just by pure accident, and the guy who led the people from Suzhou, he doesn't want to give up his leadership. So he wanted to form another Revolutionary Committee. So how Wang Hongwen resolved that was such genius. In the beginning people said "We should arrest him [the leader of the Suzhou group]." [Wang Hongwen said] "no, he has mass, he has a mass base. You don't do that." And then, so he talks over the campaign and eventually, he did arrest that guy. And there's no response.

Because he has no mass base, all he [the leader of the Suzhou group] does is obvious, just fighting for his own position. It's not about the working class. So you can see all the struggle over and over again, spontaneous, the people who are able to lead the struggle ... they have mass response. It's not like just, "I have the correct lines." But actually, you have a response from the people. So much in contrast to Wuhan.

Abbie Moses 20:56

Do you see importance of the working class leadership in Shanghai coming from the working class, or low level cadre positions, so that they were able to play the key role in Shanghai?

The Contrast in Wuhan

Fred Engst 21:08

But also just like, how his leadership position is not appointed from above, but through the struggle. Also through the correct approach he advocates is shown to be correct. That's how he built his reputation. Like in the Anting incident thousands of people, with almost 10,000 people. "Who are you?" Nobody can say "I am somebody." And so basically, that was so interesting, just like everybody, so fluidly, nobody knew each other, and so, it's through that that people gradually realise, oh, this is the way, the correct thing to do. So it's in such contrast to Wuhan, the workers in Wuhan is so much this turf mentality. And in Shanghai you just don't see that. You have it, but it's not that strong. Not dominating. Yeah.

So the Wuhan Cultural Revolution is both the student movement and the working class movement, [both] are very pronounced. And the two are linking together, influencing each other and petty bourgeois in the same way and reinforce each other. And so in the January Storm, one group of workers takes over the power. And other group says, "No, you didn't," and don't recognise them. And it is just because they didn't have anybody in a leadership position. So it's like, a split from the very beginning about who should be in the Revolutionary Committee, and students were the same way. So there's a lot of turf fighting, and then because the rebels are fighting each other, the conservatives are

able to launch a counter attack, and say, "Look, you guys claim to be revolutionary, look what you're doing." So the old party leadership and the military are able to organise these conservatives called the Baiwan Xiongshi (Million Heroes) with arms.

So the [conservative] party leadership organised these conservatives, using violence and using arms and kicked the rebels out of the factories and out of the schools. And kicked them out of the countryside. And so there's many violent conflicts with people dying, quite a few people died. And so the Central Committee sent quite a few groups to Wuhan trying to resolve this with no impact. Eventually, in the summer, Mao decided he wanted to go himself to Wuhan, and try to resolve that. And so before he got there, Wang Li from the Party Cultural Revolution Group had been there, and the government's Ministry of Public Security. Xie Fuzhi, went to Wuhan also. And then so Mao's presence in Wuhan was a secret, it was top secret, only the provincial and city garrison knew. And they allowed the soldiers to storm Mao's compound, arresting Wang Li, knowing Mao was there, and didn't stop it. And Mao had to flee to Shanghai, and the Central Committee denounced the party leadership in Wuhan for doing that kind of stuff. And so now the rebels become heroes. And then they fight over who is "the hero."

Abbie Moses 26:40

And after that there was a victory, but then they just start fighting.

Fred Engst 26:42

Just fighting. Oh, just fighting, God! And just so just back and forth, and back and forth. Just you read these memoirs, you just kick yourself, God. I mean, it reminded me of the Paris Commune. They are bickering about elections, when the army [from Versailles] is outside surrounding the city ready to attack. You're so naive.

Abbie Moses 27:11

You're saying to this day, such people...

Fred Engst 27:14

They don't want to own up to that. It's just like that they feel like they've been victimised, so long being criticised all their lives, and they're just tired of being criticised.

Abbie Moses 27:28

Unfortunately that's a trend in memories, people put the personal first, "why did my life, turn out like this?" Versus looking at it from a revolutionary perspective.

Fred Engst 27:39

It's hard. Very hard for people to be objective about their own history.

Abbie Moses 27:45

But if people have a background in the revolutionary theory they have the tools to be objective. How is it that so few...

Fred Engst 27:53

easier said than done? It just says there's a saying "Marxism is like a flashlight. You see something else but not shining it at yourself (laughs)."

Abbie Moses 28:05

Hard to look at yourself? Right? Mao talked about that in his letter to Jiang Qing, about the importance of analysing oneself (jiepo ziji).

Fred Engst 28:18

Most people are fighting against oppression. Because they're being oppressed. They're not into eliminating oppression per se. They want to be the oppressor rather than the oppressed,

Abbie Moses 28:35

Hopefully it's not most of the masses feel like that.

Fred Engst 28:41

I mean. People join the revolution because they're oppressed. So the first thing they do is to be against oppression. But without understanding the system of oppression how that works. It's hard to get out of that.

Mao and Mass Initiative

Abbie Moses 29:05

So in Wuhan then, for the Centre, for Mao, for the left, on one hand, you have the military almost promoting a coup like situation, so they had to deal with that crisis. And then the crisis of the rebels themselves having an almost civil war-like situation. So it's attacks on both fronts. A very difficult situation.

Fred Engst 29:26

That's right. In fact, in retrospect, the first year or less was how to mobilise the people within the system, how do you do it okay. And Mao is a great strategist. Just brilliant. He will have no clue about Red Guards if Red Guards didn't. spontaneously come to existence. And he saw the Red Guards as a very powerful revolutionary energetic force that can be used to shake up the system. And the party, old guards can do nothing about it because these Red Guards are formed by their own children. These are the at the beginning, the first crop of Red Guards are high cadre children. And Mao took that and spread that. Mao is like pirating. Mao is never great about inventing things. He just thinks, from the masses to the masses. All right, he saw something great, let's put that out, let's use it. And it was just so powerful. And then this Red Guards. There's a phrase about them "tian bu pa, di bu pa" (not afraid of heaven or earth). They're not afraid of anything. Right? They're not afraid of heaven. They're not afraid of Earth.

And even the conservatives, who defended their parents, they're rebels outside of their hometown. They go to live in Beijing, go around the country and young people tend to be sympathetic to the underdog.

Abbie Moses 31:22

That's their position overall, right?

Fred Engst 31:25

So they tend to be sympathetic to the underdog. And so they go to a place like Wuhan. And they say "Well, I don't know who are the capitalist-roaders. So let's first attack, and see what they do." What do you call it? Huoli zhencha [reconnaissance by firing], like in a war, you shoot and see where the fire comes out. So like that you find out where the enemy is, right? And so they say, well, let's just first bombard them, and see their attitude. If their attitude is nice, "oh, maybe they are okay." If they start being defensive "see, we got you!" So that's how you get people mobilised. But then how to mobilise workers? Mao had no clue. And Shanghai workers showed how to do it. And Mao just supported it.

Abbie Moses 32:20

Right. But in terms of before, even that, though, there were the attempts even in '59, and then '62, with the Jiaoyu Geming [Revolution in Education], to try to get the students to step up.

Mao's Understanding of the Capitalist-Roaders

Fred Engst 32:32

Well Mao tried many things. I mean, just like, when it comes to history, Mao's understanding of the capitalist-roaders didn't start until pretty much the mid 60s. Because pretty much in the beginning he thought pretty much just all revolutionaries have different opinions on how to build socialism,

Abbie Moses 32:52

He didn't understand that the problem was as deep as it was,

Fred Engst 32:55

Right. I mean, even to his death, I don't think he fully comprehended the danger of capitalist-roaders, or even [he] comprehend, but it was too late. Like Deng Xiaoping, he let him to stay in the party. Right? I mean, you won't do that for a KMT general. If it was Chang Kaishek, he won't do that. Right? So what can you do? What can you do? I mean, within your own ranks, I mean, Stalin, would have just killed them. So one extreme is Stalin just killed those people, didn't solve anything. Mao's trying to give them a chance to re-educate themselves, it didn't work. Alright, so in hindsight, you can say anything, all right. I mean, some people say Mao's too soft on these people. Well, on the other hand, how do you know they're diehards?

Abbie Moses 33:56

I mean, in the end, in the last months, he did say Deng Xiaoping was a diehard.

Fred: But it's too late. It's too late.

Abbie: I cut you off. You were talking about how at the time Mao didn't know at that time how to mobilise the workers,

Fred Engst 34:10

So then Shanghai workers showed how to do it. Alright. And then what to do next Shanghai workers showing the January Storm. Mao just seeing the mass movements and sees what has potential, let

the people be the creator of the history. And, Mao did not recognise the Shanghai Commune because he thought this might not be the right thing. And then other provinces showed the three-in-one combination. He said "well, this is good." All right. So that's how he deals with these things. So how to mobilise masses by the spring of '67. I think it's resolved. There's no more issue about how to mobilise. People are all mobilised,

Overcoming and Not Overcoming Factionalism

Abbie Moses 34:53

The question is no longer how to mobilize, but how to consolidate--

Fred Engst 34:57

How to overcome factionalism. Just like from the rest of the Cultural Revolution. I mean, [whether] you call it three years or 10 years. It's all about overcoming factionalism. And Mao is just powerless.

Abbie: And I'd asked you before [about] in Wuhan, if there were other attempts after the July 21 incident [to resolve the factionalism]. Well, after you said after the rebels were empowered then the factionalism happened. I said, did a similar attempt happen as in Beijing, in '68, where he [Mao] talked to the Red Guard leaders, and you're saying they tried many times, Zhou Enlai tried, there were many attempts to try to win over the rebels... In Wuhan.

Fred: Yeah. Zhou Enlai went to Wuhan many times, talked to these groups, had study groups, takes them to Beijing to have study and make an agreement to stop the factional fighting. They go back-- start right over again. It's just like, they tried everything they can think of. And it really comes down to immaturity of the working class,

Abbie Moses 36:08

Did workers from Shanghai, did they go to Wuhan to try to explain some of their [experiences?]

Fred Engst 36:13

Tried, but? But who listened to you?

Abbie Moses 36:17

If Hankou and Wuchang couldn't get together...

Fred Engst 36:19

Why would they listen to somebody from Shanghai? See, that's the thing about the majority in the working class, I can just see in Shanghai. There's a mass base for working class consciousness. Whereas in Wuhan, there's a lack of that. Yeah, just that glaring immaturity, this turf mentality, and this "let's unite around me." See anything you do, ideology, you can have the correct one, but if the people don't have understanding, not intrinsic, a spontaneous understanding of this, then there's only so far you can do, you cannot do more than what you can. And Shanghai is in such stark contrast. There is factional fighting. But once the workers find out the leaders' interest in fighting for their own position, they lost interest. Just that simple. But [in Wuhan], God, I mean, listen. The factional tension is so strong among the workers. "You are my representative. You capitulated. You made an agreement. You betrayed us." You can go to Beijing, make an agreement, when you go back immediately your own people said you're a traitor. That turf mentality is so strong

Abbie Moses 38:00

In Beijing their solution was this Red Guard factionalism, this just can't go on.

Fred: They had to stop that.

Abbie: But in Wuhan the problem was more complicated,

Fred Engst 38:13

Right?. Because you have factories of people working there. It's very tragic. The leaders tried many times to restart a movement. There are some following. And then they fall apart because a lot of people see them just fighting for their own positions.

Abbie Moses 38:40

I've heard though other than Shanghai there were other bright places, where there were some positive developments too?

Fred Engst 38:52

Yeah, maybe, but not enough. There's not enough memoirs. there's no stories about it, just very anecdotal things.

On Cultural Revolution Memoirs and Narratives

Abbie: But in Wuhan there's a lot of memoirs.

Fred: Oh, God, Wuhan has a few dozen, a few dozen literally. I mean, so many people wrote their memoirs, and some become neoliberal types, rabid anti-communists. Some become just saying, "Well, I mean, I was mistreated. " And some, they also had a few groups of people work together and wrote a long history. But it's very disorganised. I have a hard time going through that literature.

Abbie Moses 39:48

There's not a coherent state narrative that people can line up to, through which to sort through these issues. And there's no one in academia, whether in China or abroad, there's no way that people will say, let's talk about the political struggle.

Fred Engst 40:21

It's very complicated. Like you have almost 10 years of history, a lot of struggle, a lot of factions, a lot of realignments and different names. And there's students and there's the students side of that, but then students later on graduate and go to somewhere else. So students are out of the picture pretty much after '68. And so that just left the workers. And workers [according to what those in academia say] in this field, "there are some people in the Revolutionary Committee, they're just window dressing, and they don't have real power." And people complain that Mao didn't give them real power. How do you gain your power? People just think that Mao can give you power and you have power. I mean, who would listen to you?

Abbie Moses 41:13

What's the mass base?

Fred Engst 41:15

I mean, oh, God, So the Shanghai story is the best that China has to offer. Wuhan is the best example of a country that came from semi-feudal semi-colonial history, with a heavy burden of petty bourgeois mentality, the difficulty of the struggle, how to have a vanguard, how to have a class how to organise a working class for a goal that's for the working class, not just for personal emancipation. I mean, you can see a lot of in the last century of working class struggle, a lot of struggles fail, it has to do with this kind of factionalism.

The New GPCR Leadership and the Question of Mass Base

Abbie Moses 42:12

Absolutely. The thinking, I understand from 1973 to 76, was that first the anti Lin Biao campaign--then linking onto the anti-Confucius campaign--would spark a larger national struggle. I'm thinking they must have assessed "Okay, we have a strong point in Shanghai, we have some strong points in Beijing too." Was there a strategic thought of how do we connect the dots at the national level through this sort of thing?

Fred Engst 42:40

In retrospect, Zhang Chunqiao is not a great revolutionary leader. It's like no base was built by him. All right, he had Shanghai, a good base to work with. But he's very much trying to be a caretaker, not to have Shanghai get too messy. So he didn't have the vision. He didn't have the vision, how to explore the party leadership and working class supervision. He didn't have that vision. And so he pretty much is trying to hold things so they don't get too out of hand. So he sort of missed out the opportunity, in essence,

Abbie Moses 43:35

and with Wang Hongwen, there were some thoughts he would be a successor to Mao.

Fred Engst 43:45

In retrospect, it might have been a mistake for him to go to the centre. Because he lost his mass base. In going to the centre, nobody listened to him. I mean, he doesn't have doesn't have a real power base. What happened? He later, I don't know enough. I mean, his secretary is still alive. And he, he knows a lot of stuff. But he's not saying right now.

Abbie Moses 44:20

The clock is ticking on that.

Fred Engst 44:22

I know. I know. I know. I mean, just like God. I mean, history doesn't go by the way we want it to, for anybody. Yeah, I mean, people want to pick his brain but who knows.

Abbie Moses 44:37

you mentioned about the person in Anting...`

Fred Engst 44:39

Yeah, I mean, there's a guy who has been the head of the Shanghai workers rebel newspaper for almost three years, and he has a whole lot of stuff. And all the struggles inside the workers headquarters between the Workers' Headquarters and Zhang Chunqiao. You know, there's friction there. Because Zhang Chunqiao relied on his writing group. And has somewhat of a distrust of the workers.

Abbie Moses 45:08

Now Yao Wenyuan was part of the writing group.

Fred Engst 45:10

Right, right. So this guy who headed the workers' newspaper for years, he wrote his memoir, but he doesn't want to publish because he is afraid that his children may suffer. Right. So you see that everybody has their Achilles heel.

Abbie Moses 45:40

Some more than others, right?

Fred: Yeah, I know.

Fred Engst 45:45

But Shanghai generally didn't go through a lot of a terrible struggle, because they were in power. So they were in the upper hand. Unlike Wuhan where these rebels were in prison over and over being criticised over and over. So they were tempered. But they to the end didn't realise their factionalism.

Industrialisation During the GPCR

Abbie Moses 46:12

What's your impression of the situation in the Sanxian Jianshe--the Third Front Construction areas, where they had this huge industrialization happening?

Fred Engst 46:43

I mean, China's industrialization has to do with that. I mean, China being industrial, you see a lot in Chengdu and Sichuan. All the industries, they didn't have didn't have nothing before that. It's all industrialised during the Cultural Revolution,

So today, China being an industrial power is all based on the Maoist period, in a very short period, and they were able to transform the country incredibly,

Abbie Moses 47:25

In some ways through the struggles, they're able to advance production.

Fred Engst 47:50

It's just so complicated in the sense that you're fighting capitalist-roaders, and you're trying to industrialise, you have to face the mass army from the north, the US in the south, and Chiang Kai Shek in the east, my God, everything at once.

Abbie Moses 48:11

It's like "learning to play the piano," like Mao said. Talk about playing ten pianos.

Fred Engst 48:17

I know. Talking about having self confidence. I don't think anybody in history has the self competence that Mao had during the Cultural Revolution, just like, well, you trust the line of the masses, you dare to do this stuff. Who will dare to do all that stuff. I mean, people give all kinds of excuses to the Soviet Union for Stalin. And that is just 1/10 or 1% of what China has to deal with. And, and on top of this, the balance between industry and agriculture...

Abbie Moses 48:58

In the Third Front, they really took seriously the idea that you needed to resolve the contradiction between industry and agriculture, to have agriculture at the site of production, just like in Daqing and both because of the mental manual contradiction, and also in preparation in case there as a third world war, to sustain to make it a sustainable process. They had the infrastructure to do that.

Fred Engst 49:26

It's just really incredible. Like, you come back in awe. The difficulty and the brilliancy, and then the limitation they're faced with. I mean, the factionalism. Mao can be a genius and from the people find

out the Red Guards, Workers' Headquarters, January Storm. But when people find this factionalism what do you do?

The Need to Learn Through Experience, Evaluating Leadership and Zhou Enlai

Abbie Moses 49:53

I heard some remarks he [Mao] said in '75, that when it comes to empiricism there's nothing you can really do. People need to learn over time, right? Especially there's the need then for Marxist Leninist theory, right, then people are able to get through some of those rules, but then some people are unable to for different reasons, including their backgrounds.

Fred Engst 50:22

Right? Well, I mean, just people have to learn from their mistakes. And I tell my own story a lot of times, just when I was a kid, I liked light fires. Yeah, I almost burned down our village. And I got spanked by my father many times, and for lighting fires. I was afraid of my Father but I wasn't afraid of fire, until I almost burned the whole village. From then on, I know the danger of fire. I mean, you can talk with logic and talk [about] everything... When AIDS first started a lot of these men said "I have a healthy body. it's not gonna be me. it's not gonna be me." And then one after another... "Oh, this is serious." So yeah, people have to learn the hard way. So knowing the history of the Cultural Revolution allows the future working class to learn, to [overcome] the mistakes quicker.... But you're still gonna make the same mistake.

Abbie Moses 51:54

There's no way to completely...

Fred Engst 51:55

Yeah, yeah, you can not completely bypass it. But knowing this history, people say, "Oh, wow, that is so true."

Abbie Moses 52:07

What about the question of leadership that Mao was relying on during this period of Jiang Qing, but we talked a little bit about Wang Hongwen, Zhang Chunqiao, in terms of the need for there to be people to organise at a more central level. That's something that in wider circles and on the left that people

don't generally appreciate. Sometimes there's the anarchist deviation, "if we just get rid of it all..." But of course there are shortcomings too among leadership.

Fred Engst 52:42

I always think just like in revolution, you end up with the cards in your hand, not what you want but what you have. You have to work with what you have. What can you do?

Abbie Moses 52:59

There's the particular issues of the Four on one hand, and then you had the moderates. Chen Yonggui, etc.

Fred Engst 53:09

And there's a huge controversy today, among the left, how to evaluate Zhou Enlai. It's a huge controversy. And what I find is, a lot of people don't appreciate the complexity. And all the evidence they point out [showing] Zhou to be a real capitalist-roader to me means just Zhou Enlai doesn't see things that clearly. I mean, Zhou Enlai typifies a huge portion of the party leadership, who are colour-blind towards capitalist-roaders. They are just colour blind.

Abbie Moses 53:52

Fred Engst 53:56

Zhou Enlai, throughout the history, from the founding of the party all the way to the end, almost every line struggle. He is colour-blind,

Abbie Moses 54:06

There's a big controversy where [regarding] Zhang Chunqiao's essay on the Social Basis for the Lin Biao Clique, the moderates, in particular, accused that essay of attacking the empiricists, even though it doesn't. And the reason they said that was because they were using that as a pretext to say this was an attack on Zhou Enlai, because Zhou Enlai was criticised for empiricism by Mao in the 30s, and they're very sensitive about that.

Fred Engst 54:43

Yeah, I don't know the ins and outs but Zhou Enlai from what I can see, is a dedicated revolutionary, has a devastating shortcoming. And throughout history, he's a doer, you give him a task, he will carry it out really better than anybody else. But if you went to him to see the way to move forward, he's not

[the one]. Just that everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. It's like if you forced me to play piano--I can't.

Abbie Moses 55:23

Some people there's some places they won't go

Fred Engst 55:25

Right. You can't assume everybody is like Mao. On the other hand, Mao cannot do what Zhou Enlai does. Right? Mao spends time thinking about general directions. What's the main contradictions. And Zhou Enlai doesn't know what's important and what's not. He checks every detail. I mean, he just like micromanages.

Abbie: Deng Xiaoping had his strengths too.

Fred: Deng Xiaoping's a brilliant guy. Read the memoir by Qi Benyu. And Qi Benyu says that he was so impressed in one meeting, talking about economy, people were talking about all kinds of things, and were writing notes back and forth. He tried to run the notes but he couldn't figure out what is the point? Which is like so confusing. And then Deng Xiaoping's speech "one, two, three, four." Just organises everybody's thought so crystally clear. Like he just can just through all that stuff know what is the key thing. That's a talent. That's a talent not everyone has. Yeah, so Deng Xiaoping can spend most of his day playing poker. Yet, he knows what's important. And whereas Zhou Enlai strung out himself on details, killing himself. But he doesn't know what's important. Just like, everybody has their own talents. And so if Zhou Enlai wants to sabotage the revolution, he has the best situation. If you want to sabotage it--

Abbie: He has all the cards.

Fred: Oh, yes. All the cards, all the cards.

Abbie: But he didn't [sabotage it]

Fred: No, no, I mean, everything you can see that on the critical things, he wants to support. He just is a half-beat off (laughs).

The May 16th Conspiracy and the Background to the Struggle Against the Historical Opera *Hai Rui Dismissed from Office*

Abbie Moses 57:51

I have something that on my mind a lot too is the question of Lin Biao. There's the essay Long Live People War.

Fred Engst 58:15

Yeah, Lin Biao's.

Abbie Moses 58:18

But I heard there is evidence that it was drafted by Wang Li. But then Wang Li was criticised and ousted in '66, '67.

Fred Engst 58:32

Yes, it's '67. When the British Embassy was burned in May 16 Yeah. All that comes to nothing actually. Yeah. So, in retrospect, you know, Mao tried very hard to understand factionalism. So, this struggle against the May 16 [conspiracy]. The struggle Yida San Fan'an [The One Strike and Three Cases] and Qingli Jieji Duiwu [Cleansing of the Class Ranks] all these things in retrospect, is Mao's trying to grapple with the factionalism and it basically comes down to just immaturity--nothing. I mean it really comes down to nothing. And he keeps on trying to find--it's like Stalin always finding enemies, right? Why is this? There must be an enemy in there. There must be bad guys in there. But you go through and finally, it's just immaturity of the working class. That's my conclusion.

Abbie Moses 59:44

With the May 16 Conspiracy, that was a question more of leadership than working class at that point right?

Fred Engst 59:52

In the beginning it was just trying to find a clique, but then I think in '69 or '70 Mao asked Zhou, how come you're not going after the May 16 [Group]? So there was, a lot of people, starting over, trying to go after these so-called May 16th Group. And at that point it becomes you don't have to sign up for that group. If your ideology is ultra left, you are a member. And then after the Lin Biao incident, no more talk about May 16.

Yeah, I mean, a lot of history, even though I went through it, I didn't know that detail. But now, there are people who work on this in the last few years, and a lot of things came out and it's fascinating, it's just like, I keep on having new thoughts about why things happened that way.

For example, the *Hairui Baguan* (*Hairui Dismissed from Office*) my new understanding is *Hairui Baguan* itself is not the issue. It's all about how to make the Central Committee go on to sign up for the Cultural Revolution. In 1957, Mao's trying to do a rectification campaign. And then that turned 280 degrees, becoming an anti rightist campaign, and Mao learned his lesson. So you cannot go against the bureaucracy, without the bureaucracy agreeing with you. Because he's a minority. So they say "Mao manipulated, Mao tried to get the snake out of the the tunnel" (yinshe chudong). And I think Mao played a brilliant "yinshe chudong" [drawing the snake out of the hole] with the Cultural Revolution, by targeting *Hairui Baguan*, because that is split between between Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen. Peng Zhen and Liu Shaoqi were together on the anti-rightist campaign. And so they're all into holding onto the party and refusing any criticism. So Mao saw an opening with *Hairui Baguan*. I thought that Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen were unified after *Hairui Baguan*. No, no, no, because *Hairui Baguan*, Peng Zhen supported it. Liu Shaoqi realises that *Hairui Baguan* is criticising him because Liu Shaoqi was staunchly insisting that Peng Dehuai being removed.

It's just so brilliant. Just like talking about manipulation. Mao is a master of this.

Abbie Moses 1:03:18

Most people, most academics, they jump to the end game and say that *Hairui Baguan* is just a criticism of Mao.

Fred Engst 1:03:27

Oh, no, it's not about Mao. It's so blatantly obvious. Because Liu Shaoqi in 1962. In the 7000 party cadre meeting, says everybody else can be rehabilitated, except for Peng Dehuai, and made it very clear. And also it was a surprise to me, Peng Dehuai was only removed from office as a defence minister. His position as part of the Politburo never got removed until '65.

Abbie Moses 1:04:04

In '65 I understand he was still conducting affairs and visits in an official capacity.

Fred Engst 1:04:10

So they didn't treat him as the enemy. So he's still a high-party cadre.. All the denunciations and everything but he's a Politburo member for heaven's sake.

Abbie Moses 1:04:28

It's funny, it doesn't make it to the histories.

Fred Engst 1:04:31

Right. And the thing about it is that every time the Politburo [holds] a meeting, he refused to go. He refuses.

Abbie Moses 1:04:43

Because of indignity?

Fred Engst 1:04:45

I know, you see, that's the difference between Mao and Peng Dehuai. Mao [before Liberation] got removed from office, but Mao keeps on trying to use the Red Army trying to help overcome the difficulty, right? It's not about personal gripes. So the person who is really afraid about Peng Dehuai coming back is Liu Shaoqi. That's known. Within the party.

Abbie Moses 1:05:14

Is there anyone who writes about this?

Fred Engst 1:05:28

What you need to do is put things, and piece things together. I just after reading on the Lushan Meeting from different sources and memoirs and finally put things together. My god, it's so clear.

Abbie Moses 1:05:45

it's not that complicated. You just got to read the stuff. People don't do the basics. They don't even read it.

Fred Engst 1:05:51

Yeah, you have to read the first hand things and put things together and learn how to read history not about personal opinion but about what happened and that's why Li Xun's book is good. Her book has very little about her opinion, only in the end of the chapters there is a little bit. But it mostly just

describes what happened. But in so many history books it's like almost they are like the fly on the wall, they almost describe the person's eyebrow movements.

Abbie Moses 1:06:23

Like their own imagination. I think it's part of post modernism's "whatever you see is true. Like who cares about reality?"

Fred Engst 1:06:35

It's so much about what they think what happens. So back to Lin Biao. Lin Biao represents those generals who fought for the revolution and made a great contribution but they don't buy people like Liu Shaoqi and Peng Zhen who never led the army, never led any military base, just only party work. So there's a red area of cadres and a white area.

Abbie Moses 1:07:22

They don't, they don't accept them

Fred: genuine leaders.

Fred Engst 1:07:26

Liu Shaoqi knows that. It's like first with Gaogang in 1953, Gao Gang was actually Xi Jinping's father's buddy, from Shaanxi, Shaanbei--North Shaanxi, rebel leaders. Liu Zhidan, Xie Zichang, these people died before the '49 revolution. So Gao Gang is the one who actually organised the Northeast during the Korean War. He was doing the logistics. And he wanted to challenge Liu Shaoqi's position. And Mao wanted nothing about it. Mao doesn't want anything with that factionalist stuff. And so Mao backed Liu Shaoqi against Gao Gang. But all these top generals actually felt the same as Gao Gang, just like "what were you doing Liu Shaoqi? You were doing the party organizing, but you were not leading the battle." And Mao doesn't see it that way. Just like there's a division of labour. So Lin Biao, Ye Jianying, these old army generals are on the side of Mao when criticizing Liu Shaoqi. They're on board. Lin Biao was very clear in 1962 at the Seventh Party Congress, and did not name Liu Shaoqi, but made it very clear: "You guys made a mess because you did not listen to Mao." And that was the sentiment among the other generals.

Abbie Moses 1:07:26

Making a mess how?

The Great Leap Forward and Its Impact on the Inner-Party Struggle

Fred Engst 1:07:26

In the Great Leap Forward, and all the mess afterwards. Mao was trying to overcome these excesses. Starting from the summer of '58, one meeting after another, trying to stop the Communist Wind, and all the efforts. Deng and Liu were all unified on the ultra-left hypocrisy. Yeah, I mean, they flip flopped. Alright, they First they were opposed [to collectivization] and then they tried to make up for it by being ultra-left? Well, it's not just "making up." See what is interesting, is that in the beginning, it's pretty natural. I think it is pretty natural. First they saw we need to have new democracy for a long time. They're not ready for socialist transformation. And so when they've been criticised, and then they made a self-criticism, but then they saw something they didn't realise before, to industrialise China, with the 156 projects that Soviet Union gave to China, you need a lot of workers, workers need the grain. How are you going to get the grain?

Abbie Moses 1:11:08

So they concentrate on that point of view.

Fred Engst 1:11:10

When you have an individual family, then you have a hard time getting the grain. But when you have collectivised, wow, the grain is in the village, you just go get it! That's why they supported the collectives. So then with any problems they can turn in more grain for industrialization-- [it] become hotshot! You see, because China wants to industrialise. All these projects, we need to start building steel mills, coal mines, machine building, chemistry, everything. We need a lot of workers, we need a lot of grain, and so they find collectivization is the best, it is the best at getting the grain out of the peasants! So they carry it to the left extreme. So that's the opportunist part. It's not that they want to sabotage. It's just that they saw this as a great way to get grain from the peasants.

Abbie Moses 1:12:16

The reason [I brought up] sabotage is because the whole point of the policy was to overcome the division between town and countryside, to overcome the bureaucracy. So how could it be other than sabotage or deceit to just look at that one aspect [of the grain].

Fred Engst 1:12:38

Well the reality is just like in the pre-'49, who can lead a battle to fight against the Japanese or fight against the KMT, who is "the Guy?" So under New China, who can get more grain, to build new

factories, is who is glorious. So now our battle is not fighting the KMT, not fighting the Japanese, our battle is to build industry. And so by hook or by crook, "I don't care how you get it, you get these things." So Liu Shaoqi's method is trying to set up very high standards and see "if they can do this much, how about you?" So I don't see it as a conscious sabotage. That's reading too much into it. And I don't think it needs to be like that. It's just that their ideology, their ideology, about competition, about going ahead and promoting people who can show results. Alright.

Abbie Moses 1:14:04

That's always Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping's line. They're open about it.

Fred Engst 1:14:08

Right. Yeah. That's their ideology. Alright, so then, faced with tremendous difficulties. They blame the bottom. 1959 nobody else than Zhao Ziyang in 1959, found out in Guangdong, he was the party secretary in Guangdong. He found out peasants, to get more grain for themselves, under-reported how much grain they're produced. So Zhao Ziyang wrote a report about peasants purposely hiding how much grain they have

Abbie Moses 1:14:54

Ironic, because he's thought to be the reformer.

Fred Engst 1:14:56

I know. So you go through the history, you see all people behave in different places and different times, and it's so interesting. And then [there's] a nationwide campaign against hiding production, Mao read that, and finds out "Woah, that means our productive forces are fighting against relations of production. So we cannot have common level accounting, we have go back to work teams." And so Mao's reading is so different from other people. Other people say "see peasants are hiding [grain]. So the reason we cannot get grain is not because production is going down, it's peasants are hiding."

Abbie: We got to crack the whip.

Fred: We got to crack the whip. Yeah, he did, actually in Henan in Xiyang, the famine was caused by that. [Head of Henan Province] Wu Zhipu actually said, you guys are hiding production. And they actually hand-cuffed these team leaders, hanged them on the roof and say "you show us where the grain is." And so the village brought their seeds, animal feed everything. That's what caused the famine. And then when people are starving, have no food, they all went out begging and the news

spread. Wu Zhipu actually blockaded the news. And the people from Henan could not write to the centre about what's going on. So they have to go to a neighbouring province to write. And four party members said that in their village most people died of starvation. They wrote with their blood, and a piece cloth and sent it to the centre. I mean it's that degree. I mean, these capitalist-roaders, for their own *wushamao* in Chinese [black gauze caps of officials in imperial China symbolic of official privilege and interest], for their official titles, they just didn't care about people's lives.

Abbie Moses 1:17:18

Was Wu Zhipu ever held to account for what he did?

Fred Engst 1:17:32

Well, he was transferred. Because he's Liu Shaoqi's. So he got transferred to Guangzhou or somewhere else.

Abbie: Because he was Liu Shaoqi's guy.

Fred: Yeah because he was Liu Shaoqi's guy. Because Liu Shaoqi actually asked him in 1958 to boost his production. And then afterwards, Liu Shaoqi asked him, says, "just forget about our conversation."

Abbie: Never happened.

Fred: Yeah, to bury it. And so then Wu Zhipu died before the Cultural Revolution began. And then after the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping restored Wu Zhipu, which is just outrageous!

Abbie Moses 1:17:58

Like "it never happened." How were they able to pull it off and manoeuvre to claim that Liu and Deng were the reformers during the Great Leap Forward? Given their direct role, how were they able to pull that off? I mean, right now, that's the history, "These were the ones who opposed Mao" [opposed the GLF's extreme policies].

Fred Engst 1:18:52

You see, the party today does not publish anything of writings of Liu or Deng Xiaoping of '59 or '58 to 1962.

But we have, during the Cultural Revolution, what they said all those years it's right there. I mean, just like another little side note, in 1962 During the 7,000 cadre party meeting, Peng Zhen wants to compile all the Central Committee documents since 1958, with the hope of finding [some things related to] Mao. But instead it's all Liu Shaoqi's stuff [laughs] so they never published it. But that also made Liu Shaoqi worry about Peng Zhen, because

Abbie: He knows too much.

Fred: Yeah he knows too much (laughs).

Abbie Moses 1:20:03

Supposedly Liu Shaoqi was put in power in '62 and Mao [had] lost his post [as state chairman]?

Fred Engst 1:20:12

No Mao resigned from being [state] chairman in 1959. Mao actually talked about staying out of the front line and going to the back after Stalin died. He saw how difficult the transition in the Soviet Union was, he doesn't want to do the same thing. So he asked them to relieve his duties as the head of state from '54. But it took many years to convince [others]. And so inside the party, I think by '56, he already unofficially stepped aside.

Abbie: Because he did accept responsibility for mistakes in the Great Leap Forward on one hand, and generally the narrative is that he stepped down because of the mistakes.

Fred: Well that's so twisted. That's so twisted. Mao made a self criticism in 1962 and says, well I'm the Head Chairman of the party so I have to own up to what I [did wrong]. And what is that mistake? He didn't say it specifically, but throughout the time, he made self criticism about '58's high target [for output]. In '60, he made a self-criticism about the collective cafeteria and throughout he always often made self criticisms. You read his chronicle [*nianpu*], throughout he always openly [speaks of] these mistakes--owns up to it. Liu Shaoqi, in '62 made a self criticism for the Central Committee, not about himself, and that's why Lin Biao's speech is so important. He said, "All these years, Mao keeps pointing out what we should do, you guys didn't follow." That's known in the party. Because in the spring of 1960, '59, remember Mao wrote that letter directly to the work team, the sixth level, saying "don't boast about your production, and do whatever you can to achieve, that's all you need to do. And

don't worry about that pressure from the top." And [it was sent down] all the way to the team level. And a lot of party bureaucrats were angry at Mao for doing that.

Mao worried about you if you keep on doing this, you will not have grain. Yeah, he was worried. He was worried. And people like Li Jingquan, who was head of Sichuan, refused to put Mao's letters to the local level. Hiding it. I mean, these are the actual things. So it's so crazy to think about [arguments such as] "Mao's afraid about his losing in fighting, so he has to use the Cultural Revolution or something." It is like if you want to play politics, no one is [his] match. Mao has backing with all the army generals. If he wants to do it [directly seize power he could] easily. But that's not his style. He knows remove Deng, remove Liu Shaoqi, it doesn't solve the problem. Even to this degree, they, Liu Shaoqi actually asked people to install bugs in Mao's room, in Mao's bathroom, in Mao's bedroom, in the train where Mao rides. They bugged Mao. And Mao discovered it. And you know what Mao did? He said to Liu Shaoqi, "You try to figure out what to do." So he basically said "I know you are doing this."

Abbie Moses 1:24:54

Which year was that in?

Fred Engst 1:24:55

'63 or '64.

Fred Engst 1:24:58

So "I'm not going to resolve this, you resolve this." Right, and Yang Shangkun went down because of that. Yang Shangkun later on became the head of state in Deng's period. Yang Shangkun was the one who arranged my father's [trip] to the farm in Yanan. Yang Shangkun is the Zhongyang Bangongting Zhuren [Director of the General Office of the Central Committee]. So he is the Central Committee office manager. So he deals with all the office things, logistics, right, So he knows so many top secret stuff.

Abbie Moses 1:26:10

So he was behind the bugs?

Fred Engst 1:26:15

Right. But, but he did it because Liu Shaoqi asked him to do it.

Abbie Moses 1:26:19

But even so, I mean, he should have had some second thoughts.

Fred Engst 1:26:23

yeah, I mean, he's on the side of Liu Shaoqi. So. But Mao's way to deal with that it's like he never is doing backhand scheming. But he knows people well. So he plans both ways. Like he anticipated, Lin Biao wanted to murder him. So he left. I mean he has superb memory and intelligence. Such a rare combination, a rare combination.

On Great Leap Forward Deaths and Responsibility

Abbie Moses 1:28:26

On the GLF. There's the whole industry of the death toll in academia. There's a whole series of people who make their name by inflating it, "of now it's 30, 60 million."

Fred Engst 1:28:38

I looked through that. And what I found out is that the number they give actually is a gross death, not abnormal deaths. But it's still a very high [number of] abnormal deaths. I mean, for the three years total, maybe 10 million is not out of line, [it's] possible. There is no official... It's like, how many people die from COVID? How do you define it? It's hard to define. Alright, so basically, what you do is say, okay, normally, how many people die in a year, and historical trends. And so historical trends have variations. So what is out of the 95 comes the interval, okay? And you can use that as a way to do it. But a lot of these are huge numbers. Like 40 million. That's gross. That's a gross death. You have a population of 600 million. And if people live until 100, you will have 1% every year [die]. If you live to 50, you got 2% a year. So let's compromise [and say] one half percent, one half percent of 600 million is quite a lot of people. Yeah, I figured out three years, what they gave for the number is a three year total [of deaths] and today [more people] die than that. But still, there's about 10 million, concentrated in Henan, Anhui, Sichuan, Shandong, these are big provinces. My partner, her family, have people dying during these years, clearly due to starvation.

Abbie Moses 00:45

It's one of the minor few shortcomings of your uncle's [William Hinton's] last book Through a Glass Darkly. He says he didn't he doesn't see evidence [of widespread famine].

Fred Engst 00:57

There is there is. There is. Yeah, I mean, that's one of the things that I had to grapple I had to understand in my effort to crawl back in to Marxism, in the 80s and 90s. One thing I just didn't understand is the famine. So in the year 2000, I came to teach, and I went to Henan, Xiyang, went there and talked to people and all of a sudden it clicked for me, that the number is the gross death. So you do a little simple calculation, you find out they exaggerated enormously, but still a lot of people did die and why did they die. Now we find out why.

Abbie Moses 01:48

That's important. Right? specific.

Fred: I mean, The devils in the details.

Abbie: You talk people, you talk to the villagers.

Fred Engst 01:58

You talk to the local people. And also you can see it during the Cultural Revolution, during the mass uprising. People didn't criticise Mao. These people, they know who is responsible,

Abbie Moses 02:10

Same thing when I was in Anhui too, they're very straight about who's responsible, and upholding Mao during this time. And you know, of course, not that it's worth talking about the academia's responses, "it's because they're brainwashed. It's because they're nostalgic. It's because they're stupid."

Fred Engst 02:25

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean you can say that but they know who in their village did what. And also during the Cultural Revolution. That was the time. I think that's the best thing to tell. During the Cultural Revolution people were free to say what they want to. They were very clear. Who did it. Right. So Li Jingquan and throughout the history, what Mao was trying to do, and what these people trying to do, the contrast is just so glaring. So back to Lin Biao. Lin Biao is among those generals who don't mind targeting Liu Shaoqi, Peng Zhen, those people. They're actually more into carving their own turf. So, in the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, they side with Mao. Mao sort of knows they're using him--in the letter to Jiang Qing, right? But still, you can only deal with the cards that you have in hand. So once the factional struggle is going on in Wuhan in the July 20 [1967] Incident. Lin Biao saw his

opportunity to get rid of all the people not within his clique. So actually he installed four important positions in the army all as his underlings from the Siye [Fourth Field Army]. During the War of Liberation there were four detachments. Lin Biao's fourth detachment all the way from the Northeast to the South, Peng Dehuai's went all the way to the west. So Lin Biao installed his followers in the Army *Zong Canmouzhang* [Chief of Staff] *IZongqin*, the people doing logistics. And also the head of the Navy and head of the Air Force, all his generals. So basically he tried to form his own kingdom and promote his children, right. And also, the reason Jiang Qing went to the Politburo is because Lin Biao wanted his wife to be in the Politburo. And, so Mao took Jiang Qing's name off, twice. And then finally, these people insist and say, "We got to put Ye Qun [Lin Biao's wife] in there." So they insist on putting Jiang Qing in there. So Mao says, "Okay, I don't want to be the fall guy. I mean, you guys are doing this. I know, I'm going to be the fall guy, because this is like a family type of thing." He's against it. But then later on, after Lin Biao's down, Jiang Qing has her own support.. Once she became Politburo member, it's not about husband and wife. In fact, Mao from then lived separately from Jiang Qing.

Abbie Moses 06:56

When was that starting from?

Fred Engst 06:59

Beforehand of course Mao travelled to different places and they won't always stick together but when they're in Beijing, they're together with their son. Once Jiang Qing became a Politburo member [in April, 1969], [they concluded] we cannot be a husband and wife team because this is a political thing. So from then on,they're not together anymore.

Abbie Moses 07:30

I was hearing someone else say it was a clarity of principles, and a personal sacrifice.

Fred Engst 07:35

Right. And so that is people later on say

Abbie: He wasn't with Jiang Qing...

Fred: See, Oh, God, it's just the whole thing got twisted. It's just like, if they're together, they're their husband and wife team, if they're not together... know, right. Right. Right. You're telling me. Trying to sort through all these things to make sense. It took me years.

Abbie Moses 08:08

That's why it's important [to] put some outlines out there for people. We can't have every person having to do stuff.

Fred Engst 08:16

Right? Right.