
sumer culture and, in the process, establishes himself as a profound and original cultural critic in his own right. *Fables of Abundance* is a rare picture of an intellectual searching for fresh, new ground on which to stand as an interpreter of modern life.

THE PRIVATE LIFE OF CHAIRMAN MAO: The Memoirs of Mao's Personal Physician. By Li Zhisui. With the editorial assistance of Anne F. Thurston. Trans. by Tai Hung-chao. Random House. 682 pp. \$30

BURYING MAO: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping. By Richard Baum. Princeton. 489 pp. \$35

Ever since Mao Zedong officially founded the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, the inner workings of its political system have remained clouded in mystery. Two new books plumb that mystery and uncover, at bottom, a large irony: a country supposedly governed by ironclad ideology was buffeted this way and that by a few men's personal whims.

Li Zhisui was Mao's personal physician (his great-grandfather had also been physician to a Chinese emperor), but his story of Mao's private life belongs less to medical annals than to the *National Enquirer*. Mao's insatiable appetite for young women (he passed on venereal disease to hundreds of them), his slovenly personal habits (he neither bathed nor brushed his teeth), his drug addiction, and his extravagant "imperial" processions from city to city hardly fit his once-popular image as an ascetic, ideologically inspired patriot. Convinced that Chairman knows best, Mao trusted few and worked closely with no one. When thwarted, he would contemplate returning to the mountains to launch a new guerrilla campaign. He seems to have enjoyed few things as much as the terror and chaos caused by his Cultural Revolution (1965-68).

But can this tale, with its lurid sex and the relentless pettiness of Mao and his vicious, self-indulgent wife, Jiang Qing, be entirely believed? Anne Thurston, a noted China authority, has

shaped and written much of the book, and her contribution gives a creditable historical background to Li's anecdotes. Li's source materials, his diaries, were burned in 1966, yet he asks the reader to accept verbatim dialogues as well as minutely observed details of events he could not have personally witnessed. Nor can Li qualify as an unbiased observer when it is obvious that he allowed few standards, political or ethical, to interfere with his role as Mao's physician, confidante, and servant.

Baum, a political scientist at UCLA, readily admits that he is using limited and questionable documents, but he nevertheless manages to construct a richly textured and convincing portrait of the political transformation that ensued after Mao's death in 1976 at the age of 82. Deng Xiaoping, the master manipulator, demonstrated again the centrality of personal control in China, and during his reign the scheming of factions and rivals customarily took the place of policy debates. It was, after all, his ambivalence about market reforms and political liberalization that led to the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989. Deng is now 90 years old and sick, and the People's Republic stands on a precipice once more, with few institutions in place that can guarantee stability, economic reform, political change, or even the shunning of nationalistic militarism. Baum makes clear that Deng's one-man show has been better for China than was Mao's. But Deng, too, has cast the Chinese people adrift in complex and dangerous circumstances, being no more willing than Mao to trust China's fate to independent political processes he cannot dominate.

THE SOUTHERN TRADITION: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism. By Eugene D. Genovese. Harvard. 138 pp. \$22.50

If any more evidence is needed that the end of the Cold War turned the world upside down, this book should do it. It is not so much the author's argument that "southern conserva-