I fully agree with professor Gong Yuzhi’s summation of Deng Xiaoping’s relation to Mao Zedong in the reform era as a “combination of correction of Mao’s mistakes and inheritance of his legacy.” On the contrary, if correction of the Mao personality cult and other mistakes are extended to negation of the entirety of Chinese revolutionary and socialist history, this “would mean a fundamental betrayal of the facts of China’s revolutionary history, not to mention the will, emotions, rationality, and conscience of the party and people.” Gong persuasively summarizes Deng’s contributions, including Deng’s understanding of the beginning stage of socialism and market economics, and his affirmation and pursuit of democratic politics. But what exactly does “democratic politics” indicate? Around the time of the third plenary meeting of the 11th Central Committee in the late 1970s, Deng paid special attention to political reform, emphasizing separation of party and government and elimination of the lifetime tenure system, and he cherished “highly civilized, highly democratic” socialism as the goal of the reform. Afterward, we must note that Deng’s definition of socialism was limited to shared prosperity and the elimination of exploitation. It did not touch upon requirements of the institutional level or political foundation such as constitutional government, elections, the principle of popular sovereignty, and other issues (more recent official interpretations of prosperous society are similarly limited to economics).

Gong’s statement that Chinese socialist experiment was “started by Mao and realized by Deng” affirms the continuity of the two development stages before and after 1978. This point is crucial. Just as many scholars have pointed out through a mass of empirical research (such as that on rural industry) and careful theoretical analysis (such as that
on the function of the state), the majority of reform policies could not have succeeded without the various preparations of the Mao era. Yet at present, to what extent have the reforms actually succeeded? Gong uses the past tense in a complete affirmation of reform success; he is overly optimistic. He says that “the economy of socialist China gained the attention of the entire world when China took market economics to be a fruit of modern human civilization, and merged it with the fundamental system of socialism.” He does not mention the hidden ills and price of China’s rise. Nor did he discuss the specifics of the “fundamental system of socialism,” particularly in the context of China’s current intensifying social crises. His past tense observation overlooks societal, environmental, and many other problems. In fact, the issues of corruption, rural decline, state enterprise “reform”, lost healthcare for the masses, unaffordable education, horrifying death toll in mining, and other problems already have raised questions regarding the legitimacy of the reform path taken since the 1990s. If it cannot even guarantee the most basic social justice, is “socialism” worthy of its name? Thus the new generation of leaders has, under the pressure of increasingly frequent mass incidents, begun to reflect on China’s developmental pattern and adjust public policy and implementation.

In other words, although the Chinese path of socialism undoubtedly was “started by Mao,” the argument that it was “realized by Deng” remains unconvincing. Although Mao and Deng-eras show continuity, they also exhibit rupture. The future of the Chinese path also remains open. Many possibilities exist, and we cannot yet judge whether it will, in the end, succeed.

II

Roderick MacFarquhar is the most influential Cultural Revolution specialist of the academic world outside of China. One of his fundamental points is that the Cultural Revolution was a national experiment of far-reaching effects, and in the end the bad turned to good and great destruction caused great reform. I understand “destruction” to have two meanings. First, in the sense of opposing the bureaucracy and existing knowledge and production systems, it means an overturning of modernity by utopian romanticism. Second, it means the self destruction of certain accomplishments of the revolution, namely the party and state system as well as the cadre and cultural elite. Issues of