On Photographs
Roderick MacFarquhar

Regarding the question of hanging the portraits of our leaders, the Central Authorities made a clear ruling as early as 29 March 1960 . . . “In the organizations for the Party, the People’s Liberation Army and the people’s associations of various kinds, it is permitted to hang the portrait of Mao Tse-tung alone; it is also permitted to hang the portrait of Mao Tse-tung, Liu Shao-ch’i, Chou En-lai, Chu Te, Ch’en Yun, Lin Piao, Teng Hsiao-p’ing, seven persons. The manner of hanging these portraits is: if it is desirable to hang the seven portraits of Mao, Liu, Chou, Chu, Ch’en, Lin, Teng together, the portrait of Mao Tse-tung can be placed in the centre and the others on the two sides. It is also suitable to put the portrait of Mao Tse-tung in the first place and the others in order as indicated, and from left to right. According to our understanding there are now not a few units, especially the primary level units, which have not hung the portraits as described above. We are asking these units to inspect carefully the way in which these instructions have been carried out so that we may have a unified system according to the regulations of the Central Authorities.

(General Political Department of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), 14 March 1961.)

This quotation from the PLA’s Bulletin of Activities ¹ should be sufficient proof that Chinese propaganda officials have been concerned about the hierarchical ordering of photographs. Evidence from the Cultural Revolution suggests that they have also been concerned about the size of photographs. After Liu Shao-ch’i became Head of State in 1959, the order went out that on national day that year and on all future national days, newspapers should publish equal-sized photographs of Mao and Liu side-by-side on the front page.²

The arrangement of portraits by rank and size is of course an easy matter. It is more difficult to obtain unposed photographs of more than:

one leader with the object of making a political point. A New China News Agency (NCNA) photographer was instructed to take many photographs of Mao and Liu together at the first session of the Third National People's Congress (NPC) (December 1964-January 1965) when Liu was re-elected Head of State. The word from the propaganda authorities was: "This is an important political mission. It must be accomplished, or the news photographer shall be spanked." The unfortunate photographer apparently made a series of unsuccessful attempts to oblige. It was then decided to prepare a doctored photograph. However, K'ang Sheng discovered this plan and the propaganda officials were prevented from issuing the fake. Another photograph of Mao and Liu together was issued.

This attempt to prepare a doctored photograph recalls the more successful effort of Soviet propagandists who contributed to the post-Stalin jockeying for power by issuing a photograph from which three people had been removed to show Malenkov between Stalin and Mao. More important, however, what is made clear by the Bulletin of Activities and Cultural Revolution revelations is that the Chinese propaganda authorities are as conscious as their Soviet counterparts of the political importance of photographs that can tell a story. What is less clear is why China specialists, the present writer included, have neglected the systematic analysis of photographs in their attempts to get below the surface of Chinese political reality.

The examination of photographs should be an accepted part of what is sometimes called "Kremlinology," the decoding of the "esoteric communications" or aesopian language by which propaganda authorities attempt to convey to Party members the realities of power and the direction of policy. "Kremlinology" can be a useful scalpel for helping dissect the body politic of a Communist State, if it is remembered that it is only one instrument among many, that it requires a good surgeon.

3. Ibid. p. 33. I have not seen the original and have not therefore been able to check whether "spanked" is a faithful translation. 4. Ibid.


6. An example of the casual attitude towards photographs in the China field is the fact that so major a work as Franz Schurmann's Ideology and Organisation in Communist China (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. Revised ed., 1968) has undergone a major revision without anyone, including the present writer, noticing that the picture captioned as the Eighth (Lushan) Plenum is actually a picture of the Seventh Plenum. (The picture is among those between pp. 234 and 235 in the revised edition.) That this is not simply a "nit-picking" comment will be argued below.

with a broad knowledge of the body and that the instrument itself must be a sharp one. Even then miracles of surgery cannot be expected. In the case of Chinese politics, our scalpel is still fairly blunt. This article represents a preliminary attempt at helping to hone a finer tool.

One of the bases of Kremlinology is the assumption that in Communist countries verbal formulae of various types are used to convey information. Consequently an important way of ascertaining the status of a policy or a person is to note if a formula embracing it or him is changed. Alternatively, one can examine the formulae employed by individual leaders to assess their attitudes towards persons or policies. We have it on the highest authority that this kind of Kremlinology is practised by the Chinese leaders themselves. Mao, speaking about critics like Marshal P'eng Teh-huai at the Lushan Plenum in 1959, said:

These persons do not mention adventurism, but they smell [of?] opposition to adventurism. For instance they said that “there have been losses and gains.” To place “gains” in the latter position is obviously done after much deliberation.⁸

Photographs can also be used as formulae. Photographs are normally taken of official functions at which, in most countries in the world, attention is paid to the positioning of officials on a hierarchical basis. Photographs should therefore normally reflect that hierarchical ordering. If they do not, there is at least a reasonable possibility that the photographs published were selected to make a political point. What that point might be can rarely be deduced from the photograph alone, but usually demands a knowledge of the current political situation.

Once again, so authoritative a source as Mao Tse-tung has indicated the concern of Chinese officialdom about hierarchical ordering:

On T'ien-an-men that day, I deliberately put Li Tsung-jen near me. It is better not to get a place for that man. It is better to leave him without a position and power.⁹

What Mao seems to mean is that by putting Li Tsung-jen close to him in a position of eminence which everyone would know he did not really merit, he was preventing Li from obtaining real position and power as he might have done if he had been fitted carefully into the hierarchy of leading non-Communist officials who normally appeared on the T'ien-an-men on national occasions. Mao's words go to show his interest in the correct positioning of officials on occasions when photographs would be taken. This, together with the other evidence cited, suggests that there are real grounds for this inquiry.

In what follows, since this is only an exploratory article, my comments on the political contexts of apparently unusual photographs must be brief. I can only hope they will also be suggestive.

⁹. *Current Background* (Hong Kong) (*hereafter CB*), No. 981, p. 72.
Party Occasions

Let me start not with a function, but an occasion—the anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on 1 July. On the first of these anniversaries after the regime came to power, 1 July 1950, the People's Daily printed across the top of its front page the pictures of four leaders. On the left was Mao (a bigger picture than the other three), and then from left to right Liu Shao-ch'i (unusually, in collar and tie), Chou En-lai and Chu Teh. Thus, at an early stage in the regime's history, the Chinese people were clearly informed both who were their leaders and what was their ranking. The importance of this information is underlined by the fact that on page 5 of the same issue some pictures were printed to illustrate Chinese Communist history. These showed Mao alone and Mao and Chu Teh together. For the average Chinese, the CCP was synonymous with Mao and Chu and their names had been inextricably linked since the early 1930s on Chingkangshan. The pictures on page 5 were an acknowledgment of Chu Teh's historic role, but the pictures on page 1 told the reader that Chu Teh, despite his immense contribution, no longer ranked as Mao's second-in-command. Another point the front-page pictures were probably designed to make was that collective leadership existed, but Mao, as the bigger photograph underlined, was unquestionably the top man.

On the 30th anniversary of the Party in 1951, a different formula was employed which obviated the necessity of Mao's photograph being larger than the other three. Photographs of the same four men, in the same order, were arranged vertically down the left-hand side of the front page. Again, there could be no question about who was on top of whom. Down the right-hand side of the front page were the photographs of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. This being a special anniversary, on inside pages there were pictures of the Central Committee (CC) members and alternates elected at the Seventh Congress in 1945. In 1952, the eight front-page photographs were the same, but the Central Committee was not portrayed. The following year, the formula changed. There were no photographs of even the top four Chinese leaders.

What is one to make of this? What was the relevant political context? The simplest explanation is that the Chinese were responding to developments in Moscow. The anniversary in 1953 occurred four months after the death of Stalin. This had been followed, in the Soviet Union, by an immediate diminution of his cult. The Chinese may have been told by Moscow, or decided off their own bat, that to print a picture of Stalin at this juncture would be something of an embarrassment. Nor could

11. In 1956 the Chinese were prepared to ignore Soviet sensitivities by displaying Stalin's picture because they disapproved of the way in which Khrushchev had denounced him at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).
they print pictures of just Marx, Engels and Lenin; it would have been an insult to Stalin that the Chinese, and probably the Russians too at that time, were not prepared to offer. Thus if Stalin went, the other three had to go. Why not go back to the 1950 formula of just printing pictures of the four Chinese leaders? Possibly it was felt that it was an inappropriate time to exalt leaders, even collectively. Whatever the reason, the Chinese ceased printing pictures of their leaders on their Party anniversary.

**Party Functions**

This source of photographic data having dried up, we are forced to turn to other Party functions. An obviously important series is the Plenums of the CC. No pictures were published after the Third (June 1950) and Fourth (February 1954) Plenums. But from the important National Conference of the Party in March 1955, it became the practice to publish photographs after the more important Party meetings.

Before considering these photographs, one comment is necessary. It seems likely that during the course of a plenum, the men on the podium may change seats for a number of reasons. A man making a report may move nearer the centre; or someone may have to leave the meeting on business and a number of others may move inwards to avoid leaving a gap in between them. I assume that photographs may be taken at such moments as well as at the formal opening and closing of the meeting. It would thus be possible for the appropriate officials – before the Cultural Revolution, presumably the director of the propaganda department, Lu Ting-yi, or the Party General Secretary himself, Teng Hsiao-p’ing – to choose for publication whichever photograph he felt would best illustrate the message he wanted to convey.

The National Conference of March 1955 was the occasion when the Party wound up the purge of Kao Kang and Jao Shu-shih. It was thus a time for demonstrating the unity of the remaining leaders and indeed all Mao’s colleagues in the Politburo were said to have spoken. They were listed in the order Liu Shao-ch’i (2) Chou En-lai (3), Chu Teh (4), Ch’en Yun (5), K’ang Sheng (6), P’eng Chen (7), Tung Pi-wu (8), Lin Po-ch’ü (9), Chang Wen-t’ien (10) and P’eng Teh-huai (11). One would have assumed that the picture of the Politburo at this conference, printed in the *People’s Daily* on 5 April, would have reflected this order with one of the following formulae.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 & 6 & 7 & 8 & 9 & 10 & 11 \\
10 & 8 & 6 & 4 & 2 & 1 & 3 & 5 & 7 & 9 & 11 \\
11 & 9 & 7 & 5 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 4 & 6 & 8 & 10
\end{align*}
\]

instead it was:

7 8 10 5 3 2 1 4 9 6 11

P'eng Chen, Tung Pi-wu, Chang Wen-t’ien, Ch’en Yun, Chou En-lai, Liu Shao-ch’i, Mao, Chu Teh, Lin Po-ch’ü, K’ang Sheng, P’eng Teh-huai.

The first point that strikes one is that Liu Shao-ch’i occupies the central position which should be Mao’s. All available evidence suggests that there was no question of Liu replacing Mao, be it in terms of real or titular power. A possible explanation is that Liu conducted the purge of Kao Kang and Jao Shu-shih and this fact had to be underlined.13 Mao had been absent from the CC’s Fourth Plenum at which the confrontation with Kao and Jao had taken place. The reasons for his absence are unclear to this day, but it meant that Liu Shao-ch’i was in charge of the Kao-Jao affair. It has been suggested too that Liu had a particular reason for denouncing them in that he had been closely linked with Jao Shu-shih in the past.14

There is however another way of looking at this line-up. Possibly Mao is occupying the central position politically even if not mathematically. Part of the political context of the Kao-Jao purge was the allegation that he had propagated the “absurd” theory that the CCP was really two parties, the party of the revolutionary bases and the army and the party of the white areas. Kao had apparently attempted to unite the former “party” behind him to challenge the leaders of the latter “party,” Liu Shao-ch’i and Chou En-lai, for the succession to Mao. Could it be that the picture was meant to show Mao sitting between these two “parties” to show that they were both united around him and that there was no chance of using absurd theories to split them?

The picture does lend itself to such an interpretation. The men on Mao’s left were all red area or army men; on his right, Liu, Chou, Tung Pi-wu and P’eng Chen could certainly be identified as white area men. The identification of Ch’en Yun and Chang Wen-t’ien as white area men is perhaps less certain, but both men did a good deal of white area work in the early 1930s.

Even assuming that this is the correct explanation of how the photograph was posed, there are still unanswered questions about individual placings. Why does No. 9 (Lin Po-ch’ü) rank above No. 6 (K’ang Sheng)? Could this be because Lin had worked closely with Kao Kang in the early 1940s when Lin was Chairman and Kao the Secretary of the Shen Kan-Ning Border Region, and that therefore his alignment against Kao at this time had to be given particular prominence? Can the high positioning of Chang Wen-t’ien (No. 10) on the other side of Mao be explained in a similar manner, in that Chang was the only member of

the Politburo who stayed on in the north-east to work with Kao Kang after the liberation? Even so, why does No. 8 (Tung Pi-wu) outrank No. 7 (P'eng Chen)? Was this because Tung was to head the control commission that was being set up to prevent a recurrence of the Kao–Jao affair? Only a greater knowledge of the Kao–Jao affair can give us firm answers to these questions.

The Party's Fifth Plenum was held shortly after the National Conference and presumably in view of their proximity it was felt unnecessary to issue another picture for the Plenum. However, a picture was issued on the occasion of the Sixth Plenum in October 1955. This was the Plenum which ratified the policy of accelerated collectivization put forward by Mao in his speech to provincial leaders on 31 July 1955. The report of the Plenum stated that important speeches were made by seven members of the now 13-man Politburo (Lin Piao and Teng Hsiao-p'ing having been elected to it at the Fifth Plenum); the seven were Liu, Chou, Chu Teh, Ch'en Yun, P'eng Teh-huai, P'eng Chen and Teng Hsiao-p'ing. To judge by the photo that appeared in the People's Daily on 16 October, three of the men who did not speak were absent from the meeting: Tung Pi-wu, Lin Po-ch'iü and Lin Piao. The photo line-up was:

13 5 4 2 1 3 11 7 6 10

Teng Hsiao-p'ing, Ch'en Yun, Chu Teh, Liu Shao-ch'i, Mao, Chou En-lai, P'eng Teh-huai, P'eng Chen, K'ang Sheng, Chang Wen-t'ien.

The immediate thing that strikes one is that while Mao is correctly flanked by the Nos. 2 (Liu) and 3 (Chou), after them the order of seniority draws one's eye along the men on his right. The result is that Teng Hsiao-p'ing, who, as junior member of the Politburo, is correctly positioned at one of the extremities of the line-up, actually appears to be occupying the No. 6 position. This may have corresponded to power realities, for after the Eighth Congress a year later he did in fact move up to that position. Was this picture designed to alert Party members to the real status of a man who had only been elevated to the Politburo six months earlier?

This seems a plausible hypothesis; but if so, what accounts for the prominence of P'eng Teh-huai (No. 11) on Mao's other flank and the elevation of P'eng Chen (No. 7) above K'ang Sheng (No. 6)? No answers were provided by the Seventh Plenum held on 22 August, 8 and 13 September 1956. This was the Plenum that prepared for the Eighth Congress and was perhaps not considered politically important enough to merit a picture.

At the opening of the Eighth Congress, the members of the Politburo formed the Standing Committee of the Congress' Presidium. They were listed in the order of the speakers at the National Conference of March 1955, with the addition of Lin Piao and Teng Hsiao-p'ing who were elected to the Politburo after that conference. But the photographic ranking, as revealed in the People's Daily photograph on 16 September...
of the opening day, did not correspond to the ranking in the Presidium Standing Committee. Instead it was:

12 6 8 7 5 3 1 2 4 11 9 10 13

Lin Piao, K’ang Sheng, Tung Pi-wu, P’eng Chen, Ch’en Yun, Chou En-lai, Mao, Liu Shao-ch’i, Chu Teh, P’eng Teh-huai, Lin Po-ch’ü, Chang Wen-t’ien, Teng Hsiao-p’ing.

The top five men are seated appropriately; so are the bottom two. K’ang Sheng (No. 6) was possibly seated in an inferior position because his star was on the wane at this period; he was to be demoted to alternate membership of the Politburo at the first plenum after the Congress, as was Chang Wen-t’ien (No. 10). The latter’s forthcoming demotion may explain why he was seated in a position inferior to that of P’eng Teh-huai (No. 11); but it does not explain why P’eng Teh-huai, who would himself drop in ranking after the Congress, though not to alternate status, was seated above Lin Po-ch’ü. Possibly P’eng Teh-huai’s high ranking in the photograph reflected a rise in status that had begun at the Sixth Plenum, a year earlier, to judge from the photograph issued then. This would imply that his demotion was organized after the photograph of the opening of the Congress. (P’eng dropped below Teng Hsiao-p’ing and Lin Piao in the post-Congress Politburo; he also had three post-Congress newcomers placed above him.) If P’eng Teh-huai’s demotion was organized during the Congress, a possible reason is the fact that it was he who had proposed, just before the Congress started, that the “thought of Mao Tse-tung” should be eliminated from the new Party constitution.15

After the Eight Congress, there were no photographs of the first four plenums of the new CC. Then after the second session of the Eighth Congress (5–23 May 1958) an unusual picture was issued.16 A numeral analysis is pointless and so I will give the names, from left to right facing the camera:

Li Ching-ch’üan, Ulanfu, Lin Piao, Liu Shao-ch’i, Teng Hsiao-p’ing, Mao, Chou En-lai, Chu Teh, P’eng Chen, K’o Ch’ing-shih.

These men included five of the six members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) (Mao, Liu, Chou, Chu, Teng) together with Lin Piao who was to be elected to it at the Fifth Plenum after the Congress. Then there was P’eng Chen who was almost certainly the most powerful man under the PSC, though officially outranked by Lin Po-ch’ü and Tung Pi-wu. The picture thus shows six of the seven most powerful men in the country, but with them it puts an alternate member of the Politburo (Ulanfu) and two men who would be elected full members at the Fifth Plenum after the Congress (K’o Ch’ing-shih and Li Ching-ch’üan, the First Secretaries respectively of Shanghai and Szechwan). Why were these three included?

15. See P’eng Teh-huai’s confession in The Case of Peng Teh-huai, pp. 119–120.
16. Actually two pictures were issued but the other one just showed Mao with delegates vaguely in the background; People’s Daily, 25 May 1958.
Ulanfu, a Mongol, was the only representative of a minority people in the Politburo. Possibly he was placed with the others as a sign to the minority peoples that despite the current campaign against local nationalism, the Han majority still respected minority feelings. It is worth remembering that only two months earlier, Mao himself had thought it necessary to issue a directive on the nationalities problem, calling on the minorities to trust the Han.

The presence of K'o Ch'ing-shih and Li Ching-ch'üan in the photograph, like their elevation to the Politburo, was probably designed to symbolize the increased power of the provincial-level leaders as a result of the decentralization that the regime had been implementing over the previous few months. Ulanfu's presence – he was First Secretary in Inner Mongolia – would have accentuated this point.

Let us turn now to the senior men in the photograph. Two questions need to be answered: why was Ch'en Yun, the one PSC member, excluded from the photograph? Why was Teng Hsiao-p'ing, not Liu, shown next to Mao? Ch'en Yun was certainly at the Congress for he addressed it. Perhaps his absence was meant to underline the abandonment of moderate economic policies of which he had been a prominent spokesman; perhaps it was meant to show that he still disapproved of the current "Great Leap Forward." Liu Shao-ch'i's speech had mentioned the existence of doubters; probably Ch'en Yun was the principal one.

But why was a picture selected which showed Teng Hsiao-p'ing not Liu Shao-ch'i next to Mao? Was this an attempt by Teng Hsiao-p'ing to suggest that, despite the fact that Liu had made the major report to the Congress, he, Teng, was closer to Mao? It could have been a hint to Party members that the breach that had developed between Mao and Liu over the previous year's rectification campaign had not been fully healed.

Following hard upon the second session of the Eighth Congress came the Fifth Plenum. It was probably thought unnecessary to publish an-
other group photograph, which might indeed have confused the message conveyed by the Congress photograph. Instead the *People's Daily* (26 May 1958) published pictures to give another message: two of Mao on top of one of Liu, on top of one of Chou, on top of one of Chu Teh, all of them depicting the country's top four leaders performing physical labour.

The Sixth Plenum of November–December 1958 was the occasion for a certain retreat on the communes and the Great Leap. The post-Plenum picture was calculated to show that unity had been restored in the top leadership. The Politburo was probably now too large to fit on a podium so only the PSC was shown. The photograph portrayed all seven members of the PSC in their correct hierarchical positions:

Lin Piao, Chu Teh, Liu, Mao, Chou, Ch'en Yun, Teng Hsiao-p'ing,24

or, in numbers:

\[
6\quad 4\quad 2\quad 1\quad 3\quad 5\quad 7
\]

The Seventh Plenum of April 1959 was the one at which Liu Shao-ch'i was officially selected as the Party's nominee to succeed Mao as Head of State. Once again the Plenum photograph showed the members of the PSC, but with slight variation 25:

Lin Piao, Ch'en Yun, Chou En-lai, Mao, Liu Shao-ch'i, Chu Teh, Teng Hsiao-p'ing.

In other words, Teng Hsiao-p'ing had changed places with Lin Piao, and occupies a senior position next to No. 4 with Lin now next to No. 5. Possibly this was meant to display the real power of Teng vis-à-vis Lin. Another possibility is that Teng had placed himself on Liu Shao-ch'i's side of Mao in acknowledgment of Liu's new status and as a pledge that he would collaborate with him in future. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao alleged that after 1959 Teng Hsiao-p'ing never reported to him.26 This suggests that after the replacement of Mao as Head of State, Teng decided that Liu's full succession to Mao was assured and consequently decided to work wholeheartedly with him. If this hypothesis is correct, then the Seventh Plenum photograph was probably designed to indicate Teng's new allegiance.

The photograph after the important Lushan Plenum is even more interesting. This Plenum, held in August 1959, was the scene of the confrontation between Mao and P'eng Teh-huai over the Great Leap Forward. The post-Plenum photograph should ideally have shown the whole PSC in its correct hierarchical order to symbolize the unity of the top leadership in the face of the attacks of P'eng and his three collaborators. Instead it just showed27:

Liu, Mao, Chou.

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Why were four members of the seven-member body not shown? Two were definitely ill – Ch’en Yun28 and Teng Hsiao-p’ing who had broken his leg playing ping-pong.29 Lin Piao had turned up at the previous two Plenums, but his frequent absence from public view had led observers to assume that he was not in good health. If he was again ill, this meant that P’eng Teh-huai would be succeeded as Defence Minister by a sick man.30

As for Chu Teh, he was probably excluded from the photograph for supporting P’eng Teh-huai during the Plenum.31 None of these facts could have been deduced simply by looking at the Plenum photograph; but the absence of four out of seven members of the PSC should have given rise to greater speculation as to what happened at Lushan.32

If Chu’s absence from the Eighth Plenum photograph was a signal of his opposition to Mao, then perhaps the Ninth Plenum photograph was designed to show that the two old comrades were reconciled33:

Ch’en Yun, Chou, Liu, Mao, Chu, Teng Hsiao-p’ing,
or, expressed numerically:

5 3 2 1 4 7

Apart from Chu’s proximity to Mao, one notes the reappearance of Ch’en Yun, a confirmation of his reinstatement to help run the more moderate economic policies designed to help China through the “three

28. See “Down with Ch’en Yun, old hand at opposing Chairman Mao,” Ts’ai mao hung-ch’i (Finance and Trade Red Flag), 15 February 1967, in SCMP-S, No. 177, p. 9. Ch’en was resting in Dairen.

29. See Teng Hsiao-p’ing tz’u-pai shu (Teng Hsiao-p’ing’s Confession) (Reprinted by Kwangtung Province Ascend the Mountains, Go to the Countryside “Conquer the Tiger (?)” Youth Combat Corps, no date), p. 4. (This item is reproduced in Group X, Roll 1, Part 1 of the microfilmed material distributed by the Center for Chinese Research Materials, Washington.)

30. Lin Piao was apparently sick through much of 1965 on the eve of another even more important assignment as Mao’s successor. See “Lo Jui-ch’ing deserves to die ten thousand times for his crimes,” Ching-kang-shan (Chingkang Mountains) and Kuang-tung wen-yi chan-pao (Kwangtung Literature and Art Combat News), 5 September 1967, in Joint Publications Research Service (Washington) (JPRS), No. 43903, pp. 80–81.

31. See “Down with the old swine Chu Teh,” Tung-fang hung (The East is Red) 11 February 1967, in SCMP-S, No. 172, p. 22; also “Towering crimes of Chu Teh, big warlord and big careerist,” Chan pao (Combat News), 24 February 1967, in SCMP-S, No. 175, p. 5. At some point in 1959, after the Plenum presumably, the CC circulated Chu Teh’s self-criticism; see the pamphlet Expose the Towering Crimes of Counter-revolutionary Revisionist Li Ch’i against the Party, Socialism and Mao Tse-tung’s Thought (Peking: “East is Red” Commune of the Peking Institute of Cinematography of the Red Guard Congress, and the “Red Army” Combat Corps of the Peking Scientific Education Film Studio of the Workers’ Congress, 1 April 1967), in Survey of China Mainland Magazines (Hong Kong: U.S. Consulate General) Supplement (SCMM-S), No. 23, p. 10.

32. Which is why it was a pity that the photograph in the Schumann volume suggested that the PSC was present, correct and united at Lushan; see above, footnote 6.

bitter years.” But though Ch’en had been restored to influence, it would seem that Teng Hsiao-p’ing could have himself placed to suggest that he outranked Ch’en in terms of real power. Finally, one notes the absence of Lin Piao again – ill?

The 10th Plenum of September 1962, the last before the Cultural Revolution, was the occasion for another swing leftwards as China’s economic recovery gave Mao greater room for political manoeuvre. The post-Plenum photograph (People’s Daily, 29 September 1962) showed the following very interesting line-up:

Liu, Teng, Mao, Chou, Chu

or

2 7 1 3 4

The most striking aspect of this line-up is the position of Teng. No longer is it a case, as at the second session of the Eighth Congress, of him simply sitting between Mao and Liu; the way things have been arranged, his sitting next to Mao has resulted in Liu being banished to an outer seat. Only since the Cultural Revolution has it become clear that a deep breach opened up between Mao and Liu during 1962 after the 7,000 cadres conference of January that year. But this contemporary photograph hinted at what had happened behind the scenes and also suggested that Teng’s relationship to Mao may have been closer then than was claimed retrospectively during the Cultural Revolution. Possibly Teng, seeing Liu slipping, was deserting him and hoping to increase his own power. The photograph also indicated that Ch’en Yun had been once more eclipsed as the Party turned left again and that the shadowy Lin Piao was still ill.

Other interesting pictures appeared in the People’s Daily around this time, indicative in retrospect of some of the tensions among the leadership. It was very near national day, and among the important visitors in China for the celebrations was Mme Sukarno. A number of wives of top leaders – Chou En-lai’s, Ch’en Yi’s, Liu Shao-ch’i’s – were seen in her company. But only Mme Liu (Wang Kuang-mei), her opposite number as wife of Head of State, was shown alone with her, unaccompanied by her husband. In other words, Mme Liu was enabled by her husband’s status to play an independent diplomatic role, despite the fact that, unlike Mme Chou, she held no senior Party post. It may have been annoyance at this that led Mao to bring his wife out into the public eye for the first time since 1949.4 On the same day as Mao and Chiang Ch’ing appeared on the front page of the People’s Daily with Mme Sukarno, Liu and his wife appeared with her on page 2.5

There would not have been anything strange about this relegation of

34. Indications of later bad feeling between Mme Mao and Mme Liu are provided by the accusations against the latter that she ignored Chiang Ch’ing’s advice not to wear a brooch/necklace on a foreign tour; see CB, No. 848, p. 13.
35. 30 September 1962, i.e., the day after the 10th Plenum photograph had appeared.
On Photographs

the Lius to page 2 if it had not been that there was another photograph on page 1, of men junior to Liu. It was a picture of Teng Hsiao-p'ing shaking hands with P'eng Chen on the latter's departure to Vietnam. Apart from its prominence on page 1, another interesting aspect of this picture was its deviation from the conventional departure scene formula. The usual photograph on such occasions depicted all the people who had come to send off (or greet) the departing (or arriving) comrade. Exceptions to that rule suggest a political point is being made. For instance, the picture in the *People's Daily* on 25 October 1961 which showed Chou En-lai being greeted on his return from Moscow by just Mao and Liu seemed designed to suggest that these two men actively approved of his walking out of the CPSU's 22nd Congress. An ordinary arrival picture, indistinguishable from countless others, would not have had the same effect. In the same way, the Teng Hsiao-p'ing–P'eng Chen handshake seemed designed to suggest a particular cordiality between these two men in the wake of the 10th Plenum.

Now most Party members who had surmised from the previous day's picture of the 10th Plenum that Teng had supplanted Liu in power and influence would also have known that Liu and P'eng Chen had worked together over the course of many years.* Was the Teng–P'eng picture designed to show that Teng had won P'eng over to his side? That such a hypothesis may be the correct one is suggested by a wall-poster of 9 January 1967, reporting what Mao had said at a CC meeting three days earlier. Mao had repeated his charge that, since 1959, Teng had not briefed him and added: "Then he grabbed P'eng Chen." Perhaps the Teng–P'eng handshake photograph of 30 September 1962 symbolized that "grabbing."

**State Functions**

Photographs of state functions in China are difficult to analyse because the situation is confused by the presence of numbers of non-Party officials. In addition the state hierarchy does not correspond to the Party hierarchy, even as far as Party officials are concerned. The top four officials in Party rankings until the Cultural Revolution were Mao, Liu, Chou and Chu Teh. But on state occasions, from the adoption of the constitution in 1954 till the elevation of Liu to the position of Head of State in April 1959, the state ranking was Mao (Head of State), Chu Teh (deputy Head of State), Liu (head of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC)), and Chou (Premier). After 1959 the

36. In the Cultural Revolution material, Liu and Teng are excoriated as the leading opponents of Mao; but P'eng Chen's long historical connection with Liu is constantly alluded to—see for instance "A Compilation of dossiers," Supplement to *Kung nung ping (Worker, Peasant, Soldier)*, September 1967, in *SCMM–S*, No. 27, pp. 36–37.
position was further complicated and the order became Mao (because he was Mao), Liu (Head of State), Tung Pi-wu and Soong Ch’ing-ling (deputy Heads of State, Mme Soong not being a member of the CCP), Chu Teh (head of the Standing Committee of the NPC) and Chou En-lai (Premier).

However, fruitful study can be made of the few photographs of one series of state functions, the Supreme State Conferences (SSC). According to the national constitution of 1954, the SSC was to be convened whenever necessary by the Head of State who acted as its chairman. The deputy Head of State, the head of the Standing Committee (SC) of the NPC and the Premier as well as other persons concerned were to take part. The first widely publicized session of the SSC was that of 25 January 1956 at which the 12-year programme for agriculture was launched. The announcement of the SSC in the *People’s Daily* of 26 January 1956 was accompanied by a picture of the meeting. Mao was shown at a table flanked by top officials with two further rows behind him. The officials were not named in the caption, but it is possible to make out who they were with the aid of the clearer photograph in *China Pictorial* (February 1956) and the list of top officials attending given in the *People’s Daily* report. The line-up was as follows:

**Front Row:**

Huang Yen-p’ei, Kuo Mo-jo, Shen Chün-ju, Li Chi-shen, Liu Shao-ch’i, Mao, Chou En-lai, Ch’en Yun, Teng Hsiao-p’ing, Ch’en Yi.

The pattern is easily deciphered:

Deputy-Chairmen NPC-SC; Chairman NPC-SC; Head of State; Premier;
Nos. 7, 6, 5, 3  Liu Shao-ch’i  Mao  Chou  Deputy Premiers  Ch’en Yi
Deputy Premiers  Nos. 1, 4, 7

**Second Row** (the two end men are hard to distinguish):

(?) Ch’eng Ch’ien, Tung Pi-wu, Ch’en Shu-t’ung, Li Wei-han, P’eng Chen, Li Fu-ch’un, Li Hsien-nien, (Ulanfu?).

Here the pattern is:

(?) Senior non-CCP Dep.Chmn. National Defence Council, President Supreme Court, Dep.Chmn. NPC-SC Nos. 10, 9, 8, Deputy Premiers Nos. 9, 10, 8(?).

**Third Row:**

The people in the third row are virtually impossible to recognize but probably correspond to the seven other top people – deputy chairmen of the National Defence Council and of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference – mentioned in the *People’s Daily* report.

As can be seen, a fairly strict hierarchical order is maintained. Chu Teh, deputy Head of State, was absent in Eastern Europe. It does not
seem likely that any of the other absences have a political significance with the exception of Teng Tzu-hui, the fifth-ranking deputy Premier, who was in trouble at the time. Teng had been responsible, as head of the CC’s rural work department, for the speed of collectivization which Mao had criticized six months earlier as being too slow. Teng was the senior official concerned with agriculture and should have introduced the 12-year programme to the SSC but his place was taken by his deputy, Agriculture Minister Liao Lu-yen.

What is important about this photograph is that it establishes a clear pattern for future reference. The next SSC to be photographed was that of 27 February–1 March 1957 at which Mao delivered his speech on contradictions among the people. On this occasion, the photograph really only showed the front row which was as follows:

Li Wei-han, Huang Yen-p’ei, Kuo Mo-jo, Shen Chün-ju, Li Chi-shen, Soong Ch’ing-ling, P’eng Chen, Mao, Chou En-lai, Ch’en Yun, Teng Hsiao-p’ing, Teng Tzu-hui, Ho Lung.

The pattern is similar to the January 1956 session:

Dep. Chairmen NPC-SC Head of State Premier Deputy Premiers
Nos. 9, 7, 6, 5, 3, 1, 8 Mao Chou 1, 4, 5, 6

This time there are a number of oddities about the photograph. Liu Shao-ch’i and Chu Teh were both absent. We know that very shortly after the SSC, Liu made a very extensive tour through the country so it is highly unlikely that he was ill. We also know that there was a great deal of opposition to Mao’s rectification plans and later an assertion by a “bourgeois rightist” that the opposition was led by Liu and P’eng Chen, was printed in the People’s Daily. Was Liu’s absence from the photograph of the meeting at which Mao made the keynote speech for the projected rectification campaign meant to signal his opposition to Mao’s ideas? If so, was Chu Teh absent for similar reasons? And if so, why was P’eng Chen shown completely out of place on Mao’s right-hand side? By itself the picture suggests that P’eng approved Mao’s speech. A great amount of contrary documentary evidence proves that he did not. Why then did he sit beside Mao in Liu’s place? Was he a sort of symbolic watchdog for Liu? No final answer can be suggested, but further comment can be made.

On this occasion, the Chinese allowed the picture to tell its own story. Unlike the January 1956 SSC, no name list of high-ranking officials attending this SSC was issued. This was the occasion on which Mao was making the most important political speech since 1949, and yet it did not receive the same publicity that attended the launching of the 12-year agricultural programme. Perhaps it was felt that a name list would have revealed an embarrassing number of absentees; perhaps the number of absentees explains also why the photograph published, unlike that issued

37. For a fuller discussion, see my forthcoming volume mentioned above in footnote 23.
for the January 1956 session, made it very difficult to distinguish those sitting in the rows behind Mao.

The next SSC of which a photograph was issued was the 16th, held on 15 April 1959. It was the last convened by Mao before he gave up his position as Head of State. The grouping was less formal as the two published photographs (People's Daily, 16 April 1959) showed. In the main one Mao was shown standing with Liu Shao-ch'i, Chu Teh and Chou En-lai behind him; the second picture showed the audience arranged in three sides of a square in front of him. In both pictures everyone seems to be in a convivial mood, with the possible exception of the Panchen Lama—this being the SSC at which the Tibetan revolt was discussed. Perhaps the picture of a smiling Mao was thought to be appropriate to underline that his relinquishment of the post of Head of State did not signal any real diminution of his power. Backed by China's other top three leaders, Mao was apparently the head of a united hierarchy.

The photographs of that 16th SSC are however less interesting in themselves, than in contrast to that of the 17th, the first convened by Liu Shao-ch'i. Facing the camera (People's Daily, 25 August, 1959) are only: Soong Ch'ing-ling, Liu, Chou.

Mme Soong was there in her new capacity as one of the two deputy Heads of State. Chu Teh, now head of the NPC-SC, was probably absent from the photograph for the same reason he had been absent from that of the Eighth (Lushan) Plenum—the backing for P'eng Teh-huai. But what strikes one most forcefully about this photograph, as compared with the ones of previous sessions of the SSC, is that it suggests the occasion has been diminished. No longer does it look, as it did in January 1956 and February–March 1957, like a great occasion of state. Nor does it suggest, as did those photographs of the SSC of April 1959, a great leader communing convivially with his senior colleagues. It is difficult not to think, as one looks at the short three-man line-up over the unidentifiable bent heads of the front row of the audience, that someone wished to suggest that, Head of State though he might now be, Liu could not hold a candle to Mao.

Conclusions

In certain cases, as the discussion shows, the study of photographs raises more questions than can be convincingly answered. Perhaps it should be reiterated here that such study is but one, rather blunt, instrument, to be used along with many others in the dissection of Chinese politics. But what I hope this article has shown is how the study of photographs can alert one to underlying political realities. The absence of a leader, such as Ch'en Yun, from a photograph should cause one to wonder if this means that policies he has been associated with have been abandoned; or whether, as in the case of Liu and Chu at the SSC of February—
March 1957, a new policy is being launched without the backing of some of the country's most important leaders. The consistent positioning of a leader, such as Teng Hsiao-p'ing, above his official ranking should make us wonder whether that man is attempting to push his way to the top, and to speculate what that means for the internal cohesion of the leadership. In the particular case of Teng, one wonders if he could regularly have appeared in so favourable a photographic light without the tacit support of someone even more senior—presumably Mao since it was Liu whom Teng was usually upstaging. If this were the case, it would mean that Mao became finally disenchanted with Teng rather later than is suggested in Cultural Revolution material.

I have confined my analysis to the pre-Cultural Revolution period, partly because I know the political context better, partly because it is important to compare the retrospective history of that period with all types of contemporary evidence. Analysis of the photographs of the post-Cultural Revolution period, that is, since the Ninth Congress of April 1969, is in one sense easier than it is for the years before 1966 because, with the substitution of stroke order for hierarchical ranking in listing Politburo members below Mao and Lin Piao, the problem of discrepancies between an official ranking and photographic ranking no longer arises. At the same time, photographic analysis is now more important than ever. Before the Cultural Revolution, it could help one delineate the hierarchy behind the hierarchy; now it must be used to determine the hierarchy behind the stroke order.

In analysing photographs of whatever period, certain principles, which one might call the four "C"s, seem to be important: consistency, comparability, context and caution.

It is pointless to examine photographs without reference to other photographs of similar occasions. One must always establish whether or not a photograph is consistent with a pattern. If not, is there a non-political explanation?

38. Richard Solomon (in "One party and 'one hundred schools': leadership, lethargy or luan," Current Scene, VII, Nos. 19-20 (1 October 1969), p. 34) refers to a picture of Mao meeting some Shanghai non-Party intellectuals in July 1957 in which Mao appears on the extreme left of the picture. He cites a former CCP cadre as observing that the picture might have been designed to ridicule Mao for "leftism" since the Chairman would normally be photographed in the middle of a group. Solomon concurs with this view, suggesting that the photograph conveys the message that Mao's blooming and contending policy was "right in form but left in essence."

But how unusual was Mao's positioning in the light of other photographs of similar occasions? Certainly Mao normally stands or sits in the centre of formal group photographs; but this is not necessarily the case with informal photographs or photographs of informal occasions. Examples of the informal situation can be seen in the People's Daily of 26 May and 13 June 1957, where Mao is shown standing on the left of groups of Youth Leaguers and workers' dependants. In Jen-min hua-pao (People's Pictorial), No. 4 (1958), p. 1, and ibid. No. 9 (1960), p. 1, Mao is shown on the right of two informal groups. There can be little doubt that the meeting in Shanghai in July 1957 was meant to be seen as an informal occasion at
Secondly, one must always compare photographs with other indicators of ranking and political health. It is clearly significant that Teng Hsiao-p'ing's photographic ranking was so often more flattering than his Politburo ranking. Comparability is clearly more difficult in the anti-hierarchical post-Cultural Revolution era, but it is still possible. If a man is listed as attending a meeting, but does not appear in the relevant photograph—like Ch'en Yun at the second session of the Eighth Congress—then it is legitimate to wonder about his position and the policies he has espoused.

Consistency and comparability are only indicators, however. If they suggest that something unusual may be occurring, it is essential to examine the political context to confirm that this is likely and to ascertain what may be happening. In the case of Ch'en Yun at the second session of the Eighth Congress, as argued above, the political context did suggest that he and his policies had suffered a setback.

But caution is always in order. Ch'en Yun's absence from the Lushan Plenum picture could legitimately have given rise to the idea that he had been implicated in P'eng Teh-huai's attack on the Leap Forward. Only during the Cultural Revolution was it revealed that, sympathetic though he may have been to P'eng's views, Ch'en Yun could not have supported them at Lushan because he was not there. (And caution should of course include the awareness that a photograph could just conceivably have been chosen at random, though the evidence cited at the beginning of this article suggests that this is unlikely to have been the case on important occasions.)

If caution is essential, it should never lead one to pass over an unusual which the Chairman just engaged in "intimate" conversation with the non-Party people and saw a play with them. This being the case, the principle of consistency would suggest that there is nothing to be deduced from Mao's positioning in this photograph. (And indeed if anything were to be deduced from the positioning, the simplest explanation would be that the Chairman is being depicted in a completely natural position, i.e., on the left of non-Party people.)

39. The photograph (People's Daily, 11 May 1966) was not the only evidence of course. Following the principle of comparability and seeking indications from other material, one noted that there had been no official greetings ceremony for Liu on his return from an Asian tour in April. The political context—the clearly impending fall of P'eng Chen, a man closely associated with Liu in the past—buttressed the photographic evidence.

In the light of later developments, it is worth noting that this photograph showed, next to Mao, Teng Hsiao-p'ing, Chou En-lai and Lin Piao in that order. It is still impossible to be certain of the reason for Teng's prominence in this photograph. One possible explanation is that Mao may have wanted to avoid threatening Teng's position too openly and so drive him into collaboration with Liu before the latter had been disgraced. Confirmation of this hypothesis is suggested by the new Politburo ranking that emerged after the 11th Plenum in August 1966. While Teng suffered, in that two men (Tao Chu and Ch'en Po-ta) were promoted above him, his ranking actually improved, for the demotion of Liu Shao-ch'i, Chu Teh and Ch'en Yun meant he rose from No. 7 to No. 6. (For a table comparing the rankings before and after the 11th Plenum, see The China Quarterly, No. 28 (October-December 1966), p. 186.)
Supreme State Conferences

January 1956

Front Row
Huang Yen-pei Kuo Mo-jo Shen Chün-ju Li Chi-shen Liu Shao-ch'i Mao Chou En-lai Ch'en Yun Teng Hsiao-p'ing Ch'en Yi

February – March 1957

Li Wei-han Huang Yen-pei Kuo Mo-jo Shen Chün-ju Li Chi-shen Soong Ch'ing-ling P'eng Chen Mao Chou En-lai Ch'en Yun Teng Hsiao-p'ing Teng Tzu-hui Ho Lung
photograph. Photographs may rarely be conclusive, but they are often indicative of political undercurrents. For the CCP insider, a photograph may only be visual confirmation of political developments of which he is already aware from other sources. For the outsider, a photograph may be an early signal that something is up and further study is required. After all, it was Liu Shao-ch'i's absence from the photograph of the meeting of Mao and other top Chinese leaders with the Albanians in May 1966 that helped one to infer that he was in trouble even before the Cultural Revolution really got under way.89

39. For footnote see p. 306.