

ASIANetwork EXCHANGE

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Editors' Note

Redux — “On Contradiction”

Addressing the Mao Controversy

In the months since the Winter Issue of *ASIANetwork Exchange* went to press, the long-standing controversy over the historical evaluation of Mao Zedong has resurfaced—with a vengeance. The release in the United States of *Mao: the Unknown Story*, a searing critique of the late Chinese Communist Party Chairman, co-authored by Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, has fueled and intensified the debate over Mao and his legacy.

Many ASIANetwork members who are concerned with modern Chinese history have been faced with questions as to whether or not—or how—the book should be utilized in their teaching.

Reviews of the book have varied widely. The *Guardian* has asserted, for example, that Chang and Halliday have

torn away the many masks and falsehoods with which Mao and the Communist party of China to this day have hidden the true picture of Mao the man and Mao the ruler. Mao now stands revealed as one of the greatest monsters of the 20th century alongside Hitler and Stalin.

Thomas Bernstein, of Columbia University in New York, has countered that “the book is a major disaster for the contemporary China field.” He continues,

Because of its stupendous research apparatus, its claims will be accepted widely; yet their scholarship is put at the service of thoroughly destroying Mao’s reputation. The result is an equally stupendous number of quotations out of context, distortion of facts and omission of much of what makes Mao a complex, contradictory, and multi-sided leader.

As editors of *ASIANetwork Exchange*, we hope to encourage dialogue about this important controversy in the pages of the newsletter.

The Passion of the Mao

To launch the discussion, we are highlighting in this issue (p. 19) an interview with Mao biographer, Lee Feigon, who is just now releasing his new film, *The Passion of the Mao*. This movie itself promises to fan the flames of the controversy. We thought it appropriate to include the Feigon interview, particularly in light of his long-time service to one of our member institutions, Colby College, as professor of East Asian History.

Readers’ comments on the book, on the interview, and on the Mao controversy more generally are most welcome.

Tom Lutze and Irv Epstein

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