



Mao: The Real Story

By Alexander V. Pantsov, Steven I. Levine



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This “comprehensive, judicious, and finely detailed” (Roderick MacFarquhar, *The New York Review of Books*) biography of Mao Zedong traces how he created a totalitarian government even more destructive and extreme than Stalin’s, while transforming China from an impoverished nation to a leading world power.

Mao Zedong was one of the most important figures of the twentieth century, the most important in the history of modern China. A complex figure, he was both a champion of the poor and a brutal tyrant, a poet and a despot. In this major new biography, the authors draw upon extensive Russian documents previously unavailable to reveal surprising details about Mao’s rise to power, his leadership in China, and the true nature of his relationship with Stalin.

Mao brought his country from poverty and economic backwardness into the modern age and onto the world stage. But he was also responsible for an unprecedented loss of life during the disastrous Great Leap Forward and the bloody Cultural Revolution. He lived and behaved as China’s last emperor.

Mao is the full story of Mao’s life and rule told as never before.

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Editorial Review

From Bookforum

If *Mao: The Real Story* conveys anything about Mao Zedong, it's that there is no single real story of him to be had through biography or history. Despite Pantsov and Levine's efforts, the Great Helmsman is an indigestible figure. The obdurate Maoness is the chief reason that *Mao: The Real Story* can never quite find a comfortable perspective on its subject. The reliance on Soviet and Chinese archives means that much of the biography focuses on the turbulent bureaucracies space around Mao, where allies and rivals and foreign emissaries tried to make sense of contradictory and incoherent information ... The details bounce around so much that it becomes harder and harder to remember what they are supposed to be details of. —Tom Scocca

Review

“Mao’s will for power, his vision as a revolutionary, and his prodigious capacity for cruelty marked mankind. Yet it is impossible to understand the transformation of modern China without absorbing the enormity of one man’s impact. Pantsov and Levine have opened what are perhaps the final vaults of archival treasures to buttress their new and engrossing portrait of the Chinese revolutionary titan. With clear narrative and sparkling anecdote, they have chiseled a more complete Mao, in the full dimension of life as a man, as an eager collaborator with Stalin in the Communist bloc and as the tiger on the mountain who both built and ravaged a nation.” (Patrick Tyler, former Beijing Bureau Chief of The New York Times and author of *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China*)

“This fine book is based on extraordinary access to Soviet archives and documents recently published in China and the West, shedding new light on some aspects of the Chinese leader’s life and career. . . . Pantsov and Levine succeed in conveying a balanced image of Mao’s complex persona and revealing the contradictions in his beliefs and actions.” (Thomas P. Bernstein *Foreign Affairs*)

“Here finally is Mao in the round: vigorous, idealistic, deluded, and ultimately evil—the full human being in rich personal and political detail. The widest possible use of Chinese sources provides deep insight into Mao’s family, colleagues, and rivals and illuminates the dilemmas he faced and the strategies he chose. New materials from the Soviet archives enrich our understanding of Mao’s formative relationship with Stalin.” (Andrew J. Nathan, Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science, Columbia University)

“A new, important history. . . . The authors’ most serious contribution is probably their insight into Mao’s Stalinist creed and his movement’s complete financial and ideological reliance on the Soviets.” (John Pomfret *Washington Post*)

“Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine's vividly written and highly authoritative biography, steeped in previously inaccessible Soviet archival sources, forever banishes the myth that Mao’s revolution succeeded as if the Russians had never come.” (Alice Miller, research fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University)

“A comprehensive, authoritative new study that challenges the received wisdom regarding Mao’s relationship with Stalin and the Soviet Union. . . . The Great Helmsman fully fleshed, still complicated and ever provocative.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

“Definitive.” (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

“Definitive. . . . Thick with detail, this book sets a high bar for future Mao biographers.” (Booklist (starred review))

review))

“China scholars now will have to reassess every element of Mao’s career. . . . More important than Pantsov and Levine’s scholarly chops, however, is that they spin a balanced and utterly compelling story larded with telling and often newly uncovered anecdotes about Mao’s family, wives, comrades, rivals, and victims. The common sense of the authors’ judgments on Mao’s crimes and achievements builds on their insights into Mao’s complex personality (and, yes, sex life). One of the most important China books of recent years and a page-turner, too.” (Library Journal (starred review))

"Comprehensive, judicious, and finely detailed. . . . [A] major study." (Roderick MacFarquhar *New York Review of Books*)

"A substantial and hair-raising contribution to our knowledge of the Great Helmsman." (Jim Landers *Dallas News*)

“*Mao: The Real Story* is stuffed with important information The authors have opened up the Russian archives and unearthed material on Mao that has hitherto been kept secret in Moscow.” (Andrew Roberts *The Wall Street Journal*)

"Alexander Pantsov and Steven Levine draw on recently declassified Soviet material to reveal surprising details about the founder of the PRC. . . . [Including] a hitherto unseen 15-volume dossier on Mao, the basis of a vivid and heterogeneous portrait of the chairman that exposed his personal life, particularly regarding his health and his serial affairs." (*Time Out Shanghai*)

About the Author

Alexander V. Pantsov is a professor of history and holds the Edward and Mary Catherine Gerhold Chair in the Humanities at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. Born in Moscow, Pantsov graduated from Moscow State University Institute of Asian and African Studies in 1978. He has published more than ten books, among them *The Bolsheviks and the Chinese Revolution 1919-1927* and *Mao Zedong*.

Steven I. Levine is research faculty associate in the department of history at the University of Montana. Levine has published extensively in the fields of modern Chinese politics and foreign policy as well as American-East Asian relations.

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