

H-Diplo ESSAY 267

Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars

15 September 2020

The Journey of Scholarship

<https://hdiplo.org/to/E267>

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I turned seventy on April 20, 2020. There is an old saying in China: “A man seldom lives to be seventy years old.” You can’t help but sigh helplessly. It is not uncommon that old age clouds your memory. Perhaps, too, it is still too early to pass the final judgment on me. But when looking back, many things come vividly to my mind. And I frequently reflect on the road I took to become a scholar.

Without exaggeration, I was successful in my youth. I am the same age as New China. My parents went to Yan’an in 1936-38, studied at the Anti-Japanese University¹ and joined the Eighth Route Army. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, they were both assigned to work at the Ministry of Public Security. I grew up within the compound of the Ministry of Public Security, which was diagonally opposite of Tiananmen Square at the time. As a descendant of revolution, I was very comfortable from an early age. I started at the Hsianshan Children’s Home when I was seven years old. This was then one of the best elementary schools in Beijing, and was founded by Xiong Xiling, who had served as premier during the early Republican era. At the age of 13, I was admitted to Beijing No. 4 Middle School, one of the best in China. At the time, I aspired to be a scientist – to serve my country worthily by advancing science. That was also my parents’ wish. One of my favorite books at the time was *Kexuejia tan ershiyi shiji*.²

The Cultural Revolution interrupted my studies. Classes were suspended to allow time for revolutionary activities. As a ‘Red Guard,’ I actively responded to the call of Chairman Mao Zedong, travelling all over China to spread the ‘revolutionary spark.’ I even took the lead in igniting the revolutionary spark at the Baotou Middle School. As the representative of Middle school “Red Guards” from Beijing, I supported “rebels” in Wuhan, participating in negotiations with the CCP Hubei Provincial Committee and Central-South Bureau Committee. Then my parents were overthrown as “capitalist roaders.” I became ‘a happy-go-lucky kid,’ going on trips to scenic spots in Xi’an, Chengdu, Chongqing, Nanjing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang, Guilin. I stayed in Xinjiang for more than two months, sharing mutton meals at the home of the Chief of Staff of Kashgar Military District in Southern Xinjiang.

¹ The Chinese Communist established Anti-Japanese Military and Political University in Yan’an, where young people would study for a year or two, and then rushed to Anti-Japanese Front.

² Li Siguang, et al., *Kexuejia tan ershiyi shiji* [Scientists talk about the Twenty-First Century] (Beijing: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1959).

I was fortunate to join the army at that time, becoming a ground serviceman in the Naval Airforce, just in time to miss the “Down to the Countryside” movement (that sent millions of ‘privileged’ urban youths to live and work in the countryside). At the age of 19, I became an acting mechanic and a ‘top technician’ in our division. The division commander once patted me on the shoulder and said, “young man, you have done a great job, and you represent the future of China’s naval air arm.” I was very excited, thinking that even if I couldn’t be a scientist, I could still serve my country well by being an excellent serviceman.

Just when my future in the military began to look very bright, the whole army plunged into a campaign to uncover “elements of May 16 Corps.”³ Defense Minister Lin Biao sent down instructions to the effect that “the army will not tolerate any member of May 16 Corps.” I was a child from an official’s family and became a major target for investigation in the East China Sea Fleet. During the investigation, a student I didn’t know accused me of beating someone to death during the “Destroying Four Olds” campaign.⁴ The conclusion of the investigation was: “Everything happens for a reason, but no evidence has been found in the case.” The leaders in the military were afraid of taking any responsibility and thus arranged for my demobilization.⁵ In February 1971, I returned to Beijing and became an equipment fitter at Shijingshan Power Plant. I was not even 21 years old.

From then on, I embarked on a new journey of pursuing my studies. At the elementary school, our classmates often cited the old saying, “Laziness in youth spells regret in old age” to encourage each other. In two years, I reviewed junior high school mathematics and physics lessons, taught myself senior high school mathematics, such as trigonometric function, and English. I was preparing to enter the university. At the time, Chinese universities only admitted worker-peasant-soldier students, who did not need an exam in subject areas. Acceptance to a university was premised on satisfactory political reviews and recommendations from leaders of work units. But I thought: how you could do well in a university without a solid knowledge base?, and continued my preparations.

Fortune smiled on me. In 1973, Premier Zhou Enlai proposed the restoration of the policy of entrance exams for universities. You now had to pass the exams in order to get admitted. This was really a policy made for me. “Constant efforts never fail the aspirations of ambitious persons,” goes the old adage. In that year’s entrance exams for universities, I did very well, and my test score was the first place in all four subjects in my examination district. I was admitted to the Department of Thermodynamic Systems of China’s prestigious Tsinghua University. A teacher made a special trip to Shijingshan to notify me, encouraging me to prepare for university life.

In the end, though, fortune stopped smiling. Even before the school term began, Jiang Qing denounced the decision to hold the 1973 entrance exam for universities as the return of the “rightist education line.”⁶ The decision was rescinded. College admission still hinged on one’s political background, at least for Tsinghua University, which supported the “Gang of Four.” Because I had excellent test scores, I thus became a representative of someone “doing my own professional work well, but not caring enough for politics.” Not only was I denied admission to college, but I also became a target of criticism. I was even accused of “worshiping things foreign and fawning on foreign countries” because I taught myself English.

It was indeed beyond my comprehension. Could we say that the development of our country no longer needed science and technology? Was the idea of serving the country worthily with science wrong? In rage, I burned all mathematics, physics,

³ “The May 16 Corps” was a mass organization during the Cultural Revolution. It was classified as a reactionary organization because it opposed Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing.

⁴ “Destroying the Four Olds campaign” was a mass campaign in the early stage of the Cultural Revolution. The Four Olds were Old Thoughts, Old Cultures, Old Customs, and Old Habits.

⁵ Two years later, the case was cleared and I was declared innocent.

⁶ Jiang Qing was Mao Zedong’s wife. She was then a Politburo member and also a member of the “Gang of Four.”

and chemistry textbooks, as well as the practice questions. I made up my mind to study liberal arts, pursuing Marxism-Leninism, political economy, and history. I was then 23 years old. I really wanted to understand what designs Marx and Lenin had for a socialist society. For example, was it possible for a socialist country to only care about politics, but not scientific knowledge?

At a report-back meeting on studying Marxism-Leninism at our factory, my remarks caught the attention of Li Ximing,⁷ who was then the Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Shijingshan Power Plant Committee. He promoted me from the boiler shop to the propaganda section. I was put in charge of the cadres' theoretical education, although I was still a worker. Although this was unlike studying at a university, it was a rare opportunity for someone who was interested in teaching himself literature and history. At least I got a lot of free time to read. In addition to studying Marxism-Leninism, I read many history books, including the memoirs of Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, *Disan diguo de xingwang* (*The Rise and Fall of Third Reich*), *Longmeier zhanshi wenjian* (Erwin Rommel's War-time Documents), etc.

Just when I felt that the god of destiny was smiling on me again, I was unexpectedly arrested by the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau in March 1976 and thrown into prison. I was accused of "spreading major political rumor splitting the Party Center." In fact, I did say at a meeting that "after Premier Zhou Enlai passes away, Zhang Chunqiao will attempt to seize the post of Premiership."⁸ It was a rather common hearsay at the time. When Zhou Enlai died in January 1976, the CCP Central Committee, controlled by Jiang Qing and Zhang Chunqiao, made an unfavorable appraisal of Zhou's lifetime achievements and inappropriate arrangements for Zhou's funeral, which caused widespread discontent in China. Later, they violently suppressed a spontaneous mass mourning of Zhou at Tiananmen Square. This was the April 4th (1976) Movement (also known as the first Tiananmen Incident). I learned later that my arrest warrant was signed by Zhang Chunqiao himself in an attempt to implicate Defense Minister Marshall Ye Jianying.

I was held in solitary confinement and was neither allowed to have any contact with the outside world nor to bring anything into the prison. But when I requested to study Marxism-Leninism, they couldn't turn me down. So, I began to read *Collected Works of Lenin*, and Marx's *Das Kapital*. When I was reading the second volume of *Das Kapital*, a major earthquake occurred in Tangshan, resulting in massive destruction and hundreds of thousands of deaths. Through my father's contacts,⁹ the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau allowed me to serve my jail time out of prison.

When I returned to the factory, I was sent to Tangshan as an aid worker. By October 1976, the "Gang of Four" was overthrown, and China's political atmosphere was changing. In 1977, the entrance exam for universities was formally restored. I felt that I had another chance, and planned to register for examination in order to enroll in Beijing University. I didn't anticipate that my case had not been redressed, even though the Tiananmen Incident verdict had been overturned. The reason was that my arrest in March 1976 was not carried out through regular legal procedures, and there was no file record. Thus, the public security bureau could not provide a certification to prove my innocence. While many of my relatives and friends entered universities, I could only continue to do hard work at the boiler shop. But I kept my reading and study during my spare time.

A few months later, after the head of Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau Liu Chuanxin committed suicide, a batch of compromising materials was discovered at his home, including a file on me. Thus, my case was redressed. Soon, Beijing Municipal Electricity Authority transferred me to the Propaganda Division. Li Peng (who later became China's premier),

⁷ Li later became a member of the CCP Central Committee Politburo and first Secretary of Beijing Municipal CCP Committee.

⁸ Zhang Chunqiao was then a member of Politburo Standing Committee and vice-premier. He was also a member of the "Gang of Four."

⁹ Before the Cultural Revolution, my father was deputy director general, Bureau of Reform through Labor, the Ministry of Public Security. In 1976, he was then in charge of the Joint Special Cases Office, the CCP Central Committee.

but who was then director of Beijing Municipal Electricity Authority, asked me to start a newspaper, namely, *Beijing Electricity* (later renamed *China Electricity*). Entrusted by Director Li, I spent the entire 1978 producing the newspaper, which was started from scratch. Given the heavy work load, I couldn't leave my post. Therefore, I missed another opportunity to take the college entrance examination.

Because no college graduates joined China's news agencies, publishing houses, or research institutions during the Cultural Revolution, there was a temporary shortage of talent in these organizations after the Cultural Revolution. They started to recruit people with no college degrees to join them. After the newspaper *Beijing Electricity* was in regular operation, I asked permission to take the talent recruitment exam of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Although I had no college degree, I wanted to be part of a research institution. Beijing Municipal Electricity Authority gave me permission.

In later 1978, after taking the exams, I joined the CASS Institute of World History. I thought that I could now begin my academic career. I soon found that it would not be feasible to work at China's top palace of learning without a record of formal schooling. Although I started to write academic articles, I was only a proofreader for the journal of *Shijie lishi* (World History). Half a year later, I registered for a Master's degree program at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Although I had not received college education, I needed formal academic training. I was then 29 years old.

My test score was among the best of the candidates, but my admission letter did not arrive. The Institute of World History CCP Committee Secretary Zhao talked to me, stating that someone reported to Deng Liqun, who was then vice president of the CASS (and would later become the head of the propaganda department of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee), that I had written an anti-socialist article. Thus, I was considered a "political dissident." I did write an essay, entitled, "The Concept of Science and other Issues in a Socialist Society," which was published first at the CASS' *Weidinggao* (Preprint) and then *Zhexue yanjiu* (Philosophical Studies)'s supplement.¹⁰ In that article, I argued that "China has not entered the socialist society according to Marxist-Leninist classical exposition. The theory went beyond reality. This is the source of the leftist policy which China carried out from the foundation of New China to the Cultural Revolution."

I agreed with their claim that I was a "political dissident." But I was not anti-socialist. I contacted Deng Yingtao, the son of Deng Liqun. Yingtao invited me to his home to talk with his father. When I entered his study, Deng Liqun was reading my article. I explained to him my intention in writing the essay and the logic behind it. Deng said, "It seems that you have read much on Marxism-Leninism, and your understanding of socialist theory is not wrong. But your assertion that China is not yet a socialist society would generate unhealthy political effects." After learning about my family's background, he said with a smile, "You are one of our own kids." The next day, I received the admission letter from CASS's Graduate School. *Beijing Ribao* (Beijing Daily) published a front-page report, entitled, "Becoming talented through self-study: Middle-school student Shen Zhihua was admitted to a graduate degree program."¹¹

In my opinion, science exists to inquire about the truth, and historical study is to seek the historical truth. With this ideal in mind, I worked to find a topic for my Master's thesis. At first, I wanted to work on the Korean War because Chinese history books stated that the war was started by South Korea, which was instigated by the United States. But how could Seoul, the capital of South Korea, have been occupied by North Korea only three days after the outbreak of the war, I wondered. There could be some hidden historical facts here. My job was to dig them out. But due to the political sensitivity of the topic, I had to give it up. Then, the Institute of World History assigned me to research African history, and I started to

¹⁰ Shen Zhihua, "The Concept of Science and other Issues in a Socialist Society," *Weidinggao* (Preprint), no. 5 (1979); and *Zhexue yanjiu* (Philosophical Studies), October 1979 supplement.

¹¹ *Beijing Ribao* (Beijing Daily), September 6, 1980, 1.

study African socialism. When China's "Reform and Opening" was started in the late 1970s, I began to research the history of the Soviet Union, focusing on Vladimir Lenin's New Economic Policy.

Professor Qi Shirong was my Master's thesis advisor, and he was a famous modern world history scholar in China. Professor Qi advised that all historical research started from research into archival sources. If you want to write a 10,000-word essay, you should have grasped at least one-million-word's-worth of historical documents. How could you explore historical truth without sufficient documentation? This was the biggest lesson of my graduate studies, underpinning my long-held faith in historical research. Professor Qi and I had frequent long conversations, and he often encouraged me by saying, "You should continue to work like this, and in ten years, you will be a first-rate scholar in China." I was very proud of myself at the time.

Here was indeed a rare opportunity for me to have graduate training. I truly valued it. For three years, I got up early and slept late, and my work ethic never slackened. Mr. Liao Moshu, who was a vice mayor of Beijing before the Cultural Revolution once wrote the two-line Chinese poem in calligraphic style, "Diligence is the path to the mountain of knowledge, hard-work is the boat to the endless sea of learning," to congratulate me on being accepted to the graduate program. These words became my companion. In addition to completing assigned readings and course work, I wrote and published six academic articles during my graduate study, some of which were reprinted by *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily).¹² Mr. Zhu Tingguang,¹³ director of the Institute of World History had a high opinion of me. When a national World History conference was held, student candidates were not able to make the trip to the conference due to budget constraints. In order to give me an opportunity to present my work at this major conference, Mr. Zhu gave up his air ticket and transferred the fund to cover my airfare. At the conference, I met several prominent scholars of World History in China. When I recall this episode, I am still very much moved.

While I was very proud and felt a bright future ahead of me, I suffered another major misfortune. In May 1982, less than ten days before my master thesis defense, I was again arrested by the Public Security Bureau. I was charged with "disclosing top state secrets" and working for the CIA. It was a real joke. I did share with an American doctoral student 12 volumes of materials for internal circulations on China's rural reform. Although these were internal publications, you could make copies at the Beijing Library. How could I be accused of "disclosing a top state secret"? I later learned that when Ronald Reagan became U.S. president, U.S.-China relations became quite tense. The American government arrested a Chinese citizen, accusing him of stealing U.S. classified information. The Chinese government decided to retaliate on an equal footing. In the end, the so-called American spy was free to depart China for America, but I ended up in a Chinese prison.

I was sentenced to two years in prison, expelled from graduate school, and banned from public employment. I appealed, but Mr. Zhang, the presiding judge, told me, "We all know about your case, but we can only adjudicate this way. For the interest of our country, you should accept it." With tears in my eyes, I signed the court verdict. When I was a child, my father told us the story of China's national hero Yue Fei.¹⁴ From my childhood, I had been determined to serve the motherland with selfless loyalty, but it was beyond my imagination that I had to do this for the motherland. I thought: should my academic career, which just got underway, end in this way?

During my two years in prison, the only thing I wanted to do was to continue my research. I had no idea whether I would ever be able to. But I was not willing to give up my research project. There was neither a chair nor a table in my prison cell.

¹² Shen Zhihua, "My View on Historical Study Methodology – Notes on Reading "anti-Duhring," *Shehui kexue zhanxian* (Social Sciences Front), no. 2 (1981), 60-64. Abstract of the article was reprinted in *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), June 12, 1981, 5.

¹³ Zhu Tingguang was a product of the New Fourth Army. He was a Division Chief at Theory Bureau, the CCP Central Committee Propaganda Department before the Cultural Revolution. He was a member of the writing squad, which produced the nine polemic commentaries during the Sino-Soviet ideological debates in the early 1960s.

¹⁴ Yue Fei was a national hero from the Song Dynasty. When he was young, his mother tattooed the four-Chinese characters, "serving the motherland with selfless loyalty" on his back. It is a much-told tale in China.

I squatted down in the corner, setting up a washbowl in an upside-down position on my knee so that I could write. During the day, I had to perform hard labor but continued to write in the evening under a dim 15-watt lamp. In over a year, based on my Master's thesis, I was able to complete a 400,000-word manuscript, entitled, "New Economic Policy and the Road of Soviet Socialization of Agriculture." With the assistance of a former colleague Zhang Hongru at the Institute of World History and Qiao Dongming, a prison guard, I was able to publish one article in the prestigious journal, *Shijie Lishi* (no. 6, 1983).¹⁵ Although my name did not appear in the article, I was overjoyed.

In May 1984, I was freed and walked out of prison with a thick stack of manuscripts. Although I was behind bars for two years, I did not lose my "Kungfu skills" of an academic. I did not fall too far behind in academic research. My main argument in my freshly-completed book manuscript was: Lenin attempted to explore a road for undeveloped countries such as Russia to achieve industrialization by using the "New Economic Policy," and the solution was to establish a market economic system. China's "Reform and Opening" at the time was a continuous exploration of Lenin's ideas. Thus, the manuscript not only was creative academically, but also had practical significance for Chinese politics. Therefore, it had to be published as soon as possible.¹⁶

Unfortunately, as an ex-convict, I had fallen to the bottom of society. I was not even able to find a job, let alone publish a book. At the end of my rope, I borrowed a couple of hundred Chinese yuan and traveled to Southern China to go into the business world. When I came to bid my farewell to Professor Qi Shirong, I told him: Your disciple is worthless, and I cannot follow you in the academia. If I can make a fortune in the business world, I will return to continue historical research. If not, I will die in a strange land and will never come back. After I left his home, I looked up to heaven and sighed heavily with tears in my eyes.

I was in the business world for about ten years and was able to make a considerable fortune. In the early 1990s, I returned to Beijing with a lot of money and set up a private research institute. I wanted to continue research on history. Many people asked: 'You have so much money, why do you want to sit on a cold stool to read and write?' But it was simple for me. I believed that the value of life was in pursuing something you wanted to pursue. You attain happiness if you can combine work with personal pursuits and hobbies. Moreover, I had to keep my promise to Professor Qi Shirong.

In September 1993, I was a participant at an international conference held in Manzhouli and organized by the CASS's Institute of Modern History. I traveled to the conference at my own expense. I was 43 years old that year. The paper I submitted to the conference, titled "The Soviet Dispatch of Troops to China's Northeast: Aims and Results" received favorable comments from Yu Shengwu, the former director of the Institute of Modern History. The article appeared in *Lishi Yanjiu* (Historical Research), China's premier history journal. This gave me a boost of confidence, and I came to feel that it was actually possible to be an "independent" scholar. At the time, I built a new house in the mountainous area on the outskirts of Beijing. I shut myself in behind closed doors and devoted myself to study and writing. Professor Niu Jun with Professor Odd Arne Westad once came over to visit. We drank heartily and talked freely. Arne is not only a great scholar, but is great company.

Then a golden opportunity arrived. The Soviet Union disintegrated, and its archival documents were opened to the public. Archival materials are the food of historians. I made contacts with Wang Renzhi, Secretary of the CASS CCP Committee. I proposed to collaborate with CASS in collecting Russian documents. I would provide the funds, and CASS would provide the research staff and do all the required paperwork for traveling abroad. Wang had a background in history, and we had been neighbors. We soon cut a deal. Over several years, we collected tens of thousands of Russian archival files. These

¹⁵ Zhang Hongru, "On the Relationship between History and Reality," *Shijie lishi* (World History), no. 6 (1983), 11-19.

¹⁶ The book was finally published in 1994, entitled, *Xin jingji zhengce yu Sulian nongye shehuihua de daolu* (New Economic Policy and the Road of Socialization of Agriculture in the Soviet Union) (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1994).

documents were then translated into Chinese and published in 34 volumes of *Selected Documents on Soviet History*.¹⁷ I benefited immensely from these documents. Only when you have collected sufficient documents will you be able to make great strides in research. Years later, I edited and published several other documentary collections, such as the three-volume *Declassified Russian Documents on the Korean War*,¹⁸ the eight-volume *Documents on U.S. Intelligence Estimates on China*,¹⁹ the twelve-volume *Selected Russian Documents on Sino-Soviet Relations*,²⁰ and the nine-volume *Catalog of Documents on Social Transformation of Eastern European Social System*.²¹ With these achievements, I felt that I had taken over the mantle of my mentor.

When I was in the business world, trading gold jewelry, I made my “first pot of gold.” As mentioned, I made use of this money to set up a private history research institute. Meanwhile, I invested in a significant project: translating the Chinese classic *Zizhi Tongjian* (History as a Mirror) into vernacular Chinese and published a new edition of the book with both classical and vernacular Chinese in several volumes. This new edition sold hundreds of thousands of copies, and I was able to make my “second pot of gold.” My personal funds increased exponentially. During that time, I fell into love with Li Danhui and married her. Danhui was then an editor at Zhonghua Shuju (Zhonghua Book Company).²² She has significant expertise in ancient Chinese prose and poetry. I was the editor-in-chief of the volumes, and she was the deputy. We were a good team at work. More importantly, we shared the same ideals. When I proposed to use the money made from editing and publishing *Zizhi Tongjian* to set up a private fund for historical research in China, she fully supported my idea. She donated all her earnings of 250,000 Chinese yuan from the project to the foundation. I exclaimed then: “This is truly an extraordinary woman!”

At the time, Chinese government funding for education and research was minimal. The typical researcher had only a couple of hundred Chinese yuan research money annually. Younger scholars usually had no research money at all. We established our private foundation supporting historical research, providing funding to cover history conferences, offering younger scholars grants for research and publications. CASS President Hu Sheng supported these exploits. Danhui and I wanted to be the trail-blazers in using societal resources to expand academic research in China. I persuaded her to accept early retirement from CASS. We traveled abroad together to collect archival documents, attended conferences, organized research for the Oriental History Association (which I founded), and edited and published *Oriental History Academic Books Series*. Indeed, we are like-minded people.

¹⁷ Shen Zhihua, chief ed., *Sulian lishi dang'an xuanbian* [Collection of Selected Historical Documents of the Soviet Union] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 2002), 34 vols.

¹⁸ Shen Zhihua, ed., *Chaoxian zhanzheng: Eguo Dang'anguan de jiemi wenjian* [The Korean War: Declassified Documents from the Russian Archive], 3 vols. Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo shiliao congkan (Collection of Historical Materials), no. 48. Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 2003.

¹⁹ Shen Zhihua and Yang Kuisong, chief eds., *Meiguo duiHua qingbao jiemi dang'an, 1948–1976* (Declassified American Intelligence Documents on China, 1948–1976) (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2009), 8 vols.

²⁰ Shen Zhihua, chief ed., *Eluosi jiemi dang'an xuanbian: ZhongSu guanxi* [Selection of Declassified Russian Archives: Sino-Soviet Relations]. Shanghai: Dongfang Chuban Zhongxin, 2015.

²¹ Shen Zhihua, chief ed., *Lengzhan yu shehui zhidu zhuanxin – DongOu geguo lengzhan shiqi dang'an wenxian bianmu* (*Catalog of Documents on Social Transformation of Eastern European Social System*) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2019), 9 vols.

²² Zhonghua shuju is the oldest publishing house in China and one of the most famous ones in China in publishing Chinese classics.

At the time, Danhui and I met frequently with several other prominent Chinese Cold War scholars, such as Zhang Baijia, Yang Kuisong, Niu Jun and Niu Dayong. We used the money from the foundation to hold annual nation-wide conferences at sites like Li River (Guilin), Jiuzhaigou (Sichuan), Zhangjiajie (Hubei), and the Wuyi Mountain. We often invited foreign scholars, including Mori Kazuko, O. Arne Westad, and Christian F. Ostermann. While scholars were meeting to discuss Cold War history, family members, led by Niu Dayong's wife, would tour the scenic spots.

When discussing Cold War history studies, I have to discuss my close association with Professor Chen Jian. We got to know each other in 1981 when Professor Ye Shuzong invited me to give a talk at Shanghai Teacher's College. Chen Jian was then a graduate student at East China Normal University (ECNU). We felt like old friends at the first meeting and talked happily with each other. We lost contact when I landed in prison, and he traveled to the United States to study. We resumed contacts in 1996 to resolve a knotty problem in the international academic circles, which was about a debate surrounding one of Mao Zedong's telegrams to the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin during the Korean War.²³ With his recommendation, for the first time, I participated in a Cold War International History Conference, held in Hong Kong in 1996. I became acquainted with Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and many international scholars. With our joint efforts, Chen Jian and I have been able to promote Sino-American academic exchanges in the study of Cold War history and China's Cold War studies.

The first book I wrote and published after returning to academia was on the Korean War.²⁴ I hoped to resolve a puzzle I had first encountered over 20 years prior. The declassified Russian documents provided me with solid documentation for the endeavor, and I must thank Sergei Goncharov for his help.²⁵ In the book, I argue that Stalin's aim in starting the Korean War was neither to aid Kim Il-sung nor to promote revolution in Asia. Stalin's objective was to secure Soviet strategic interests in the Far East, i.e., to control exit to the Pacific and ice-free ports, such as Port Arthur and Dalian Port, which Mao intended to take back. Mao Zedong's decision to send the Chinese troops to fight in the war stemmed from his determination to maintain the Sino-Soviet Alliance and to consolidate the Communist regime in China. I did not think that the outbreak of the Korean War was a result of the Sino-Soviet Alliance. On the contrary, it was a consequence of differences and contradictions within the Alliance.²⁶

My next major project was to study the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations during the Cold War. I researched and published on the following topics: Soviet aid to China, the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crises and their impact on China, China's "anti-rightist movement" in the 1950s, the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958 and the rupture of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, among others.²⁷ These publications had much influence in

²³ Shen Zhihua, "The Discrepancy between the Russian and Chinese Versions of Mao's 2 October 1950 Message to Stalin on Chinese Entry into the Korean War: A Chinese Scholar's Reply," translated by Chen Jian, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Issues 8-9, Winter 1996/1997: 237-242.

²⁴ Shen Zhihua, *Chaoxian zhanzheng jiemu* (Uncovering the Secrets of the Korean War) (Hong Kong: Tiandi Tushu Youxian Gongsi, 1995).

²⁵ Sergei Goncharov was a scholar before becoming a ministerial counselor at the Russian Embassy in China. He gave me an entire collection of archival documents on the Korean War, which President Boris Yeltsin presented to the South Korean government.

²⁶ Shen Zhihua, *Mao Zedong, Stalin yu Chaoxian zhanzheng* (Mao Zedong, Stalin, and the Korean War). (Guangzhou: Guangdong Renmin Chubanshe, 2003). For a translated English version of the book, see Shen Zhihua, *Mao, Stalin and the Korean War: Trilateral communist relations in the 1950s*, translated by Neil Silver (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

²⁷ Many of the topics are discussed in Shen Zhihua, *Wunai de xuanze: Lengzhan yu ZhongSu tongmeng de mingyun, 1945-1959* (Helpless Choice: The Cold War and the Fate of the Sino-Soviet Alliance) (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2013), 2 vols. For an English version, see Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959: A New History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015).

China and drew attention from international academic circles as well. Scholars in Poland and Hungary invited me to their countries to attend conferences and give talks, and they published my articles in their academic journals. My research on Mao Zedong's "anti-rightist movement" received favorable comments from Professor Roderick MacFarquhar of Harvard, who concurred with my view. I argued that when Mao Zedong first proposed that the people "speak out freely and air their views fully"—letting "one hundred flowers bloom"—he sincerely wanted to punish CCP officials. (He actually "achieved the same result by different methods" when he launched the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s). But Mao felt that the Polish and Hungarian Crises threatened CCP's rule in China, and he thus reversed the course and turned against the "rightists."

Many foreign scholars have little understanding of China's national conditions, and they frequently asked Chinese scholars to show Chinese archival documents to prove their arguments. We felt embarrassed. In China, it is immensely difficult to acquire materials from state archives. The Chinese Archives pay much attention to taking good care of archival materials but do not encourage scholars to make use of them. Li Danhui and I traveled to more than 30 provincial and municipal archives in China, but we had very limited access to reading and photocopying archival documents. We had to make connections and court people in positions of power in order to get access. For instance, in order to research at Xinjiang Autonomous Region Archives and Yili Autonomous Prefecture Archives, Li Danhui's father²⁸ made a phone call to Mr. Zhou, who was then Secretary the CCP Xinjiang Autonomous Region Committee. This made it possible for us to collect documents on the Ita Incident of 1962²⁹ at these two archives. Through the invention of Mr. Xi, who was then governor of Fujian Province, we were able to enter Fujian Provincial Archives to read the meeting minutes of the CCP Central Military Commission front-line headquarters during the Bombardment of Jinmen in 1958. Even these reliable and high-level contacts did not always guarantee success. For instance, we traveled thousands of miles to Tibetan Autonomous Region Archives, but we got nothing from Tibet.

I was an independent scholar outside the formal state system for over ten years. I conducted research, presented my works at national and international conferences, and got published. But I had an ambitious plan for China's Cold War Studies, and I wanted to take the lead in organizing significant research projects and mentoring graduate students. But as an independent scholar, I could not accomplish these. While thinking of these issues, Professors Yang Kuisong and Chen Jian persuaded me to join East China Normal University (ECNU) and to lead ECNU's Cold War Studies. I consented without hesitation. I was a "sanwu," or "three withouts": without formal academic certificates, without a professional title, and without a work unit.³⁰ It was unheard of for people such as this to join China's higher education institutions.

At the time, I was also an adjunct professor at both Beijing University and Renmin University. Professor Niu Dayong, chair of History Department, and Professor He Fangchuan, Vice President of Beijing University (Beida) wanted me to join Beida formally, as a faculty member, but Beida's Human Resources Department turned down their request because there was no such precedent for such a hire. But East China Normal University treated me very differently. Ms. Zhang Jishun, Secretary of the CCP Committee at ECNU, was sincere and worked efficiently in recruiting me. Only a couple of months after I had a formal conversation with her on the issue, ECNU completed all paperwork, and I was formally hired. Shanghai has stringent rules regarding recruiting talent from other provinces. Scholars in arts and humanities, who are 50 years or older, are not allowed to be formally hired in Shanghai. But I was close to 55 years old in 2005. I knew that Ms. Zhang fought a fierce battle in order to hire me.

²⁸ Li Zhengting (Li Danhui's father) was then a high-ranking CCP Central Committee official.

²⁹ In the early 1960s, local ethnic minorities in Xinjiang fled to the former Soviet Union by the thousands (The total number reached 61,361 by late May 1962), most of them recruited by the Association of Soviet Nationals. This exodus is known as the "Tacheng Incident in the Ili region" (or the "Ita Incident").

³⁰ "Sanwu" people are outside of the formal state system.

It has now been 15 years since I formally joined ECNU. When I first arrived at ECNU, I was the only one in an empty office—the newly-established Center for Cold War International History Studies. I soon enrolled Zhou Na as a doctoral student and recruited post-doctorate fellows, such as Yao Yu, Zhan Xin, Zhang Minjun, and Liang Zhi. ECNU's Cold War Center rapidly grew into a major operation, involving scores of students and staff in what has become China's key research base for Cold War history. The Center is also a repository for archival documents on Cold War history collected from archives all over the world. The ECNU's support for this ambitious project is a measure of the leadership of the University's President, Yu Lizhong.

Although I now work in the state system, I feel that the development of China's academic research relies on both government and private support. For a time, Li Danhui's and my Oriental History Fund was beginning to run out. When I first arrived at ECNU in 2005, I made a very ambitious plan and wanted to do big things. I needed funds to cover many of the expenses, which we were not able to get reimbursed from ECNU. Danhui's elder brother Li Danke and my younger brother Shen Zhigeng each donated one million Chinese yuan to ECNU Cold War Center. I was particularly grateful to Mr. Qian Xiaohua, a Shanghai real estate agent, who provided much financial and other support to Oriental History Fund, which was later formally registered as Oriental History Research Foundation. Who dares to say that Chinese entrepreneurs have no social responsibility? Later on, we established the Contemporary Documentary Sources Center at ECNU and Center for the Study of the History of "Reform and Opening." These have also been supported by entrepreneurs such as Qian Xiaohua and Yu Jiandong.

As an academic leader, one of the most important responsibilities is to grasp the new trends in research. In 2009, the Chinese military entrusted me to study the history of Sino-North Korean relations. After two-three years of research and reading into historical materials, I found that the Sino-North Korean relationship was completely different from what we usually read from Chinese newspapers and books. The so-called "friendship forged with flesh and blood" is just propaganda and based on a myth. In China, the study of the Korean issue and the history of Sino-North Korean relations is a forbidden area. It is challenging to find useful historical materials on the topic, and the Chinese government severely restricts scholarly pursuit into these topics. The historical truth about Sino-North Korean relations is a blank space in academic research. But finding out the truth on Sino-North Korean relations is essential for the Chinese government to make decisions in handling issues in its neighborhood, particularly, in Northeast Asia. It took me seven years to complete a manuscript on the history of Sino-North Korean relations. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, I couldn't publish the book in mainland China. Thus, the book was first published in Japanese in Japan in 2016, then in Korean in South Korea. A Chinese version was released in early 2018 by the Chinese University Press in Hong Kong,³¹ and an English version was published in New York in the fall of 2018 as well.³² Although I could not publish all my findings on Sino-North Korean relations in mainland China, I was able to submit many research reports to relevant government agencies. I believe it is essential that China's policy-makers and foreign policy officials should know this history.

I feel that China's relations with many of its neighbors, such as Vietnam, Mongolia, and India, are very complicated and changeable. But Chinese scholars have done little to research the history of these relations. Scholars and policy-makers know little about the neighborhood. I believe that historians should be held responsible for this inability to provide policy-makers with the relevant background knowledge. I wrote to the Central government leaders and proposed to expand the study of China's relations with its neighboring countries and asked for their support. My current research project, "Document Collection and Historical Studies on China's Neighbors' Policies toward China," was designated an "NSSF (National Social Science Fund) Specially Entrusted Project" in 2015, and has been continuously supported by National

³¹ Shen Zhihua, *Zuihou de "tianchao": Mao Zedong, Jin Richeng yu Zhong Chao guanxi* (The Last "Celestial Empire": Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations) (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2018).

³² Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

Social Sciences Fund. This is a joint project, involved all researchers at ECNU Cold War Center and scholars outside ECNU.

In recent years, the history of China's "reform and opening" has become an emerging new area of inquiry. The topic is immensely important from the perspective of China's developmental road. At present, many countries have declassified their archives for the period up to the late 1980s. With the deepening of research, I am confident that we will be able to acquire an extensive collection of documents. Additionally, this is also an interdisciplinary field of inquiry. I am sure that ECNU will be a leader in this field.

I once asked Mr. Jin Chongji for advice. Jin was a former deputy director of the CCP Central Committee's Center for Literature and Documentation, the editor of many of the official biographies of Chinese leaders, and the first person to access many of the classified documents on modern Chinese history and the history of the CCP. Should the people be told the truth, I asked. Mr. Jin shared with me his principle: You don't have to tell all the truth, but all you say must be the truth. I fully agree with him, but these are dangerous waters when you find yourself in the deep. I myself have often been accused of being a "traitor to China" by various ill-wishers. In China, it is often painful and even dangerous to be a scholar. Nevertheless, I will remain steadfast in telling the historical truth.

Shen Zhihua is professor of history and director of Center for Cold War International History Studies, East China Normal University, Shanghai. The author of a number of major Chinese-language works on Cold War history, he is also the coauthor of *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949-1976* (2018); *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959: A New History* (2015); and *After Learning to One Side: China and its Allies in the Cold War* (2011). In 2011, Shen was public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. He is the preeminent scholar of Cold War history in China.