

CHAPTER 28

The Lin Biao Affair

A FEW MONTHS after the construction of the power station canal began in 1971, news of the attempted coup d'état by a faction of the military led by the central committee Vice Chairman Lin Biao became public. When the attempt failed, the leaders were arrested; Lin Biao and his wife and son fled toward Russia in a military aircraft that was shot down by a missile, and their remains were recovered from the site of the crash, on the border between Inner and Outer Mongolia. For most people, this was something unimaginable: Lin Biao was the only leader in the history of Red China to have been acknowledged in Party literature as Mao's successor, and it was normal practice in official recitations to refer to the Party central committee "led by Chairman Mao and Vice Chairman Lin." People had to memorize and recite Lin Biao's introduction to Mao's quotations, "In Praise of Mao Zedong Thought," also known as the "Preface to the New Edition," even more than the quotations themselves, and for a time, Lin Biao was an even more prominent figure than Mao himself.

Thus the incident could not be announced to the public simultaneously, and the news spread gradually in ever-widening circles. Since the Party's hold over hundreds of millions of people was at stake, there must have been particular strategies for the prevention of outbreaks of unrest [for different regions], but in the case of Tibet, they initially sounded out the Party leaders at county level and above, then announced the news to rank-and-file Party members, government officials, local government workers, and finally ordinary people. "Class enemies," however, were not told. At our canal work camp at that time, they always held separate meetings for "class enemies," and we were told as usual about "cherishing the Party central committee led by Chairman Mao and Vice Chairman Lin" and continued

to recite Lin's "Preface to the New Edition," while in the ordinary meeting they were sounding the war cry against "Lin Biao's anti-Party clique."

Meanwhile, a number of differing accounts of the failed coup were circulating in society at large. Some said that Lin Biao's exaggerated praise of Mao was designed to ensure that by constantly being forced to sing his praises, ordinary people would naturally become fed up with him. Others said that during the revolution, many of Lin's former comrades were accused of being "counterrevolutionaries," "Party factionalists," "warlords," "capitalist roaders" and "revisionists," removed from office, and expelled from the Party, and ingratiating himself with Mao was a way of ensuring that this did not spoil his own career. It was also said that Lin Biao's intention was to free China from the misery it was then enduring, but only because when one political faction tries to overthrow another it always purports to have nobler aims.

Later on, when the military leaders who had conspired with Lin were brought to trial, their statements of confession printed in the *Tibet Daily* said that they had planned for two scenarios. In the first, when Mao went on a tour of the provinces they planned to take the opportunity to assassinate him, denounce him to the whole nation, and seize power. In the second, in case of failure, they would divide the country by establishing a principal base in Guangzhou in the south, from where they would carry on a civil war. Perhaps because Mao Zedong's karmic potential and fortune were not yet exhausted, neither plan was realized, and all those involved lost their lives. As far as we Tibetans were concerned, if the second scenario had come to pass and China had been split up, it could have provided Tibet with a welcome opportunity, and whatever had motivated Lin Biao's group, we were disappointed at least that their back-up plan had failed.

In the wake of the Lin Biao affair, the authorities increased their oppression of the people, and "class enemies" in particular, by launching the "Oppose Lin Biao and Confucius" campaign (*Lin khag Kong khag*). In the meetings for "class enemies," we constantly had to express our thoughts about the Lin Biao case with reference to our own progress in "reform," and sometimes submit them in writing. Ordinary people also had to write denunciations of Lin Biao and Confucius and post them on the camp notice board, but although the people working there had attended school in the period since Democratic Reform, those were schools in name only, and in practice most of them did not know how to write a single word of the denunciations regularly demanded of them. Since we "class enemies" knew how to write, we had to do it for them whenever we had spare time, and

even during mealtimes. However, if what they said could not be put into writing exactly, some people found this unacceptable and got angry, and a few made false accusations that their words had been deliberately misrepresented. Likewise, during the fortnightly breaks from the work camp when we were allowed to return home, the neighborhood committees had us write denunciations to be posted on the walls of the alleys in their area, which was a very onerous addition to our regular burden. To tell the truth, I felt embarrassed that my written Tibetan was not good enough, despite what I had been able to learn as a child thanks to the kindness of my good parents, and this was obviously because I had had to spend my time working like a beast of burden at the age when I should have been studying, something I regretted bitterly.

The reason for the denunciation of Confucius, the founder of the Chinese cultural tradition who lived thousands of years ago, was that Lin Biao was a devotee of Confucius and quoted him in many of his writings, so Confucian thought was identified as the source of Lin's alleged wrong-headedness.