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Political Leadership, Mobilization and The People's Republic of China*

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Caught between a profusion of behavioral models of social change and a limited systematic literature on leadership, the westerner who studies Chinese political leadership is only beginning to integrate the experiences of the People's Republic with established generalizations. As a result the book, *China, Management of a Revolutionary Society*,¹ closes with an article by Gabriel Almond which ignores the roles of individuals in that management and only mentions the Asian nation on a few pages. Though entitled, "Some Thoughts on Chinese Studies," Almond's piece is directed at the problems of modernization experienced by European nations and the developmental models appropriate for analyzing them. Admittedly not a Chinese specialist, Almond writes from this approach to suggest China may fit into it.² As a leading American theorist he concentrates on the functional expression of social forces, rather than the roles of those who can rapidly energize those forces.

Leadership is thus studied in terms of Weberian typologies, and political mobilization everywhere takes the form Gabriel Almond has described so aptly.³ This may well be appropriate, but there are limitations worth recognizing. For mobilization theories derived of nations where the activity took place over centuries may not be applicable to those that achieved the transition in the lifetime of one man; and classifications of leadership lose some of their suitability when the conversion from one type of leadership, or one type of mobilization, to another occurs. By focusing on the People's Republic this problem can be clarified.

One difficulty in doing this, however, is the weakness in the concept of leadership, Political Scientists do not even agree on exactly what leaders do.⁴ The conceptual weakness creates the possibility of analysing leaders by

¹John M. H. Lindbeck, ed., *China: Management of a Revolutionary Society* (Seattle, 1971).

²Gabriel Almond, "Some Thoughts on Chinese Political Studies," in Lindbeck, pp. 377-385.

³Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach* (Boston, 1966).

⁴Lewis Edinger, ed., *Political Leadership in Industrialized Societies* (New York, 1967), p. 5.

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whatever theory seems appropriate. As a result Mao and Bismarck may be classified as national unifiers at one moment and dissimilar organizers of the international arena at another. Little account is taken of the arena in which they lead, or the differences in their intents. So Mao is compared to Casterleigh and George Washington as easily as his contemporaries: Ghandi, Sukarno, and Kenyatta.

To resolve some of these difficulties this article takes on a number of presumptuous tasks. First it outlines a functional framework for analysing what leaders do. Then there is an application of the framework to particular leaders in the Chinese People's Republic. Which leads to a conclusion that applies the resulting perspectives on China to Western theories on various kinds of leadership. Leadership is partly defined here in terms of political mobilization.

I

When the question is asked, what do leaders do, examples of individuals immediately come to mind. One is likely to concentrate on those who hold a particular position, speak for an influential interest, or have persuaded large numbers to follow them. In itself this choice simply emphasizes the posts leaders hold or the results of their actions. The same is true if one uses such classical definitions of leaders as those who affect the behavior of followers.⁵

Only by going on to ask, how do leaders affect others and how do they make their posts more symbolic does one probe the meaning of the definition. In answer one then finds the functions of leadership provide valuable insight. Though a list of the functions will not be totally applicable to one leader, it provides general categories that can be applied to the analysis of particular individuals. As the processes and objectives affected by political leadership, the functions on such a list impress themselves on a social system; whether it is a group, party, government, society, or a sub-unit thereof. They are manifest and evident, latent,⁶ or delayed by time or intervening events in taking affect. And the functional results of a leader's activities are not necessarily those the leader intended. Nor can all functions of a society be affected by a leader.

The theory of functionalism, which is derived from biological analysis of the bodily contributions of the heart (which has the function of pumping blood), skin (which functions as a protective covering), etc., suggests functions benefit the equilibrium of the social system; otherwise they are

⁵Ralph Melvin Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership* (New York, 1974).

⁶Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (Glencoe, 1957), pp. 60-63.

dysfunctional.⁷ But leaders affect a multitude of systems, often variously, by the same act. Their effectiveness depends on which aspects of an act are functional and which are dysfunctional. For it may be productive to create disequilibrium among one's enemies, or to promote some types of dysfunctions when social change is intended.

Analysis of leadership functions includes cognizance of their functional and dysfunctional attributes. It illuminates the implications of a leader's action, or non-action, while suggesting where a leader's impact could be examined. The list of those functions served by political leaders include:

Political mobilization — The motivation and rallying of followers, organizations, and social units to influence political action.

Political socialization — Whereby education, example and adaptation provide the climate for particular social responses.

Issue identification may reflect the leader's choice, articulation, and personification of a policy position. The leader represents the focus of issue identification for others.

Conflict management includes preventing conflict, resolving conflict, as well as purposely directing it.

Goal organization is indicated in the stated intent of the leader, the choice of priorities, role definitions for followers, and the bureaucratization a leader may implement.

Communication informs, motivates, and establishes a psychological and informational climate for other functional activities.

Group unification may be promoted, personified, and managed by an effective leader.

Cultural displacement, especially in a changing society, provides an opportunity for followers to identify their cultural adaptation with the example of the leader.

Ego identification gives followers both ego support and ego projection when comparing themselves to the leader. Families naming their children after presidents demonstrate this.

These functions can also be applied to political units and other political forces. For instance, political parties carry on the functions of goal

⁷*Ibid*, pp. 25-30.

organization, socialization, cultural adaptation, as well as that of recruitment; while courts of law exercise conflict management, issue identification, and communication.

The contributions of political leaders, as differentiated from political parties or courts of law, are evident in the rank ordering of the functions. If the list started with political recruitment one would probably be applying it to political parties, while conflict processing would be the first item on a list of legislative functions, and communication would lead the list of a political commentator's functions.

Whether actively or passively, a function necessarily practiced by political leaders is political mobilization. With mobilization, augmented by other functions, leadership furthers movements, gives life to codified institutions, and unites or fractionalizes groups of people. Mobilization signifies followership and the influence leaders have on social behavior. It is a function ranging in application from the creation of disciplines to the goading of enemies into taking a political action. Exercised dynamically it prompts religious zeal, revolutions, the morale necessary to overcome adversity, or increases in levels of productivity. Passively expressed the symbolism and personification of mobilization maintains established values and promotes calmness. Political mobilization is the function tapped in persuasion, implementation, the setting of mood, or the acquisitions of simple support.

II

The problem in placing such emphasis on mobilization as a function carried out by individuals, is the uses the term has in development literature. Almond, writing with Powell, notes, for instance, that "mobilized modern systems (are) marked by both a high degree of structural differentiation and a secularized political culture."⁸ In the article mentioned earlier he goes on to question if this is being brought about in China the way it has been in Russia, Germany, and Great Britain.⁹ Thereby he supports David Apter's suggestion that mobilization is public involvement for purposes of modernization and industrialization.¹⁰ Such analysis looks at purpose, social impetus, and historical processes, rather than the effect of individuals. Its exponents are likely to see leaders as the handmaidens of the process or

⁸Almond and Powell, p. 258.

⁹Almond, p. 381.

¹⁰David E. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization* (Chicago, 1965).

figures with which individual stages of development can be identified.¹¹ Where they perceive a group as having an influence on mobilization they emphasize elites rather than individuals; movements rather than their organizers. The result is a delegitimization of "great men" theories, and increased regard for institutionalization, interest pressures, and social forces. Governments and worldwide trends create change according to this interpretation: individuals only influence the application of governmental actions and broader trends.

For students of China, charisma, and the leading Chinese figures this must be confusing. It suggests the People's Republic would have modernized as successfully, in the last thirty years, without Mao or Chou; in the provinces national movements and regional local currents would have their effect. But Ralph Thaxton has ably pointed out that local level Chinese mobilization was not a generalized movement.¹² And in his book entitled, *Mao Tse-Tung: The Man in the Leader*, Lucian Pye describes the effect of the individual. Only mentioning Gabriel Almond in the dedication, Pye writes:

It is beyond our power to measure the precise importance of Mao's personality in permitting him to become more successful than others before him in bringing together all the scattered forces of one hundred years of Chinese revolution and create the phenomenon of the Chinese People's Republic.¹³

He and Thaxton would probably support J. P. Nettl's description that:

Mobilization is taken to mean a process which is induced, not a mere state or level which can be worked out either from 'hard' objective indices, or simply abstracted from subjective notions like participation, levels of cognition, etc.¹⁴

In Pye's view "Mao personally manifested. . . mastery in providing both the words and actions which could mobilize the Chinese people and provide them with a new emotional base for their national life."¹⁵ Acting in "a time when the Chinese people were at a point in their collective history in

¹¹Myron Weiner, "Political Participation: Crisis of the Political Process," in Leonard Binder, et al., *Crisis and Sequence in Political Development* (Princeton, 1971).

¹²Ralph Thaxton, "On Peasant Revolution and National Resistance: Toward a Theory of Peasant Mobilization and Revolutionary War With Special Reference to Modern China," *World Politics* XXX (Oct., 1977), pps. 24-57.

¹³Lucian Pye, *Mao Tse-Tung: The Man in the Leader* (New York, 1976), p. 229.

¹⁴J. P. Nettl, *Political Mobilization* (New York, 1967), p. 32.

¹⁵Pye, p. 233

which their paramount needs were precisely a new vision based on the articulation of ideas and efficacious political action. . . ,”¹⁶ Mao energized and united in a method that contained elements of charisma and of bureaucratization.

Others also aided the mobilization effort: Chou En-Lai headed the administration, Lin Piao organized a loyal military force, and Liu Shao-Ch’i directed energies into channels of economic productivity. Together with colleagues this team represented the successes, shifts and divisions in recent Chinese leadership.

But as long as he lived they were always subject to the dominance Mao could exercise through his ability to mobilize the public. No other Communist leader, not Lenin in Russia or Tito in Yugoslavia or Castro in Cuba, had gained power with such universal public support. The goals of Mao became so acceptable to his followers other leaders would find it impossible to compete. Reasons for this continue to fascinate the interested world, which may gain insight from a recent comment by Lucian Pye.

The secret of (Mao’s) greatness lies. . . in his extraordinary ability to understand, evoke, and direct human emotions and the innumerable ways in which he has used his own person to command the sentiments and passions of others. . . for he is possessed of a personality that fits the definition of a “dramatizing” character whose skill lies in commanding the “immediate affective response in others.”¹⁷

These are all elements of charisma, the concept social scientists and journalists use to describe the personal appeal of prominent figures. But in the personality of Mao, charisma also refers to the commitment and emotion evoked among followers and it accounts for a vision followers feel they have a part in fulfilling. It is the dynamic whereby he met the needs of his followers through psychological exchange and political success.¹⁸

The effect of this on the relationship other leaders had with Mao deserves close attention. It resulted in both dependence and group initiative; currents he often encouraged. In the early thirties, when the Chinese communist movement was faced with failure and divided by friction, Mao had been able to provide subordinates with a sense of acclaimed purpose and had quietly restrained challenges to his authority. He had made this possible

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Lucian Pye, “Mao Tse-Tung’s Leadership Style,” *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (April, 1976).

¹⁸James V. Downton, *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process* (New York, 1973), pp. 14-20.

by establishing a power base as the first of the communist leaders to mobilize peasants through appeals to their discontents; and then added to his reputation with brilliant strategical suggestions in meetings of the party leadership, success in turning a military retreat into a triumphant march of 6,000 miles, and the facility to expose the lack of support for his opponents. Other leaders came to respect him as they came to depend on his power base and to suffer from exposure of their own weaknesses through his tactical proposals. Their dependence was extended when he did not purge those he displaced—but simply encouraged their rehabilitation until they accepted his thought and could play a part in his organization. If not themselves engulfed in his charisma, they understood its affect on the population and the power it gave Mao to control. If they forgot, Mao reminded them in such moves as recruiting the youth for the “cultural revolution” to frustrate efforts at challenging him with a mobilization of the bureaucrats. No matter what conflicts lower level leaders had among themselves they realized charisma gave Mao the power to recruit new support and to define an ideology. So they worked for the common purpose. The resulting dominance over explanation and the enunciation of political purpose encouraged the subsidiary leaders to find it simpler to fulfill their posts than to challenge. Their achievements were recognized in terms of the role they played in the larger scheme. This gave them a share in the charisma and the ideological explanation. They were recognized for goals fulfilled rather than consultation provided. The ideology even lessened their potential for representing special groups by emphasizing party purposes rather than the demands of interests. Therefore Mao could expect compliance with his suggestions and acceptance of his dictates. For he could outflank those who tried to be independent and so did not need to trade for advantage. As long as the goals of the movement were personified in his leadership other figures acted in accordance with his ideology and his expressed purpose. They understood the need for their inferior roles.

Yet it is just this dependence on a charismatic leader that leads to the collapse of other revolutionary movements. They cannot sustain their initiative after the leaders demise. Which is one of the reasons western analysts place so much emphasis on the development of institutions of mobilization and on differentiated interests which can further specialized demands. They feel illness, death, or changed emotional needs by followers can mark the end of an effectiveness based on personal mobilization.

But the People’s Republic was never a nation totally dependent on personalism. It has been successful in overcoming some of the limitations of

that circumstance with the unique group of leaders who ruled with Mao. They were able to institutionalize his ideology. In the communication of society, and in the bureaucratization furthered by Chao En-Lai and Lin Piao, there are numerous suggestions on how the transition from charismatic leadership to, what Weber calls, "routinization" and the support of "rational-legal" leadership occurs. In the military Lin Piao headed an institution which is generally recognized for its impact on social mobilization: army life regularizes and hierarchically commands the affairs of a vast manpower that learns to use technological equipment and respond to group action. Lin Piao could not only direct this effort with perseverance and tactical success, he was able to use it for the ideological purposes of the party. With similar effect, Chou En-Lai was a loyal adherent who could implement policy through institutionalization, diplomatically negotiate the compromises that alleviate friction, and publicly explain complex proposals. Other leaders, such as Liu Shao-Chi and administrators in Peking and some provincial governments played their own roles. They integrated popular initiatives, party efforts and governmental objectives by strengthening bureaucracies. Thus, as a leadership team they all helped bring China into a less personal era. Where he recognized the benefits this would bring to expression of his ideology, Mao continenced it.

But tensions would arise between a leadership of bureaucratization and the populism of Mao. The supreme figure continued to mobilize segments of the citizenry and to isolate obstreperous opponents, for he wished to contain the kind of power that was increased by organization and role identification. He preferred personal communication to that of institutionalization. So he strove to prevent what western observers would analyze as the kind of social mobilization necessary to bring a population to modernity; and he frustrated those who find continuity is the basis to governmental success.

Some have suggested the resulting cycles of leadership in the People's Republic have brought forth fruitful modernization. Pointing up the difficulties of Nehru in India and of a succession of Philippine presidents in systematically furthering directed development, these theorists suggest a leadership where the "rational-legal" sometimes comes to the fore, and sometimes the "charismatic" predominates, provides time for adjustment and continues the various specialized identifications of insecurely mobilized populations.¹⁹ In a recent article that aptly maps the cycles of dominance

¹⁹G. W. Skinner and E. Winkler, "Compliance Succession in Rural Communist China: A Cyclical Theory," in A. Etzioni, ed., *Complex Organizations* (New York, 1969).

by charismatic, and then rational-legal, practices, Paul Hiniker and Jolanta Perlstein hypothesize:

The desire for industrialization and economic development naturally moves charismatic leadership in the bureaucratic direction. However, the ensuing unconstrained emphasis on economic development naturally conflicts with the value of equality; the ensuing rise of expert personnel naturally conflicts with the dominance of reds; and the ensuing emphasis on technical activities naturally conflicts with mass mobilization. In sum, successful bureaucratization engenders cognitive dissonance in those ideologically committed to charismatic leadership. Strong commitment to charismatic authority forecloses the option of dissonance reduction via changes of charismatic ideology. Since events dissonant with charismatic leadership are inevitable, obvious, and undeniable in a bureaucratizing society, the sole avenue open for dissonance reduction is that of seeking further social support for the charismatic doctrine. Hence the success of the bureaucratic pattern, and/or the implied failure of the charismatic pattern, stir a new charismatic proselyting urge in the committed ideologues and leads, with acquiescence of the bureaucrats, to a new round of charismatic proselyting and policy formation. But, reimpositions of the charismatic-leadership style again conflicts with successful economic development efforts . . . the cycle begins another period in its wave like oscillations. The process persists until a kind of short circuit occurs by virtue of loss of numbers of ideologically committed supporters from the leadership.²⁰

The circuit is now closed, and the charismatic leader is dead. No longer is purpose personified to such a degree that others understand their roles purely as followers. In pursuance of an ideology and of continuity, even more than a man, the roles have become increasingly circumscribed and structurally related to each other. Authority now rests in specialized tasks, so it can be observed; rules now outline responsibilities and duties, with lines of domination imbedded in the rules. Leaders with major responsibilities know to whom they must report and how they will be evaluated.

²⁰Paul J. Hiniker and Jolanta Juszkiwicz Perlstein, "Alternation of Charismatic and Bureaucratic Styles of Leadership in Postrevolutionary China," *Comparative Political Studies* X (Dec., 1978).

III

It is too early to know how strict such organization in China will become. But there are innumerable examples in history and current affairs that highlight its characteristics. With tests and statistics the measure of ability, leaders find they are evaluated in terms of meeting carefully defined objectives. As a result their duty of fulfilling rules and immediate organizational demands supplants the emphasis on filling the goals of the movement. On the upper levels leaders have some input into setting the objectives, but they are also subject to the stated guidelines that dominate decisions on where to delegate power and on whether to respect the power of another. Even the dominant leader today, who defines roles and assigns duties, is subject to the established relations already structured into the organization. In fact a major claim to being dominant depends on maintaining that organization. So the successors to Mao are at once the focal point of organizational decision making and the prisoners of its established structure. Over time they can make adjustments in the apparatus of role making and role defining. But their success will depend on how they do this while maintaining organizational continuity. Thus they may find themselves reduced to promoting fear by threatening the position of inferiors, finding means to make rewards that will not arouse the backlash of those not favored, and establishing the moods that encourage persons to react in a particular manner. Both the furtherance of their own positions and the effectiveness of their regimes depends on how well they use the organization to manage conflicting demands. When conflicts arise among their subordinates some of their authority rests on not becoming too subject to political trades. They must determine policy and duty. In this their mobilization skills come to the force when they make a decision that invigorates support or can encourage potentially antagonistic or apathetic leaders to carry out the necessary duties. Leading an organization rather than a movement they integrate specialists and promote power relationships among social units, rather than further the power of groups or the disintegrations of certain established forces.

The contemporary leaders are entering the era of high social mobilization; it is a condition shaped by events that have occurred before. But unlike many leaders in European countries, they and their recent superiors had a direct hand in molding that mobilization. Hardly subject to the slow development of events, or the necessary exchanges among the elites of Western Europe, they have often played a direct and dominant role. In this they always lived in the shadow of the most dominant of their number. As

that shadow spread and became less defined they found new means of influence possible, and they furthered them. So China has gone through a number of stages.

1. A charismatic revolution.
2. Bureaucratization, with the cooperation of the charismatic leader, by a team of associates who could cooperate in specialized tasks.
3. Friction through the different demands of modernized bureaucracy and charismatic leadership.
4. Oscillation in the imposition of one type of leadership or another. The negotiation and tolerance of Chou helped further this, while the dynamics of its tensions propelled the nation forward.
5. Increased influence by the administrative core.

Yet in each stage individuals have played their roles. In the People's Republic, maybe more than any other nation, it is impossible to say the leaders were simply prisoners of events and their positions. They had a direct hand. The mobilization is largely a result of their interaction.

Now, as they enter a more bureaucratized era, it may be easier to compare them with western leaders. Their roles and positions seem more familiar. Moreover the links between the population and their major leaders are no longer as direct. So overall mobilization may continue in a seeming social wave rather than a led revolution. But even the new leaders are dominant figures. They can still play individual roles. So their capabilities will continue to have personal affect on the institutions and attitudes of China's future. Even in the west the character of mobilization depends on the styles, practices and purposes of leaders. Should it be promoted by elites or historical evolution, it is focused by political leaders.

The prime remaining question for leadership everywhere is: can those brought to power through the present structure recognize the needs and possibilities that will bring their mobilization capabilities to the most beneficial application?