



# CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC LEADERSHIP IN CHINA

A RESEARCH REVIEW AND CONSIDERATION

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Background

China's economic and political importance has captured the world's attention. China has become increasingly integrated into the global economy. Between 2000 and 2003, it accounted for one-third of global economic growth measured at purchasing-power parity, more than twice as much as the United States ("Food for Thought," 2004). Politically, China is the largest communist country in the world. As China seeks to raise its international prestige by hosting the 2008 Olympic Games, social factors have also captured the world's attention: China's status as the most populous country in the world, and its domestic and international crises over democratization, legitimization, and corruption. For all these reasons, China is a compelling case for inquiry into public leadership.

Throughout its rich 5000-year history, China has witnessed drastic public leadership transformations, from imperial, semi-colonial, semi-feudal, and semi-capitalist to socialist and Communist leadership. But today, China faces opportunities and challenges it has not previously encountered.

### 2. Purpose

This review is motivated by the need to (a) provide researchers and practitioners interested in contemporary public leadership in China with a comprehensive overview of the recent literature and (b) establish the context for future theoretical and empirical work on public leadership both within China and cross-culturally.

### 3. Defining Public Leadership

What should be considered in the category of public leadership? Kellerman & Webster (2001) use *public* to refer to the "sector generally regarded as political, to the domain of individuals and institutions dedicated to governance and public policy" (486). They define a leader as "one who creates or strives to create change, large or small, noting that leaders may hold, but do not necessarily hold, formal positions of authority" (487). They consider leadership "a dynamic process in which the leader(s) and followers interact in such a way as to generate change" (487). Rainey (1997) discusses public leadership in the sense of leadership in public sectors or organizations. Donahue (2003) further explains the evolving definition of public leadership: the broad definition of the term refers to "people who accept responsibility for defining and pursuing the public good" (55), while the "specific fading theme of public leadership" refers to the increasing delegations of government responsibility to non-government organizations and the increasing likelihood that leaders of government will possess cross-sector experience and orientation (55-56).

These definitions share three foci: (a) political leaders and processes, (b) leadership in public sectors or organizations, and (c) leaders in the government and public/nonprofit sectors who assume responsibility for creating the public good.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Research Questions

This review answers three questions:

- a Where has the scholarly attention on public leadership in China been focused thus far? In which disciplines has the work been done? On what questions have scholars focused? What methods have they used?
- b What themes emerge across studies, above and beyond the individual contributions of scholars and collaborative research programs?
- c What are the compelling directions for future theoretical and empirical work on public leadership in China?

## 5. Methods

To identify relevant discussions, we searched major online academic resources in both English and Chinese. The English databases we searched were Academic Search Premier, JSTOR (Journal Storage), PsychInfo, and SocioInfo. The major English journals on leadership include *Leadership and Organizational Development*, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *Leadership in Action* and *Women in Management Review*. The Chinese academic databases we searched are the National Library of China and the Library of Beijing University. Collectively, these resources include numerous current major scholarly journal articles (peer-reviewed journals) and book reviews in several disciplines (psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science) and domains of study (leadership studies, Sinology and Asian studies).<sup>2</sup> We conducted abstract searches that looked for “China or Chinese” and “leader or leadership” in the abstract fields of journal articles. A significant number of the set of articles yielded used the word “leadership” in a metaphorical or very general sense. Our larger set of articles was thus narrowed down by setting the following four parameters:

### Focus

We selected only those articles that center on public leadership.

### Geography

This review is confined to the geographical area of mainland China. With the recent academic interest in Asian studies, a considerable literature has emerged on the leadership of Chinese communities and Chinese ethnic groups in places outside mainland China, such as Taiwan (Li-Li, Liu & Maanling, 2004), Singapore (Li, Fu, Chow & Peng, 2002; Liu, Lawrence, Ward & Abraham, 2002), Malaysia (Liu, et al., 2002), and the U.S. (Wong, 2001; Yeh, 2004). Their dynamics are distinct enough to be separate areas for inquiry and review.

### Time of Publication

As we are interested in contemporary public leadership in China, we selected scholarly materials published in the last five-and-a-half years, January 1999 through June 2004. Within this range, we concentrate on materials that discuss events of the past half-decade. In a few cases, to provide a sense of the continuity of the leadership research, we review materials analyzing events dating back to 1989 (widely perceived as marking a halt of democratization that has given rise to a series of ensuing changes in Chinese Communist leadership) or even tracing back to 1949, the founding of People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the official establishment of the Chinese Communist leadership.

### Language

The majority of the materials reviewed in this article are in English, authored by American, European, and Chinese researchers. Most of the Chinese scholars whose works we reviewed were working in U.S. research institutions at the time of publication. We review comparatively few materials in Chinese by mainland Chinese scholars, due to a rather small set of such literature meeting the other three criteria.

## FINDINGS ON CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC LEADERSHIP IN CHINA

### 1. Leadership Transition

The topic of leadership transition in China is currently of great interest, as China recently witnessed its most significant top leadership succession resulting from the 16th Party Congress in November 2002. The leadership transition research falls into four areas: *four generations* research, application of Western

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**view of the world.”**

There is a current focus on the third and fourth generations. Prior to the 2002 election, many scholars scrutinized the profiles of the third generation leaders and predicted the profiles of the fourth generation leaders. The importance of these discussions, and of this domain of inquiry more generally, is seen in the recent large turnover in China’s top leadership.<sup>3</sup> In a particularly interesting study, Li (2001) used a quantitative approach to assess top leaders’ educational backgrounds and predicted that the fourth generation leaders would be solid technocrats; his prediction was accurate. In a subsequent study, Li (2002) compared the fourth generation with the previous three and described the collective characteristics of the fourth in terms of their political experience in the Cultural Revolution and a political environment “characterized by idealism, collectivism, moralism, [and] radicalism” as well as their educational background (337).

Bo (2003), Li (2003), and Tanner (2003) have focused on the predispositions of the leaders of different generations. They “have tracked with great care who is on the rise in Chinese politics and who is in decline, who belongs to which network, and where key individuals stand on critical policy issues” (Pye, 2003b, 164). This focus has enabled them to draw new conclusions that a “more professional political elite and more thoughtful intellectuals [are] now emerging” (Pye, 2003b, 164). This sanguine vision of the new leadership, however, has been challenged by scholars who adopt political and historical lenses to explain the roots and trends of China’s Communist rulers’ view of the world. Terrill (2003), drawing on his broad-ranging work on China’s political history, highlights the remnants of the dynastic China evident in the new leadership’s domestic and foreign policies with such key undercurrents as “idealism and realism,” “doctrine,” “paternalism,” and “unity” He predicts that these factors will lead China to a future of both political crisis and promises—a collapse of the “empire” and the emergence of a democratic federation (340-342).

Besides the work on the transitions across generations, considerable attention has been paid to intergenerational differences. One major reason for this may be a belief that the fourth generation’s “ability to sort out the intergenerational differences will in part determine how well it responds to ... challenges” (Fewsmith, 2002). For this reason, understanding the ways in which the fourth generation will mirror and differ from earlier generations is seen as critical. Fewsmith (2002) identifies significant differences between the generations in terms of their political experiences, merits and opinions on domestic and foreign policies:

differences between those who graduated from college before the Cultural Revolution broke out and those who were direct participants in that event; between those who have risen to important positions on the basis of their own merit and those who have done so on the basis of family backgrounds; between those who are more market oriented and those who are doubtful about the market; between those who welcome globalization and those who are suspicious of it; and between those whose sympathies lie with the poorer interior regions and those whose allegiances lie with the wealthy entrepreneurs of the cities on the coast. The resolution of these differences will have as great an impact as the generational turnover itself (34).

theoretical models and concepts, change of focus in the concerns of Chinese leadership, and change in the prospects and challenges for top leaders.

### **1.1 Four Generations Research**

Many scholars divide Chinese leaders into four generations. The consensus has been that the representatives of the four generations are, in chronological order, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiao Ping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao (Fewsmith, 2002; Moody, 2003; Seckington, 2002). Li (2002) provides a convincing rationale for dividing the generations this way.

A number of scholars (e.g., Li, 2002) have further studied the idiosyncratic characteristics of individual leaders, which will be explored in depth below.

### **1.2 Application of Western Theoretical Models and Concepts**

One vein of the leadership transition research pertains to the application of Western theoretical models and concepts to account for Chinese leadership transition. Some academics interpret these transitions through Max Weber's three ideal types of authority and general transition theory (Tian, 2003). Drawing on Weber's theory of legitimacy and transition, Zheng (2003) concludes that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) "has accomplished the transition from a revolutionary to a reformist party" and explains that the current leadership's greatest challenge is to become an "institutionalized ruling party." Objections to this approach have arisen. Tian (2003) criticizes the application because it "simplifies the complexity of historical phenomena, and falls prey to the difficulties of universalism and dualism." Further, Tian believes that "Chinese political ideas and practices have developed in a distinctive cultural tradition and may not be able to be fully understood in Western terms and categories." He therefore objects to the application of Western theories in explaining leadership transitions in China and proposes an "alternative *tongbian* interpretation of Chinese politics."<sup>4</sup>

Other scholars adopt Western concepts to explain the formal or informal rules guiding China's leadership transition. Lin (2004), for example, uses Douglass North's idea of "institutions" and Robin Cowan and Philip Gunby's concept of "path dependency" to elucidate how the process of turning informal rules into formal ones has shaped leadership transition in China, while at the same time causing a few problems (256).<sup>5</sup> In particular, Lin criticizes the process of ending the tenure system as being an incomplete leadership transition; the institutional trajectory started with "setting term limits for state leaders," defining "age limits for provincial and ministerial officials," "attaching Party leadership to state leadership," and finally "abolishing the life-tenure system for national Party leaders"; however, the age and term limits for senior Party leaders are yet to be formalized (274).<sup>6</sup>

Lin (2004) also observes in the recent leadership transition "another unwritten norm"—the "so-called 'jiandang yuzheng' (anchoring Party leadership to the government)" (263):

Both practices of "anchoring Party leadership to the government" and "separating the Party from the government" follow the Chinese regime's general principle of one-party rule. Their alternating appearance in PRC history reveals the political elite's capability for developing different practices from the same principle (264).

### **1.3 Change of Focus in the Concerns of Chinese Leadership**

A category of Chinese leadership transition research analyzes how the concerns of China's public leadership have changed across generations. Many scholars compare and contrast the significance of the 25-year reforms since Deng's "Open Door" policy in 1979 with those of the current political reform since the 16th Party Congress in 2002. Dittmer (2003) reveals a continuation of the leadership's political goals—a "continuation of Dengist emphases on elite civility and administrative institutionalization" and a development of "Jiangism ... in terms of both state-building and nation-building."<sup>7</sup>

### **1.4 Change in the Prospects and Challenges for Top Leaders**

A fourth category of leadership transition articles concerns how the changing political environment has influenced leaders of different generations and how it indicates the prospects and challenges of development for China's new leaders. The articles in Wang's (2003) edited volume demonstrate how the differences in the generational leaders' "formative experiences" "can result in radically different policies and views of the world."

For China's new leaders, the changing political environment points to serious domestic challenges such as (a) the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist leadership, including the transformation of the CCP into an "institutionalized ruling party" (Zheng, 2003), (b) problems of eudaemonic legitimacy as the post-Mao leadership's strategy (Chen, 1997), (c) problems of the Chinese cognitive model of political legitimacy developed by its leaders (Guo, 2003), (d) the corruption of CCP members (Zheng, 2003; Hsu, 2001), and (e) social crises such as regional development discrepancies and high unemployment (Fewsmith, 2002). International challenges that have received scholarly attention include the response of the Chinese leadership to human rights issues as threats to the legitimacy of the government (e.g., Wachman, 2001), and how they handled Taiwan Strait relations (e.g., Hsu, 2003).

## 2. Democratization in the Processes of Political and Economic Liberalization

While the topic of democratization—a preoccupation of the new Chinese leadership—could have been considered in the preceding section on leadership transition, we single it out because of its increasing significance and interest to various constituencies worldwide and the wealth of scholarly attention it has received.

### 2.1 Inner/Intra Party Democracy

*Inner party democracy* is widely perceived to be one of the most important aspects of the new leadership's efforts on "institution building," a top priority for the new leaders (Li, 2002, 342-343). A number of scholars examine the top leadership selection procedures as a thermometer for inner party democracy. For instance, Nathan & Gilley (as cited in Pye, 2003a) offer descriptive accounts of the Party's procedures for selecting top leaders.<sup>8</sup> They observe that, for younger cadres, both luck in their patronage ties and merit are crucial for their selection. Commenting on the outcome of the procedure, they note that "the new leaders are quoted as expressing political thoughts and policy options that verge on democratic" (cited in Pye, 2003a, 176).<sup>9</sup>

Factors that are helpful for promotion into the government system and into the Party hierarchy are also being examined. In a quantitative study, Zang (1998) has found that

university education and seniority in party membership increased a cadre's odds of being promoted into the post-Mao Zedong leadership. However, the impact of university education on promotion was greater in the government system than in the party hierarchy. The analysis indicates that the current Chinese leadership is an administrative-technical elite resembling its counterparts in the former East European socialist countries (39).

In two subsequent studies, Zang (2001b) constructs a theoretical model explaining the Party's leader selection criteria. Zang (2001b) develops a "dual career path model," demonstrating that "educational credentials and Chinese Communist Party seniority are weighed differently in leadership selection in China and that elite dualism is a better framework for elite studies than technocracy" (62). Zang's results reveal that China's leadership, composed of "politically reliable bureaucrats" and "administrative-technical elite," is characterized by political technocracy, resembling its counterparts in the socialist Eastern European countries (73). Drawing on evidence from Eastern European history, Zang considers political technocracy to be a "stable polity" and argues that it "will stay in power for the foreseeable future" because it allows the CCP to "co-opt intellectuals and professionals into the power circle," significantly reducing dissent among intellectuals (73-74). A second study conducted by Zang (2001a) further explicates the different effects of educational credentials on leadership selection in the CCP system and in the government system (189-205).

Contrary to this Chinese scholar's view, Gilley (2003) argues that the criteria for promoting top Party leaders are personal loyalties rather than merit, which bespeaks a lack of democracy in the CCP (12).

## **2.2 Democratization at Other Levels**

Besides the literature on intra-party democratization under the new political leadership, a considerable literature has examined democratization at other political levels and in other places in China. Examples include analyses of the Chinese leadership's views on the conventional democratic process in Hong Kong (Goodstadt, 1998) and of the implementation of direct democracy at the grass-root level through the self-government of the villager committee and the urban residents' committee (Peng, 2001).<sup>10</sup> In the discussion of local leadership below, we address in greater detail the literatures on democratization at the provincial, township, and village levels.

## **2.3 Factors Influencing Leaders' Approaches to Democratization**

The factors that will facilitate or impede China's democratization are the subject of another group of studies. Some scholars (e.g., Li, 2002) stress the crucial role of a peaceful political environment in democratization. Maintaining appropriate Sino-U.S. relations and Taiwan Strait relations, for example, is seen to benefit China's democratization process. Other scholars look to the influences of the Party's precedents on democratization. For example, Lin (2004) identifies constraints and opportunities for new leaders in the inner-party democratization for new leaders. In Lin's view, it is the "preexisting rules governing intra-party politics" that have given rise to the constraints and opportunities. One of the major characteristics of the preexisting rules is the "tension between the principle of majority rule and that of democratic centralism (*minzhu jizhongzhi*)."

The emergence of class politics in China has been identified as one of the most significant new social factors that may influence leaders' approaches to democratization. Chen (2003) explains:

China's market reforms over the last two decades or more have brought about a significant degree of societal stratification and the rise of class politics. The diversification of class interests forces the party-state leadership to take sides in the emerging class warfare and to show a manifest class orientation in government policy making... Meanwhile, the rapid expansion of the underclass, widespread resentment against socio-economic polarization, and the lack of institutionalized channels for articulating and advancing class interests have combined to create a potentially explosive situation that, to both the regime and its allies, has considerably increased the risks and costs of democratization (141).

## **2.4 Generational Changes in Leaders' Approaches to Democratization**

A set of literature focuses on generational changes in leaders' approaches to democratization. In some cases, leaders face new challenges. Yang (2003) notes the continuing limitations of freedom of speech under the fourth-generation leadership, seen in their curbing of the independent press and censorship of the Internet. Others point to problematic ways in which the third-generation leaders faced dissidents, as in the 1989 pro-democracy student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square (Buruma, as cited in Ikenberry, 2002; Mason & Clements, 2002).

Mason & Clements (2002), in particular, offer powerful insights into the different generational approaches to democracy through a detailed review of the Tiananmen Square event. They note that recent reforms have imposed institutional constraints on policy and personnel decisions (178-179) and that the fourth generation, unlike their predecessors who established legitimacy through their roles as revolutionary

heroes, garnered power through their “administrative skills, technical expertise, and records of accomplishment in lower-level positions” (179). All told, the fourth generation is less well positioned to use informal authority to resort to force (i.e., ordering the People’s Liberation Army to quell opposition), but will instead go through a “decision-making process that is governed much more by bargaining and compromise among representatives of powerful institutional interests” (179).

### 3. Prominent Political Figures in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

#### 3.1 *Social and Historical Approach: Presidents’ and Premiers’ Works and Biographies*

Prominent political figures such as Presidents and Premiers have been the focus of three types of inquiry. The first category contains works, including autobiographies, written by the top leaders themselves, in which they provide their own views on Chinese leadership. Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping wrote extremely influential works on their ideas of effective leadership tactics in China (Deng, 2000; Mao, 2001); these have been reprinted many, many times and have become required readings for CCP members.

A second category includes works on prominent political figures written by their senior advisors, secretaries, personal friends, relatives, and others who had the opportunity to interact with the leaders personally. These works offer compelling daily leadership stories and often impart moral lessons. For instance, Chen (2002), a political commentator, gives vivid accounts of the political thoughts and decisions of Deng Xiaoping and other top leaders from his vantage point at the PRC embassy in Washington, D.C. These works are almost exclusively written in China for Chinese audiences. The works in these two categories are influential because most Party members read them.

A third category includes works by non-Chinese scholars. Lacking insider knowledge, these scholars tend to draw leadership lessons from analyses of leaders’ behaviors in historical events. For example, Zhang & Vaughan (2002) study Mao in the context of social and historical developments. Zong (2002b) provides information about the career background of the former Premier, Zhu Rongji, and offers a thorough review of his appointment. Kampen (2000) provides a longitudinal historical account of the Chinese Communist leadership.<sup>11</sup>

#### 3.2 *Psychological Approaches to Leaders’ Behaviors and Traits*

A literature using psychological approaches to analyze the behaviors, leadership styles, and personalities of China’s public leaders has emerged recently and received increasing Chinese public attention. This is due in part to the fact that psychology is a relatively new but emerging research discipline in China.

More generally, psychoanalytic approaches, examining the effects of psychological factors on leaders’ thoughts and behaviors, may emerge as a meaningful alternative method for cross-cultural leadership research, shedding light on leaders’ lives in a way that conventional studies tend to overlook (Sheng, 2001). For example, applying psychoanalytical theories of pathological narcissism to Mao’s life, Sheng (2001) argued that Mao was “afflicted by narcissistic personality disorder, based on diagnostic criteria delineated from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV).” The author further uses detailed biographical information to account for Mao’s political decisions.

The articles in Feldman & Valenty’s (2001) edited volume examine a variety of methods of analyzing the connections between a political leader’s personality, political motivation, and behavior. In this volume, researchers apply and test psychodiagnostic and psychobiographical methods cross-culturally, profiling leaders from countries including China (Feldman & Valenty, 2001).



### **3.3 Cross-cultural/Comparative Approach**

A large category of literature on prominent political figures compares senior Chinese leaders to their counterparts in other countries, their predecessors, and even prominent leaders in ancient Chinese history. Jochnowitz (2002) compares Mao's leadership with that of more recent leaders. Zhu (2000) compares Mao's leadership with that of Soviet leader Josef Stalin. Berenberg (2002) contrasts Jiang's leadership of China's economic and political liberalization with Deng's. Zong (2002a) compares the leadership of former Premier Zhu Rongji to that of his predecessor, Li Peng.

## **4. Local Leadership**

Much of our discussion thus far has centered on leadership in the central government, but it is widely accepted that there are five levels of government in China below the central government: provincial, prefect, county, township, and village governments. This section reviews the available literature on leadership at three of those levels. We do not discuss leadership at the prefect or county levels because our search yielded no recent research studies on those topics.

### **4.1 Provincial Leadership**

The literature on provincial leadership examines provincial leaders' social backgrounds, careers, political attitudes, and leadership characteristics, more often than not in the contexts of their provinces' political procedures. Based on interviews with local cadres in Shanxi Province, Goodman (2000) found that there was still, in the 1990s, considerable CCP influence in the local political and administrative leadership of provincial institutions. Bo (2004) emphasizes the increasing importance of studying provincial leadership, noting that, in a ranking of the power index of formal institutions after the 16th Party Congress, provincial units emerged as the most powerful institution in Chinese politics.

### **4.2 Township Leadership**

A few scholars have studied township leadership through analyses of democratization at the town level. Saich & Yang (2003) discuss the open recommendation and selection (ORS) process as a mechanism for resolving the problems of local governmental reform and as a "mechanism for broader but controlled participation." Manion (2000) details the background of the round of township-level elections and the "relationship between Communist Party management of cadres and election of township leaders by congress delegates."

### **4.3 Village Leadership**

The first experiments with economic reform in China were undertaken in rural areas. For this reason, studies of village leadership developments in the rural areas are particularly valuable for understanding public leadership in China more generally. Literature on democratization at the village level, or grassroots democracy, has examined the election process, nomination methods, and Party membership of village leaders (Kennedy, 2002); evaluation of village leaders (Kennedy, Rozelle & Yoajiang, 2004); and the "rise of peasant public opinion leaders in some districts and the predicament of popularly elected leaders" (Wen, 2002).

Shi (1999) reveals the relationship between economic development and village leadership elections to be a concave curve, finding that "economic wealth increases the likelihood that a village will hold semi-competitive elections for people to choose their leaders, but its impact diminishes as economic wealth increases." Even more interesting, Shi identifies three ways in which village leaders may take advantage of rapid economic development to delay the process of political development.<sup>12</sup>

**“The influence of China’s cultural traditions on its public leadership is evident in the cultural emphases on morality and on collectivist values.”**

Studies on electoral processes form the majority of the village leadership literature. Guo & Bernstein (2004) explore a different dimension of village leadership by studying how village leaders adjudicate jurisdictional disputes between village committees and the Party branches. Their study is much needed because it reveals the fact that the innovative village committee election has given rise to conflicting “relations between the elected village committee chair persons and the appointed Party secretaries.” Both seek control over collective economic resources and financial decisions (Guo & Bernstein, 2004). Basing their research on a “quite industrialized and wealthy” village in southern Guangdong, they found that conflicts can arise between the two because the bases of their legitimacy and authority differ.<sup>13</sup>

## **5. Cultural and Historical Traditions**

As China has enjoyed the longest continuous experience of political governance on its core territory of all nations, examination of the influences of culture and traditions on its public leadership is particularly warranted.

### **5.1 Influence of Cultural Traditions on Leadership**

The influence of China’s cultural traditions on its public leadership is evident in the cultural emphases on morality and on collectivist values. Moral leadership, a topic of much scholarly attention in the United States, has always been an integral part of public leadership in China. Wong (2001) explains that the Chinese culture has a “long history of valuing leadership and preparing leaders on moral grounds.”

Ling, Chia & Fang’s (2000) study reveals that Chinese leaders who exhibit collectivist values tend to be favored. They developed the *Chinese Implicit Leadership Scale* (CILS) and administered it to different occupation groups. They found that the Chinese use four dimensions to describe their conceptualization of leadership: personal morality, goal efficiency, interpersonal competence, and versatility (735-738). The authors note that cadres, along with the other groups, gave the highest ratings to interpersonal competence, “reflecting the enormous importance of this factor, which is consistent with Chinese collectivist values” (735-738).

### **5.2 Influence of Historical Traditions on Leadership**

Many Western scholars (e.g., Fokkema, 2003) observe that contemporary Chinese people and leaders have a preoccupation with hierarchy and respect for the glorious past (p. 164). Even amid increased globalization, historical experience still “dictates Chinese people’s critical absorption of Western influences and the continuity of the Chinese tradition” (164). History and tradition are embraced. Fokkema (2003) contends that “keeping the empire together” constitutes a major concern of the public leadership in China (164-165).

## **6. Other Aspects of the Leadership Literature**

The final literature we review extends the focus beyond the five camps identified in the literature to a set of four smaller camps of work, reflecting the breadth of inquiry in the scholarship on public leadership in China. These four camps are: military leadership versus Party leadership, women as public leaders, religion and public leadership, and student leadership.

### **6.1 Military Leadership versus Party Leadership**

The relationship between military leadership and Party leadership merits examination because of the rise of military power in China and the new challenges to the fourth generation leaders described above. A new generation of leaders, and the scholars who study them, have by and large agreed on the compelling need to engage in structural changes to “better define the relationship among the State, the Party, and the

military” (Li, 2002, 342-343). As a result of the 16th Party Congress, the Party leadership experienced significant transition and the military has obtained the third-ranking power index among formal institutions in China (Bo, 2004). For this reason, scholars have called for research that will “investigate China’s civil-military relations, which will affect regime stability and governance in Chinese politics” (Lee, 2003). Scholars have written on the difficult challenges facing the military leadership. It needs to (a) prioritize weapons systems to develop deterrence and competence capability; (b) adapt to developments in U.S.-China relations; and (c) resolve the interdependence of military and Party leadership to “ensure the efficacy of military policy decision-making process and policy implementation” (Lee, 2003). The 16th Party Congress gave rise to the current Jiang-Hu dual leadership; Jiang is the military leader and Hu the Party leader (Chopan, 2002; Lee, 2003). Scholars (e.g., Mason & Clements, 2002) predict that (a) the People’s Liberation Army will transform its leadership so that it will not intervene in domestic politics to advance the Party leaders’ interests, and (b) the relationship between military and Party leadership will be institutionalized.

### **6.2 Women As Public Leaders**

Chinese female leaders have to fight not only to achieve gender equality, but also to avoid political influences from the Party.<sup>14</sup> One Chinese female scholar explains that, in China, any women’s movement is subservient to other national, social, or political purposes (cited in Fokkema, 2003). Women’s ultimate goal, scholars have argued, has been to serve the state and the people rather than to fight for gender equality as an end in itself. However, in the 1980s, public attention shifted from the collective to the individual and women began searching for a gendered identity (168). Goodman (2002), having interviewed women in Shanxi province, concluded that while women were seldom publicly identified as leaders in local politics, they did have a role in the leadership of the reform efforts (347). For example, although women are rarely found in formally recognized leadership positions, wives of the rich often play pivotal roles in economic development (Goodman, 2002, 347).

### **6.3 Religion and Public Leadership**

Since the founding of the Republic, the Chinese government has claimed that it protects freedom of religious belief under law. However, the international community has frequently criticized China’s religious policy and continues to do so. Notably, many of the articles on public leadership in China that fit into our parameters discuss the influence of the Party leadership on religious leadership, rather than discussing leadership within individual religious groups. Studies that do focus on leadership in individual religious groups have examined the training and leadership required to safeguard the ideals of the Buddhist monastic tradition (Birnbaum, 2003), and the leadership of Li Hongzhi, leader of Falun Gong (Penny, 2003). A few papers examine Party leaders’ views on specific religions, including Catholicism (Brown, 2001) and Falun Gong (Watts, 1999).

### **6.4 Student Leadership**

The literature on student leadership in China has several branches. There are articles on the need for training programs to develop students’ leadership skills in schools (Chan, 2000b). Other researchers have examined the effectiveness of training programs that help to improve secondary school students’ leadership skills (Chan, 2003), or, more generally, they have assessed the leadership qualities among secondary school students (Chan, 2000a). Student leadership in the context of the Party leadership has also been examined. Several scholars have reviewed student leadership tactics in the 1989 Tiananmen Square student demonstrations (Ikenberry, 2002; Ling, 1999; Lui, 2000) and sought to explain the great influence of a radicalized student leadership in China through these demonstrations (Thompson, 2001). A particular approach to this work has been the analysis of student leadership from the perspective of dissident leadership to illustrate and test collective action theories (Mason & Clements, 2002).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LITERATURE ON PUBLIC LEADERSHIP IN CHINA

Our review yields not only a rich array of areas in which public leadership in China has been studied, but also a number of characteristics to be observed across studies. In this section, we touch on common themes in the literature as well as what we observed to be scarce or missing in the literature.

### **1. Concentration on the Party/Communist Leadership**

A great focus, almost an obsession, with Party/Communist leadership is evident in the work of both Western and Chinese scholars. Even when they discuss leadership in other public sectors (i.e., military, women, religions, and schools) and at other levels (i.e., provincial, township, and village), almost all of the

works reviewed analyze the influence of the Party leadership on other forms of leadership, or sometimes their mutual influences. This focus leaves great gaps in our understanding and rich areas for future work.

**“It seems that Chinese scholars are more likely to conceive the study of public leadership as quasi-academic; they often take the liberty of offering practical advice to leaders in addition to forming leadership theories.”**

### **2. Paucity of Research on the Effectiveness of Public Leadership Training Programs**

We found no recent scholarly articles that evaluate public leadership training programs in China. A few studies assess student leadership training programs in secondary schools, but more research is needed in this area, given a recent dramatic spike in the number of Chinese Party leaders and public administrators who are participating in leadership training programs, both in China and in the United States.

### **3. Chinese Public Leadership versus Public Leadership in China**

We framed our inquiry as “public leadership in China,” intending to offer a comprehensive review of research on the diverse forms of public leadership that have emerged in mainland China. In contrast, a review of “Chinese public leadership” would have focused on the characteristics of public leadership in China that are distinctively Chinese. While an intriguing study for cross-cultural scholars, at present, the body of work directly comparing public leadership in China with that of other countries is too sparse for a review.

### **4. Translation Effects**

We based this exercise on Western definitions of public leadership. It is worth noting that there are several subtly different Chinese translations of that term. Changes in the translation might extend the discussion in different directions, and the translation exercise can reflect interesting differences in the mindsets with which scholars in the United States and China approach the study of leadership. More specifically, Chinese researchers are more likely to consider a political approach to leadership. For example, we have observed that in China the word *public* is typically translated as *gonggon* (meaning of, concerning, or affecting the people or the community) or *gongzhong* (meaning the people or the community). The word *leadership* has been translated into *lingdaoxue* (meaning leadership studies or leadership science), *lingdaoceng* (meaning the group of leaders), or *lingdao* (meaning the leader(s) or the act/strategy of leading). Combining the words together, the most common translation for the phrase public leadership has been *gonggong lingdaoxue*, which encompasses the Western definitions of public leadership studies.

The Chinese translations seem to suggest additional concerns of Chinese scholars and may indicate an area in the traditional leadership studies canon in China that is not considered mainstream by their Western counterparts. It seems that Chinese scholars are more likely to conceive the study of public leadership as quasi-academic; they often take the liberty of offering practical advice to leaders in addition to

forming leadership theories. Indeed, when browsing the few contemporary Chinese national-prize-winning journals that claim to be academic journals on leadership—i.e., *Lingdao Kexue (Leadership Science)*, *Lingdao Zhi You (Leaders' Friends)*, *Xiandai Lingdao (Modern Leading)*, we were struck by the “how-to” discussions that dominate each issue. The line between explanatory inquiry and normative argument is less sharply drawn by Chinese than by Western scholars.

### **5. Shift from Government Leadership Studies to Public Leadership Studies**

There is a lack of research on leadership in China's public and nonprofit sectors other than the central and local governments, because, at one time, there was simply a scarcity of such institutions in China. But as intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, national nonprofit groups, and local nonprofit groups emerge in China, it is important for researchers to examine these groups and their leadership.

While the study of leadership has a long history in China, the academic movement that links the word *public* with *leadership* began only recently. We have found that most leadership literature in Chinese in the past three decades focuses on *government leadership*, in large part because academics consider the Party leaders the major audience, and, traditionally, has been true. In our search to identify and understand a contemporary public leadership canon in China, we observed that the literature tends to be catalogued simply as *leadership* or *government leadership*. Ostentatious labels such as *Ganbu Jiaoyu Cailiao* (Instructional Materials for Cadres) are often printed on the covers of these works. We have also observed that, to date, major Chinese online research databases have included as their keyword search terms only *lingdaoxue* (leadership) and *xingzheng lingdao* (government leadership), not *gonggong lingdaoxue* (public leadership). Local journals on leaders and leadership, an alternative source of research on public leadership, exist but lack research depth.

Chen's (2003) book, *Gonggong Lingdaoxue (Public Leadership)*, may be the first scholarly work in China to mark the shift from government leadership to public leadership. It is the first Chinese book we have found that was officially approved for publication, treats public leadership as a separate subject in its own right, and centers its discussion on public leadership in China.<sup>15</sup>

Ying (2003) is among the first scholars in China to identify public leadership as a “new way of leadership in the public field.” He notes that societal development has brought out changes in the “function, power and ability of the leadership in the public area” and argues for the compelling need for the study of public leadership in China.

### **6. Conflation of Good and Leadership**

In this literature review, following the parameters outlined, we identified many articles that celebrate what might be termed *good leadership* in China, but few that focus on bad leadership. Many scholarly works have been critical of the Chinese government and Party leadership, but have not framed their critiques as studies of leadership.

Given the rapid pace of change in China during the five-and-a-half years covered by this review, scholars have naturally focused on recent dynamics. But this also reflects a general bias in leadership studies: leadership and good leadership are conflated (Kellerman, 2004), while cases of bad leadership are overlooked, to the detriment of our scholarly understanding of leadership. The closest approaches that scholars of China's leadership make to the study of bad leadership are the aforementioned public concerns about leadership transition and the discussions of military and Party leadership. To find fuller discussions of bad leadership in China, one would have to revise the search criteria to go beyond the study of leadership.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we identify particularly compelling directions for future research, apparent in the review, in which there is either a great gap in the current work or there would be a great potential benefit in additional work.

### *Consequences of leadership transition*

The consequences of leadership transition, especially its impact on constituencies other than the leaders, have not been addressed in much detail. Leadership transition may influence the stability of the regime and elicit various types of political behavior from others (e.g., protest and other forms of collective action). But such consequences are typically discussed in brief concluding remarks. Many of the studies we identified are more impressionistic and reflective than interpretive; there is less attention to empirical detail. Future researchers need to make the public leadership in China not simply a dependent variable, something to be explained, but rather an independent variable, used to explain other changes in turn. This may be a natural next step for schools which, to date, have been understandably preoccupied by a desire to explain current dramatic changes.

### *Chinese political culture*

Researchers need to deepen and tighten the integration of discussions of public leadership with analyses of Chinese political culture. U.S. researchers need a richer knowledge of the Chinese political culture. Chinese scholars, in addition to adopting the historical approaches they are uniquely positioned to adopt, need to appreciate the number of significant political trends that are simultaneously happening and constantly changing in China. These trends (e.g., the decay and diversification of official ideology, the rise of private entrepreneurs as new social elites, the creation of provincial identities, and nationalism) are transforming Chinese cultural beliefs and norms. They constitute an evolving, transformational, and dynamic context for public leadership in China. Thus, for instance, studies that focus on the influence of Confucianism on public leadership in China, overlooking or underappreciating current changes and the evolution of Confucianism in China's modern state, should be regarded as limited at best.

### *Public leadership in China as distinct from Party leadership*

Given the diversity of contexts and disciplines reviewed in this article, it is surprising to note how few researchers directly address the concept of leadership in China, not to mention the more recent concept of public leadership in China. Potential researchers, both Western and Chinese, may be disillusioned by past scholarly overinvestment in the Communist/Party leadership. Instead of retreating from the field, they need to create new research programs on the other types of public leadership that are emerging in China in its progress to democracy and economic development.

In addition to these major gaps that need to be addressed, our review raises several more detailed questions, attention to which would greatly advance our understanding of public leadership in China. We use the criteria of the importance, timeliness and status of emerging research studies to suggest five such sets of research questions.

- 1 Economic and political developments in China. How have China's recent economic and political developments affected top leaders' approaches to leadership? How will they mutually influence each other? Answers to these questions will provide much-needed insights into how the top leadership will change and where China's economy and politics are likely to head. While some scholars have researched these topics, their explanations tend to lack detail and provide little understanding.

- 2 Influence of central government leadership on leadership at other levels and in other areas. To what extent does the central government leadership influence the leadership at other levels and in other areas? Is the environment for other types of public leadership nurturing or harsh and uninviting? Research on this topic will help people within and outside China to gauge and promote its democratization and development.
- 3 China's political future. In the next half-century, what kind of Chinese public leaders will world leaders confront? To what extent will they resemble their counterparts in the West? Answers to these questions would not only enrich the academic understanding of public leadership, but also would help practitioners engaged in China.
- 4 China's aggressive steps to encourage foreign direct investment. In what ways will China's public leadership benefit from this push? What challenges will there be? What kind of leadership education programs will help to develop public leaders in China who can work effectively with the great number of international organizations either expanding into China or considering doing so?
- 5 Intra-national diversity of experience. In coping with the great regional discrepancies in China, local leaders often find themselves locked in fierce economic competition with the governments of their provinces, prefectures, cities, counties, towns, and villages. Local cadres' contributions to economic development tend carry a lot of weight in the public perception of their effectiveness as leaders. As intranational differences in China persist, and in some cases magnify, how will the regional discrepancies shape leadership behaviors and values in different provinces, prefectures, cities, counties, towns, and villages throughout China?

In the field of postmodern and postcolonial Asian studies, there is a radical, arresting prediction that Chinese culture will achieve world supremacy in the middle of the twenty-first century (Fokkema, 2003, 164). Whether China will achieve global or regional supremacy or sit modestly but firmly alongside other countries, the scale of China and the scale of its current developments make the study of its public leadership a gold mine for researchers. The multidimensionality, complexity, and rapidly changing nature of the topic promise to challenge and reward the most inquisitive of minds. Research in this area has the potential to advance the growth and prosperity of China and to give people, organizations, and nations a better understanding of Chinese leaders, Chinese leadership, and China itself.

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### ENDNOTES

- 1 The reader may ask why we review work on Chinese leadership under the umbrella of how Westerners think about leadership. First, most of the current scholarly work on leadership is being done in the United States. Second, Chinese scholars and practitioners are looking to the United States to understand leadership in both the American and the Chinese contexts. However, a provocative and potentially fruitful question remains: How might Chinese scholars construe public leadership with a slightly different focus? We discuss this in a subsequent section of the paper.

- 2 This paper primarily reviews scholarly articles. Occasionally, we refer to books (particularly Chinese leaders' autobiographies and biographies) because in-depth book-review articles were identified in our search strategy.
- 3 Li (2002) reports that "it is estimated that over 50 percent of China's high-ranking leaders are due to retire" (336).
- 4 *Tongbian* is a distinctive mode of correlative thinking in Chinese tradition. It is "based on a set of characteristics that outline the parameters of a natural worldview in terms of continuity through change. It takes into consideration a variety of actual, specific, and dynamic historical phenomena in China and rouses our sensitivity to the fact that certain Western cosmological assumptions lead to structural differences between Western and Chinese intellectual traditions" (Tian, 2003, 37).
- 5 Douglass North's term *institutions* refers to the "rules of the game" in society, which "include current laws and jurisprudence, accepted habits, and formal or informal codes of conduct." Robin Cowan and Philip Gunby's "path dependency" "emphasizes the impact of past choice of rules on current institution building" (Lin, 2004, 256).
- 6 There is a body of literature published before 1999 that discusses the change of focus in the preoccupations of Chinese leadership across different generations.
- 7 Following the precedent set by Deng in the 1980s, Jiang retained the chairmanship of the Central Military Commission (CMC) (Lin, 2004, 274). A *New York Times* article of Sept. 7, 2004 reports that Jiang plans to yield his position as the chairman of the CMC, thereby giving the new leader Hu Jintao a chance to become the country's undisputed top leader, commanding the state, the army, and the ruling party (Kahn, 2004). Some have argued that "Mr. Jiang, 78, has calculated that he will be called on to remain military chief or to hold another position of influence" because Chinese political battles are often waged by indirection, with senior officials rarely stating their bottom line and often relying on supporters to represent their interests (Kahn, 2004).
- 8 Lucian Pye (2003a) reviews the book *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files* by Andrew J. Nathan and Bruce Gilley (2003).
- 9 Cadres are governmental officials in China. In most of the Western journals on Asian studies, Sinologists use the word *cadre* because it is the literal translation of the Chinese term *gan bu*, which actually means governmental official.
- 10 Peng's article was published in China in 1987 and was translated into English in the journal *Chinese Law and Government* in 2001.
- 11 Kampen's book has attracted tremendous attention from the academy. For example, Benton (2001), Brady (2000), and Stranahan, Roberts & Janssen (2001) have all reviewed it.
- 12 Shi (1999) notes that newly acquired economic resources can consolidate the power of an incumbent leader by (a) making peasants more dependent on the village authority, (b) providing incumbent leaders with resources to co-opt peasants, and (c) enabling incumbent leaders to bribe their superiors to ignore the decisions of the central government to introduce competitive elections into Chinese villages.
- 13 Guo & Bernstein (2004) observe that town leaders, when resolving conflicts between appointed Party secretaries and elected village chiefs, tend to support the Party secretaries. One major reason is that the town leaders feel that the Party secretaries regard them as superiors and are often more responsive to them (257). A solution to these conflicts that now being widely adopted in rural China is to require that Party secretaries run for the post of village committee chair. This regulation, the authors note, in effect merges the two institutions.
- 14 Surprisingly, less scholarly attention has been directed to comparing female and male leaders in China than to comparing women leaders in China with their international counterparts.



15 In China today people can largely publish books freely as long as they have sufficient funds. Indeed, there is a widespread joke in China that “It is easier to publish a book in China than an article in a Chinese journal.” However, not all published books are approved by the government. The ideas and arguments advanced in officially approved books are generally recognized as having greater weight than books that do not have official approval, which are sometimes referred to by a word that translates to *underground book*.

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