Review Article: Political Change in China – Power, Policy and Process

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China's politics have changed dramatically during the last decade. Schram, in one of the works which have stimulated this review article,[1] has characterized the period since 1978 as one of 'Economics in Command' by way of contrast to the exhortation to put 'Politics in Command' – the slogan that dominated the last decade of Mao's life and the era of the Cultural Revolution. The drive to economic modernization has replaced 'class struggle' as the main goal of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Political reform has been an essential part of that drive, for in its analysis of the failings of the previous three decades[2] the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has argued that economic growth and development could not occur without political stability and institutionalization.

Subsequent changes in China have had a profound impact on the study of China's politics in the West. China's politics have become more open, both to the Chinese and to the West. In general, more information is now available, as witnessed for example, by the work of the State Statistical Bureau re-established after an absence of almost twenty years. There has been a tremendous increase in the number of newspapers, journals and books published in the PRC. Moreover, China's 'open door' policy to the West has meant that there is an element of independent assessment and verification of official sources, as (for example) by the World Bank. Academics have followed the flag and trade. Not only do Western scholars have greater access to information and sources than they did a decade ago, but it is now possible to undertake both field work and library research in China itself.

The 1980s have seen the Western social sciences established in China (for the first time since 1949) and they have even achieved some respectability. Politics was a subject of study in Chinese schools and universities before 1980 but at that time it referred to Marxism–Leninism, and effectively political education. However, in 1980 a political science that was not identical to Marxism–Leninism was recognized as a legitimate academic discipline. An Institute of Political Science

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[1] S. R. Schram, *Ideology and Policy in China since the Third Plenum, 1978–84* (London: Contemporary China Institute, 1984). The others are F. C. Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China* (London: Macmillan, 1984); P. R. Moody, *Chinese Politics after Mao* (New York: Praeger, 1983); and N. Maxwell and B. McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1984).

[2] The CCP's review of its post-1949 history was formulated in the *Resolution on Party History since the Foundation of the PRC* adopted by the 6th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in June 1981.

has been established as part of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and there are some twenty-five departments of political science in Chinese universities. The surveys carried out by Chinese social scientists, and their published research are interesting sources of information in their own right.[3] Moreover, the emergence of political science in China means that Western scholars can now expect a sympathetic hearing for their research plans when in China, where a decade ago their requests (had they been put) would have met with unremitting stares of non-comprehension.

During the mid-1970s restrictions on access and information meant, almost necessarily, that the Western literature on China's politics was relatively uniform in its approach, and somewhat restricted in its concerns. There was a tendency for the political system of the PRC to be regarded as *sui generis* and to be studied in isolation. It was characterized as a socialist or a communist party but as radically different from the Soviet Union because of the CCP's separate and distinct existence before 1949, Mao's vision, and the experience of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) during the years 1966–69. As part of the Third World its development was characterized, in contrast to other developing countries, in terms of equality and popular participation. The literature was dominated by three preoccupations – the 'Chinese road to socialism'; leadership factions, and particularly analysis of the 'two line' struggle within the CCP suggested during the GPCR; and discussion of policy cycles, the apparent oscillation between conservative and radical phases in the political history of the PRC after 1949.

By far the most important result of changes in China on the study of China's politics in the West has been the rejection of a considerable portion of past Western scholarship. The CCP's rejection of the politics of the Cultural Revolution and its reassessment of that period has triggered a reappraisal of earlier research, its findings and judgements, in the West. Sometimes this has occurred through the release of additional information and sources on the earlier period or events; sometimes through additional research. A simple example may help demonstrate the extent to which such reappraisals can fundamentally alter the Western vision of China. Until the late 1970s almost every book published on China's politics accepted without question that there was a relative, and increasing, equality of income in the PRC particularly amongst the peasantry, even if it were an equality of poverty. However, more recent research has detailed the extent to which inequalities persisted and even increased during the era of Mao-dominated politics. For example, Friedman cites differences of some one hundred to one in rural incomes by the late 1970s.[4] Not surprisingly, these reversals, the denial of Mao's vision and its replacement by policies that seem to be concerned solely with economic growth, as well as the relative speed at which

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[3] For example B. Womack, ed., *Media and the Chinese Public* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1986); and Li Fan, 'The Question of Interests in the Chinese Policy Making Process', *China Quarterly*, No. 109 (March 1987), p. 64.

[4] E. Friedman, 'The Original Chinese Revolution Remains in Power', in B. Cumings, ed., *China from Mao to Deng* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1983), p. 23.

such changes took place all served to undermine the confidence of Western scholarship in the late 1970s.

The suspension of disbelief that characterized much of Western scholarship during the 1970s has been replaced by a far healthier scepticism. Although there is still a tendency for China's politics to be studied in isolation, explicitly comparative perspectives have been far more widely and freely employed in the 1980s. Thus, for example, recent publications have considered China in its East Asian[5] and socialist contexts.[6] In one of the most stimulating and lively books written in the 1980s Nathan has even compared China's most recent campaigns for democracy with both Western visions of democracy and traditional Chinese political culture.[7]

Compared to the era of the Cultural Revolution, since the late 1970s there has been considerably greater disagreement in the West about the nature and direction of the Chinese polity. Moreover, a much wider range of topics and issues has provided the focus for research. The intention here is to place these new interpretations and preoccupations in perspective. Developments in China and their impact on the study of China's politics have made breast-beating and recriminations an almost fashionable pursuit. Sometimes it appears that such recriminations have gone to a point of vituperativeness well beyond that of scholarly interest.[8] Here, in contrast, the argument is that the study of China's politics in a general sense is a relatively new pursuit. Indeed in the narrow sense of politics as a specific activity the study of China's politics in the West has really only become academically possible since 1978. Significantly, the last decade has seen the development of the conceptual and factual basis for the study not only of China's contemporary politics but also of politics before 1978.[9] This plea of novelty is not presented as an excuse for the failings of past research, but rather that they should be viewed in their appropriate perspective as part of a learning process.

TOTALITARIAN BLINKERS

A brief survey of its development before the late 1970s should suffice to demonstrate the extent to which the study of China's politics in the West was both new and undeveloped. Before and during the era of the Cultural Revolution lack of information, access and historical perspective resulted in a relative lack of sophistication and scope. At first sight, the events of the GPCR seem not only to

[5] For example: P. de Beauregard, J. P. Canestan, J. L. Domenach, F. Godement, J. de Goldfiem and F. Joyaux, *La Politique Asiatique de la Chine* (Paris: Fondations pour les Études de Défence Nationale, 1986).

[6] For example, Marc Blecher, *China: Politics, Economics and Society* (London: Pinter, 1986).

[7] A. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1986).

[8] For example, L. T. Sigal, 'On the "Two Roads" and Following our Own Path: The Myth of the "Capitalist Road"', *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs*, No. 7 (1982), p. 55, and the responses in the same journal, No. 8.

[9] For example: M. Goldman, *China's Intellectuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); and W. A. Joseph, *The Critique of Ultra-Leftism in China, 1958–1981* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1984).

have challenged the conventional wisdom about China's politics but also to have led to significant methodological developments. However, in retrospect the impact of the GPCR was to highlight methodological questions rather than to lead to any dramatic change.

There was little academic literature on China's politics published in the West before the GPCR, and that was largely concerned with outlining its basic contours. China's politics were described almost solely in terms of a totalitarian model. Attention focused on national leadership and policies, as well as their immediate political and ideological environments. The leadership was regarded as cohesive and united around the generation of revolutionary leaders who had first come to power in 1949. In large measure what happened in China appeared not only to revolve around but also to be determined by Mao Zedong and Mao Zedong Thought.[10]

This model and its concerns were challenged through the presentation of the GPCR as a 'revolution within the revolution'. There had clearly been differences of opinion and power within the CCP's leadership not only during the GPCR but also during the early 1960s which had to be taken into account. The way in which the GPCR developed suggested that though political power was highly centralized, it also existed outside the CCP's political bureau. Moreover, the GPCR drew attention to China in a spectacular way. The general public and the academic community were attracted to China studies, creating a need and a market for more secondary literature.

The result in the 1970s was the emergence of a larger and more varied literature. Although variants on an explicit totalitarian approach were by no means abandoned,[11] other perspectives were adopted as, for example, the attempts to highlight what were seen as pluralistic tendencies.[12] In particular, in the wake of the GPCR the study of China's politics came to be dominated by consideration of socialism, policy cycles and factionalism. Though earlier concerns with biography, ideology and organization were not absent, the range of topics chosen for investigation expanded. Politics was no longer regarded as an activity confined to the more orthodoxly defined 'centre'. For example, studies appeared of the intermediate[13] and basic[14] levels of the political system, as well as of eco-

[10] Three seminal works which together reflect the major academic preoccupations of that period are: A. D. Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); S. R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger, 1963); and H. F. Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

[11] For example, R. C. Thornton, *China: The Struggle for Power* (London: Indiana University Press, 1973).

[12] For example, P. Chang, *Power and Policy in China* (London: Pennsylvania University Press, 1975), and A. P. Liu, *Political Culture and Group Conflict in Communist China* (Oxford: Clio Books, 1976).

[13] For example, D. Solinger, *Regional Government and Political Integration in Southwest China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), and L. T. White, III, 'Leadership in Shanghai, 1955–69', in R. Scalapino, ed., *Elites in the People's Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972).

[14] For example, G. Bennett, *Huadong: The Story of a Chinese People's Commune* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1978).

nomic enterprises[15] and specific local areas.[16] Although it could not be argued that the impact of the GPCR was to shift the major focus of attention in the literature as a whole from considerations of policy to those of power, a less one-sided emphasis certainly emerged.

Despite those developments, methodological advance was limited by the emphasis given to contemporary events, the continued influence of the totalitarian perspective, and uncertainty about what constituted politics. The start of the GPCR challenged perceived orthodoxies about China's politics, and for the most part surprised Western academic observers.[17] The immediate response was a near panic that led to radically new arguments and theories, some of which were readily discounted within a short period.[18] It was a pattern which was to be repeated, if less spectacularly with each 'crisis' or change in direction of China's politics: a not uncommon occurrence given China's political instability particularly in the 1970s. The study of China's politics has of course to be concerned with and take account of contemporary developments. However, to allow those developments to determine the perspectives on China's politics is to issue an open invitation to be faulted. None the less, it remains remarkable how many observers of China's politics have persisted with linear explanations,[19] did not learn the lessons of the GPCR and were surprised, or even disappointed, by the change to the post-Mao era.

The methodological problem highlighted here is simple. The study of China's politics in the West has not had a good record for either prediction or explanation. Prediction in the social sciences is a notoriously hazardous, and possibly even dubious, activity. More serious is the relative poverty of explanation. For example, there were almost no accounts or interpretations of any aspect of China's politics published during the era of the Cultural Revolution which could encompass future change. Significantly, explanation seems to have been the preserve of those who viewed China from a wider and often historical perspective.[20] The literature of the 1970s appears more concerned with the specifics – be they personalities, policies or periods – than with longer-term explanation. In his somewhat artificial debate with Winckler about the relevance of policy cycles, Nathan argued that political phenomenon and periods in the PRC should be

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[15] For example, W. Brugger, *Democracy and Organization in the Chinese Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[16] For example, E. Vogel, *Canton under Communism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

[17] Surprise is clearly reflected in the pages of the *China Quarterly*, No. 27 (September 1966), and the following issues. For example, Joffe at that time described the GPCR as not so much the 'titanic struggle' described by the *New York Times* of 26 June 1966 as a 'titanic riddle', in 'China in Mid-1966: "Cultural Revolution" or Struggle for Power?', *China Quarterly*, No. 27 (September 1966), p. 123.

[18] For example, S. R. Schram, 'The Party in Chinese Communist Ideology', *China Quarterly*, No. 38 (1967), especially p. 23, where the author discusses reactions to Mao's attack on the CCP.

[19] This point is made forcefully by Winckler when, with not a little justice (and hindsight), he indicates the relative success of cyclical explanations. E. A. Winckler, 'Policy Oscillations in the People's Republic of China: A Reply', *China Quarterly*, No. 68 (December 1976), p. 734.

[20] For example: F. Wakeman, *History and Will* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

analysed more as unique historical events.[21] He seemed to suggest that was not the case in the 1970s. However, one consequence of the concern with the contemporary, stimulated by the GPCR and the release of information by the Red Guards and others in the cause of factional conflict, was the emphasis on data-collection almost as an end in itself. The literature on China's politics expanded greatly, but it expanded in terms of description rather than terms of explanation. The real achievement of that period was the attention to detail. Paradoxically, in the post-Mao period much of that detail proved flawed, as the unreliability of sources emanating from the GPCR and the dangers of an over-dependence on official sources both became clearer.

The GPCR stimulated to some extent the search for perspectives that would provide alternatives to the totalitarian approach to China's politics. Yet in the 1970s the results were limited particularly in contrast with the study of the politics of other specific areas. Thus, for example, even the briefest comparison with the variety of approaches to the study of Soviet politics almost two decades ago suggests the relative breadth of the latter.[22] In the 1970s the study of China's politics centred largely on considerations of socialism, factions and policy cycles. Moreover, there was even less methodological change than might appear to have been the case because of the continued influence of the totalitarian perspective. Although that perspective was rarely explicit, it did underlie much of the literature both as a model and as a determinant of the choice of particular topics for investigation. Totalitarian in this context does not imply rigid adherence to the paradigm suggested by Friedrich and Brzezinski, but rather the exclusive concentration and outreach of power within a political system, and its organizational consequences. Even the new concerns with socialism, factions and policy cycles demonstrated the continued influence of the totalitarian perspective, either through shared perceptions or through intellectual origins.

The various socialist interpretations of China's politics tended to reinforce the general totalitarian perspective, and indeed came closest to the earliest formulations of the totalitarian model. Those that approved of the CCP's socialism highlighted the mobilizatory power of its leadership and ideology, the regime's goals as defined by that ideology, and the absence of political mediation. To take but one example from the available literature, there are more than distant echoes of, *inter alia*, Kornhauser's account of the totalitarian polity in the following descriptions of Mao's 'revolution from above':

He set out to break down the gulf between the elite group and the masses, to spread a new outlook at the centres of decision-making, to motivate decisions differently, and to substitute for the 'invisible hand' of the price mechanism the visible bond of Mao Tse-tung's thought; Mao preaches a socialist morality, a collective selfless attitude, and a concern for world revolution, as against an individualistic, competitive morality.[23]

    [21] A. Nathan, 'Policy Oscillations in the People's Republic of China: A Critique', *China Quarterly*, No. 68 (December 1976), pp. 730–1

    [22] See, for example, F. Fleron, ed., *Communist Studies and the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969).

    [23] E. L. Wheelwright and B. McFarlane, *The Chinese Road to Socialism* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1973), p. 126.

Those socialist perspectives that disapproved of the CCP's variety of social-ism more obviously perpetuated the influence of the vision of the CCP as totalit-arian, and on occasion used the term explicitly as description. The emphasis was on the power and nature of the ruling elite, class or strata; the CCP's ideology was regarded as flawed in its content and application; and there was criticism of the 'cult of personality', the extent of centralized state power, as well as of purges'.[24]

On the surface, the factional accounts of the 1970s with their emphasis on elite-level conflict and coalition formation might seem – as some of their authors undoubtedly thought – to present a pluralist alternative to the totalitarian per-spective.[25] However, it is clearly misleading to regard elite-level conflict with no social base as an indication of pluralism. Indeed, in the light of the available evi-dence it is more likely to be a hallmark of the more authoritarian systems and those polities where the elite is less accountable to the population at large. The observation of conflict or consensus in any political system ought not to surprise the political analyst. That to some extent it did so was more a function of the pre-GPCR conventional wisdom, rather than political reality in the PCR. The fact that the majority of factional analyses described a small and homogenous elite emphasized the shared perception on the concentration and exercise of power.

Interpretations of China's politics that were concerned with policy cycles were similarly shaped by a totalitarian perspective. There were three general explana-tions for the appearance of such cycles prevalent in the 1970s – the interaction between ideology and environment; the inherent dynamic of Mao Zedong Thought; and elite-level conflict between two major power blocs.[26] Each assumes the existence of a totalitarian polity – with its characteristic concentration of power, the ability and will to mobilize – as the machinery for the generation of cyclical patterns.

One reason for both the poverty of explanation and the continued influence of a totalitarian perspective was that there was little attempt to define politics. In large measure this was an organizational as well as an intellectual problem: a function of the relative novelty of interest in China's politics and the limitations of primary sources. The study of China's politics had developed from general China studies rather than from the social sciences, and there was a consequent tendency to emphasize the collection of detail, to analyse China in isolation, and to equate 'politics' with 'contemporary China'. In part it reflected, and was rein-forced by the CCP's own *Weltanschauung* at that time which declared that politics was everything. Of course there are many different valid and useful definitions of what constitutes politics. None the less, an individual study re-quires a relatively precise definition and focus if there is to be explanation and

[24] For example: L. Maitan, *Party, Army and Masses in China* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

[25] One account that does seem to believe it is presenting a pluralist alternative is W. Ting, 'Coali-tional Behavior among the Chinese Military Elite: A Nonrecursive, Simultaneous Equations, and Multiplicative Causal Model', *American Political Science Review*, 73 (1979), 478–93. One which most definitely does not is J. Domes, *The Internal Politics of China* (London: Hurst, 1973).

[26] Nathan, 'Policy Oscillations in the People's Republic of China', pp. 724–7.

not just description. The problem highlighted here appears to refer back directly
to the debate of the mid-1970s about the relative academic merits of area studies
as opposed to the social sciences.[27] However, that is misleading since the real
issue results from the tension between history and the social sciences. Historical
method and historical perspective are central to the social sciences, in particular
political science, and both history and the social sciences are engaged in ex-
planation. On the other hand, their kinds of explanation are of a radically differ-
ent intent, and to some extent incompatible. To put it crudely, history is more
concerned to understand finite events whereas the social sciences focus on con-
tinuing processes. The notion of contingent history can only at most be a tactic
of historical analysis, and in practice is rarely even that. For their part the social
sciences accept that they have a more contingent universe to observe, and from
which to generalize.

Under such conditions the continued influence of a totalitarian perspective on
China's politics was perhaps no surprise. None the less, it did limit the study of
China's politics. As several writers pointed out when the study of politics in the
Soviet Union was at a similar early stage in the process of its development, the
totalitarian perspective restricts the area of investigation; discourages other
channels of inquiry; and, to a certain extent, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.[28]

NEW PERSPECTIVES

In terms of methodological development the late 1970s and 1980s have seen the
study of China's politics in the West start to come to grips with many of the
problems first highlighted by the GPCR. In particular, the totalitarian perspect-
ive no longer dominates the literature. There is now a wider range of interpreta-
tions of China's politics, which have generated new concerns for investigation.
China's politics are studied less in isolation, and techniques of political analysis
from other fields of inquiry have been adopted. Above all, politics has come to
be regarded and definable as an activity less than the whole. One important re-
sult is that recent research has concentrated on politics as a process, as well as in
terms of power and policy.

Within a very short period of time, the conditions for academic inquiry have
changed dramatically. Official sources are now more numerous, more reliable,
available for export, and more open to independent verification. For example,
since 1978 newspapers at provincial-level and below – a major source of in-
formation, however suspect – have increasingly become available for foreign
subscription, whereas there had been an almost total prohibition between 1961
and 1978. Yearbooks on a variety of topics and statistical digests were published
in the 1950s. Many of those have restarted and they have been joined by new

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[27] L. Pye, ed., *Political Science and Area Studies: Rivals or Partners?* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton
University Press, 1975).

[28] H. G. Skilling, 'Soviet and Communist Politics: A Comparative Approach', *Journal of Politics*,
22 (1960), 300–13; and R. C. Tucker, 'Towards a Comparative Politics of Movement Regimes',
American Political Science Review, 55 (1961), 281–9.

publications.[29] In general, some indication of the increase in the information flow may be judged by a comparison of the numbers of books and titles openly published in 1984, compared to 1980, 1977 and 1971. Some 2,421 million copies of 7,771 new titles appeared in 1971; 3,308 million copies of 12,886 titles in 1977; 4,593 million copies of 21,621 titles in 1980; and in 1984, 6,000 million copies of 40,000 new titles.[30] China's purposive integration into the international community has even involved supranational agencies in research in China. For example, the United Nations was involved in China's most recent census, the World Bank in designing China's most recent economic development plan.[31] Moreover, access to China for research has now become dependent on the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' administrative ability to deal with a large number of foreign scholars rather than a question of political sensitivity.[32]

These changed circumstances are very much part of the reform era. However, the change in political direction which has emerged since 1978 has itself been a stimulus to change in the study of China's politics. The rejection of the Cultural Revolution by the CCP, the speed of change, and the realization that the previous portrayal of China was at best misleading has led to greater scepticism. The search to interpret the impact of reform on the nature and direction of the polity has not led to a relatively narrow and uniform vision such as characterized the era of the Cultural Revolution. On the contrary, it is possible to identify at least five major interpretations of the significance of the changes in China's politics.

It is perhaps significant of the new scepticism that few authors are prepared to accept the CCP's account of recent developments at anything like face value, as they might in the past. Many are prepared to accept the regime's essential premise that it has rejected the policies of the Cultural Revolution because that era failed to produce the material basis for the development of socialism.[33] Many are also prepared to accept that the earlier conceptualization of politics was dysfunctional.[34] For example, there can be little doubt that the lack of distinction in both theory and practice between the functions of the state administration and those of the CCP was such a manifestation of 'Politics in Command'. The CCP's tendency to interfere in the affairs of the state administration – instead of maintaining the division between policy making and policy implementation in the

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[29] In addition to the more obvious economic and statistical yearbooks, there are those of more direct relevance to political studies, as for example, the *Zhongua renmin gongheguo xingzhen quhua jiance* [PRC Handbook of Administrative Areas] (Beijing: Ministry of Civil Affairs), and the *Zhongguo baike nianjian* [The China Almanac] (Beijing: The Chinese Almanac Publishing House).

[30] Data for 1971, 1977 and 1980 are taken from *Almanac of China's Economy, 1981* (Hong Kong: Modern Cultural Company Limited, 1982) p. 725.

[31] The World Bank, *China: Long-Term Development Issues and Options* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985).

[32] M. Yahuda, *The New Social Sciences in China* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[33] M. Selden, 'The Logic – and Limits – of Chinese Socialist Development', in Maxwell and McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development*, p. 1.

[34] T. Saich, 'Party Building since Mao – A Question of Style?', in Maxwell and McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development*, p. 149.

hands of itself and the state administration respectively – was encouraged by Mao's anti-bureaucratism. In consequence the state administration ceased to implement policy: cadres simply lived to draw their salaries and keep out of trouble. The CCP for its part became overloaded as it attempted to carry out its tasks as well as those of the state administration. Similarly, because 'Politics' was 'in Command' workers and cadres spent so much time engaged in political campaigns that production and administration suffered.

However, the CCP's presentation of its reform programme is less readily accepted. Instead there is considerable emphasis on the dangers and difficulties inherent in promoting 'socialist democracy' and of introducing 'capitalist techniques in the short-term to the long-term benefit of socialism'. To a considerable extent both measures have been directed at restoring the CCP's legitimacy.[35] More specifically, the campaign to create 'socialist democracy' is designed to ensure a practical and efficient distinction between party and state. In the process it is hoped not only that 'party life' will be revived, but also that cadres in the state administration will be more dynamic and innovative in the pursuit of their duties, as well as responsive to the public at large. In the economy, a higher degree of enterprise management and the 'responsibility system' are directed at tapping initiative, creating flexibility and increased growth. The essence of the 'responsibility system' – which first started in the rural economy – is that the producer has a contract, or 'responsibility', with the state. Once that contract is fulfilled spare capacity or additional output is at the producer's disposal.[36] Western analysts, for their part, have not been slow to indicate the relatively clear contradictions in both politics and economics that face the CCP. It is trying to ensure higher degrees of accountability, participation and spontaneity without surrendering political control.[37] It is trying to mix market forces and administrative measures to stimulate economic growth.[38] There is also a potential contradiction between CCP's economic and political goals – as, for example, in crude terms between growth and equality. Particularly from a socialist perspective, some commentators have pointed to the inherent instability generated by current policies as the CCP tries to reconcile its aims.[39]

From a socialist perspective, the political consequences of economic reform in a communist party state present problems of approach and analysis that are by

[35] D. S. G. Goodman, 'Democracy, Interest and Virtue: The Search for Legitimacy in the PRC', in S. R. Schram, *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1988).

[36] A. Watson, 'Agriculture Looks for "Shoes that Fit": The Production Responsibility System and its Implications', in Maxwell and McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development*, p. 83.

[37] D. S. G. Goodman, 'The Chinese Political Order after Mao: "Socialist Democracy" and the Exercise of State Power', *Political Studies*, 33 (1985), p. 218.

[38] S. Ishikawa, 'China's Economic System Reform: Underlying Factors and Prospects', in Maxwell and McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development*, p. 9; and C. Riskin, 'Market, Maoism, and Economic Reform in China', in M. Selden and V. Lippit, *The Transition to Socialism in China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1982), p. 300.

[39] V. Lippit, 'Socialist Development in China' in Selden and Lippit, *The Transition to Socialism in China*, p. 116; and B. McFarlane, 'Political Economy of Class Struggle and Economic Growth in China, 1950–1982', in Maxwell and McFarlane, eds, *China's Changed Road to Development*, p. 21.

no means new. Perhaps the most celebrated rehearsal of the arguments was that occasioned by the Prague Spring and presented in the pages of the *Monthly Review*.[40] To oversimplify greatly, debate polarizes between the economic and political determination of socialism. In contrast to the CCP's interpretation of reforms there are those who see developments since Mao's death and particularly since 1978 as a move towards capitalism. In such views the era of the Cultural Revolution represented either a period of socialism or transition to socialism. The current reforms are seen as they are presented, as the rejection of the era of the Cultural Revolution, and hence of socialism.

An articulate and recent version of this perspective on events since Mao's death has been produced by Chossudovsky.[41] He challenges the view that the CCP is pursuing socialism through an examination of the reforms in industry, agriculture and foreign trade; class relations in China; and the PRC's integration into the international community. The essential argument is that proletarian state power was fragile after 1949 because the working class failed to replace the national bourgeoisie whose power was derived from the internationally-dominated economies of the former Treaty Ports. Compromise led to the emergence of an alliance of the state and national bourgeoisies, which Mao tried to combat in the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. However, after 1976 this alliance, together with the rich peasantry, combined in their own economic interests. According to Chossudovsky, property rights have been restored; international capitalism and extra-territoriality (albeit in Special Economic Zones as opposed to Treaty Ports) have been re-introduced into China; and labour has become a commodity once again. Because reform is not controlled or supervised by the Chinese working class 'the transition cannot be towards socialism' (p. 216).

An alternative socialist perspective that rejects much of the case for capitalist restoration is powerfully put by Friedman.[42] He argues that China's economic reforms are not capitalist in the eyes of capitalists; and that there are more social formations than simply socialism and capitalism. Moreover, he rejects the case for essential change in the revolution since 1976. This is not to deny the power of reform since Mao's death for Friedman recognizes the benefits that have accrued to various sectors of the population, and in particular the rural poor. His argument is that revolutionary process ended not in 1976 but in 1949. Thereafter there was no revolutionary movement committed to 'social and economic democracy' (p. 21).

There was factionalism within the CCP's leadership, as in the GPCR (and indeed all the political conflicts of 1955–76), but no revolution committed to widen the original revolution's social base. The revolution that came to power in 1949 institutionalized inequalities of power, status and wealth, and in the

[40] P. M. Sweezy and C. Bettelheim, *On the Transition to Socialism* (London: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[41] M. Chossudovsky, *Towards Capitalist Restoration? Chinese Socialism after Mao* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[42] E. Friedman, 'The Original Chinese Revolution Remains in Power', in Cumings, ed., *China from Mao to Deng*, p. 21.

process revealed its own limitations. According to Friedman, its promise was one of egalitarian materialism, but state power was wielded by a narrow social stratum who could not but act through personal relations and in their own interests. However, it was a narrow social stratum which shared the values of the widest possible social base. The heart of this revolution was the peasant army. As a result the CCP's leadership could satisfy its immediate constituency without coming into conflict for the most part with popular values. Thus, there has been a strong and consistent emphasis on traditional thought and behaviour, as for example with respect to the family, where women can be divorced on grounds of infertility and children are obligated to look after their parents in old age. Where the CCP's leadership chose not to avoid conflict, for whatever reason – as, for example, when Mao speeded up the pace of collectivization during the second half of 1955 or in launching the GPCR – then the military has reasserted the values of the 'original Chinese revolution'.

In Friedman's view it is hardly a recipe for socialist development let alone revolution – 'What is popular is catastrophic; what is necessary is unpopular' (p. 25). Certainly the lessons of the CCP's population policy are there to be learnt. After 1949 Mao in particular argued strongly against a policy on population growth, and encouraged the peasant army's demand for a wife and family. In so far as his view was clearly articulated, he seems to have justified this policy through the belief that productivity would increase with population (a traditional peasant attitude) rather than in terms of economic capacity. By the late 1970s the control of population growth was one of China's most pressing problems. For example, grain production and consumption per capita had barely risen since the mid-1950s.[43] Yet after a few years of relatively successful controls in the early 1980s the problems still remain. In 1986 a slight relaxation of the campaign to limit family size resulted in a near doubling of the annual population growth rate.[44]

In contrast, but not in total contradiction to that view are those perspectives which emphasize the changes of the last decade in terms of the institutionalization of politics. The era of Mao-dominated politics and particularly the Cultural Revolution is seen as a period when there was an increasing uncertainty about and tension between, in Teiwes's terminology the 'normative and prudential rules' of China's politics, largely because of the high degree of personalization.[45] Mao was clearly a most important destabilizing element in China's politics – though he was not the only one – from the summer of 1955 until his death. The rejection of the Cultural Revolution has just as clearly entailed a search for stability and the restoration of rules to China's politics. However, as Teiwes points out neither depersonalization nor institutionalization is an easy or automatic process (p. 129). Personalized authority is deeply rooted in Chinese polit-

[43] L. Bianco, 'La politica demografica', in M. C. Gibelli and M. Weber, eds, *Una modernizzazione difficile: Economica e societa in Cina dopo Mao* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1983), p. 159.

[44] Wu Cangping, 'Zero population growth is the best plan', in *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily], 6 April 1987.

[45] Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China*, Part III, p. 93.

ical culture. Moreover, there is the obvious paradox that Deng Xiaoping's attempt to depersonalize China's politics rests on his personal charisma and authority.

Those authors who have examined the ideological and political changes of the last decade have been understandably wary of predicting the results of processes still under way. None the less, it is possible to identify two somewhat different perspectives to the institutionalization of politics. They are differentiated by their view of what went before. The first regards China before 1976 as a totalitarian polity, which has emerged into a post-totalitarian system. The second is less convinced that China was totalitarian before 1976 and sees the current political system as essentially authoritarian. In this context the distinction between authoritarian and post-totalitarian follows Linz.[46] Authoritarian regimes allow a limited pluralism but no political challenge to the single party or dominant elite: social elites may exercise autonomy but only in their non-political interests. In a post-totalitarian regime, the social structure remains integrated in the political system.

Moody, in his account of the extent of liberalization from Mao's death to 1983, presents the case that China has changed from a totalitarian to a post-totalitarian polity.[47] He distinguishes between two dimensions of liberalization: de-politicization and democratization. In Moody's view China's post-Mao liberalization has been characterized by the former rather than the latter. De-politicization entails the dismantling of the totalitarian polity which is highly ideological, voluntarist and mobilizatory. The result has been less emphasis on mass mobilization and more on administration, less ideological determination of issues and more articulation of public opinion. However, it has not led to democratization for power remains monopolized by the competing factions within the CCP leadership.

Schram, in his detailed analysis of the development of ideology and policy from the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in December 1978, which marks the start of the reform era, until 1984, describes an authoritarian rather than a post-totalitarian polity.[48] In contrast to Moody, he emphasizes the continued importance of ideology, and the new development towards an acceptable pluralism. Through tracing the ideological debates, particularly during the year from the spring of 1983 to the spring of 1984, Schram not only identifies the different strands of thought and personalities involved, he also demonstrates that in the post-Mao era ideology is not to be dismissed lightly. The battle being fought in those debates was for control of the new 'Marxist Moralism' which legitimates both the CCP and the political

[46] J. J. Linz, 'Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes', in F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby, eds, *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975), Vol. 3, p. 175.

[47] P. R. Moody, *Chinese Politics after Mao.*

[48] See Schram, *Ideology and Policy in China since the Third Plenum.* A similar argument is developed in Tang Tsou, 'Back from the Brink of Revolutionary-"Feudal" Totalitarianism', in V. Nee and D. Mozingo, eds, *State and Society in Contemporary China* (London: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 53.

system. However, he does not deny that the sphere of politics has become re-
stricted since 1978. Rather, he highlights the contradiction between, on the one
hand, the need for and articulation of ideological rigidity and, on the other, the
acceptance and implementation of economic diversity. The result, he concludes
is that 'China seems headed, willy-nilly, for a certain degree of pluralism, not to
be sure in the sense of prizing diversity for its own sake, but at least in tolerating
a more complex and heterogeneous pattern of behaviour than in the past'
(p. 71). Certainly, the tendency to political and social pluralism has very definite
limits. They are enshrined in the CCP's oft-repeated 'Four Basic Principles' that
demand support for 'The socialist road, the CCP's leadership, the dictatorship of
the proletariat, and Marxism–Leninism Mao Zedong Thought'.

POLITICAL CHANGE

The scepticism that has resulted in alternative interpretations of political change
during the last decade has also been brought to bear on the history of the PRC.
One example of this has been the reappraisal of previous accounts of China's
politics in terms of 'two-line struggle'. During the 1970s many Western com-
mentators reflected the practice of the PRC's media and reported political con-
flict in China in terms of two 'lines'. The approach was first publicized at the
start of the GPCR when it was said, in China at least, that the 'Top person in
authority taking the capitalist road', Liu Shaoqi, had opposed Chairman Mao's
'proletarian revolutionary line', not only in the 1960s but throughout the history
of the CCP. When Lin Biao fell into disgrace this too was propagandized as a
struggle between two 'lines', and indeed was presented as the tenth 'two-line
struggle' in the history of the CCP.[49] 'Line' in this sense was seen not simply as a
set of policies, but also as entailing an ideology and having some organizational
form.

   Although this perspective was not adopted wholesale by Western analysts, it
was none the less common to find China's politics in the 1970s described in
terms of 'ideologues' versus 'pragmatists', 'radicals' versus 'moderates'. That this
was an unsatisfactory paradigm became crystal clear in 1976. When Zhou Enlai
(who was labelled a 'moderate') died, he was expected to be succeeded by Deng
Xiaoping (another 'moderate') as Premier. His appointment was opposed by the
so-called 'radicals' – particularly Jiang Qing (Mao's wife) and her three associ-
ates from Shanghai, later to become known as the 'Gang of Four' – who when
the opportunity arose removed Deng altogether from the political bureau of the
CCP. A prominent role in Deng's ouster was played by Hua Guofeng, the then
Minister of Public Security. As a result he became Acting Premier instead of
Deng. Yet, within a month of Mao's death it was this same Hua who played a
decisive role in the arrest of the 'Gang of Four'. Of course, there are several ex-

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[49] For an apparent 'outside' account based on this perspective, see J. Chen, *Inside the Cultural
Revolution* (London: Sheldon Press, 1975).

planations for Hua's political movements and actions during 1976. However, they are difficult to explain in terms of 'two-line struggle'.

Objections to the 'two-line' approach had in fact already been articulated by Teiwes in the mid-1970s, through an examination of its validity during the early 1960s. Teiwes's comments were not widely disseminated (because they appeared in a journal with restricted circulation), but they were widely misrepresented. Presumably for that reason and because they jarred with the prevailing ortho-doxy the original article was not reprinted until almost a decade later.[50] The essence of his criticisms was that debate on policy was nowhere near as polarized as the 'two-line' perspective would suggest and that, although there was leader-ship conflict, Mao was not a protagonist. In Teiwes's view Mao was above the conflict: he was the pivot around whom everyone else revolved and whose sup-port they needed and tried to obtain. (The argument has been misrepresented as depicting a 'Mao in command'.) Mao's role in the 1960s was that of the 'ideas man', who identified problems and encouraged others to find their solution. However, he was mercurial and often changed his mind. This left the leaders of the CCP frequently at a loss about how to adapt to the changing Mao (p. 40).

More thorough, and these days more acceptable, reappraisals of the 'two-line' approach have been published in the 1980s. In particular, it is now fashionable to recognize that debate within the CCP has resulted from the interaction of three, rather than two 'lines'. These perspectives on development have their ori-gins in the mid-1950s when the CCP was trying to determine its future strategy. The alternatives facing the CCP at that time can be characterized in terms of the main mechanism each recommended for development – the market, mass mobil-ization and administration.[51] Each was not only a basic perspective on develop-ment, but had a set of policies prepared for implementation, as well as its proponents. The strength of these three visions may be judged by their resurrec-tion when debate became both necessary and more open after Mao's death.[52]

These and other reassessments of the history of the PRC are not only interest-ing for what they reveal in their own right, but also in two wider respects. In the first place they provide the historical perspective which is an essential part of ex-planation. In the second they draw attention to politics as process. As a result in the late 1970s and during the 1980s the study of China's politics in the West has not only sought to interpret what has happened (and indeed to explain why), but it has also become increasingly concerned with the internal workings of politics. Thus, for example, there have been studies of the central decision-making process through its formal communications network;[53] of specific

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[50] Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China*, Part I, p. 10.

[51] D. Solinger, ed., *Three Visions of Chinese Socialism* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1984). More colourfully, Friedman has referred to these as Titoism, Maoism, and Stalinism, in 'Some Ori-gins and Consequences of the Maoist Theory of the Socialist Transition', in M. Selden and V. Lippit, *The Transition to Socialism in China*, p. 159.

[52] D. Solinger, 'Economic Reform via Reformulation in China', *Asian Survey*, 21 (1981), p. 947.

[53] K. Lieberthal, *Central Documents and Politburo Politics in China* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, 1978).

instances of policy-making;[54] and of the dynamics of factions.[55] As Schram's account of ideological formulation after 1978 admirably demonstrates this new focus is a direct result of the new and improved conditions for research.

None the less, there appears a reluctance to develop explanations of political change from such recent research. Instead the literature reflects a wariness about identifying specific trends or determinants of China's politics. Both are understandable given the evolution of the study of China's politics during the last twenty years. On the other hand, without such explanations every new development in China's politics is liable to be regarded as the signal of major systematic change. Consequently, by way of conclusion, it is perhaps appropriate to speculate about the dynamics of political change in the PRC.

A consideration of factions within the CCP leadership might seem the logical place to start an examination of political change. However, the imperatives of CCP organization as well as of traditional Chinese political culture hinder such observation. Both emphasize an outward display of conformity and unity. In addition, it is clear that no simple factional model can provide an adequate explanation of political change. There is a variety of intra-leadership groups and factions to several of which individual leaders may have affiliations. There are loyalty groups within the CCP leadership, and factions based on personal ties. Leaders are united by their attitudes to development strategy – the three 'lines' referred to before. They are also united by their attitudes on specific policy issues; and by shared experiences, as for example, their treatment during the GPCR or an earlier career posting. In short, it is difficult to relate an individual's political fate, faction and policy stance.

Some examples may help indicate the scale of the problems facing factional analysis. The current reform era is associated largely with two people – Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping. Chen's ideas have been seminal to the introduction of market forces and foreign investment in economic development. Chen first formulated those ideas in the mid-1950s. Deng Xiaoping first became associated with any such ideas in the late 1970s. He has certainly fired the popular imagination for reform, and most Chinese now regard the reform ideas as his own. However, their careers since the mid-1950s are both contrasting and confusing in terms of factional analysis. Chen was Mao's major opponent in the debates on development which occurred during the mid-1950s. In contrast, Deng appears to have been one of Mao's favoured allies in those debates. (According to Khrushchev,[56] Deng was the only person in the Chinese leadership Mao ever had a good word for.) Even more confusing is their fate in the GPCR. Deng was

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[54] For example, Tsou, Blecher and Meisner, 'Policy Change at the National Summit and Institutional Transformation at the Local Level: The Case of Tachai and Hsiyang in the Post-Mao Era', in Tang Tsou, ed., *Select Papers from the Center for Far Eastern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981), No. 4, p. 241.

[55] For example, L. Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981); and J. Domes, *Politische Soziologie der Volksrepublik China* (Wiesbaden: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1980).

[56] S. Talbot, ed., *Khrushchev Remembers* (Harmondsworth, Middx: Penguin, 1977), Vol. 2, p. 301.

removed as the 'Number Two Person in Authority Taking the Capitalist Road'. Chen, on the other hand, though demoted was not purged, and maintained a position in the leadership throughout the era of the Cultural Revolution. Again, one major proponent of literary reforms in the 1980s was Zhou Yang. Yet this was the same person who during the 1950s and 1960s from within the CCP's Propaganda Department insisted on the then tight controls of style, content and distribution. It was a discipline that punished (often severely) many of those whom Zhou encouraged in the 1980s.

There may certainly be factions within the CCP's leadership. However, its intra-leadership groups would seem to be inherently more fluid than is usually associated with a definition of factionalism. Moreover, it seems more reasonable to search for an explanation of political change through an examination of the divisions within the leadership, rather than of the intra-leadership groups assumed to result from those divisions.

The experience and research of the last twenty years would seem to suggest that the CCP's leadership is divided by various factors of policy, personality, experience and ideology. These divisions are so numerous and so varied that on single issues or programmatically reaching a decision, particularly a binding decision, is difficult. As the examples of the careers of Chen, Deng and Zhou suggest, divisions within the leadership need not be constant over time, nor mutually reinforcing. Moreover, individuals may act out of mixed motives. As a result coalition building is both necessary and difficult. It is frequently easier for the leaders of the CCP to reach a negative decision – to agree what they do not want – than it is to make a positive decision. There is an inherent tendency to maintain the status quo, which is further reinforced by the danger (for the individual) of appearing on the 'wrong' side.

The Chinese political process thus appears very conservative. Real change is slow, cautious and incremental in contrast to the rhetoric that accompanies the announcement of major policy changes. There is none the less change not least because individuals have beliefs and seek power, if rarely exclusively. The policy process tends to be not only incremental but also deliberately experimental. During experimentation partial interests are necessarily involved. The leader, who can carry out an experiment in one part of the country and then use the experience of that experiment to pressure the decision-making process, is in a good position to carry the day nationally. (Of course, most of the experiments exploited in this manner are specifically created for that purpose, and almost all involve a degree of connivance between central and social leaders.) When this happens on a large scale, and it is a common feature of China's politics, then (somewhat paradoxically) the formal national proclamation of a new policy initiative only follows that policy's implementation. A recent example of that process at work is the adoption of the 'responsibility system' in agriculture, which was already in practice throughout much of China before its formal adoption as policy in 1981. Similarly under Zhao Ziyang's guidance (when he was CCP leader in Sichuan province during the late 1970s) a version of the recently adopted urban reforms were in operation on a 'trial' basis. As can be seen in the

case of Zhao Ziyang, who first became Premier and is now concurrently Acting General-Secretary of the CCP, political fortunes are closely linked to that process and its results. Obviously, that process of experimentation and the exercise of political pressure are not necessarily single-issue specific. Moreover, in the decision-making process individual leaders' support for each other may develop into cohesive leadership groups, if not coherent strategies.

The exceptions to this picture of incremental change occur when extra-ordinary circumstances force unity or a specific decision on the leadership. The most obvious examples of such a situation are an external threat, an economic crisis (as in 1961), or a crisis of legitimacy (as in 1978). However, during his life-time it is clear that Mao was sometimes able to impose his policies and a general change on the rest of the leadership as a whole. The source of his authority, as Teiwes points out,[57] lay essentially in having proved himself to be right in so many ways before 1949, when others would have acted differently, and does not appear to have been transmitted to his successors. Deng has not so far acted to initiate dramatic change, though that may equally be through choice and the desire to regularize politics rather than an inability to act.

In addition, the CCP leadership has shown that it can unite to act negatively against either an individual, specific policies or a more general strategy, particu-larly when there appears to be a threat to the status quo. Mao's 'First Little Leap' of early 1956, the campaign against Lin Biao which started in 1971, the arrest of the 'Gang of Four' in 1976, and the rejection of the era of the Cultural Revolution in 1978 would all seem to be appropriate cases. It is at these times of internal or external threats – internal or external to the leadership that is – that the political system is most vulnerable to sudden and dramatic change, precisely because the leadership has become destabilized. Throughout the history of the PRC political mass movements and campaigns have frequently extended beyond their original terms of reference, and seemed to develop their own momentum. The GPCR is perhaps the most spectacular and vivid example of that phenomenon. However, it resulted in major changes in China's policies, organizational structures and leadership personnel on average every four or five years from 1949 through to the early 1980s.

The resignation of Hu Yaobang as General Secretary of the CCP in January 1987 provides an excellent, and recent, example both of the CCP leadership's ability to unite against an individual and its awareness of the potential dangers of destabilization. Hu is not an orthodox Marxist-Leninist. He has been im-patient about the speed of reform, and outspoken in his belief that Marxism–Leninism must adapt to changing principles. He has not been particularly popu-lar with the population as a whole; and has derived much of his political power from his personal connection with Deng Xiaoping, and from promoting col-leagues who had served under him when he headed the Young Communist League before the GPCR. This was not a sound basis for mobilizing majority support within the leadership, and indeed it would seem clear that he had prob-

[57] Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy and Conflict in China*, p. 48.

lems in coalition-building. For example, on several occasions at the end of 1986 it seems that the People's Liberation Army refused to accept his nomination as Chairman of the Central Military Commission (to replace Deng Xiaoping).[58]

The catalyst that led to his resignation was clearly the student demonstrations at the end of 1986. In the 1980s popular demonstrations are still too reminiscent of the GPCR for the comfort of most of the CCP and its leadership. The cause of Hu's immediate problems was not the demonstrations but rather the transition to the post-Deng succession, due to be announced at the 13th Congress of the CCP in September 1987. Hu's position seemed assured, but it depended heavily on Deng and was exposed by the student demonstrations. They allowed Hu's opponents to suggest that he had created the political climate in which such events flourished. Moreover, they provided the opportunity for Hu's opponents to launch a pre-emptive strike against what they saw as his rise to supremacy and the threat to the status quo. The result was Hu's resignation as General-Secretary, but not as a member of the CCP's political bureau. Had that occurred the status quo would have been severely upset, particularly had the conflict widened with an attempt to replace Hu. It would appear that the dynamics of political change have altered little with the transition to the post-Mao era. On the other hand, one reason that CCP leaders seek to institutionalize politics is because they hope to restrict the dimensions of political change, not least in their own interests.

[58] 'Zhao's first task is to win over the PLA', *South China Morning Post*, 21 January 1987.