

Introduction

FACTIONALISM IN LEADERSHIP RELATIONS AND DECISION MAKING

Factionalism, a politics in which informal groups, formed on personal ties, compete for dominance within their parent organization, is a well-observed phenomenon in Chinese politics. In addition to frequent references to factional activities in the literature, a few studies focus on this topic specifically: Andrew Nathan explores factionalism in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) politics in terms of clientalism;¹ William Whitson attributes factional tendencies in the military to the CCP's Field Army system during the war;² Lucian Pye elucidates factionalism from the perspective of Chinese political culture;³ and Frederick Teiwes depicts the 1954 Gao-Rao Affair as essentially an outcome of factional struggles among the elite members.⁴

The study of factionalism in CCP politics, however, remains strikingly deficient. There are few thorough and systematic examinations of how factionalism has developed in CCP politics. Theoretically, it is hard to imagine how factions, which tend to divide the Party, can exist in the CCP, not necessarily because the CCP leadership has always vowed to

1 Andrew Nathan, "A factionalism model for CCP Politics," *CQ*, 53 (January 1973), pp. 34–66.

2 William Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927–71*, London: Macmillan, 1973.

3 Lucian Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics*, Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981.

4 Frederick Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court: Gao Gang and Party Factionalism in the Early 1950s*, New York: M. E. Sharp, 1990.

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eliminate factional activities in the Party, but because the CCP is a Leninist party, the unity of which is vital for its rule. More pragmatically, if factionalism forms the essential dynamics in the policy process, how can we distinguish a genuine policy dispute from the unprincipled factional conflicts? Or, as some may suggest, if the two entangle, to what extent can factional activities affect a policy outcome, or vice versa? Furthermore, how can factionalism affect the overall political development in China? In short, factionalism remains a puzzle of, rather than an answer to, Chinese politics. As Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael Oksenberg point out: “Few questions [about factionalism] have so engrossed outside observers of Chinese politics as these, yet on few issues is there as little certainty.”⁵

Factionalism in China has drawn so much attention yet still remains a puzzle because it involves two major issues that have remained the most problematic in our study of CCP politics: leadership relations and leadership decision making. *Leadership relations* have been infamously unpredictable, marked by frequent purges ever since the CCP was established in 1921 and by a particularly vicious cycle of succession struggles after 1949. Except for Jiang Zemin, who was handpicked by Deng Xiaoping after the May 1989 crisis, all the successors – Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, Hua Guofeng, Hu Yaobang, and Zhao Ziyang – were purged. Moreover, all were toppled by their patrons, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, with the exception of Hua, who was ousted by Deng after Mao’s death. *Leadership decision making* in China has also puzzled us, not necessarily because of its secrecy, but because of its inconsistency. Policy outcomes switched constantly between “Left-adventurism” and “Right-conservatism” in Mao’s period, or between “emancipation of mind” and “socialist spiritual civilization” in Deng’s. As a well-known metaphor in China says, “the Party’s policy is like the moon – the one on the first night of the month is different from the one on the fifteenth.”

This book is designed to explain leadership relations and decision making from the perspective of factionalism. The aim is to show to what extent factionalism affects changes in leadership relations and policy outcomes.

5 Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structure, and Processes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 58.

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[More information](#)*Introduction*WESTERN ANALYSIS OF FACTIONALISM IN
LEADERSHIP RELATIONS AND DECISION MAKING

Chapter 1 examines the evolution of Western analysis of leadership relations and decision making in China. The explanations can be generalized by three predominant models: the policy-choice model, the structure model, and the power-struggle model. All three highlight factional activities, yet their explanations vary greatly.

The policy-choice analysts argue that leadership relations are determined by the leaders' *choices* in policy making. Different diagnoses by these leaders of an existing problem lead to different policy choices. Factional activities, if there are any, emerge in policy confrontations in which those with shared views team up in order to make their choice prevail. Harry Harding notes that "the leaders of post-Mao China fall into two groups. More conservative leaders are cautious and skeptical about dramatic departures from the planned economy, state-owned industry, and centralized political system that were the legacy of the Soviet model. Radical reformers, in contrast, entertain bolder and riskier measures that would launch China in the direction of a market economy, new forms of public ownership, and a more pluralistic political order."⁶

Drawing on the theory of bureaucratic politics, the structure analysts argue that leadership relations reflect the leaders' positions in the *structure* of policy making, and their *institutional interests* determine their policy choices. Factional activities are essentially underlain by interest conflicts among the agencies involved in the policy process. Policy making appears inconsistent because, given "the segmented and stratified system of authority," bureaucratic interactions, interwoven with factional activities, often lead to "unintended outcomes" in the policy process.⁷ Thus, the structure analysts see similar career paths as a major criterion for factional alignments. Lieberthal and Oksenberg point out that all the prominent members of the "petroleum faction" rose to power from the oil industry.⁸

The power-struggle analysts maintain that leadership relations are

6 Harry Harding, *China's Second Revolution*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1987, pp. 2–3.

7 Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*, esp. p. 137.

8 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–51, 60–1.

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determined by the *distribution of power* among the elite members, and leadership decision making essentially reflects the vision of those who have prevailed in the power struggle.⁹ Factionalism has its roots in endless power struggles. As Lucian Pye explains, “the prime basis for factions among cadres is the search for career security and the protection of power. . . . The strength of Chinese factions is the personal relationships of individuals who, operating in a hierarchical context, create linkage networks that extend upward in support of particular leaders who are, in turn, looking for followers to ensure their power.”¹⁰

Explanations involving the three models, however, are based on a problematic assumption that factionalism is a dependent variable that results from policy disputes, conflicts of institutional interests, or power struggles. A close examination shows that the CCP leaders with shared policy preferences did not always get along. Liu Shaoqi supported Mao most of the time in policy making,¹¹ but his desperate effort to keep up with Mao did not prevent a merciless purge by Mao. Although Lin Biao’s “attitude was truly one of ‘Do whatever the Chairman says,’” his relationship with Mao ended up in an ultimate “tragedy.”¹² Indeed, the CCP leaders with shared policy preferences often had different factional alignments: both the Gang of Four and Lin Biao supported the Cultural Revolution (CR), yet the fierce power struggle between them was an underlying factor in Lin’s eventual fall (see Chapter 4); Chen Yun and Peng Zhen were both known for their conservative attitudes in the Deng period, yet Chen played a crucial role in blocking Peng from entering the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC); and both Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were reform-minded leaders, yet Zhao kept an indifferent attitude to the toppling of Hu (see Chapter 7).

Conflicts of institutional interest can constitute an essential dynamic in the policy process, yet it would be difficult to explain the final policy outcomes if “there is no way precisely to measure the real authority of any particular group of officials.” Moreover, how can we define institutional interests if it is not the institutional arrangements but personal ties, or

9 Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 3 vols., New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, 1983, 1997.

10 Pye, *The Dynamics*, pp. 7–8.

11 MacFarquhar, *The Origins*, 1:2–3.

12 Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The Tragedy of Lin Biao: Riding the Tiger during the Cultural Revolution*, London: C. Hurst, 1961, p. 161.

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guanxi, that not only “bind different agencies together” but also “constitute the single most important ingredient which integrates the system and enables it to function”?¹³ Nonetheless, the structure model reveals a significant reality in CCP politics: the offices are distributed as spoils among those who dominate. A leader strives to advance the interests of his office essentially because it has been knitted into his *guanxi* networks, and its well-being has a substantial impact on the strength of his faction. Thus, a leader’s power is determined not so much by his official position as by the support he can generate through his *guanxi* networks. Deng and Chen Yun, for example, remained the most influential figures until they died in 1997 and 1995, although they held no official positions after 1989.

The power-struggle model has perhaps provided the most compelling explanation of factionalism in CCP politics. However, its analysis invites more profound questions. If a leader’s power comes from his factional networks instead of his institution or the support to his policy choices, how can he develop and control these networks in the CCP political system, a totalistic system in which the Party’s unity is a necessary prerequisite? How can he adjust the interests of his faction to those of the institution over which he presides in policy making?

In a fundamental departure from previous scholarship, I argue that factionalism is an independent variable in the shaping of leadership relations and in leadership decision making in CCP politics. Specifically, a leader’s power is based on the strength of his factional networks; his relationships with his peers are shaped not so much by their pros and cons to his policy choices as by the consequences of their interactions with his power in a hierarchical context; and decisions are made according to the vision of those who have prevailed in the power struggles rather than through the due process in which everyone is entitled to present his preferences. The axis of my analysis – the relationship between factionalism and power – appears consistent with the power-struggle model. But the fundamental difference must be stated precisely: power struggles do not give rise to factional activities; rather, it is factionalism that turns power into an overriding goal in CCP politics, in which authorities are highly personalized, institutionalization of the political process is deficient, and the procedures and rules for decision making are uncertain.

13 Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*, pp. 137–8, 156.

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[More information](#)*Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics*CONDITIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF
FACTIONALISM IN CCP POLITICS

An inevitable question arises from the assumption that factionalism is an *independent variable* in the shaping of leadership relations and decision making: how could factionalism develop and prevail in CCP politics despite the CCP leadership's repeated denouncement of, and vows to eliminate, factionalism in political affairs? Chapter 2 addresses this question from the perspective of the CCP system, a system in which (1) power is entrusted to individual leaders in a hierarchical context, (2) the Party monopolizes all the legal channels for the expression of diverse interests, (3) a formal process for decision making has never really been adopted, and (4) the military frequently intervenes in political affairs. Factionalism is innate to CCP politics because these four features provide the development of factionalism with necessary and sufficient conditions.

The CCP carried out its revolution with Mao's strategy of "setting up base areas in the countryside and encircling cities from the rural areas." Thus, the CCP forces were developed separately by various leaders in their base areas, which were isolated from each other. In a perilous situation during the war, these leaders were allowed a large degree of independence in decision making, and they entrusted power to their subordinates according to the strength of their forces and, more importantly, the degree of their loyalty. This pattern of personal entrustment of power fostered close personal ties, or *guanxi*, between a leader and his followers, and the former needs the latter's support as badly as the latter needs the former's protection in political affairs.¹⁴ These *guanxi* created "old-boy networks" and prepared the roots for factional development.

However, it is the *single-party rule* that turns the universally existing old-boy networks into political factions. In China, the CCP monopolizes all the legal channels for the expression of political and socioeconomic interests. But these interests are rarely harmonious, because situations across China vary greatly. Thus, as Mao said, "intra-party struggles are inevitable because different social interests will eventually find expressions within the Party."¹⁵ When differences emerge, however, the CCP

14 See Pye, *The Dynamic*, pp. 6–8. 15 SWMZD, 4:124.

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leaders are not allowed to make them public, because the Party's appearance of unity is vital for its rule; that is why whenever differences in the CCP leadership broke out, a purge would follow, and the victims were always accused of "scheming to split the Party." Thus, the involved leaders have to seek support through informal channels – old-boy networks – to solve their differences. My examination shows that in CCP politics *guanxi* networks function as (1) exclusive channels of communications among political associates, (2) outlets for their particular interests, and (3) the command system of their forces – functions that are normally assumed by the political organizations in a pluralistic political system. Repeated abuse of personal ties in a system of single-party dictatorship turns the universally existing old-boy networks into political factions.

A solution to the conflict between the single-party rule and diverse socioeconomic interests is to institutionalize the policy-making process, namely, to establish a formal process through institutional arrangements in which formal rules, compliant procedures, and standard operating practices are abiding in policy making. While keeping the system essentially intact, formal institutional arrangements can provide plural channels for the expression of diverse interests in the policy process; compliant procedures can override personal ties, or *guanxi*, in decision making; and standard operating practices can make it difficult to abuse one's power in political affairs. All this strengthens the authority of institutions rather than individual leaders.¹⁶

But institutionalization of the political process has not been achieved in China. Power has always concentrated in the hands of individual leaders. In retrospect, an important reason, which has largely been overlooked in the literature, why Mao and Deng maintained their command was their exclusive privilege to violate any established rules and procedures in decision making whenever they felt their dominance was being threatened. As a result, all the formal arrangements in decision making

16 After Stalin's death, for example, factional phenomena – frequent purges based on personal implications and the abuse of personal ties in political affairs – faded away in Soviet politics as the political process was institutionalized. For institutionalization of the policy process in the ex-Soviet Union and its impact, see Jerry Hough, *Soviet Union and Social Science Theory*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, pp. 23–31; and Robert Daniels, "Soviet politics since Khrushchev," in John W. Strong, ed., *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev and Kosygin*, New York: Van Nostrand-Reinhold, 1971, pp. 22–3.

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became a facade, beneath which *guanxi* to the powerful leaders became indispensable to achieving the desired policy goals. The dependence on *guanxi* networks in political affairs has promoted factional activities.

The other major consequence of the lack of a formal process is, as rational-choice theory predicts, that the policy process is bound to collapse when the policy makers' preferences are intransitive – that is, when there are differences in kind among them.¹⁷ A policy crisis emerges in such a situation. To solve this crisis and to ensure the operation of the system, the dominant leader, namely Mao or Deng, had to resort to military intervention to enforce his choice, which happened repeatedly in CCP history. Given that most of the CCP factions originated from the armed forces during the war, repeated military intervention has not only consolidated the dominant leaders' power but also strengthened their factional alignments. As a result, the military has become the most important power base in CCP politics. Without military support, a Party leader could not be dominant in policy making, no matter how influential he appeared. Leaders like Liu Shaoqi in Mao's period and Chen Yun in Deng's were typical examples.

MOUNTAINTOPS AND LEADERSHIP RELATIONS
WITH MAO IN COMMAND

Factionalism played an essential role in the establishment of Mao's command. Mao pointed out that "China's revolution was made by many mountaintops."¹⁸ Mountaintops, or *shantou*, refers to the CCP base areas, which were usually developed in the mountainous areas ideal for guerrilla warfare during the revolution. Since these base areas were isolated from each other and the CCP forces in these areas had to fight independently, strong personal bonds were forged between the leaders and their forces, and among the cadres and officers from the same mountaintop. These personal bonds formed the foundation of the CCP factions. Thus, "mountaintop" has become a synonym for political faction, and "mountaintop mentality" (*shantou zhuyi*) refers to factionalism in the CCP jargon.

17 See Thomas Schwartz, *The Logic of Collective Choice*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 12–17.

18 *Wansui*, 2:479.

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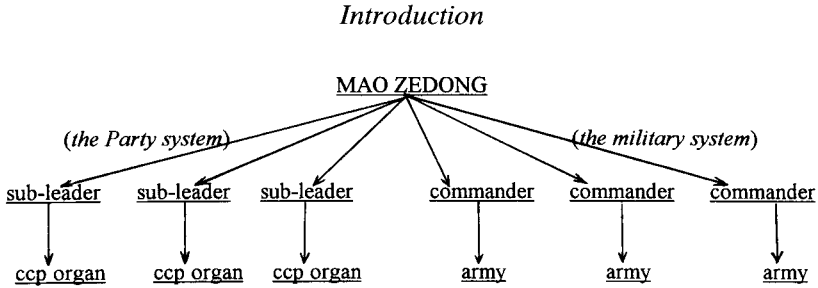
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Figure I.1. The structure of the Yan'an Round Table (solid arrow = direction of control based on personal loyalty)

Chapter 3 examines how all the mountaintops came under the leadership of the Yan'an Round Table¹⁹ – the first-generation leadership with Mao in command²⁰ – after Mao and his followers prevailed in the struggles against the mountaintops led by Zhang Guotao in the military and by Wang Ming in the Party. More significant was the establishment of Mao Zedong Thought as the CCP's "guiding principle" during the Yan'an period in 1937–45. This not only marked the CCP's ideological independence from Moscow, but it also made Mao's command unchallengeable, for any challenges to his command would eventually undermine the Party's ideological legitimacy.

But the structure of the Yan'an Round Table was faction-ridden. As shown by Figure I.1 (a simplified version of Figure 3.4), it was Mao's authority based on personal loyalties, rather than institutional arrangements, that secured the stability of leadership relations. Mao's command was supported by the mountaintops in both the Party and military systems, which are virtually independent of each other in the CCP polit-

19 The term is coined by Roderick MacFarquhar. It refers to the first generation of CCP leaders "whose comradeship had been forged by the Long March, Japanese aggression, and civil war." (MacFarquhar, *The Origins*, 1:1.)

20 The Mao-in-command model was formalized by Michael Oksenberg, "Policy making under Mao," in John M. H. Lindbeck, ed., *China: Management of a Revolutionary Society*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971, pp. 79–115. For Mao's path to power, see Jin Chongji, ed., *Mao Zedong zhuan, 1983–1949* (A Biography of Mao Zedong, 1983–1949), Beijing: Central Document Press, 1996; and Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun, "From a Leninist to a charismatic party: The CCP's changing leadership, 1937–1945," in Tony Saich and Hans van de Ven, eds., *New Perspectives on the Chinese Communist Revolution*, New York: M. E. Sharp, 1995, pp. 339–87. Teiwes and Sun's analysis overlaps with Chapter 3 in this book. Yet my analysis differs from theirs in perspectives, source materials, and their explanations and evaluations of various events and figures involved in the establishment of Mao's command.

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ical system, and Mao was the *only* one who had control of both systems. While the generals' loyalties enabled Mao to secure his hegemonic position in the Party, the principle that "the Party commands the gun" provided Mao with political legitimacy to command the military.

The Yan'an Round Table provided the CCP with a strong and cohesive leadership in its revolution, which was carried out by various mountaintops. It not only embodied the comradeship among the mountaintop leaders and their loyalty to Mao, but also created a structural shackle on the factionalism embedded in CCP politics. Leadership relations were structured in such a way that a subleader who attempted to expand his power base would have to engage in a zero-sum struggle with the other leaders, and his expansion could also face Mao's suppression because it posed a potential threat to his command. To be precise, by entrusting the supreme authority to Mao on the one hand and creating a system of checks and balances among Mao's comrades on the other hand, the Yan'an Round Table secured the stability of faction-ridden leadership relations. The status quo could be maintained as long as Mao wanted to, because no one but Mao – *the* leader who had full control of both the Party and military and whose Mao Zedong Thought provided this leadership with ideological legitimacy – could exert an external force to break the leadership stability.

But the problems in faction-ridden leadership relations were exposed soon after 1949. Rapid expansion of the CCP forces after the collapse of Kuomintang (KMT) brought about a situation in which China was virtually divided up by various CCP mountaintops, and their leaders became the "kings" in the areas controlled by their forces.²¹ Meanwhile, Liu Shaoqi's mountaintop grew so powerful that Liu's men began to manipulate the policy process at the Center. In an effort to prevent "independent kingdoms" and to undermine Liu's forces, Mao moved all the mountaintop leaders to Beijing. The effort of centralization led to an overall redistribution of power among the CCP leaders. This broke the stability of the Yan'an Round Table.

Chapter 4 focuses on the first major elite conflict after 1949 – the Gao-Rao Affair in 1954 – in order to demonstrate the significant transition of the Yan'an Round Table after 1949. The Gao-Rao Affair was not an aber-

21 Mao called these regional leaders *ge lu zhuhou* (dukes and princes from their territories).