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INTRODUCTION

RODERICK MACFARQUHAR

Sixty years is a long life-span for a revolutionary regime to survive and remain vigorous.¹ The celebration in 2009 of the 60th anniversary of the Chinese communist conquest of power and the creation of the People's Republic of China (PRC) was in stark contrast to the fate of its erstwhile Soviet "elder brother." Despite suffering terrible human tragedies and political upheavals – notably, the great famine of 1959–61 and the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76² – the PRC had emerged as a powerful and dynamic country. The purpose of this volume is to chronicle how that came about. The purpose of this introduction is to proffer a hypothesis, based on that chronicle, to explain the Chinese success.

One factor was surely the longevity of the revolutionary leadership.³ Despite the enormous problems of revolutionary nation-building described in the first two chapters of this volume covering the period from 1949 to 1965, the seven members of the ruling Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) remained in place for seventeen years until Mao purged colleagues whom he no longer trusted

- 1 The English Revolution of the 17th Century – the Protectorate – lasted only slightly more than a decade from the execution of King Charles I in January 1649 to the restoration of his son as King Charles II in 1660. If one takes the storming of the Bastille on 14 July 1789 as the symbolic start of the French Revolution, it was only fifteen years until Napoleon was crowned emperor in 1804. If one dates it from the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, the revolutionary era lasted barely a decade. The Soviet regime lasted seventy-four years, but by the 60th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1977, the Soviet Union was wallowing in the stagnation and corruption of the Brezhnev era, and the efforts of Gorbachev to revive it in the late 1980s with *perestroika* and *glasnost* only brought about its demise. Despite the loss of its Soviet benefactor and the U.S. embargo, the Cuban revolutionary regime celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2009 under the continuing aegis of the Castro brothers. The communist revolution in Vietnam – partially a liberation struggle – was finally victorious in 1975, and a strong regime has been in power for thirty-six years.
- 2 For the famine, see below, Chapter 2, and, for more detail, Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The history of China's most devastating catastrophe, 1958–1962* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); for the Cultural Revolution, see below, Chapters 3 and 4, and Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's last revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Belknap Press, 2006).
- 3 The English Protectorate collapsed two years after the death of Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector. Robespierre, Danton, and other prominent French revolutionary leaders were guillotined in 1794, only a year after the execution of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Stalin made sure that all leaders of the Bolshevik Revolution had been executed long before he himself died.

during the Cultural Revolution.⁴ Even so, two members of the pre-Cultural Revolution PSC, Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun, as well as other senior leaders, survived that political upheaval, and Deng emerged in 1978 and used his revolutionary prestige to lead the post-Mao recovery. Living into his early 90s, Deng was able to put his stamp upon China's reform (*gaige*) and opening up (*kaifang*) and to see a successor leadership firmly in place before dying in 1997.

A second factor was control of the military, which determines whether or not a revolutionary leader has the ultimate means to enforce his will. Mao Zedong headed the Party's Military Affairs Commission through the Civil War and until the day he died and, after the 1949 Revolution, allowed only one civilian colleague, Deng, to be a member. This increased Deng's legitimacy in the eyes of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). He had been chief political commissar of one of the great field armies that had won China from Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in the Civil War, and in the 1970s and 1980s, he twice served as PLA chief-of-staff, the only civilian ever to do so. This career experience and prestige enabled him to dislodge the PLA from the positions of political power it had taken over from the disrupted Communist Party during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, described in Chapters 3 and 4. It meant, too, that in the crisis of 1989 over how to deal with the students in Tiananmen Square, the PLA would obey orders emanating from Deng to expel the demonstrators, with deadly force where needed.⁵

A third factor may have been readiness to rule. Unlike the Soviet leaders who were mainly exiled intellectuals engaged in ideological disputes before 1917, the Chinese communists had had many years experience in governance during their time in Yan'an and other base areas prior to the success of the revolution. The Party had been honed into a formidable instrument of power. And, again unlike the Soviets, the Chinese communists fought and won their Civil War before they took power. Thus, after three years of economic recovery, Mao felt able to abandon New Democracy, his version of Lenin's "liberal" New Economic Policy (NEP) of the early 1920s, and initiate the collectivization of agriculture and the nationalization of industry. He completed the program by 1956, without the catastrophic disruption caused by Stalin's bloody collectivization and First Five-Year Plan (FYP) (1928–32), which dealt a lasting blow to Soviet agriculture. Those long years of governing experience

4 Unlike Stalin, Mao seems never to have ordered the execution of his colleagues, although he was prepared, as in the case of PRC president, Liu Shaoqi, to allow them to die of neglect in custody.

5 By contrast, in the English Revolution Richard Cromwell lacked authority after the death of his father, and this left power in the hands of General Monck, who brokered the return of Charles II. In France the executions of the French civilian revolutionary leaders enabled Brigadier General Napoleon Bonaparte to fill the vacuum after rising rapidly during France's revolutionary wars. Trotsky and, later and more brutally, Stalin disciplined the Soviet Red Army and its top brass to accept strict civilian control. Gorbachev was the only general secretary to face a revolt by his generals. Their coup was a failure perhaps because Soviet generals were unused to this role, but it led inexorably to Gorbachev's downfall, underlining the importance of control of the military to the leader of a revolutionary regime.

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both before and after 1949 meant that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) emerged from the ten-year battering of the Cultural Revolution damaged but not destroyed.

A fourth factor may have been the length and impact of the revolutionary high tide.⁶ By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, rural collectivization and the command economy with its Five-Year Plans had lasted over sixty years. No Russian remembered pre-World War I capitalist industrialization. The NEP was a distant memory in Soviet history books. During the Brezhnev era, entrepreneurship involved corruption and the black market, a fitting background for the rise of the oligarchs who looted the economy of post-Soviet Russia. The new nation became heavily dependent on its mineral wealth.

The relative ease with which the rural-savvy CCP pushed through collectivization,⁷ and later herded the peasants into ultra-collectivist communes, was a triumph that confounded their Soviet brethren. But almost certainly the peasants joined these new rural organizations as a result of the unrelenting pressure by CCP cadres rather than because they were converts to socialism. For in the wake of the great famine, it became clear that the unfamiliar tenets of collectivization had not been sufficiently inculcated into the minds of the peasants; even some of Mao's senior colleagues effectively favored decollectivization. And in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1970s, the peasants of the two provinces worst hit by the famine, Anhui and Sichuan, spearheaded a return to family farming.⁸ Decollectivized agriculture along with township and village enterprises (TVEs) were the springboard for the Chinese economic miracle. The socialist high tide had not lasted long enough to undermine traditional Chinese rural entrepreneurship.

A fifth factor was probably nationalism.⁹ Few of the recruits to the CCP in the 1920s, including Mao, were well schooled in Marxism-Leninism. But the

6 The English Civil War involved fighting in all parts of the British Isles, and Cromwell had little time to institutionalize a strong civilian order before his death. The French revolutionaries established a new calendar, but they had no time to found a new order before they fell victim to the Reign of Terror. On the other hand, the Stalinist command economy based on rural collectivization and state-owned industry lasted over fifty years to the end of the Soviet period, inhibiting the rise of a dynamic new economy in the post-Soviet era, but leaving openings for the emergence of a new breed of unscrupulous economic oligarchs.

7 Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, and Deng Xiaoping all came from rural backgrounds (of varying degrees of wealth), and even the few leaders who were not from peasant families would have learned a great deal about the countryside during their sojourns in the base areas before 1949.

8 Zhao Ziyang, later prime minister, later still the General Secretary dismissed at the time of the 1989 Tiananmen events, was the Sichuan first Party secretary who godfathered the reforms in Sichuan; see Chapter 5. His counterpart in Anhui was Wan Li, later chairman of the standing committee of the National People's Congress at the time of Tiananmen.

9 For Lenin and the early Soviet leaders, the revolution was all: the Russian Civil War was fought to defend the revolution and the belief was that the Bolshevik Revolution would be safe only when revolutions had taken place in countries like Germany and Britain. When those revolutions failed to appear, Stalin's "socialism in one country" policy was designed to safeguard the revolution by strengthening the Soviet Union. But probably not till the Nazi invasion and, after World War II, during the Cold War against the West was Soviet patriotism actively cultivated.

Bolshevik Revolution and Lenin's excoriation of imperialism suggested that the CCP would be a better alternative to Sun Yat-sen's Nationalist Party as an instrument for patriotic young intellectuals intent on capturing power, expelling imperialists, and restoring China to its erstwhile greatness. Of course, under Comintern tutelage and with Stalin's example they went with the socialist program as an essential part of self-strengthening. In power, Mao carried his socialist and egalitarian convictions to the limit, first in the Great Leap Forward, then in the Socialist Education Campaign (Chapter 2), and to an even greater extreme in the Cultural Revolution, when he plunged China into political and economic chaos in an endeavor to plant socialism firmly in the hearts and minds of his countrymen.

Mao's effort was counterproductive. His colleagues who survived the Cultural Revolution, notably Deng, realized that twenty years of leftist excesses had subverted the original purpose of the revolution to build a strong modern China. The purpose of the Deng reform program was to reorient the Party and nation toward economic development and to eschew ideological excess. The rapid pace of change during three decades of reform (Chapters 5, 6, & 7) has shown how much time was wasted during the Maoist era. But the challenge for China's current leaders is to modify the extremes of wealth the reforms have encouraged – “to get rich is glorious” – and to steer the nation back toward a more equal society, although not to the extremes espoused by Mao.

But underlying these social and economic challenges are political issues. Despite the enormously important reform program that he bequeathed, Deng Xiaoping did not leave behind a fully institutionalized polity (Chapter 6). Jiang Zemin and his successor Hu Jintao managed to surmount serious domestic shocks – Falungong, the SARS epidemic, the contaminated milk scandal, the deaths of thousands of children in the shoddily built schools leveled during the Sichuan earthquake, ethnic unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, along with tens of thousands of protest demonstrations across China each year – without apparent threat to Party rule. The Chinese leadership has become a self-perpetuating oligarchy (Chapter 7). To broaden the oligarchy's appeal, Jiang opened the doors of the Party to professionals and even private entrepreneurs, discarding the traditional recruitment only from the ranks of peasants, workers, soldiers and cadres. It remains to be seen if this was the equivalent of letting the fox into the chicken coop; surely, it will further dilute the Party's “serve-the-people” ethos and likely increase the already widespread intra-Party corruption.

With the effective jettisoning of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as an explanation of the world and a guide to action and losing thus the justification for its practitioners to run China, with no rule of law and a tenuous rule by law, the Party is dependent on economic success and national prestige

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for its legitimacy. The Beijing Olympics, the 60th anniversary parade, and the Shanghai Expo must have occasioned patriotic pride. But Chinese society is increasingly modernized, increasingly sophisticated, and increasingly more demanding, as the unquenchable “blogosphere” daily demonstrates. Yet, the Chinese leadership tries to control that society of 1.3 billion people from one center by employing a secretive system devised over a hundred years ago for conspiratorial activities against the government of the day. Can this be the guarantee of another sixty years of Party rule, another cycle of Cathay? Perhaps a further edition of this work will tell.

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CHAPTER 1

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND CONSOLIDATION OF THE NEW REGIME, 1949–1957

FREDERICK C. TEIWES

AN OVERVIEW

When the People's Republic of China (PRC) was formally established on 1 October 1949 the nation's new leaders faced daunting problems. Society and polity were fragmented, public order and morale had decayed, a war-torn economy suffered from severe inflation and unemployment, and China's fundamental economic and military backwardness created monumental impediments to the elite's goals of national wealth and power. Yet by 1957 the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could look back on the period since 1949 with considerable satisfaction. A strong centralized state had been established after decades of disunity, China's national pride and international prestige had grown significantly as a result of fighting the world's greatest power to a stalemate in Korea, the country had taken major steps on the road to industrialization and achieved an impressive rate of economic growth, the living standards of its people had made noticeable if modest progress, and the nation's social system had been transformed according to Marxist precepts in relatively smooth fashion.

Moreover, all this had been accomplished with only limited divisions within the Party elite. Thus Chairman Mao Zedong could convincingly claim at the Eighth CCP Congress in September 1956 that "we . . . have gained a decisive victory in the socialist revolution [and] our Party is now more united, more consolidated than at any time in the past."¹ A year later, intervening events and persistent problems set the stage for considerably enhanced elite conflict as the CCP began to evolve the bold new developmental strategy of the Great Leap Forward (GLF); yet Mao reaffirmed that the socialist revolution had been achieved,² while his leading colleague Liu Shaoqi, plausibly argued that Party

¹ "Opening address at the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China" (15 September 1956), in *Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China*, 1.7.

² In his "Talk at a meeting with Chinese students and trainees in Moscow" (17 November 1957), in *CB*, 891.26, Mao declared that the victory represented by the change of ownership systems in 1956 had not

unity remained firm.³ As China began to move in uncertain directions, the official judgment of the PRC's first eight years as a period of achievement and cohesion was still fully credible.

What explains the achievements of this initial period? To a considerable degree, the unity of leadership sustained throughout 1949–57 was the bedrock upon which other successes were built. The extent of this unity was remarkable in view of not only the drastic purges and bitter conflicts that marked the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, but also the factional cleavages that had afflicted the inner Party life of the CCP in the 1920s and 1930s. Only one major purge – that of Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in 1954–5 – affected the top elite; as we shall see, even this conflict had a relatively limited impact on Party cohesion. Even more significantly, nearly all the surviving Central Committee (CC) members chosen at the Seventh Party Congress in 1945 were reelected in 1956. In addition, elite stability was reflected in the largely undisturbed pecking order within the higher reaches of the regime. Although subtle shifts of rank and influence inevitably occurred, dramatic rises such as that of Deng Xiaoping who vaulted from the relatively low twenty-fifth position on the 1945 CC to Politburo status in 1955 and then to the Party's General Secretaryship in 1956, were rare indeed. And apart from the very small number actually dropped from the CC in this period, key figures who suffered losses of power and influence were generally restored to equal status after relatively short periods of penance.

Such leadership was an enormous political asset. With a strong elite commitment to maintaining both clearly defined power relations and the principle of Party unity, policy issues could be vigorously debated within official forums without danger to the regime. Since personal maneuvering for advantage was kept to a minimum under such circumstances – indeed, too blatant maneuvering would be counterproductive – relatively unfettered debate maximized the likelihood of balanced and flexible decisions. Once a decision was made, the commitment to unity as well as formal norms of Leninist discipline usually guaranteed prompt implementation by responsible leaders of the various hierarchies of the PRC. More broadly, the aura of authority and confidence generated by a united leadership served to impress ordinary officials and the populace and thus facilitate their enthusiasm for or acquiescence in Party programs.

The sources of leadership unity were varied. The victory of 1949 against considerable odds was obviously a crucial factor. This victory, which

been conclusive but “genuine success in the socialist revolution” had been achieved as a result of political and ideological movements in 1957.

³ After various debates in 1957, Liu in December told visiting Indian Communists: “Our Party has guarded its unity at all times, there’s been no split . . . ; no one has gone his own way.” Cited in MacFarquhar, *The origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1.311.

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Map 1. PRC: political (*pinyin* romanization)

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represented both the culmination of a protracted revolutionary struggle and an opportunity for national renewal, greatly enhanced the authority of the top leaders who had developed the Party's successful strategy. At a more prosaic level, revolutionary success provided the spoils of power that were widely shared within the elite. Individuals and groups from the many pre-1949 CCP civilian and military organizations, leaders whose revolutionary credentials were linked to particular episodes such as the Nanchang uprising of 1927, which marked the founding of the Red Army, or the December 9 movement of Beijing students against Japan in 1935, and various personal networks within the leadership, all benefited from the parceling out of positions and influence. Although the Long Marchers who were closest to Mao tended to predominate in the highest bodies overall, no major revolutionary group was discriminated against except those leaders who had challenged Mao before he achieved unquestioned preeminence, and even those figures received some symbolic positions and tangible power. Thus there were few groups with immediate grievances that threatened unity.

After 1949, moreover, shared ideological commitment to Marxism and a broad consensus on ambitious industrialization and social transformation further contributed to elite cohesion. Although ideological movements are notorious for splits and infighting – phenomena the CCP would experience in later years – and broad agreement on goals does not necessarily prevent bitter conflict over means and priorities, circumstances operated to inhibit such developments in the early and mid-1950s. To a substantial degree, this resulted from the mutually reinforcing interplay of Party unity and policy success throughout the period. Unity contributed to effective solutions to problems; success in solving problems further deepened leadership solidarity. Success also served to mask or diminish any latent conflict over goals. As long as rapid rates of economic growth were attained, any unpalatable byproducts of modernization would hardly give cause for a fundamental challenge to existing policy. Another vitally important element was the existence of a model that specified not only goals but means as well: the experience of the Soviet Union in building socialism. A wide consensus existed on following the Soviet model, which served to focus policy debate on incremental modifications rather than on fundamental approaches, and thus lower the stakes of any conflict.

The high level of unity from 1949 to 1957 did not mean an absence of leadership cleavages but simply that they remained latent in comparison with later periods. One potential source of division was the diversity of revolutionary careers among the Party elite. Although unified by the larger struggle, at the same time participants in different revolutionary events and organizations developed their own personal networks and group identities. During the Cultural Revolution after 1965, such groupings would become critically