Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics

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CONFLICT MODELS AND THEIR EXPLANATIONS OF
FACTIONALISM

From Unity to Conflict

Factional politics is a politics of conflict. Before the Cultural Revolution (CR) unfolded in 1966, factionalism was barely noticed in the study of Chinese politics because the field was predominated by *unity* analyses. These analyses see Chinese politics as a united entity, integrated by ideology and organizations, maintained by discipline and a strong leadership, and safeguarded by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) commanded by the Party.

A *totalitarian* model was applied in the 1950s and the early 1960s. As Oksenberg points out, this model stresses the Soviet-like qualities of the CCP regime: "the adherence of its leaders to Marxism-Leninism, the totalitarian grip of the top political leaders upon the entire society and culture, and the centrally planned economy in which resources were allocated through political command."[1] Ironically, this description corresponds to the CCP's nostalgic view, which sees the initial years of the PRC as "a period not only when the Party's policies were usually correct, but also when leadership relations were marked by a high degree of unity and democracy."[2]

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1 Michael Oksenberg, "Politics takes command: An essay on the study of post-1949 China," in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 14:579. The preeminent works on this model include Richard Walker, *China under Communism: The First Five Years*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1956; John Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963; and Doak A. Barnett, *Communist China and Asia*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960.

2 Frederick Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court: Gao Gang and Party Factionalism in the Early 1950s*, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1990, p. 3.

   Indeed, this was a period of startling accomplishment for the CCP: a Stalinist system was established, the confrontation with the hostile forces led by the United States in the Korean War boosted national confidence, the economy recovered and was molded into the Soviet central-planning model with an astonishing speed. All this transformed a family-oriented traditional China into a state-centered socialist nation in which, as Mac-Farquhar observed, "the Party state swiftly came to dominate all sections of society."[3]

   This achievement was unmistakably reflected in the literature. Franz Schurmann advanced an *ideology* model, depicting the PRC polity as the realization of Lenin's dream of the unity of theory and action – the combination of ideology and discipline produced effective organizations and brought a new life to a fragmented old nation.[4] A variant of this model resulted from the debate on the originality of "Maoism."[5] It stresses the importance of Maoism in the maintenance of ideological consensus and effective organizations, which are crucial for activating and regulating the massive political participation.[6] Like the totalitarian model, these studies were based on the unity-centered analysis, although they were more objective and therefore had a higher scholarly value.

   A few China watchers, however, tried to see through the unity facade of Chinese politics. Lucian Pye argued from a unique cultural perspective that traditional patron-client relations still played a crucial role in CCP politics. His study reveals a dilemma of the CCP system: the deep-seated fear of insecurity drives those working in the system into an endless search for support and protection by knitting patron-client ties

3 Roderick MacFarquhar, "Epilogue," in MacFarquhar and Fairbank, *Cambridge History of China*, 14:539; and *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1: *Contradictions among the People*, *1956–1957*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1974, pp. 15–25.

4 Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

5 See Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961; and "The legend of the 'legend of Maoism,'" *CQ*, 2 (April 1960), pp. 35–42; Karl Wittfogel, "The legend of 'Maoism,'" *CQ*, 1 (January 1960), pp. 72–86, and 2 (April 1960), pp. 16–30; and Arthur Cohen, "How original is 'Maoism?'" *PC*, 10, no. 6 (November 1961), pp. 31–42.

6 Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung: A Political Biography*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966; Benjaming Schwartz, "Modernization and Maoist vision," in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *China under Mao*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966, pp. 3–19. The influence of this approach can still be seen in Maurice Meisner's *Mao's China and After: A History of People's Republic*, New York: Free Press, 1988.

in a hierarchical context, yet the frustration and anger caused by the eventual inability of such a relationship to provide for the desired security makes the seemingly stable structure vulnerable to collapse.[7] Roderick MacFarquhar highlighted policy disputes among the leaders behind the pretense of unity. The departure is not necessarily his elaboration on Mao's dominance in politics, but his analysis on how Mao manipulated the policy-making process despite differences among the CCP leaders.[8] The conflict-centered analysis, however, was drowned out by the grand chorus of "unity."

This chorus was soon overwhelmed by the CR. The political storm initiated by Mao blew away the entire Party establishment, let alone the facade of its unity. Yet all this was done under Mao's command, except that the CR further exposed the totalitarian feature of the regime. As Oksenberg notices, "the politicization of all aspects of the society, culture, and economy reached its apogee . . . , the deification of the leader climaxed in a cult of personality rarely attained before in history, and terror became a way of life."[9]

A Mao-in-command model emerged. It holds that Mao's command was so absolute that any departure from his line in policy making would be intolerable. Thus, all elite conflicts ended up with the purge of those who were at odds with Mao.[10] The Mao-in-command model, which predominated in the field from the late 1960s through the 1970s, reflected a profound shift of scholarly perspective in the study of CCP politics: from unity to conflict, and from stability to change. Indeed, the CR revealed the reality of CCP politics: the commitment to ideology could not hold the leaders to the same line, the cohesiveness of organization could not prevent internal strife, and discipline was undermined by increasing corruption. All this validated the conflict-centered analyses: although power

7 Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967.

8 Roderick MacFarquhar, "Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese communists' rectification movement," *World Today*, August 1957, pp. 330–41; and "Communist China's intra-Party dispute," *Pacific Affairs*, 31, no. 4 (December 1958), pp. 323–35.

9 Oksenberg, "Politics takes command," p. 583.

10 See Philip Bridgham's series, "Mao's Cultural Revolution: 1: Origin and development," *CQ*, 29 (January 1967), pp. 1–35; "2: The struggle to seize power," *CQ*, 34 (April 1968), pp. 6–37; and "3: The struggle to consolidate power," *CQ*, 41 (January 1970), pp. 1–25. For a more sophisticated version of the Mao-in-command analysis, see 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.

is centralized in a totalistic system, CCP politics is still conflict-ridden – policies emerge from disputes, and stability is maintained through endless struggles.

Yet the conflict-centered analyses invited a more fundamental debate: what is the dynamics of the conflicts in CCP politics? In other words, what are the causes of the conflicts among the leaders despite their strong commitment to the communist ideology and the virtually unchallengeable authority of the supreme leader, first Mao and later Deng Xiaoping?

Two books published in 1974 have perhaps exerted the most influence in the field. One is Doak Barnett's *Uncertain Passage*,[11] the other is Roderick MacFarquhar's *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 1: *Contradictions among the People*.

Drawing on rational-choice theory, which assumes that a policy maker's rationale is determined by his assessment of means and ends, and costs and gains in light of his interest preferences,[12] Barnett argues that a conflict originates from the leaders' different views of the national interests, which in turn leads to differences in their evaluations of the problems and calculations of means and ends. All this results in different priorities in their policy choices. But not all the priorities can be met, given limited resources. A conflict results. Thus, to understand CCP politics "requires identification of the problems that the Chinese leadership faces, assessment of alternative ways these problems may be handled, and analysis of the possible effects of external events on the policies the Chinese pursue both at home and abroad."[13]

MacFarquhar's book provides a nearly exhaustive analysis of CCP politics at the eve of the Great Leap Forward. His inference is that a conflict among the leaders, either triggered by a policy dispute or provoked by personality clashes, will eventually be solved in a power struggle, for power is not only necessary for a leader to make his vision prevail, but it also provides him with security in the jungle of CCP

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11 Doak Barnett, *Uncertain Passage*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974.

12 Anthony Downs's *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York: Harper and Row, 1957, is the pioneering volume that applies the rational-choice theory in political science. Graham Alison has perhaps provided the most implicit discussion of the application of this theory to policy making in his *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1971.

13 Barnett, *Uncertain Passage*, p. xi.

politics. The Mao-Liu (Shaoqi) conflict provides a strong case for MacFarquhar's approach:

> A careful examination of the evidence suggests that neither Mao nor Liu was consistent; that Mao and Liu were not always opponents; that many men who survived the cultural revolution, notably Premier Chou En-lai, had opposed Mao on crucial issues when Liu had stood by the Chairman; that some of Liu's supposed supporters, notably Teng Hsiao-p'ing, the Party's General Secretary, had been more often on Mao's side than Liu's. . . . But as always in the affairs of men there were also bitter feuds over power and status.[14]

These two books represent two different approaches that have had a profound impact on the study of CCP politics. Barnett's approach is employed mostly in the studies that examine how a specific policy is produced in response to the perceived problem(s).[15] Although these studies often incorporate some aspects of the power-struggle approach, they see power essentially as means for the desired policy goals. Thus, an elite conflict is essentially over policy choices rather than over power itself. Harry Harding formalized this approach into a policy-choice model. He argues that an elite conflict is essentially a policy confrontation between the leaders with different policy preferences. Thus, in order to explain a policy the Chinese leaders have adopted, we have to understand their diagnoses of the problems they have encountered and the debate they have conducted.[16] Harding explains the policy outcomes in the post-Mao period as a result of the ongoing struggles between the conservative leaders who were "cautious and skeptical about dramatic departures from the planned

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14 MacFarquhar, *The Origins*, 1:2–3.
15 See Michael Oksenberg, "The Chinese policy process and the public health issue: An arena approach," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 7, no. 4 (Winter 1974), pp. 375–408; and "Economic policy making in China: Summer 1981," *CQ*, 90 (June 1982), pp. 165–94; David Lampton, *Health, Conflict, and the Chinese Political System*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1974; Richard Suttmerier, *Research and Revolution: Scientific Policy and Societal Change in China*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974; Benedict Stavis, *The Politics of Agricultural Mechanization in China*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978; David Zweig, *Agrarian Radicalism in China, 1968–78: The Search for a Social Base*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989; and Dorothy Solinger, *Chinese Business under Socialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
16 Harry Harding, *Organizing China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981, p. 1.

economy, state-owned industry, and centralized political system" and the reformers who entertained "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."[17]

MacFarquhar's approach has been elaborated as the *power-struggle* model. Although the scholars who have adopted this model differ on how a conflict could occur, they echo one another that such a conflict, whether it was about policy choices or personality clashes, would eventually evolve into a power struggle in which the losers would be victimized.[18] On the causes of the CR, for example, some emphasize the disputes in the 1950s and/or the disastrous GLF in 1958–61,[19] others focus on Mao's growing anger with the resistance from Liu and the other leaders to Mao's policy of mass movement at the eve of the CR.[20] But all agree that the Mao-Liu conflict was essentially a power struggle rather than "a two-line struggle." Thus, the ultimate rationale in CCP politics is drawn from the calculations on how to prevail in ruthless power struggles. The revival of the GLF after the 1959 Lushan Conference, for example, was not because the policy was right or it was based on a consensus, but because, as MacFarquhar argues, Mao "did not want to acknowledge that Peng Dehuai had been right." Meanwhile, the other leaders like Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao chose to support Mao because of their own ambitions for power or, like Zhou Enlai and Chen Yun, were silenced by the deterrence of Peng Dehuai's fate.[21]

Lieberthal and Oksenberg departed from the above two models and advanced a *structure* model. Drawing upon the theory of bureaucratic politics, they explain a conflict and its policy consequence from the perspective of the structure of policy making. They argue that, like the

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

18 See, among others, Parris H. Chang, *Power and Policy in China*, 2nd ed., University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978; and Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court*.

19 See Byung-joon Ahn, *Chinese Politics and the Cultural Revolution*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976; Hong Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978.

20 See Lowell Dittmer, *Liu Shao-ch'i and the Chinese Cultural Revolution: The Politics of Mass Criticism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974; and "The Chinese Cultural Revolution revisited: The role of the nemesis," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 5, no. 13 (1996), pp. 255–68.

21 See Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, 2: *The Great Leap Forward, 1958–1960*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, pp. 333–5.

leaders in other countries, the Chinese "leaders might propound views of the bureaucracy over which they preside, and that elite contention over policy and/or power might be a manifestation of bureaucratic conflict."[22] Thus, a conflict in CCP politics, caused by either a policy dispute or power struggles, is rooted essentially in the institutional structure of policy making whereby interests of the involved institutions clash; the leaders act as representatives of the institutions over which they preside; and their behavior and policy choices are subject to the constraints imposed by this structure. Such a conflict, however, can become very complicated because of the segmented and stratified system of authority in China. As a result, its outcomes are difficult to predict, and, more often than not, unintended outcomes result, which cause policy inconsistency and destabilize leadership relations.[23]

Thus, the three predominant models vary greatly in the explanations of conflicts in CCP politics, although all three highlight the decisive role of the supreme leader, Mao or Deng, in political affairs. The differences among the three models are seen not only in their identification of the causes of conflicts – that is, policy disputes, power struggles, or conflicts of institutional interests – but also in the ways the leaders interact in a conflict. The policy-choice model focuses on the achievement of consensus in the solution of a policy dispute. Its analyses of the *process* through which the consensus was achieved often reveal the constraints this process exerted on the supreme leader, Mao or Deng, despite his dominance in policy making, for a consensus usually resulted from a compromise of various policy preferences presented by the involved leaders, including the supreme leader himself.[24]

22 Kenneth Lieberthal and Michael Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structure, and Processes*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, p. 17.
23 Ibid., p. 137.
24 There are several cases in this point. On Mao's "retreat" from the first leap forward due to pressures from his colleagues (see Chapter 5); on radical policy changes in the early 1960s despite Mao's resistance (see Kenneth Lieberthal, "The Great Leap Forward," in Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: 1949–1989*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 117–22; and Chapter 5); on Deng's repeated compromises with the conservative leaders, which in a large part resulted in "partial reform" (see Chapter 7; David Zweig, "Dilemmas of partial reform," in Bruce Reynolds, ed., *Chinese Economic Policy*, New York: Paragon House, 1989, pp. 13–38; Richard Baum, ed., *Reform and Reaction in Post-Mao China: The Road to Tiananmen*, New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1991, pp. 1–17; and Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

The power-struggle analysis focuses on leadership relations in a conflict, and how the changes in these relations affect the final outcomes. Given that a conflict, provoked by either a policy dispute or personality clashes, will eventually be solved in a power struggle, the power-struggle analysts tend to treat the policy issues as means, rather than ends, in a conflict, for what matters in the end is not who has the right idea but who prevails in the power struggle. Thus, a policy choice prevails not necessarily because it is right but essentially because it is the preference of those who dominate in politics. Cases in point are numerous: the revival of the GLF after the 1959 Lushan Conference,[25] the criticism of ultra-rightism after Lin Biao's fall in 1971,[26] the halt of "emancipation of mind" with the "four cardinal principles" in 1979 (see Chapter 7), and the crackdown on the student movement in 1989.[27] The power-struggle analysis is most supportive to the grand model of Mao-in-command or, later, Deng-in-command.

The structure analysts see conflict as routine in bureaucratic politics. Its solution does not necessarily result from a rational debate because it is difficult to distinguish right from wrong, given different perspectives from which the involved leaders are competing for their institutional interests; nor is it necessarily determined by those who appear more powerful because the bureaucratic structure exerts indiscriminating constraints on everyone involved in the process. Those who prevail may not be the most powerful or righteous leaders, but they happened to be in the most advantageous position in the structure of policy making. The more complicated the bureaucratic structure is, the harder it is for the leaders to control the interactions among the involved agencies, and hence more difficult to predict the final outcomes.[28]

Thus, while the power-struggle approach reinforces the Mao-in-command model, the analyses of the policy-choice and structure models actually depart from this grand model. The most significant contribution of the two models is perhaps their discovery that, like his colleagues, the supreme leader is also subject to the constraints of the adopted process

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25 MacFarquhar, *The Origins*, 2:233–51.
26 Roderick MacFarquhar, "The succession to Mao and the end of Maoism," in MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China: 1949–1989*, pp. 281–7.
27 Richard Baum, "The road to Tiananmen: Chinese politics in the 1980s," in MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China: 1949–1989*, pp. 441–50.
28 Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*, pp. 136–7.

or the structure of policy making. But the ultimate question remains unanswered: how could the supreme leader maintain his dominance in policy making, even though his "gross mistake" had repeatedly brought disasters to the Party? Or, if his authority is subject to the constraints of the adopted process or the structure of policy making, why did he always have the last say during the periods of crisis? In short, what really constitutes the power bases for the supreme leader? Moreover, how could he keep his power bases strong and loyal to him in a forever-changing political situation? The factionalism analysis is to provide an answer to these questions.

Factionalism Analyses and Their Unanswered Questions

Factionalism in CCP politics began to draw attention as the analyses shifted to the conflict models. The issue of factionalism was first raised in the study of the military,[29] partly due to the obvious factional tendencies in the PLA, but largely because of the crucial role of the military in CCP politics. William Whitson's examination of military politics in China revealed that factionalism in the armed forces was rooted in the CCP's Field Army system during the revolution. He argued that the commanders of each field army had developed strong personal authority over their forces, and the officers from the same field army had also cultivated close personal relations among them. Factionalism was developed upon such old-boy networks. Whitson held that the stability of the system depended largely on a balanced distribution of power among the military leaders.[30]

Among many factionalism analyses,[31] the most influential is perhaps

29 See David A. Charles, "The dismissal of Marshal P'eng Teh-huai," *CQ*, 8 (October 1961), pp. 63–76; Ralph L. Powell, "The party, the government and the gun," *AS*, 10, no. 6 (June 1970), pp. 441–71; and William Parrish, "Factions in Chinese military politics," *CQ*, 56 (October 1973), pp. 667–9.

30 William Whitson, "The field army in Chinese communist military politics," *CQ*, 37 (January 1969), pp. 1–30; see also his *The Chinese High Command*, New York: Praeger, 1978.

31 See Liao Kuang-sheng, "Linkage politics in China: Internal mobilization and articulated external hostility in the Cultural Revolution," *World Politics*, 28, no. 4 (July 1976), pp. 590–610; Tang Tsou, "Prolegomenon to the study of informal groups in CCP politics," in his *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reform: A Historical Perspective*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 102–21; Edward E. Rice, "The second rise and fall of Teng Hsiao-p'ing," *CQ*, 67 (September 1976), pp. 494–500; Jurgen Domes,

Andrew Nathan's factionalism model of CCP politics.[32] His thesis is that the CCP politics is structured essentially as one of "complex faction": a faction is built on the patron-client relationships between the leaders and their followers, and a leader's power is based on the strength of his faction. Nathan argues that factionalism has played such a crucial role that it was the cause of all the major intrastruggles in CCP history. Yet he holds that factionalism only exists at the central level; authorities at the provincial level and below are well institutionalized and faction-free.[33]

Two questions arise from the above factionalism analyses. How does factionalism affect the political outcomes in China? What are the causes for factionalism, whether it is originated in the military or not, to have become such an essential dynamics in CCP politics?

Nathan's analysis implies that factionalism undermines political stability because "no faction will be able to achieve overwhelmingly superior power," and "one faction may for the moment enjoy somewhat greater power than rival factions, but this power will not be so great that the victorious faction is capable of expunging its rival and assuring permanent dominance."[34] Thus, Nathan sees the CR as "an episode in which the long-standing factional system attempted to defend its existence against an attack based on outside social forces" mobilized by Mao, whose goal was to bring "an end to factionalism and its associated policy oscillations, and an institutionalization of the Party as an instrument of Maoist will, capable of outliving Mao himself."[35]

Generalizing on the pre-1949 factional struggles in CCP history, Tang Tsou suggests that factionalism reflects a political crisis in which the CCP leadership has either collapsed or been seriously challenged. But a hegemonic faction under a strong leader will eventually emerge through factional struggles; and as soon as the new leader gains the dominance, he will adopt a formal process in order to "enhance the capability of the

"The Gang of Four and Hua Kuao-feng: Analysis of political events in 1975–76," *CQ*, 71 (September 1977), pp. 473–97; Kenneth Lieberthal, "The internal political scene," *PC*, 24, no. 3 (May–June, 1975), pp. 1–10, and his "The politics of modernization in the PRC," *PC*, 27, no. 3 (May–June 1978), pp. 1–18; Michael Oksenberg, "The exit pattern from Chinese politics and its implications," *CQ*, 67 (September 1976), pp. 501–18.

32 Andrew Nathan, "A factionalism model of CCP politics," *CQ*, 53 (January 1973), pp. 34–66.
33 Ibid., pp. 37–42.   34 Ibid., p. 66.   35 Ibid., pp. 54–5.

political system." Thus, Tsou sees factional politics as a form of transi-
tion toward hegemony, and it is therefore temporary, unstable, and
potentially chaotic, whereas hegemonic politics is the normal and stable
state of CCP politics.[36] A great insight in Tsou's analysis is that a formal
process can effectively check factionalism and the informal politics
caused by it. Yet his analysis provides little explanation of how faction-
alism could develop in CCP politics in the first place and, more impor-
tantly, why the supreme leader, despite his hegemonic position, cannot
eliminate the rival factions, which will rise to challenge his dominance
whenever there is a chance.

But it is the first question on the causes of factionalism in CCP poli-
tics that has sparked more discussions in the literature. Not surprisingly,
various explanations fall in line with the three predominant models. The
policy-choice analysts see factional activities as a result of policy con-
frontations in which the leaders with shared views team up in order to
make their choices prevail. Thus, factional activities are policy-oriented
and tend to appear only after the consensus breaks down.[37] Viewing fac-
tionalism as an on-and-off phenomenon, some policy-choice analysts
prefer "group" to "faction," and a group is formed vis-à-vis its members'
policy preferences.[38]

The assumption that factionalism emerges after the collapse of con-
sensus falls in line with Tsou's position that factional politics reflects a
leadership crisis. More significantly, the policy-choice analysis demon-
strates that the *formal process* in policy making can effectively suppress
factional activities – again, this supports Tsou's proposition that the pre-
dominant leader adopts formal politics to secure stability. Indeed, per-
sonal ties, on which factional linkages are cultivated, become important
only when an external force, usually exerted by the supreme leader,

36 Tsou, "Prolegomenon to the study of informal groups," pp. 107–10.
37 Jurgen Domes, *The Government and Politics of the PRC*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press,
    1985, pp. 80–4. For a more substantial analysis, see Frederick Teiwes, *Leadership, Legit-*
    imacy, and Conflict in China, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1984. On the Gao-Rao Affair in
    1954, however, Teiwes initially believed that it was an unprincipled factional strife with
    little involvement of policy issues. But in a later modification, he acknowledges that
    there were significant policy issues involved as Gao Gang "did use the debates sur-
    rounding the new general line to attack the policies of others" – namely, Liu Shaoqi
    and his followers. Teiwes, "The establishment and consolidation of the new regime," in
    MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China: 1949–1989*, p. 47.
38 For example, the word "faction" is carefully avoided by Harding in his *China's Second*
    Revolution and by Solinger in her *Chinese Business under Socialism*.

breaks the formal process of political affairs.[39] In this sense, what triggers factional activities is not necessarily the collapse of consensus but the breakdown of the adopted political process.

The shared-view assumption on factional orientation, however, invites questions as we apply it to the reality of CCP politics. The grand consensus on reform, for example, was achieved after the "whatever faction" led by Hua Guofeng was ousted in 1978, but this did not stop fierce factional activities among the CCP leaders.[40] Although certain policy priorities have been the trademark of particular factions, what underlie these priorities are factional interests. Factional activities not only turn policy outcomes into vehicles for their particular interests, but also cause policy inconsistency because, as my analysis in the following chapters will show, each faction would try to skew the adopted policy to its own advantage. Had factions been merely "clusters of leaders" with shared views, Peng Dehuai might have had a quite different fate, given that he enjoyed substantial support at the 1959 Lushan Conference;[41] the combined effort of Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and other powerful leaders might have prevented the CR;[42] Chen Yun could have formed a coalition with Peng Zhen to halt Deng's reform rather than spoiling Peng's effort

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39 See Teiwes, *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China*, and *Politics at Mao's Court*. For example, Teiwes argues that although Gao's uncontrollable ambition was the essential motive for his attack on Liu, it was Mao's intervention on Bo Yibo's tax reform that triggered the entire Gao-Rao Affair.

40 Some may argue that there has never been a consensus on the reform among the CCP elite members. But as Richard Baum, "The road to Tiananmen: Chinese politics in the 1980s," in MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China: 1949–1989*, p. 340, argues: "Although members of the reform coalition forged by Deng Xiaoping could agree among themselves, in principle, on the need for economic reform and opening up to the outside world, they differed over just how far and how fast to move toward revamping the basic ideology and institutions of Chinese socialism." The consensus, however, was not just on economic reform. The decision to depart from the Mao legacy itself stood out as a radical political policy. Indeed, there had to be a reform, both in the economic and political spheres, in order to save the system – this was the consensus upon which Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, and other senior leaders like Li Xiannian and Luo Ruiqing could form an alliance in the late 1970s to topple the "whatever faction" led by Hua Guofeng, who, on the contrary, insisted on adhering to whatever policies Mao had made. The differences among Deng and his allies were on *how to reform* and *what to be reformed*. Also cf. Harding, *China's Second Revolution*, p. 63.

41 See MacFarquhar, *The Origins*, 2:187–251.

42 Cf. Yen Jiaqi, "*Wenhua da geming" shinian shi 1966–1976* (Ten-Year History of the "Cultural Revolution," 1966–1976), Tianjin: Tianjin People's Press, 1986, pp. 92–100, 126–49, 238–50.

to enter the PSC; and Zhao Ziyang could have defended Hu Yaobang, rather than being indifferent, when Hu was toppled in early 1987 (see Chapter 7).

The problems in its explanation of factionalism reveal a basic flaw in the policy-choice model. Viewing conflicts in CCP politics as policy confrontations, this model assumes that the policy-making process in CCP politics is a cooperative game of complete information,[43] where a dispute is about how to utilize the resources for an objective goal, rather than a struggle for the control of these resources, and the division between the leaders is clear vis-à-vis their policy choices, which reflect their evaluation of an existing problem. Thus, this model tends to predict a consensus when a majority is formed in a policy dispute.

But cases like this are few in CCP politics, where interactions among the leaders resemble a noncooperative game because of the uncertainty of rules and procedures. More often than not, the line-up between the CCP leaders was obscure, and so were their preferences, when a conflict emerged in an environment where the political process was barely institutionalized. As Lieberthal and Oksenberg point out,

> [Policy-choice analysts] have generally not explored the constraints upon China's top leaders which may preclude their attaining the rationality which the scholars assume. Thus, the policy analysts tend not to probe decisional constraints upon the leaders due to the limited information available to them, the ambiguities and ambivalence in the minds of the leaders concerning their hierarchy of value preferences, and the time pressures they confront in comprehensively evaluating their alternatives.[44]

Indeed, the policy-choice model can be very powerful because it is

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43 See Peter C. Ordeshook, *Game Theory and Political Theory: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 162–5, 302–4. A "cooperative game" is defined as a process "in which communication not only is possible, but also stands as a central feature of human interaction." The game becomes "cooperative" because communication among the players leads to the formation of coalitions, which represents, briefly, "an agreement among two or more persons to coordinate their actions (choices or strategies)." "Complete information" refers to the situation in which the players have an exact knowledge of each other's preference orders.

44 Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*, p. 13.

based on rational-choice theory, which has rigid requirements on the context of the game, definition of the variables and players, their relationships, and the procedures of their interplays. Yet, as I will elaborate in Chapter 2, the CCP leaders interact with each other in an environment in which (1) a formal process is barely existent in decision making, (2) access to the resources and information are seized by the leaders who seek to monopolize these assets, and (3) the rules and procedures are manipulated by the dominant leaders. All this undermines the strength of the policy-choice model. Thus, policy outcomes in CCP politics often appeared irrational from the perspective of rational-choice theory. We were "surprised" repeatedly by political events in China, not necessarily because we had failed to envision all the possible outcomes, but because more often than not it was the most "irrational" choice we could imagine that prevailed, instead of the "rational" ones we believed were more credible outcomes. The factor that is often overlooked by the policy-choice analysis is that Mao, and later Deng, enjoyed exclusive privileges in political affairs: not only did he control the information flow – all the information had to go through him – in decision making, but he could also violate any established rules and procedures if necessary. All this makes it difficult to analyze the outcomes in CCP politics in a "rational" fashion because the very basis for the rational-choice theory – the formal process, compliant procedures, and standard operating practice in decision making – is uncertain in CCP politics.

The structure approach attributes factionalism to "the flaws of the structure" of policy making.[45] It argues that conflicting "institutional interests" motivate factionalism in the policy process. Thus, similar career paths are seen as the key criterion for factional alignments, and the institutions as bases for factional activities. A case in point is the "petroleum faction" in the 1970s and early 1980s, which was formed by a group of leaders rising from the oil industry.[46]

No doubt the different interests of the involved agencies can constitute the underlying dynamics of policy making. But in Chinese politics "there is no way precisely to measure the real authority of any particular group of officials [who propound the views of the bureaucracy over

45 See Teiwes, *Politics at Mao's Court*, pp. 3–5.
46 Lieberthal and Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China*, pp. 42–51, 60–1.