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INTRODUCTION

LEADERSHIP AND POWER IN CHINA

JOHN WILSON LEWIS

THE EMERGING POLITICAL SYSTEM IN CHINA

The convocation of the Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party from April 1 to 24, 1969 closed a four-decade era of political leadership in China. The revolutionaries who as youths joined ranks with Mao Tse-tung were held together by common bonds of ideological inspiration, personal loyalty and professional or conspiratorial dedication. In the Cultural Revolution these bases of brotherhood and their common world vision were shattered. Party members, once closely united, clashed over practical policy issues and then over the legitimacy of their Party adversaries to rule at all. Mao in the ensuing struggle deposed his former comrades and promoted the second political revolution of his lifetime.

While the Ninth Congress preserved the idea of a Chinese Communist Party, it also pronounced last rites for the national organization that had brought the revolutionary movement to victory in 1949. With its missions of mobilizing the Chinese people and constructing a powerful new China given to the People's Liberation Army and local "revolutionary committees", the Party had become just another Maoist tool for waging battle on sinister social influences and revisionist classes. The Communist organization, whatever its ultimate fate, had lost its special identity and its stature as the price of nominal existence in a Maoist world.

We are currently witnessing the emergence of a post-revolutionary political system on the Mainland. Nonetheless Mao still seeks in the name of revolution to revive chosen elements of the earlier Party-led system and to retain them as parts of China's political institutions. With the widely heralded republication of his "Report to the Second Session of the Seventh Central Committee" (March, 1949),¹

¹ Reprinted in *Hung ch'i* [Red Flag], No. 5, 1968.

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Mao seemed to be hoping to turn the clock back to this decree which shifted Chinese communism's "centre of gravity" from the rural bases to the cities and identified the social classes forming the new coalition of power. Much is made of the fact that Mao then warned his colleagues that the transitional years ahead could interrupt the revolution by weakening the class-based struggle and by causing individual Party members without class consciousness to succumb to corruption and the easy life. Mao is attempting, apparently, to erase from public memory much of what occurred in China from 1949 to 1969 and to fashion leadership techniques as if the seizure of power by revolutionary committees and the armed forces in the Cultural Revolution were a directed continuation of the Party's "Liberation" of China two decades ago. He would like the effects of his second revolution to be, simultaneously, conservative and progressive, which may account for some of the ambiguities in his thought and the lack of consensus in China on the revolution's results.

Mao has taken charge personally of the post-Congress rebuilding process. To insure his own dominance and that of his chosen associates, he presented a constitution to the Ninth Congress that defied Lenin's principles of organization, while invoking the Leninist symbols of democratic centralism.¹ The former vanguard apparatus had been composed of personally powerful cadres qualified to assume the responsibilities of leadership. Organized to determine priority tasks and get them done, cadres had acquired relevant skills in a bureaucratic and competitive process of training and indoctrination. Theoretically, a Communist cadre was so disciplined to abide by the Party line that he could be detached to function on his own. Now, however, the cadre's job assignment is secondary to his learning and transmitting the Maoist viewpoint of class struggle. All echo Chairman Mao, and even the word "cadre" has lost its former appeal and unique place in the Chinese political vocabulary. The current constitution also fails to give the political and administrative organs of the Central Committee final jurisdiction over policy determination. That power too now rests with Mao.

¹ For official English-language text, see *Peking Review*, No. 18 (April 30, 1969).

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DIVERGENT ATTITUDES TOWARD THE
ORGANIZATION OF POWER

As the new Communist system begins to evolve it will be important for understanding it to compare its functions with those of the pre-1966 Communist Party. The authors in this volume based on papers presented to the Ditchley Conference on the Party have raised a series of questions concerning the Party from 1927 to 1969, and the answers to these questions may help facilitate this comparison. What role did Mao play in the crucial years of the Party's formation? What were the sources of his political strength? How did he and other leaders view the Party organization? What made his authority legitimate in the eyes of the membership? What limits were placed on that authority in practice? Within the top command, what were the personal relationships as well as institutional ties that could produce potential or actual cliques? To what extent were there clear boundary lines between the Party and the Army and between them and the society at large? What changes were wrought within the Communist organization after the take-over in 1949?

Perhaps the most elementary conclusion to be drawn from a consideration of these questions is that the Chinese Communists seek as an article of common faith to monopolize the full range of powers for eliciting compliance with their norms and directives and for inducing broad institutional change throughout China. Nevertheless, their writings on power provide contradictory interpretations of its proper domain, scope and coerciveness. Although it is only in the documents of the Cultural Revolution that Communist leaders openly acknowledge their lack of accord on how a Communist system of power should be constituted and for what purposes, the roots of these differences, I believe, can be found in the earlier history of the Party. While even the recent materials are vague concerning the precise definitions of power and its ultimate goals, they do indicate a fairly consistent range of views in the Communist hierarchy regarding the organization and exercise of power. This introduction is intended in part to summarize these differences and to examine their consequences.

Before proceeding to this task, however, I would caution against

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exaggerating the philosophical bases underlying different attitudes toward the organization of power. These bases, though certainly significant, must be weighed alongside the more personal preferences of key leaders and the way they perceive the stakes for which they are competing. The debate about the correct organization of power constitutes a serious component in the actual contest for power. Mao Tse-tung, for example, has characteristically opposed coercive or bureaucratic power within the Party, publicly considering it oppressive and self-defeating. A devaluation of this type of power, of course, would help diminish the influence of Party bureaucrats and lend support to Mao's allies outside the bureaucracy. Typical of his tactical usage of public contempt for the Organization Man was the introduction to his report of July, 1955 in which he deliberately sought to upset the established leaders blocking his policy for a "new upsurge in the socialist mass movement" in the countryside. He said in a reference directed toward that apparatus, "some of our comrades are tottering along like a woman with bound feet, always complaining that others are going too fast. They imagine that by picking on trifles, grumbling unnecessarily, worrying continuously and putting up countless taboos and commandments they are guiding the socialist mass movement . . ." ¹ By discrediting the way these "comrades" approached power, Mao helped assure victory for his policies.

The practice of manipulating attitudes concerning the "correct" organization of power is not exclusive to Chairman Mao. In expressing a Utopian version of Mao's anti-bureaucratic bias, a local group in Hunan in 1968, the so-called *Sheng wu lien* (Provincial Proletarian Alliance), taunted the bureaucrats opposing them and rejoiced at their collapse: "People suddenly found that without the bureaucrats they not only could go on living, but could live better and develop quicker and with greater freedom." ² Leadership without bureaucrats, they held, would not require coercion for it would elicit a more Confucian-like response to wise guidance and moral teaching.

¹ Mao Tse-tung, *The Question of Agricultural Co-operation* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1956), p. 1.

² "Whither China?" *Kuang yin hung ch'i* [Canton Printing Red Flag], No. 5, March, 1968, in *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 4190, pp. 1-18.

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Yet nationally the extreme Maoist position represented a challenge to the centre, and it never passed beyond the realm of wishful thinking as Peking's lieutenants smashed the *Sheng wu lien* group in the name of the Chairman.

The primacy of tactical considerations in debates about power has led to the promotion of concepts which cannot easily be put into practice. The organization of power in accordance with Mao's theory now that he reigns supreme has proved especially difficult because it has rarely been defined in positive, operational terms. Most of his recent views on the subject are found in denunciations of Liu Shao-ch'i, the former heir apparent charged with corrupting political leadership by the way he organized power in the Communist Party. Mao's persecution of the Liuist "group" is described officially as a pre-emptive strike against alleged trends in China toward a Soviet-style bureaucratic dictatorship. While it is probably true that the Chinese power structure under Liu could be fairly characterized as task-oriented, organization-minded and ruthless, the same labels could be attached to the actual Maoist alternative in current use.

Historically, power was never organized according to a strict "Liuist" or "Maoist" model, at least for very long. The deposed Liu's attitude towards the organization of power tolerated compromise for strategic gains and was not as fixed and consciously anti-Maoist as legend will hereafter have it. It is even debatable whether or not modern China had a single power system in the heyday of bureaucratic communism.¹ The politics of both Mao and Liu represented tendencies along a continuum, and according to complaints by the *Sheng wu lien* radicals in 1968, Mao in the course of the Cultural Revolution was compelled to stage a retreat which they called "unprecedented".² Substantiating this, a careful analysis of the outcome of the Cultural Revolution at the time of the Ninth Congress would indicate that Mao has not attained his stated objectives in the restructuring of power in China. Many top bureaucrats have been replaced, but others remain in positions of real

¹ For a contrary argument, see Tang Tsou, "The Cultural Revolution and the Chinese Political System", *The China Quarterly*, No. 38 (April-June, 1969), p. 63.

² "Whither China?", in *Survey of China Mainland Press*, No. 4190, p. 10.

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authority, particularly at the local levels. Mao's efforts to rehabilitate and reform cadres as well as to "purify their class ranks" remain unfinished business.

THE CHANGING ROLES OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY IN THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

None of the principal doctrines of power, when put into practice, has been able to escape the limits imposed by the requirements of making strategic choices over time or by the varied sociological and political conditions that differentiated one part of China from the other. The consequences of the changing and highly differentiated environments for the development of the Chinese Communist Party and its approaches to power are major themes in this volume.

Part I examines the history of the Chinese Communist movement with particular reference to the formation of the senior elite during the course of the pre-1949 revolution. This elite's ambiguous and uncertain role in the chaotic period following its near-destruction in 1927 is the subject of C. Martin Wilbur's essay. He discusses the makeup of the leadership cohort that outlasted the government's suppression campaigns of this period, and went on to guide the revolutionary movement. Both attracted and tested by the rigours of violent revolution, the youthful survivors gained command experience and self-confidence; success in combat bred a strong bond of comradeship among the Party leaders. In his careful, statistical account, Professor Wilbur recounts the burdens and the costs of the early struggle and explains the consequences of the conflict for the revolutionaries themselves. Characteristically, the survivors had proven leadership ability and extraordinary personal commitment to the Communist cause.

By assessing the impact of violence, frustration and defeat, the Wilbur chapter reveals that a steady transformation took place within the Party leadership after 1927. Raw, inexperienced young recruits were toughened and trained to become flexible, pragmatic and tough-minded. Party leaders either lost their fear and timid intellectualism or did not survive. The many geographical, institutional and psychological environments in which they operated taught

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them different lessons and each adapted in a slightly special way. In practice such adjustments to realities could involve the adoption of techniques from secret societies or other traditional institutions. The mini-circuit by which each Communist plugged in to the revolution could be quite unorthodox but the common language of Marxism tended to camouflage the uniqueness of individual experiences and to preserve the Communist's sense of revolutionary identity and correctness. For almost forty years leaders in the movement would help shape institutional practices and policies as if their unity of purpose were beyond doubt.

How it was that Mao emerged as the central figure in this movement is part of the story told by William F. Dorrill. His exhaustive inquiry into the actual part played by Mao in two key events in the Kiangsi Soviet raises doubts concerning the validity of Mao's public claim to legitimacy and highlights the competitive processes that underlay Mao's rise to power. The trial-and-error character of his leadership method stands out at the strategic Fourth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in January, 1931 and during the Fukien Rebellion of 1934. At these moments of critical decision, Mao was endowed with no special wisdom by which he could foresee the future and exhibited no unusual persuasiveness by which he could sway his colleagues. His position of authority, moreover, was subject to challenge by competitors in the base areas. Constrained by these intra-Party limits and the uncertainties of Moscow's mandate, Mao came to master the art of the possible. Tactically brilliant, he was usually able to manoeuvre his potential political rivals to commit themselves while he temporized and, as far as possible, let the situation work itself out elastically. Only later in the *ex post facto* reconstruction of Party history was the pure thread of ideological correctness woven into Mao's *ad hoc* and revocable decisions, and from the fictionalized version of events was to come the basis for Mao's claim to supreme leadership of the Communist revolution.

The problem of legitimacy raised by Professor Dorrill is a fundamental one.¹ The basis on which Chinese Communists accept

¹ For the attempts of two other scholars to deal with this problem, see Lucian Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psychocultural Study of the Authority*

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authority as legitimate must be ascertained before we can grapple with many of the concrete issues of power in Communist history. In large measure Mao's endowment with charisma was accomplished retroactively by a public relations campaign. This effort was restricted to an audience within the movement on the assumption that acceptance of Mao's charisma did not depend on external popular consent. Such an undertaking was not determined by the real issues of the past or by how they were resolved. The decision to establish Mao's legitimacy for the Kiangsi period was made in 1945, ten years after the period ended, and the Kiangsi history was written primarily with an eye to discrediting Mao's adversaries of 1945 and to give assurance to his supporters at that time that the failures of Kiangsi would not be repeated. As in the case of the Soviet effort to magnify Stalin's prestige, this rewriting of Chinese history was highly selective in that it skipped over those issues on which the memory was still too sensitive or where the issue itself was largely undecided. The act of legitimation would have the effect of giving assurances to the membership that the future would lead inevitably to Communist victory. This is particularly important in Communist organizations where in theory the leader must know where history is going and what the truth about history is. To the extent that the Party's voice is the voice of the leader, Mao had to be correct in his leadership from the beginning in order for the whole course of history associated with his name to have been correct. Such correctness is, it seems, necessary to preserve the element of faith in the movement.

This still leaves unresolved the question of how the Party leaders themselves think about history.¹ For those who had lived through the relevant events, the revision of history would mean something different than for those with no personal memory. For neither would

Crisis in Political Development (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968); and Richard Solomon, "On Activism and Activists: Maoist Conceptions of Motivation and Political Role Linking State and Society", *The China Quarterly*, No. 39 (July–September, 1969). Professor Solomon participated in the Ditchley Conference and this section as well as many of the papers profited greatly from his insights.

¹ See Albert Feuerwerker, ed., *History in Communist China* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968).

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a truthful account necessarily be important or desirable so long as the principal approach to the historical record was to obtain political advantage. The Communists appear to consider the current record of history as it legitimates or discredits, a useful device for silencing critics, teaching young recruits and authorizing new policies. All these uses can be seen in the history examined by Professor Dorrill.

The probing of orthodox history does more than explain policies and appearances. The extent of Mao's power and the accuracy of his analysis must be determined if we are to discover his own view of the Party not only in the Kiangsi Soviet but also in the successive decades of his leadership. Such a discovery helps us come to terms with the sources of Mao's power against such apparently strong organizations as the Army and the senior Party bureaucracy. In Kiangsi, Mao played the leading role in the Army and governmental apparatus, though others such as Chu Te also had great power. The Party high command had already repudiated him once, and during the turbulent Kiangsi years the men who ran the Central Committee came close to disgracing him again.¹ Mao's relationship with the Party was thus a strained one, and even as its Chairman he felt far from comfortable in leaving the interpretation of his will and the implementation of his policies to Party cadres.² His view of Party organization as revealed in the Cultural Revolution thus has roots that reach back to his experiences in the Kiangsi Soviet. Yet, in the optimism of his early leadership, he seems to have willingly tolerated great diversity in the movement, and only later did the traces of exclusivism in his thought become dominant.

The essay by Leonard Schapiro and John Lewis seeks to place Mao's relationship to the Party in comparative perspective. The roles of Communist and Fascist parties are examined in terms of the leader-party relationship as well as by contrasting the actual roles

¹ See John Rue, *Mao Tse-tung in Opposition: 1927-1935* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), esp. chaps. x-xii.

² In the fifties Mao was often to declare before his comrades sentiments that harked back to mass, not Party, associations. On July 23, 1959, for example, he said: "... I would go to the countryside to lead the peasants to overthrow the government. If the Liberation Army won't follow me, I will then find the Red Army. I think the Liberation Army will follow me." "Speech at Lushan Conference", translated in *Chinese Law and Government*, 1, No. 4 (Winter 1968-9), p. 35.

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of the Chinese Communist organization that developed in territories under Mao and those under the immediate influence of partisan commanders. A review of totalitarian parties shows how different situations in the struggle for power imposed limits on the independent authority of individual leaders or, conversely, provided them with the opportunity for the exercise of greater authority. Totalitarian systems have exhibited no uniform pattern in respect to the relationship of the party apparatus to the leader. Variations in one-party government seem to depend especially on the strength of the party that exists at the time the leader comes to power and on his personality.

The institution of the Chinese Communist Party has changed drastically in response to the vision of the central leadership, the conditions of military and political combat, and beliefs about the Party stemming from Marxist–Leninist ideology. For a cadre capable of adapting Party mechanisms to his own local needs in the revolution, the Communist organization as he would know it would have a special meaning and utility. Generally speaking, however, in the thirties and forties, such adaptations divided roughly into two principal types, one associated with Mao’s relatively secure base area in Yen’an and one identifiable with those Communist guerrillas who operated behind enemy lines. Only the latter could truly appreciate the inadequacy of human courage when under a constant threat of death, and this *de facto* separation of the revolutionary movement into at least two types of areas, moreover, created a basic tension between ideologically determined norms of cadre behaviour emanating from the centre in Yen’an and the demands on local guerrilla leaders to perform effectively. During the revolutionary war, the senior leadership elite concentrated on channelling this tension so as to maintain the Party’s overall unity and to avoid “factionalism”, a term often indicating excessive independence or localism. Informal steps taken to offset this pressure by seeking outside support were outlawed, and Party conflict was sealed within the organization itself. Up to the late civil war the Communist organization had concentrated so heavily on its own internal systems for cohesion and survival in revolution, that it had, despite the mythology, little direct relationship with Chinese outside the base