The Chinese Party-State

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The Chinese party-state, like its current leadership, is in the late evening of a long and familiar phase of its existence. The passing of the old guard and the working out of the consequences of the June 4, 1989, massacre in Beijing will inevitably have major consequences for the structure of state power. Whether or not the regime moves toward the more normal authoritarian concern of the maintenance of power and order or again pursues structural reform, its revolutionary vanguard mission will be over. Nevertheless, whatever regime does emerge will be the immediate political heir of the party-state. In addition, the party-state will continue to be influential as the framework in which a new and different politics takes place.

Because of the importance and pervasiveness of the Chinese party-state, every work on Chinese society and politics published after 1949 addresses some aspect of it. Yet, few attempt a comprehensive portrait. This essay will first review three works that present different perspectives on various dimensions of PRC politics. The body of the essay will then go beyond the books under review and attempt to sketch the general and characteristic features of the Chinese Communist party-state.

The first work under review, Laszlo Ladany’s The Communist Party of China and Marxism, 1921–1985: A Self-Portrait, represents the long-familiar perspective of anti-communist China-watching in which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is viewed as dedicated to an ideologically-motivated drive for power—

“totalitarian” in the full, 1950’s sense of the word. Ladany founded the Hong Kong newsletter China News Analysis (CNA) in 1953, and retired from it in 1983. Most of the book (300 of 500 pages) is derived and updated from earlier CNA material. As a result, the narration from 1953 onward has a contemporary vividness but lacks overarching cohesion. This part of the book would be confusing to the neophyte, but anyone with a grasp of the overall development of Chinese politics would be reminded of many interesting facts and tidy bits of history that have in the meantime slipped into the background. Unfortunately, the first part of the work, in which Ladany covers the pre-1953 (and therefore the pre-CNA) development of the party, is so dogmatically idiosyncratic in its views and spotty in its research and coverage that it is worthless to all but the most patient and informed readers.

The utility of the totalitarian model is that it is extremely attentive to variations in the regime’s orthodoxy and ritual. This attention is an antidote to the usual lack of concern
with regime orthodoxy in the West, and is most useful in following the leftist phase of Chinese politics from 1957 to 1976, when politics was driven by ideology and when, in any case, not much unofficial information was available. The totalitarian model became less useful beginning in the late 1970's, when the voice of orthodoxy became less decisive and less coherent. Ladany's account of the 1980's is detailed by his focus on orthodoxy, and he fails to notice the more pragmatic roots and strengths of reformist trends. On the other hand, Ladany's approach is well-positioned for comprehending the atavistic politics and assumptions of the veteran revolutionaries who returned in 1989 to straighten things out.

A very interesting feature of Ladany's approach is that, for all its alertness to the details of orthodoxy, it assumes that the party-state's purpose, direction, and drive to domination are transparent — implicit in its commitment to Marxism-Leninism. This problem is obvious in the subtitle of Ladany's book: "A Self-Portrait." One can attempt the self-portrait of another only on the assumption that the "other" is transparent. Indeed, Ladany does deliver a self-portrait — his own — one of an alert, viscerally anti-communist observer, who has been shaped by a lifetime of watching his enemy rather than knowing him, and is as out of touch with current Chinese politics as the "veteran proletarian revolutionary" Wang Zhen.

In CONTRAST to Ladany's work, Lowell Dittmer's China's Continuous Revolution: The Post-Liberation Epoch, 1949-1981 concentrates on the "mind" of Chinese communism rather than on the mouth of orthodoxy. Dittmer structures his work around an analytic formula that divides revolution into three "fundamental requisites": charismatic leadership, an illegitimate authority structure, and mass mobilization. He focuses on understanding the political intentions of the center and the way these intentions changed over time. The book is a fine overview of the general direction of Chinese politics, and it contains the best discussion that I have yet seen of the late Cultural Revolution period (1969-76). The analysis is also very sensitive to the dilemmas faced by the center and to the intellectual personalities of the actors. A good example of the insightful observations peppering the book is Dittmer's differentiation of Lin Biao's "barracks communism," with its emphasis on egalitarian asceticism and unquestioning obedience, from the critical leftism of Cultural Revolution radicals and the Gang of Four, which emphasized the critique of the party establishment. The strength of Dittmer's approach lies in highlighting and analyzing the inherent rationale for the strategic shifts in Chinese politics. He emphasizes that the post-Mao era represents a historic watershed, as the regime moved from revolutionary to post-revolutionary politics, but he is sensitive to the contradictions of the new period. Dittmer points out that the charisma of earlier times has been routinized in the 1980's into an appreciation for the regime's post-1949 achievements and hence a neo-traditionalism based on seniority — full of pride and prejudice, but having no sense of mission.

In a political environment as changeable as China's, the politics of the center attracts the greatest attention. Clearly, however, uncomfortable assumptions are involved in equating the party-state with its center. The center decides and the subordinates do not oppose, but this does not mean that the center can be either completely arbitrary or completely effective. Indeed, the problems of the party-state as an operational structure are among the most serious, persistent, and divisive issues with which the center must deal.

Hitherto, the problems of cadre recruitment and discipline have usually been treated from the perspective of the center. By contrast, Hong Yung Lee's From Revolutionary Cadres to Party Technocrats in Socialist China opens up a new perspective on the "body" of the party-state in the interaction with its "mind." This work provides an unusually well-researched and comprehensive overview of the personnel and politics of the Chinese cadre system. The treatment begins with party recruitment in the 1920's, but Lee's primary interest is the contemporary period, so the developments from the Cultural Revolution to the present receive special attention. One could argue that the book is an amalgam of two overlapping projects, the first being a chronological study of cadres development and cadre policy, and the second an analysis of the present context of cadre policy reform. As with his earlier book on the Cultural Revolution, Lee's massive research, which is quantitative but not

1 In his time, Karl Wittfogel marshaled his considerable knowledge of orthodoxy in order to discourage scholars from taking Mao Zedong seriously as an independent political thinker. He was rebutted by Benjamin Schwartz, Stuart Schram, and eventually by Mao himself. See Karl Wittfogel, "The Legend of 'Maoism':" The China Quarterly (London), January-March and May-June 1966, pp. 72-86 and pp. 16-34 respectively; and Benjamin Schwartz, "The Legend of the 'Legend of Maoism':" ibid., April-June 1966, pp. 35-42. Stuart Schram's The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung (New York, Praeger, 1963) made Wittfogel's position untenable.

oppressively statistical, has clearly advanced the understanding of the subject.

In an ideal Weberian organization, the problem of personnel is at least a homogeneous viscosity impeding the upward flow of information and the downward flow of policy. Lee argues that China differs radically from the Weberian model in two respects. First, the vast changes in the fortunes of the revolution and in cadre policy have produced very distinctive cohorts of cadres, and hence at any one time the bureaucracy is composed of very different strata. The earliest cohorts were intellectuals and workers, but the overwhelming majority of those recruited from 1928 to 1949 were peasants. The capacities and interests of each of these cohorts were distinctive, and mass mobilizational policies like the Great Leap Forward were more congenial to the peasant cohort than policies requiring specialists and bureaucratically controlled development. Such generational differences were further complicated by the Cultural Revolution, which clearly sets its instigators, beneficiaries, and victims against one another.

A second unique characteristic of officialdom in China is its low level of institutionalization. The Chinese cadre is neither bound nor protected by the regulations and professionalism that define the Weberian ideal-type official. Lee convincingly argues that this implies much greater personal discretion for cadres, and therefore their individual idiosyncrasies and relationships play a correspondingly larger role in decision making.

It is obvious from Lee's account that the cadre body of the party-state does not control its central mind, but it is equally obvious that the interests, habits, and skills of the body influence the content of central policy, along with such considerations as available resources and perceived crises. Therefore, every attempt at a major policy shift includes a major shift in cadre policy. But the mind is more agile than the body, and each new leadership must cope with a heterogeneous and ill-defined body of cadres, the top and bottom of which were recruited by the proponents of the now discredited policy line.

As the title of Lee's book suggests, the post-Mao era has seen a major shift from the recruitment of revolutionaries to the recruitment of technocrats. The work thus documents the great cycle in the Chinese party-state from revolutionary innovation in 1949 to obsolescence in the 1980's. (Dittmer describes the same cycle from a more analytical perspective.) If revolution is renewal below, then Mao's China was uniquely revolutionary. Not only was the cadre corps a new elite, but new structures of power were created and policy was driven by a future-oriented ideology. The Cultural Revolution was not inevitable, but from this perspective it does appear to represent the pursuit of this revolutionary logic to the point of self-destruction.

By contrast, the post-Mao era has indeed been a post-revolutionary era. In the 1980's, the oldest cohort approved and enforced policies tending toward institutionalization, decentralization, and a greater role for technocratic expertise. Society obtained greater autonomy as well. Concerns about the future communist society were postponed until 2050. The conservative return of 1989 reacted to the consequences of these developments, but conservatives do not have the energy, capacity, or time to reverse the tide. They are the deathmask of the party-state, the revolutionary guard turned rearguard.

INASMUCH as the books under review do not attempt a comprehensive description of the anatomy of the Chinese party-state, what follows is an attempt to present just such an account. Readers will notice that parts of the sketch are indebted to insights from a broad range of China specialists as well as to the books under review. However, I have refrained from any discussion of the relationship of the sketch to the existing literature because the subject is so complex and the literature so vast.

Of course, Chinese politics is not as static as this anatomy suggests. Moreover, the Chinese party-state clearly shares many features with other party-states. It also differs from other party-states in important respects. However, a comparative perspective is not taken as the leading thread of this description because of the complexity of such an effort. The task here is simply to try to organize the essential features that have given Chinese politics its special character over the past 40 years.

The first key aspect of China's party-state—its historical dynamic...
---includes two quite different features. One is the revolutionary heritage of the party-state from 22 years of rural revolution and governance of base areas. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the revolutionary experience for PRC politics, and yet the post-1949 political situation was necessarily different. Many of the basic tensions of PRC politics developed in the unacknowledged gap between the revolutionary heritage and the new situational pressures of governing a complex society. Revolutionary orthodoxy, the second feature of the party-state's history, is historical primarily because of its orientation toward future transformation. Such future-oriented rationalism was officially the foundation of Chinese orthodoxy until Zhao Ziyang's speech at the 13th Party Congress in 1987, although it had ceased to provide practical policy direction since the death of Mao in 1976.

The second aspect, structure, describes the party-state's penetration of society and includes three major subdivisions. The first, unrestricted authority, describes the party-state's constitutional (or, more precisely, anti-constitutional) characteristics. Cadre politics involves the personal responsibility and authority of cadres. Societal bonding explores the linkage between the party-state and societal interests.

The final aspect, context and responsiveness, first considers the ecological constraints on the party-state. Since constraints such as resources and the international environment open up even broader areas of possible discussion, only their taxonomy can be presented here. Under the rubric of responsiveness, I attempt to examine the party-state's attempts at political change.

The most important contribution of the prerevolutionary period to the structure of power in the PRC was the overcoming, not just of the Guomindang, but of the "total crisis"—China's disunity, confusion, and vulnerability to foreign powers. Since chaos was the primary enemy, the primary task of the revolutionary party was the creation of a new power at the village level. The task of building the party-state/army power structure was supplemented by the task of co-opting societal forces through unified-front tactics, and the power structure was tested by combat with warlords, Guomindang, and Japanese forces in guerrilla warfare.

The leadership structure of the base areas was integrated in the sense that military, economic, and political functions were combined. The command structure was based on comprehensive leadership at each level, and facilitated a political process based on broadly targeted mass campaigns. The campaign rhythm required cycles in which enthusiasm was followed by reassessment and consolidation. Thus, at the initial phase of the cycle, cadres were encouraged to be bold, and at the end they were held accountable for poor results or for deviations from what became defined as the correct path. Clearly this kind of revolutionary authority structure is as different from the Weberian bureaucratic model as a guerrilla army is from the Prussian army.

The primary resource of the Chinese revolution was popular mobilization. In confronting a government that had far more extensive resources in every other respect, the party depended on popular support for survival and eventually for victory. Therefore, the party had to remain close to the masses, and its policies had to address the concrete needs of the masses. With victory, the party established a monopoly of state power and the masses lost their clout, although the politics of the base areas became a nostalgic model for the PRC.

The politics of the party-state is oriented by an organizationally-enforced revolutionary orthodoxy that defines the current political situation, promises the possibility of a transformed future, and prescribes a program of action. One of the earliest and most durable contributions of Marxism-Leninism to Chinese politics was the notion of class struggle, which not only drew the line between friends and enemies but also defined politics as irreconcilable conflict. In 1957, Mao Zedong modified the notion of class struggle by introducing the idea of "contradictions among the people," and modified it again during the Cultural Revolution by detaching class identity from any relationship to the means of production.

Belief in a transformed future has been as important in Chinese Communist Party orthodoxy as class struggle. Historical materialism established a series of strategic goals: revolutionary victory, socialist transformation, and eventually communism. Each goal promised a threshold of achievement so rewarding as to justify any sacrifice. The party's knowledge of and dedication to these goals legitimated its vanguard role. By basing its legitimacy on a transcendent future, the party-state resembles a theocratic church-state. Zhao Ziyang's declaration at the 13th Party Congress that China would be in the primary stage of building socialism for 100 years was intended to push the future so far forward as to make orthodoxy vanguardism untenable. Indeed, the conservative restoration...
of 1989 was a rearguard action, intending to defend the established prerogatives of the party-state against deterioration and challenge, but without the re-establishment of a legitimating mission.

Another aspect of revolutionary orthodoxy is that it sanctions some programs and methods and precludes others. Such policy prejudices can be useful when they are appropriate to the concrete situation, and are disastrous when they are not. Mao’s own problems with dogmatic prescription led him to emphasize the role of practice and learning from experience. Nevertheless, he adopted the Soviet model of socialist transformation, and then led China into the most dogmatically driven politics of any communist country. The 1978 campaign for the slogan “practice is the sole criterion for determining truth” was aimed at removing the dead hand of Maoist orthodoxy, although the “four cardinal principles that must be upheld” soon replaced it.

Finally, we should consider the peculiar character of subsistence socialism in the Chinese party-state. Subsistence socialism is articulated as faithful to Marxism-Leninism and the Stalinist model of national economic development, but it is deeply influenced by the rural revolutionary experience. Subsistence socialism is oriented toward communal survival by means of, first, the distribution of existing resources, and second, collective effort. Egalitarianism is the prime value because it is assumed that resources are extremely scarce. This approach has two major effects on the administration of Chinese society by the party-state.

First, each unit is structured so as to provide as much as possible for all the needs of its members. This is called “work unit (danwei) socialism,” and it is carried to a greater extreme than in most communist countries. Second, decentralization tends to be oriented toward unit self-sufficiency. Each unit engages in “import substitution,” trying to be “small but complete” rather than in “commercial specialization.” Subsistence socialism desires modernization and wealth, but only after survival needs are met and on the basis of collective action and enjoyment. Economic trends in the 1980’s, including inflation, market-oriented decentralization, and encouraging individual families to “get rich first,” run contrary to the values and institutions of subsistence socialism by putting speed of economic growth ahead of communal subsistence.

Few regimes have been more revolutionary than the People’s Republic of China, and a revolutionary regime finds it a joyful necessity to create a new political structure having unrestricted public authority on the ruins of the old. In turn, these forces converged to push totalitarianism to its limit in China: Marxist-Leninist rationalism, the authoritarian traditions of China, and the preceding situation of total crisis.

The most basic principle of totalitarianism is its assumption of unity and solidarity between the people and the leadership. The assumption can motivate people to accomplishments, but it precludes any effective limit on public power or on the agents of public power, because such restrictions would implicitly undermine the assumption of unity. The state does not tolerate independent social, political, or economic powers and does not acknowledge a capacity for excess. Although the regime does acknowledge that the party and its cadres make mistakes, only the party can correct them, and only an enemy of the people would use mistakes to justify limits on the party-state. The excesses of the Cultural Revolution led to systemic critiques of unrestricted power, and the decentralizing policies of the 1980’s led in fact to the emergence of more autonomous societal forces, but not to a new orthodoxy.

It is important to note that the relationship between the party-state and the people is not founded on a social contract in the Western sense. In contrast to Thomas Hobbes’s simple contract against chaos, the party-state promises a transformed future, without exploitation or want. In contrast to John Locke’s contract to preserve property, the regime is founded on the redistribution of property, although this redistribution is coupled with the promise of collective security and prosperity. In contrast to Jean Jacques Rousseau’s contract to participate in the general will, the party-state assumes a vanguard role. The values of economic security, prosperity, and political participation are incorporated into the values of the party-state, but they are concrete problems for the party and the people to face together, and are not subject to constitutional bargaining. Constitutions and laws are based on the assumption of unity, and therefore useless as weapons of individual appeals against state tyranny.

In one important respect all states are based on military models, because they are all premised on the center’s force and its control over a given territory. To the extent that the population is assumed to be friendly, the sheath is more prominent than the sword. But the guerrilla military model on which the Chinese party-state is based is very different from the professional mili-

*The four cardinal principles are: keeping to the socialist road, upholding the people’s democratic dictatorship, leadership by the party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.
tary model of the West. Since security in the guerrilla military model is primarily a question of popular support rather than of conventional military superiority, any political force perceived as basing itself on "elements of classes different from our own" (jie ji yi fenzi), challenging the premise of solidarity, or derailing the mission of the regime becomes a mortal threat. The most characteristic response to such threats is popular struggle organized and coordinated by the party-state. The June 4, 1989, massacre demonstrated the final breakdown of this system, as the military was employed against the masses, who were challenging the party-state. As Deng Xiaoping suggested when he explained in his June 9, 1989, speech that other states did likewise without being condemned, China has now slid into a normal authoritarianism.

The presence of an overriding historical mission means that politics is in command in the party-state. The vanguard must lead; to wait for the people would be "tailist." Thus, in fact, the "party-state" is not a hyphenated dual entity but a party empowered and encumbered by state power and responsibility. The party gradually arrogated all power from state organs in the 1950's, and reassumed its control after the fall of Lin Biao. Efforts were undertaken in the 1980's to separate party and state, but they were half-hearted because parts of the state were not to remain indifferent to the party's political leadership. A poignant vignette of this dilemma can be seen in the new nomenklatura rules for elected positions. Of course, the distinction between politics and administration is somewhat artificial in any modern state, but, in contrast to the West, in the Chinese case this distinction has not been regarded as legitimate.

A state as large as China cannot be homogeneous, but China's approach to the parceling out of governmental responsibilities demonstrates an impressive commitment to unity. It is significant that all levels below the center are referred to as "local" (difa). A given level of the bureaucracy is not responsible to a given constituency but to the next highest level of the bureaucracy. Local units have no rights against the center. Nevertheless, the centralization of power at each level of the system and the tendency of leaders to remain in place means that, unless intervention from above occurs, local leadership is very powerful. Without changing the formal nature of the relationship, the process of decentralization in the 1980's has further weakened the center's capacity to dominate.

The low level of institutionalization and specialization in China puts a tremendous weight on cadre politics in general and on the personal behavior of cadres in particular. Mao once said that cadres should act like general commanders, meaning that bold action is preferable to following directives blindly. However, the use of such ambiguous criteria as "correct attitude" in selecting cadres for positions, in conjunction with the power of leading cadres and the unforeseeable directions of future campaigns, more commonly has led to very cautious policy stances on the part of cadres and the energetic cultivation of personal ties with superiors and subordinates in the hierarchy.

The low level of institutionalization also puts a premium on the need for access to leading cadres. To some extent, access itself is institutionalized: for instance, every member of the Politburo is also the leader of a major central organization, thereby establishing the access of personnel in those organs to the "center" of the center.

Participation in party congresses, people's congresses, and political consultative conferences is probably most valuable for the access to leading cadres that takes place "behind the scenes" at such meetings. Needless to say, access can also be established through relatives, friends, and colleagues. Those without the privilege of personal access to leading cadres, or in need of contacting an unfamiliar official, often try to use connections (guanxi) to establish access. Hence, the building of networks of connections and the trade in access are important dimensions of politics in China. It might be only a slight exaggeration to say that only those who do not know where they are going enter a public office by the front door.

Such personalistic politics puts the masses in the position of petitioners vis-à-vis officials. In theory, the party-state serves the masses, and this service does entail important commitments to mass welfare. But as individuals, the masses are dependent on the cadres' personal political style, and citizen rights are in fact nonexistent. In the worst case, where the leadership is hostile to an individual, there is nothing to be done but to wait until the fury passes. In the case of a large-scale action condemned by the leadership, most participants are usually exonerated (after re-education) because they are seen to have been misled, while the ringleaders are isolated and punished.

Perhaps the most serious error of the totalitarian model is that it assumes that the party-state remains uninfluenced by the society it leads. In fact, through the party's system of branches reaching into every locality and workplace, encouraging activism, and virtually monopolizing the avenues of political influence, the party-state tends to become what Gaetano Mosca called the political class—that broad and
varied minority in a society that is actually interested and energetic enough to participate in public affairs. To be sure, class-based recruitment, party orthodoxy, the power of the established party elite at each level, and party discipline constrain the range of participating people and ideas. On the other hand, the party's preference for recruitment from the working class and emphasis on activism rather than wealth or family connections has broadened its representative capacity as a political class in comparison to non-communist countries. In any case, it is to be expected that some bonding with society takes place, as new societal fermets and interests express themselves within the party. An impressive case of such bonding was the similarity in viewpoints between the Democracy Wall activists of 1978-80 and Deng Xiaoping's more progressive advisers. But the party's credibility as a catchment for progressive activism and new societal interests was hurt by the removal of Hu Yaobang in 1987 and perhaps fatally damaged by the massacre on June 4, 1989.

In addition to the party's tendency to incorporate representatives of all classes and strata in its membership, the party-state also makes a conscious effort to acknowledge the functional contribution of various strata and groups and to incorporate their leaderships into its consultative structure. The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) is the archetype of such corporatism. It evolved from the various groups and political parties that cooperated with the CCP before victory, and its membership is explicitly allocated among political and societal luminaries. The CPPCC was entrusted with writing the 1954 Constitution, disappeared during the Cultural Revolution, and has prospered in the post-Mao period as a shadow people's congress, meeting at the same time and with virtually the same prerogatives and access to leading cadres. Similarities to the people's congress do not demonstrate the political power of the CPPCC but rather the fact that the people's congresses are also a form of consultative assembly—one based on geography and work units rather than allocations to various societal groups.

Because the party-state has created the structures of PRC society, corporatism in China is not based on bargaining between the state and powerful, autonomous groups. Rather it represents an acknowledgement by the party-state that such groups make a functional contribution. Therefore, the language and politics of corporatism in China are based on emphasizing the useful contributions of the group in question and (usually) its need for further resources, rather than co-optation of such groups to prevent them from using their monopoly over scarce resources to challenge the state.

A last feature of societal bonding is the complexity of the party's own organizational interest. Lee analyzes the different interests of various cohorts of cadres; it could be added that inevitable differences of interest are present among cadres at the central, intermediate, and basic levels, and that promotion by seniority compounds and amplifies group and positional viewpoints. A key conflict in party policy often occurs between the interests of the center in new, flashy policy initiatives and the prior commitments at other levels to established policy or simply to noninterference by the center. Thus, it is wrong simply to juxtapose the party-state to society; collaboration and/or tensions occur among interests that breach the lines between the party-state on the one hand and society on the other.

EVEN if the party-state is all-powerful politically, it must operate within a given context of opportunities and resources. One of the most fundamental and difficult determinants is the effect of cultural and ideological assumptions. The influence of traditional Chinese culture is neither easily proven nor denied, because it concerns a prior commitment, a disposition rather than a conscious position. Moreover, the fund of digested experience and habits of thought is constantly growing. It now includes Marxism-Leninism, the experience in the base areas, and 40 years of PRC history. Politics is determined by its cliches as well as by its arguments or, perhaps more accurately, it is certainly but unclearly determined by them.

Another contextual determinant is the international environment. This is most obviously true in the effect on domestic capabilities of different constellations of foreign allies and enemies. In the 1980's, the party-state has been both empowered and constrained by its openness to the West. A more subtle constraint is that China's identity is partially defined by its international peer groups—the communist world and the Third World. Initially, its sense of its relationship to these peer groups was an important element in shaping China's sense of mission, and the Chinese leadership remains quite sensitive to world opinion. On the other hand, China's size as well as its autonomy in culture and resources gives it an impressive freedom of maneuver in its international behavior.

At the other end of the geographical spectrum, the poor infrastructure presents a real obstacle to centralization. Transportation, communications, finances, and the like are among the least developed
areas of the Chinese economy. Moreover, the push for subsistence socialism has created strong, cellular structures at the basic level that display (or camouflage) impressive capacities for collective action and evasion. Localism in China thus poses a formidable obstacle to the center’s effectiveness. Decollectivization has weakened these structures, but it has not increased central control. And, as a result of the economic reforms, for the first time since the early 1950’s, local forces exist outside of even the basic party-state structure.

The limitation of resources is both a constraint on current options and a motivation for modernization. Government policies significantly increased available resources, and as a result, the resource context of the party-state’s policies in the 1980’s is very different from what it was in the 1950’s. The basic concerns of the 1950’s were those of laying the groundwork for a modern economy; now, it has shifted to efficiency within a complex economy. One pair of severe resource constraints remains, namely, the problems of population and food. They are grounded in the famous statistic that China feeds 22 percent of the world’s population from 7 percent of the world’s arable land. Food self-sufficiency remains a difficult problem, and China is not wealthy enough to make long-term, large-scale dependence on grain imports an attractive or prudent alternative. The organizational and distributive aspects of the grain problem seem, like the “hydraulic theories” of yore, to justify a special role for central political-economic control.

Few countries have changed their political direction as often or as dramatically as China, and yet few seem as limited by antiquated structures and ancient leaders as does today’s China. Normal policy change in China is not based on the legislative model that lies at the heart of the input-output schema of political analysis. Instead, the process of identifying problems in current policy—the party-state’s responsiveness—is usually secret until a new policy is adopted. The typical process of originating new policies is one of local experimentation, resulting in successful models that are then further studied, copied, and generalized. Models tend to be successful examples of a particular policy rather than average cases, and the designation and promotion of models are important parts of the political process. Of course, the final policy decisions of the center are pushed without regard to local variations, but usually each level has some flexibility. As a result, current policy varies significantly across different units, with a considerable lag in implementation of centrally-sanctioned policy.

Crisis are an essential part of the logic of significant policy and personnel change. Since current policy and cadre appointments are sanctioned by the party-state, a major change requires the condemnation of previous policy and leadership and the exposure of an urgent necessity for change. The sanctity of the new leadership and its ideas arise from the ashes of the old. The disjunction between the new direction and the old is often considerable but may also be exaggerated, and in any case, lower levels often try to get away with re-articulating what they have been doing in the language of the new policy. Nevertheless, sudden, major policy shifts at the center are likely in conjunction with leadership changes. In the absence of electoral campaigns and promises, freshly discovered crises and vast policy initiatives help establish the identity of the new leadership. The current regime is anomalous in that it perceived a mortal crisis, blamed it on the previous leadership, and yet remains pledged to continue the previous policies.

The problem with structural reform within a party-state is that any reform that fixes constitutional restrictions on the state and its cadres necessarily challenges the assumption of the unity of the party and masses upon which the party-state is built. Mao Zedong was willing to “bombard the headquarters” during the Cultural Revolution, but his radical critique was of “party persons in power going the capitalist road,” not of the party-state itself. When the party was threatened by the Cultural Revolution, Mao stopped it. Similarly, the major political reforms of the 1980’s—new legal codes, competitive elections, etc.—were adopted on the assumption that they would not be used to challenge the party-state. Cadre reform was pushed on the assumption that the old guard would remain behind the scenes. In fact, however, the loss of a sense of historical mission and the impact on society of decentralization, reform, and decodification have contributed to deep structural changes in the party-state despite the fact that its outward appearance remains the same as it has for 40 years. The party-state as I have described it here has been on shifting sand for a decade.

The key point of serious party-state reform is putting the presumption of unity between the party and the people to the test of freedom of discussion and electoral openness. The party-state must pass muster with the citizen-masses. This has been Mikhail Gorbachev’s historic achievement in the Soviet Union, and in my judgment, progressive reformers in China, including Zhao Ziyang, might have been willing to accept that challenge. But the credibility of the party’s capacity to lead reform was a victim of June 1989 massacre, and this will make de-
SKETCH OF THE CHINESE PARTY STATE

I. HISTORICAL DYNAMIC

1. Revolutionary foundation
   a. total crisis
   b. integrated leadership
   c. quasi-democratic system

2. Revolutionary orthodoxy
   a. class struggle
   b. communist future
   c. revolutionary program
   d. subsistence socialism

II. STRUCTURE

1. Unrestricted authority
   a. totalism
   b. politics in command
   c. soft segmentation

2. Cadre politics
   a. correct style
   b. access and connections
   c. mass petitioners

3. Societal bonding
   a. party becomes political class
   b. corporatist tendency
   c. complexity within party interest

III. CONTEXT AND RESPONSIVENESS

1. Contextual determinants
   a. ideological/cultural
   b. international
   c. local
   d. resources

2. Responsiveness
   a. normal policy change
   b. crisis and major change
   c. structural reform