THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY: FORTY YEARS IN POWER

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The People's Republic of China (PRC) celebrated its fortieth anniversary on October 1, 1989. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) originally intended that this would be a gala occasion, an opportunity for the Chinese people to show their support for the changes the CCP has introduced in China over the past decade. But in light of the Tiananmen massacre of June 3-4, 1989, when under the orders of the Party leadership the Chinese army bloodily suppressed the democratic movement which had occupied Tiananmen Square in central Beijing for three weeks, the citizenry of Beijing was not invited to share in the festivities of the anniversary.[1]

The fact that the people of China were carefully shielded from anniversary celebrations is symptomatic of the state of relations between the CCP and the Chinese people. The Party has lost almost all legitimacy; it is highly corrupt; it has no clear vision of the future; its leaders lack imagination; and it has no idea of how to institutionalize an expanded role for the people of China in running the "people's republic." When the PRC was founded forty years ago, the Party was the focus of the hopes of the Chinese people. It rode to power on the wave of popular indignation caused by the corruption, mismanagement and oppression of the Kuomintang, or Chinese Nationalist Party. Many Chinese now see the CCP as little different than its predecessor. How and why did the CCP fall so far and so fast? The answer lies in the inability of the CCP to view the Chinese people as citizens rather than as "masses."[2]

Political parties have a number of defining characteristics, all of them worthy of study in their own right: the organizational structures, their policy programs or its ideologies, their compositions and power struggles. However, perhaps the most important aspect of any political party is the way in which it relates to its constituencies or the people it rules. Only through the study of this relationship can analysts address the central political inquiries of what makes a "good" political system, and whether the system under examination qualifies as one.

Despite great variability in the relationship between the CCP and the Chinese people, two common threads are apparent throughout the forty years of the PRC: the failure of the CCP to treat the people of China as citizens for

1. Nicholas D. Kristof, "'People's China' Celebrates, but Without the People," *New York Times*, 2 October 1989, A3.
2. This crucial distinction was first formulated by Tang Tsou, and will be central to this essay. See Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 272-273.

prolonged periods and the key role played by Deng Xiaoping in every major instance when people attempted to act like citizens rather than masses. With only two exceptions, Deng's role in these attempts was highly negative.

THE PARTY AND THE MASSES

Before surveying the history of Party-populace relations, it is necessary to distinguish between "citizens" and "masses" and the related concepts of "mass movements" and the "mass line."

> The concept of citizenship begins with members of society viewed as isolated individuals, possessing equally a set of abstract rights, who form themselves into social groups by exercising those rights . . . .In contrast, the notions of masses, mass movements, and the mass line begin with individuals viewed as members of segments of society possessing not abstract, legal, civic rights but substantive socio-economic entitlements. The masses, as the overwhelming majority of society, are members of the lower classes, who are to be mobilized and organized by political activists. It is assumed [by the Party] that their latent demands for socio-economic justice will spur them to political activism, once political leadership is given to them.[3]

Thus, the concept of citizenship implies individual autonomy, with the impetus for political activity originating ·independently within the minds of individuals for diverse motives. The concept of masses begins with the idea of collectives, with certain individuals and groups holding privileged positions. It is the obligation of one of these privileged groups, the Party, to bring self-awareness to the masses in order to mobilize them to throw off the perceived causes of the masses' economic difficulties. The masses are acted upon, and while there may be some room for independent action on their part once they have become conscious of the causes of their backwardness, most often the activities of the masses are channelled through "mass movements" and the "mass line" to serve what the Party sees as key goals or objectives.

Belief in the idea of "masses" as opposed to citizens has behavioral implications for different periods in the Party's experience. In the days before coming to power, the Party will necessarily have close relations with the people or masses. The Party must lead the people in struggle against the forces oppressing them. Few people are ever willing to let outsiders come to an area (a village or a factory) and agitate for rebellion or revolution. Rather, a long-term effort by the Party is required before sufficient trust is established to undertake larger challenges to the existing system of power. The particular vehicle by which such trust is built depends upon the characteristics of the

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3. Tsou, 272.

local area. In the Chinese case, appeals to nationalism, to morality (to re-establish what is just), to economic improvement and to socialist revolution were all used to forge the link between the CCP and the people.[4]

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However, once the Party has seized power, and the perceived shackles of oppression have been smashed, the concept of masses does not prescribe any particular role for the Party in the Party-masses relationship. To be sure, the Party continues to believe that it has a special relationship with the masses, but in reality the Party draws away from the masses. The demands of economic construction — particularly the need to extract grain and other crops from the countryside to fund industrialization, the ideological imperatives of build-ing socialist institutions to carry out the transition to socialism and the security requirement of suppressing all active or even potential opposition to the newly established Party-state — all lead to a severing of the link between the Party and the masses. In the Party's eyes, the masses remain subordinate, waiting to be activated by the Party for its own purposes. The Party retains a paternalistic attitude toward the masses: only when the Party leads the masses are they able to work toward constructive ends. Unmediated activity by the people themselves is likely to lead to "chaos" which only tears down the Party's institutional structure, hindering progress toward socialism, and ultimately communism.[5]

Intellectuals are a problematic category for a Party subscribing to a "masses" conception of the people it rules. After the period of creating socialist insti-tutions and carrying out the revolutionary program of class warfare, the Party-state inevitably confronts the issue of economic management and construction. Obviously, extracting resources from society to invest in new factories is one form of growth, but this extensive pattern of development cannot be sustained

4. On the close relationship between the Party and the people in the struggle for power, see Brantly Womack, "The Party and the People: Revolutionary and Postrevolutionary Politics in China and Vietnam," *World Politics* Vol. XXXIX, No. 4 (July 1987): 479-507. The various appeals are discussed in Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971); Chen Yun-fa, *Making Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); and William Hinton, *Fanshen* (New York: Vintage, 1966). The organizational "myth" of close Party-people (usually Party-peasant) ties is more important than the specific appeals made to establish such links. Moreover, it is clear in cases of peasant revolution that only a relatively small percentage of the peasantry is actively enlisted in the Party's cause. In the Chinese case only about 20-25 percent of the population was under CCP control when the civil war began in 1946.
5. See Womack, note 4 and Kenneth Jowitt, "Inclusion and Mobilization in European Leninist Regimes," *World Politics* Vol. XXVIII, No. 1 (October 1975): 69-96, on the Party's distancing itself from the populace.

indefinitely. Increasingly, intensive growth or improvements in productivity based on the application of new technology is required. This technology to raise productivity can come from two sources: externally through trade and investment, or internally, from the fruits of the country's own scientists and engineers. In practice, however, trade and investment by the world's most technologically advanced countries are ruled out. Revolutionary societies are usually very poor, and therefore unable to pay for the technology. Perhaps more important, their revolutionary values are in opposition to those of advanced industrial economies. This leaves only the nation's own intellectuals as the source of growth. However, the encouragement of intellectual creativity cannot be placed easily in a "masses" framework. The contributions of intellectuals cannot be structured or specified in advance. The end product of their activities — intellectual creations — are so amorphous that they cannot be compared to overthrowing landlords or other "structures of oppression." A more activist, individualist and autonomous role for intellectuals is required if they are to promote domestic economic development. In short, intellectuals must be "citizens" before they can contribute significantly to economic growth.

But citizenship is inherently a critical exercise. Every time the CCP has encouraged intellectuals to behave as citizens and not as masses, the response has never been confined to science and engineering. The outpouring of criticisms by intellectuals (and in their earlier stage of development as students) was seen by the CCP as profoundly threatening to its hold on power. Most CCP leaders saw no recourse but to smash their critics. Indeed, many felt that such mass repression only advanced the socialist cause because so many enemies of the Party-state were destroyed. It is this analytical dynamic which underlies the history of Party-populace relations in China.

THE PARTY AND CITIZENS IN CHINA: 1949-1989

A brief historical overview of this process in China adds flesh to the bare-bones analytical scheme outlined above. From 1942 to 1956, the CCP specified a "masses" role for intellectuals (in fact, for the entire population). The definitive statement of this view came in two speeches Mao Zedong delivered in May 1942, on the subject of literary and art work.[6] Mao insisted that literary and art work, and by extension, all intellectual endeavors, must serve the Party's cause. The attainment of power in 1949 did nothing to change Mao's or the CCP's position. Indeed, all segments of Chinese society were subject to varying degrees of "ideological remolding," "socialist education," and "thought reform," making the populace more "masses-like" rather than moving it in the direction of more active citizenry.

However, the basic establishment of socialist institutions by 1956, the declining willingness of the Soviet Union to provide direct economic aid to China's development efforts, and the Party's sense that its efforts had been

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6. "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. III (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 69-98.

highly successful and that most skeptical people in China had been won over
to the Party's side, led Mao and other Chinese leaders to expand the boundaries
of what was intellectually acceptable in order to promote economic growth
and to help the CCP improve itself. By early 1957, Mao called on all people,
but especially intellectuals, to take an active role in rectifying problems in
the Party and the government.[7] The resulting outpouring of criticism was
seen by the CCP as so threatening that more than 550,000 people were
branded as "rightists" and subject to systematic discrimination and punish-
ment. This figure does not count the millions of peasants who were labelled
"anti-socialist elements" and also attacked.[8]

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The consequent "Anti-Rightist Campaign" was a massive Party effort to
suppress and destroy all its critics, and its day-to-day operations were super-
vised by Deng Xiaoping, the first of his encounters with a nascent Chinese
citizenry. In later years Deng would concede that the campaign was excessive,
but he never admitted that it was wrong to carry out the campaign.[9]

The next major instance of popular activity was the early Cultural Revo-
lution (CR) of 1966-1968. The origins of the CR were complex, but suffice
it to say here that Mao called on elements of the populace, especially students,
to attack Party members he vaguely defined as "capitalist roaders." While
certain groups attacked the Party leaders and organizations, including Deng
Xiaoping who was designated the number two target of the movement, others
indirectly defended them. The result was mass violence and near civil war.[10]
It is difficult to categorize the behavior of the Chinese population during the
CR as either masses- or citizen-oriented. Certainly the Party was not directing
the behavior of the "masses." But neither were the people behaving as auton-

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7. The most important text here is Mao's "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People,"
   available in its original and most provocative form, in Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene
   Wu, eds., *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao* (Cambridge: Harvard Contemporary China Series, No. 6,
   1989), 131-189.
8. Liao Gailong, "Historical Experiences and Our Road to Development, Part 1," *Issues and Studies* Vol. XVII,
   No. 10 (October 1981): 65-94. See especially p. 81.
9. *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (1975-1982)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984), 279.
10. Two important works on the origins of the Cultural Revolution and the reasons for its violence are Hong
    Yung Lee, *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) and
    Lynn T. White III, *Policies of Chaos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

omous individuals. Two principle reactions emerged from the mass mobilization and extremely violent stage of the CR. The first of these was largely felt by the Party, and it reinforced every CCP prejudice about the inability of Chinese people to act constructively unless they were led by the Party. Unmediated popular actions created chaos. The lessons drawn by the Chinese people were diverse, with some, particularly older people, sharing this fear of chaos. But young people who were badly used by the CR began to look at the CCP more critically. Large numbers of people were disillusioned by the CR and began to think of alternatives to existing patterns of Party rule.

In 1976, a third instance of mass political participation occurred, unmediated by the Party. In the waning days of Mao's life, factional battles for succession were underway. The "Gang of Four," Mao's closest allies, went on the offensive after the death of Zhou Enlai in January, attacking "capitalist roaders" in the Party, especially the rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping. The Gang forbade all but the most minimal ceremonies to commemorate Zhou. This impropriety provoked many Chinese people, and in early April 1976, at the time of the Qingming Festival, when Chinese traditionally honor their departed relatives by sweeping their tombs, thousands of Chinese in Beijing and other cities paid homage to Zhou, voiced their support for Deng, and signified their opposition to the Gang and somewhat more indirectly, to Mao and the entire system of Party rule. In the short term, the Gang suppressed the crowds, and Deng was purged again. But popular action demonstrated to more moderate Party leaders that the Gang lacked popular support, encouraging the moderates to arrest the Gang after Mao's death in September.[11]

Another round of demands by the people for citizenship occurred in late 1978 and early 1979. The yet again rehabilitated Deng Xiaoping originally encouraged the expression of popular grievances in Beijing as part of his strategy to become China's preeminent leader. But the torrent of views appearing at "Democracy Wall" was not all supportive of Deng's attempts to reform China's economy and China's political system. Eloquent spokesmen for true democracy appeared, arguing that China could not modernize without democratizing. Deng's patience with the Democracy Wall movement expired, and beginning in March 1979, he initiated a process which suppressed the nascent democratic movement. Most importantly, Deng asserted the primacy of the "Four Cardinal Principles": the socialist road, Party leadership, dictatorship of the proletariat (later changed to the People's Democratic Dictatorship) and Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought.[12] Any statement or writing which challenged these principles could not be tolerated. Of course it was left for the Party, especially the leadership, to decide if these vague guidelines were actually being undermined.

11. The events of 1976 are captured well in Roger Garside, *Coming Alive: China After Mao* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1981), especially chapters 1-7.
12. On the Democracy Wall Movement, again see Garside, chapters 8-17; Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), chapters 1 and 2; and *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, especially 166-191.

But the Party was in an awkward position. Deng's elevation to undisputed top leader in December 1978 was accompanied by a change in the Party's program. The economic modernization of China was now the key task facing the Party and the people, and mass movements, particularly those promoting class struggle, were declared to be invalid mechanisms of Party rule. Deng was frank in his recognition that intellectuals played an indispensable role in China's modernization. Modernization required intellectuals to be citizens. Yet Deng and his colleagues were unprepared to consider fundamental changes in China's political constitution which would allow broad, meaningful partic-ipation by the Chinese people in fundamental affairs of state. These conflicting views were a prescription for continued clashes between the Party and the people throughout the 1980s.

The first such clash occurred in late 1986. In mid-1986, Deng argued that economic reform required political reform. Deng's ideas on political reform actually constituted quite marginal changes in the political system. Students and intellectuals, reflecting the spirit of Deng's ideas, if not their content, began to articulate demands for political opening, culminating in a series of demonstrations in major Chinese cities in December 1986 and January 1987. Deng was clearly disturbed by the demands for democracy, and he forced the Party's General Secretary, Hu Yaobang, the leader most sympathetic to the students' demands, to resign.[13]

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The most recent clash reflecting the conflicting imperatives of citizenship versus a mass-like view of the Chinese people occurred between April and June 1989. On the death of Hu Yaobang on April 15, 1989, students took to the streets demanding political change. By the time Mikhail Gorbachev arrived in China for the Sino-Soviet summit on May 15, hundreds of thousands of people were demonstrating, and on the day of his departure, more than a million people in Beijing had joined the students in demanding political opening. Other large demonstrations took place in most major Chinese cities. Zhao Ziyang, Hu Yaobang's successor as General Secretary, was willing to listen to the people's demands, but he was overruled (and ultimately deposed) by most other Party leaders and a group of "retired" Party elders. After a stand-off of several weeks, when it was clear the leadership would not yield

13. On these developments, see Orville Schell, *Discoes and Democracy* (New York: Pantheon, 1988) and David Bachman, "Varieties of Chinese Conservatism and the Fall of Hu Yaobang," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* Vol. VII, No. 1 (Spring 1988): 22-46.

to the demonstrators, who refused to leave Tiananmen Square, the Party leadership convinced the military to suppress the people, which it did savagely on June 3-4, 1989. Once again, Deng Xiaoping played a key role in refusing to change the nature of Party rule in China.[14]

CONCLUSION

This pattern of a Party virulently opposed to treating the people it rules as citizens, but with ever larger numbers of Chinese demanding to be treated as citizens, now poses perhaps irresolvable problems for the Party. The events of June 1989 have caused the Party to lose much of its legitimacy. The lack of legitimacy does not necessarily mean that the CCP will fall from power in the near term; there are a number of illegitimate political systems in the world, such as in South Africa, which show no sign of disappearing soon. However, the loss of legitimacy makes it very difficult for the CCP to achieve much of anything at a time when China faces profound economic and social problems. It cannot count on the willing compliance of the populace. The people might be coerced into certain kinds of actions, but in the long term, coercion is antithetical to modernization.

Recent events also pose a challenge to the Party itself. Prior to Mao's death in 1976, Party membership was composed overwhelmingly of peasants, who in the final analysis, were seen as its key constituency. Since 1976, however, the Party has tried actively to recruit intellectuals into its membership. Especially in upper-level leadership positions, the Party has moved in an increasingly technocratic direction, implicitly identifying intellectuals as its key constituency.[15] Now, in light of the Tiananmen massacre, any hope of building support for the Party from China's intellectuals has vanished. Where does the Party look for recruits? What characteristics is it looking for in potential recruits? What social groups now will provide support for the Party's rule? There are no obvious answers to any of these questions, all of which compound the CCP's legitimacy crisis.

The CCP has been in power now for forty years. In that time it has alienated progressively larger and larger elements of the Chinese population because it has failed to see the Chinese people as citizens. To most Party leaders, the Chinese people are masses. Indeed, Party rule as they know it is only possible with a "mass view" of the Chinese people. The Party's inability to keep pace with an increasingly diverse and assertive society is its greatest shortcoming, one which will prove ultimately to be its fatal flaw.

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14. I discuss these developments in more detail in my article, "China's Politics: Conservatism Prevails," *Current History* Vol. 89, No. 539 (September 1989): 257-260, 296-297, 320.

15. On China's emerging technocracy, see Li Cheng and Lynn White, "The Thirteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: From Mobilizers to Managers," *Asian Survey* Vol. XXVIII, No. 4 (April 1988): 371-399, and Li Cheng and David Bachman, "Localism, Elitism, and Immobilism: Elite Formation and Social Change in Post-Mao China," *World Politics* Vol. XLII, No. 1 (October 1989): 64-94.