

China's Political Reforms: A Net Assessment

By KENNETH LIEBERTHAL

ABSTRACT: China's leaders since the death of Mao Zedong have tried to reform the political system so as to reduce the level of political coercion, increase the use of rational/legal processes, put talented individuals into responsible positions, enhance their capacity to base decisions on pragmatic criteria, and restore and strengthen the legitimacy of the polity. Their efforts to further these goals have produced important results, but the reforms still have not taken root. The reforms have been hedged in by fundamental untouchables, resisted by uncooperative cadres, and undercut by the inherent incompatibility of different components of the reform package itself. The prognosis for the various elements of the reform effort depends both on keeping the initiative in the hands of the reformers at the top of the Communist party and on achieving good results in the economic arena.

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THE Chinese have been trying to revamp their political system since 1977. Like related efforts in economics,¹ these political changes are a reaction to the enormous problems that Mao Zedong bequeathed his successors when he died in 1976.

Mao's gargantuan attempt in his last decade to steer China away from a "revisionist" course left a political shambles. The Cultural Revolution's encouragement of mass violence and factional conflict produced a radical de-institutionalization of the political system. Bureaucratic information channels became blocked or seriously distorted. Factional conflict affected both personnel appointments and policy outcomes. Political coercion within the governing bodies and toward the populace reached extraordinarily high levels. Fundamental disagreements divided even the highest-level leaders over such basic issues as the rules by which the system should be governed. The leadership's capacity to acquire good information, to base decisions on the substantive merits of issues, to have those decisions implemented in a prudent and conscientious way, and to elicit support from the population for this entire process had all seriously eroded between 1966 and 1976.

REFORM GOALS AND INITIATIVES

In response to this situation, Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues launched a wide-ranging series of efforts to reform the political system. In broad terms,

1. Good overviews of the economic reform effort and its results are available in, for example, the symposium published in the *China Business Review*, pp. 8-27 (Nov.-Dec. 1983).

their policies seek to achieve the following goals:

- to reduce the level of political coercion throughout the system;
- to reduce the salience of patron-client relations, of factionalism, and of corruption while expanding the role of rational/legal processes in the polity and bringing into power successors with functional expertise;
- to enhance the capacity of the political organs to reach decisions based on pragmatic criteria; and
- to restore and strengthen the legitimacy of the polity.

The resulting political system will ideally be more capable of managing a wrenching evolution into modernity while maintaining the country's political stability. In more detail, the following reform initiatives have been taken to date.

Reducing coercion

There has been much attention devoted in the Western media to the vicissitudes of China's policy toward intellectual freedom. The "anti-pollution" campaign that flared up in the fall of 1983 raised the specter both domestically and abroad of another bout of radical know-nothingism. Although the line that defines the politically permissible continues to shift erratically, two basic changes have, on balance, made China significantly less coercive.

First, political labels on individuals have been removed step by step. China as of 1976 practiced severe discrimination against large groups of people based solely on political criteria. To have a bad label—as a landlord, capitalist, rightist,

bad element, and so forth—severely limited one's opportunities for employment, marriage, and perhaps even freedom. This system has in the main been dismantled since 1978.

Virtually all of the approximately 150,000 remaining rightists have been restored to full citizenship. Landlords and capitalists have generally been proclaimed to be peasants and workers now that they have "adequately reformed." About 2.9 million Party members who were judged to be counterrevolutionaries during the Cultural Revolution have formally been rehabilitated. And countless thousands—indeed, probably millions—of others who bore one stigmatizing label or another have received relief via the efforts to redress past mistakes.²

The formal declaration that class struggle and political campaigns would no longer be the driving forces of China's revolution gave doctrinal underpinning to this substantial decline in the ranks of the pariah groups. Campaigns and struggles in the past had sometimes appeared from afar to involve fairly high-minded attempts to raise the populace to new levels of political purity. But in China the police and the labor camps were two of the key instruments of these so-called consciousness-raising efforts.

Second, the decline in coercion has been manifested in genuine encouragement of discussion and debate. During Mao's last decade, even top leaders found that almost anything they said might well be regarded primarily as an indicator of their political orthodoxy—

at a time when unorthodox thoughts brought disaster. Since 1978, however, a wide range of views is solicited on many problems—although not on fundamental goals and priorities. Ministerial journals, technical periodicals, the general media, and private conversations are often spiced with relatively clear advocacy of competing positions. The reduction in political coercion, in short, has permitted a very substantial improvement in the quality of discourse on public policy.

*Rational/legal processes
and the succession*

Much of the effort since 1978 has aimed at re-institutionalizing the polity and, relatedly, at putting people of talent in leadership positions so these strengthened institutions will produce good outcomes. As the Cultural Revolution undermined standard operating procedures and immersed individuals in a terror-filled environment, patron-client ties emerged as the major way to accomplish tasks and get ahead. Factions based on personal loyalties that extended across formal institutional boundaries became key combatants for the spoils of the political system. These factional ties were nurtured by exchanging favors that ranged from personnel appointments to procurement of scarce resources, provision of political support or protection, and other similar practices. In short, corruption based on political power became a defining characteristic of China's politics.³

This insidious development had many unhealthy ramifications for the

2. Richard Krauss analyzes this system of political labels in his *Class and Class Conflict in Chinese Socialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981).

3. On Chinese factions, see, for example, Lucian Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981).

political system. It became very difficult to place the best-qualified people in executive positions because these positions were seen as part of the spoils of factional fighting. Rules on the books might affect forms and appearances, but they proved relatively weak in structuring actual behavior. Political discipline and the prestige of the political apparatus among the populace naturally suffered accordingly. Some political science literature notes that a little corruption can have beneficent effects on the politics of a developing country,⁴ but the corruption in China grew to such an extent that it considerably harmed the polity.

Sharp divisions over substantive issues exacerbated the effects of corruption, as corrupt relationships shielded individuals who opposed and sabotaged current policy.⁵ This lingering phenomenon still endangers the political and economic reforms because foot dragging by opponents makes it more difficult to produce the promised improvements in standards of living and personal security.

The pervasiveness and complexity of the intertwined problems of patron-client relations, factionalism and corruption sparked an appropriately wide-ranging mix of measures to improve the situation. At the end of 1978 the Party decided to establish a hierarchy of Discipline Inspection Commissions to investigate and root out corruption and violations of rules within the Party. The new Party constitution, adopted in 1982, considerably stiffened the rules for membership and training. These mea-

asures were preparatory to the projected three-year Party rectification campaign that began in the winter of 1983-84. This campaign is supposed to be aimed especially at identifying and removing those Party members who still support a more leftist position than current policy dictates. The campaign is also intended to instill appropriate norms in the Party cadre.

Beyond the use of disciplinary bodies and related measures, a range of additional initiatives aims at buttressing the rational/legal elements in determining personnel appointments and policy outcomes. For example, elections in which candidates exceed posts have been held for key government positions up to the level of the county. These can be—and have been—manipulated by the authorities, but they have also to some limited extent reduced the ability of individuals to use political appointments as a way to build factional support.⁶ Within both the Party and the government, moreover, the personnel rules are being changed so as to try to encourage the appointment of younger and better-educated people to executive positions.

A related initiative aims at reducing dramatically the multiple hat wearing of office holders. Before 1978 it was common for a high-ranking Party official, for example, to hold a corresponding executive position in the government and/or the military. This not only overly concentrated power; it also enhanced the potential for factional domination of individual offices and units, as one key person and his

4. See, for example, Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 59-71.

5. This is confirmed, for example, by the Commentator article in *People's Daily*, 14 Feb. 1984, trans. in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, 15 Feb. 1984, pp. K1-3.

6. Barrett McCormick, of the University of Washington, provides a good analysis of this problem in his "Leninist Implementation: The Election Campaign," in *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China*, ed. David M. Lampton (n.p., forthcoming).

followers could monopolize all the core positions. Between 1978 and 1983, in at least the most highly visible leadership positions down to the county level, this phenomenon was nearly abolished.

Personnel changes have aimed at more than reducing multiple hat wearing and breaking up factions. During the Cultural Revolution China recruited about 18 million new members into the Party, and many of these obtained official posts. After the Cultural Revolution, as already noted, about 3 million former officials were brought back to power. The new reform initiatives, however, required that many of the people from both these groups be removed—the former because they opposed current policy and the latter because they had become too old and lacked requisite skills. The attempts to remove these individuals have been combined with related efforts to slim down and rationalize the country's political institutions.

The numbers reflect the effects of these efforts. During 1983 about 70 percent of the 1400 provincial-level rehabilitees were removed and were replaced by a smaller number of better-educated officials. Overall, the number of provincial Party secretaries has dropped from 300 to 150, and the average age of these incumbents has declined from 63 to 56 years old. The percent with some college education has risen from 10 to 40 percent. Comparable changes have occurred in the highest positions in the State Council. Comparable figures are lacking, however, on the mass of cadres below the top leadership positions at each level of the national hierarchy.

The reduction in multiple hat wearing and the replacement of older cadres by younger and better-educated counter-

parts is supposed to occur as much at the peak of the polity—in the politburo and its related organs—as in other units. China's media constantly tout the need to rejuvenate the leading organs and pass leadership on to a second and third generation. The object is both to avoid another debilitating succession struggle and to guide the country to modernization with technically qualified people in place of the old generals who survive from the early days of the revolution.

Enhancing decision-making capacities

Ever since Deng Xiaoping in the spring of 1978 declared that China must "seek truth from facts and make practice the sole criterion of truth," the authorities have taken many measures to improve the political system's capacity to make pragmatic decisions. The previously noted increased freedom of lower-ranking cadres to state their views has itself contributed significantly to a more pragmatic decision-making style. But the efforts in this sphere have gone well beyond loosening the ideological straitjacket.

Several bureaucratic initiatives merit attention. There is a renewed stress on rationally allocating responsibility among members of the Party and government committees; the head of each committee is now prohibited from simply imposing his views on the members. In addition, decision making has been somewhat decentralized. Many decisions previously had to be made by the central organs in Beijing, even though these organs lacked adequate information and cooperated only very poorly with each other. Now, by contrast, some of these decisions are made by lower-level, territorial Party

and government committees that are close to the problems and better situated to coordinate the efforts of the relevant local specialized agencies.

Educated individuals are also being brought into executive positions. Many of those with a higher education who had been purged and vilified during Mao's last years have now been given responsible positions. As political agencies develop leading groups that are more educationally competent, the use of hard data as an element in decision making should increase.

There is also a more systematic effort to gather and disseminate pertinent data. The state statistical system was reduced to bureaucratic rubble during the Cultural Revolution. Substantial efforts have been made since the late 1970s to resuscitate this system and to increase its ability to withstand political pressures.⁷ Numerous new publications, moreover, are transmitting the fruits of this and related data-gathering efforts to interested parties throughout the polity.

None of the foregoing measures is a panacea. All, though, contribute to the system's ability to reach good decisions and to respond quickly to changing circumstances.

Restoring and strengthening legitimacy

Most reform initiatives help mitigate the crisis of legitimacy—or what the Chinese refer to as the crisis of confidence—that the system suffered by the late 1970s. Some measures, of course, have had a double edge, in that they

7. At the height of the Cultural Revolution, the State Statistical Bureau had only 14 people left in its central office. On the rehabilitated statistical system, see the series of articles in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, 17 Feb. 1984, pp. K17-21.

actually decrease the legitimacy of the system for those individuals who rose rapidly when other priorities obtained during the Cultural Revolution. On balance, though, a more pragmatic, efficient, rational/legal, and less coercive regime is likely to win some favor from most Chinese, especially after the turmoil of the past.

But the hangover after the Cultural Revolution binge has proven prolonged and painful; millions of youths, especially, are severely disillusioned. Corruption and patriarchal behavior have raised charges about a new class of bureaucrats, while increased exposure to the outside world has created a revolution of rising material expectations. Modernization is itself a profoundly unsettling transition, no less in China than elsewhere.

Some reform policies seek specifically to cope with the legitimacy issue. Many of these have been economic, as the ability to deliver a rising standard of living has explicitly become one basis of the Chinese Communist party's rationale for governing.⁸ But other measures have been political. These include the new election system up to the county level, mentioned earlier; strengthening the governmental representative bodies—the People's Congresses—and the various united front organizations; and the attacks on corruption by the Discipline Inspection Commissions.

On a broader level, the leaders are seeking a balance between greater freedom of thought and the promotion

8. See, for example, the speech given by General Secretary Hu Yaobang on a tour of Sichuan and Guizhou Provinces, where he said, "What do the people want the Communist Party to do? First, to gain liberation. Second, to get rich." *Sichuan Radio*, 8 Feb. 1984, trans. in *Daily Report: People's Republic of China*, 9 Feb. 1984, p. K11.

of an ideological orthodoxy to legitimize the system. The new orthodoxy is an uneasy amalgam of several elements: those parts of Mao Zedong's legacy that are most compatible with current policy; the *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*,⁹ which gives definition to the new political priorities; and broad appeals based on the patriotic bonds that are supposed to unite all Chinese.

OBSTACLES TO REFORM

The efforts to reform the political system are wide ranging. Nevertheless, the reforms have been hedged in by fundamental untouchables, resisted by uncooperative cadres, and undercut by the very incompatibility of different elements in the reform package. While significant reforms have nevertheless taken hold, it is important to understand the factors that have limited—and will continue to circumscribe—the results of these initiatives.

First, there are sharp conceptual limits to the scope of the reforms. Even the leading reformers are basically still Leninists and will not tolerate a shift away from a patriarchal system toward a fundamentally more democratic and rational/legal polity.¹⁰ Deng Xiaoping's "four basic principles" highlight this fact. They demand that the Communist party remain the sole leading party in China; that Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought—including the "enrichment" of the latter by Deng and other top leaders—remain the sole permissible

ideological system; that the socialist path remain the sole legitimate path the country can follow; and that the people's democratic dictatorship remain the country's state system for the indefinite future.

These principles have themselves been subject to varying interpretations on specifics—for example, as to what, concretely, defines "the socialist path"—but they are in their entire thrust profoundly restrictive. The Communist Party will monopolize political power, but the Party in turn must be disciplined and led from the top down. While "practice is the sole criterion of truth" on concrete and limited matters, all fundamental truths must derive from, or at least be made compatible with, Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Although economic reforms may permit foreign direct investment in China, *de facto* decollectivization of agriculture, and the encouragement of small-scale private industry, the bulk of the industrial, finance, and trade systems must remain publicly owned and operated. And the people's democratic dictatorship is a state form designed to oppress those who disagree over fundamentals.

This broad approach clearly penetrates into how the leaders think about everyday problems. For almost every issue, the path to improvement is still proclaimed to lie in having the leaders at each level properly understand the problem, commit themselves to it, and pay attention to it until it is solved. The key, in current Chinese thinking, thus remains always with the leaders, not with any autonomous bodies or staff.

Fundamentally, also, career success has continued to go primarily to those who carefully cultivate a bureaucratic base and then nurture that base as they

9. There have also been related publications of the selected works of Liu Shaoqi, Zhou Enlai, and Chen Yun.

10. These leaders are also influenced by China's long tradition of statecraft, which is likewise profoundly nondemocratic.

progress up the system.¹¹ This basic pattern of career mobility naturally strengthens the grip of patron-client relations on the polity and inhibits the selection of leading officials solely on the basis of talent.

Conceptually, in brief, the political reforms are the brain children of individuals who themselves are very much products of the Chinese system. While much significant tinkering may go on, therefore, more radical changes such as the creation of a truly multiparty system are not in the offing.

In the rough and tumble of Chinese politics, also, the reforms must contend with significant opposition. In some cases, those in charge of some specific reform are also the targets of that same initiative. This has been very much the case with local cadres who must oversee the nomination and election process to fill the offices that they themselves hold. Similarly, the Discipline Inspection Commissions were initially put under the leadership of the Party committee at their own bureaucratic level. But the primary targets of the Discipline Inspection Commissions were to be the very Party committees—and their subordinate organs—that had charge of them!¹² The current three-year Party-rectification campaign suffers from the same problem, and these examples could be multiplied many times over. They reflect the tensions inherent in trying to pre-

serve a patriarchal system while at the same time reforming it.

Balancing the political parts

The reform effort also presumes an altered balance among the basic territorial and bureaucratic building blocks of the Chinese system in a way that invites attempts from the losers to redress the balance. Territorially, the reforms—economic as well as political—should shift power and resources toward the coastal cities and away from the heartland. Bureaucratically, the reforms have important implications for the five basic building blocks of the system: economics, culture-propaganda, security, personnel, and the hierarchy of first secretaries of Party committees.

The economic bureaucracies are in charge of economic management and growth. Reform for them means enhancing efficiency and achieving a new sectoral balance that gives lower priority to development of the producer-goods industries. The cultural bureaucracies, by contrast, have responsibility for maintaining a political esprit while adapting to the demands of the economic development program. The reform program has given the cultural bureaucracies the twin tasks of freeing scientific and technological research from political constraints while bolstering a commitment to socialism and a spirit of patriotism throughout the populace.

The security bureaucracies cover everything from crime and fire fighting to political dissidence, counterespionage, and national defense. Reform to them means increasing adherence to law, lightening political repression, limiting foreign subversion, and modernizing the People's Liberation Army. The per-

11. This is the major lesson to be drawn from David M. Lampton's careful study of the careers of six major Chinese officials: *Paths to Power: Elite Mobility in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan China Center, forthcoming).

12. See Lawrence Sullivan, "The Role of the Control Organs in the Chinese Communist Party, 1978-1982" (Paper delivered at the Conference of the New York State Political Science Association, 1983).

sonnel bureaucracies control careers through the maintenance of personal dossiers and control over employment and promotion. While personnel units are embedded in economic enterprises and other organs, they in fact have their own sets of regulations independent of the host organs. Under the reform program, the personnel bureaucracies should cultivate and promote younger and better-educated individuals and weed out former leftists still in responsible positions.

Finally, the hierarchy of secretaries who lead the territorial Party committees reached a high point of power and influence as of the mid-1970s, when it was said that the "Party takes command of everything." The reforms, however, have forced these top Party executives to give up their concurrent posts in the government and/or military hierarchies. In addition, the watchword of the 1980s is to pull the Party out of detailed decision making in favor of having it concentrate on more general political tasks.

The reform program has thus had a complex effect on each of these bureaucracies. Some generalizations are, nevertheless, possible. First, the economic bureaucracies have to date gained the most, overall, from the program. They have greatly enhanced their control over economic decision making, allowing far less intrusion by the Communist Party than had previously been the case.

The power of the cultural-propaganda bureaucracies, by contrast, has been cut back. The reform program has played down the role of politics, when the *raison d'être* of these bureaucracies previously was to enforce political orthodoxy. Extensive contacts with overseas Chinese and with foreigners have simply

made the task of these bureaucracies more complex and difficult.

The security bureaucracies are in some ways in an even worse position. With the 2.9 million rehabilitations following the Cultural Revolution, numerous cadres who had been detained and abused by the security organs returned to positions of power. In addition, power within the security bureaucracies has now been divided somewhat. With the great increase in China's contacts abroad, moreover, the tasks of these bureaucracies have also become vastly more complex.

The military side of the security system has also had a mixed time with the reforms. Reportedly, high-ranking officers have been disgruntled over the denigration of Mao, have bridled at the greater political and cultural freedom allowed, and have chafed under the tight defense budgets that have accompanied the relegation of defense to fourth priority among the four modernizations.

The personnel system has been put in charge of cultivating and bringing into power a younger generation of better-educated cadres. Numerous reports indicate, however, that this bureaucracy had become a real stronghold of the leftists by the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Finally, as noted earlier, the leading secretaries in the territorial Party committees have had to yield both concurrent political positions and much decision-making authority.

The economic bureaucracies thus have clearly fared better than the cultural, security, personnel, and Party secretarial systems under the reforms. In the past, though, these other bureaucracies have time and again proven able to assert their interests vis-à-vis the

economic organs. It will still be some years before a stable balance is struck among these sectors.¹³

There are, finally, structural contradictions among the various elements in the political reform effort itself. For example, initiatives have been taken to disperse and institutionalize authority. In Beijing, therefore, there is no longer a cult of personality that permits one individual to be the unquestioned arbiter of major policies. The position of Party chairman has been abolished, and four major organs—the politburo, State Council, Secretariat, and Central Advisory Commission—make policy; whereas in Mao's last years only the first two existed.¹⁴ The degree of overlap of office holding has also diminished considerably. And the determination to prevent ruinous factional struggles and polarization of politics has meant that constant efforts have been made to fashion a consensus on issues in contention.¹⁵

The dispersion and only partial institutionalization of authority and the stress on consensus, while central components of the reform effort, also have the effect of attenuating other dimensions of that effort. Far-reaching change requires the centralization of authority in the hands of a reform group so that it

can keep the effort on track even when the reforms are still too new and untried to produce the promised results. The notion of radical change in a patriarchal system simply does not conform easily to the political preference for seeking and maintaining a consensus among decision makers.

A NET ASSESSMENT

It is simply inappropriate to proclaim the success or failure of China's post-Mao political reforms. It is possible, though, to indicate to what extent various important dimensions of the system have changed. Even this effort inevitably requires drawing conclusions where some data are either impressionistic or inconclusive. On balance, then, to what extent have real reforms taken hold in the Chinese polity since the death of Mao?

There has been a real and marked reduction in the level of political coercion. The state has essentially declared that a considerably narrower band of thought and activity should be deemed political in the sense that the state should monitor and control it. China has, in this sense, become far less a totalitarian society, although it remains highly authoritarian.¹⁶

Several concrete changes that are part of the reform effort have taken hold. There has been a substantial change in the people who hold positions at the vice-ministerial level and above in Beijing, at the vice-governor level and above in the provinces, and at the vice-magistrate level and above in the counties, with for the most part comparable

13. This analysis draws from Kenneth Lieberthal, "Reform Politics," *China Business Review* 10(6):10-12 (Nov.-Dec. 1983).

14. Of these four, the Central Advisory Commission is clearly the least powerful. Nevertheless, it does to some extent further disperse authority at the apex of the Chinese system.

15. For an excellent discussion of consensus and reform, see Christopher M. Clarke, "Changing the Context for Policy Implementation: Organizational and Personnel Reform in Post-Mao China," in *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China*, ed. Lampton; and David M. Lampton, "Water: Challenge to a Fragmented Political System," in *ibid.*

16. See Michel Oksenberg and Richard Bush, "China, 1972-1982: From Revolution to Reform," *Problems of Communism* (Sept. 1982).

changes occurring in the corresponding positions in the Party apparatus. Gross statistics, as noted previously, reveal that the new incumbents are generally younger and better educated and that the instances of multiple hat wearing have declined dramatically.

While these measures appear impressive, it is hard to gauge their real impact. New leaders appointed to provincial posts, for example, typically must work with an apparatus that remains loyal to their predecessors, who, more often than not, remain on the scene in some honorific post. Patterns of personal interaction will change only slowly, and in many cases clear institutional boundaries have yet to be drawn. China thus remains very much in a transitional stage, where some of the critical building blocks of a reformed polity have been put into place, but where they have not yet taken root. Current policies will have to be maintained for some years with constant attention devoted to making the reforms take hold before one can have real confidence in the permanence of the reform initiatives.

This issue of policy continuity focuses attention on the apex of the political system—the Party politburo and its related organs. While Deng Xiaoping has tried hard to put into place capable successors such as Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, Yao Yilin, and Wan Li, on balance what is impressive is the degree to which the old generals and aged revolutionaries still cling to power. The most powerful men currently, in terms of setting the broad outlines of policy, include Deng himself, who is 79 years old; Chen Yun, 79; Peng Zhen, 82; Li Xiannian, 78; and Ye Jianying, 86. The order in which these men leave the political stage can affect the thrust of the political-reform effort.

Nor is age a problem only at this highest level of decision making. Hu Yaobang is 69 and Zhao Ziyang is 66. The other sixteen members of the politburo average 73 years old; only four of them are under 70. Of the nine members of the Secretariat, eight are 68 to 71 years old. And the five leading members of the Military Affairs Commission average 82.5 years old; at 79, Deng is the youngest of them. When one considers that the Central Advisory Committee was to be the body to which older leaders would retire with honor, the problem with removing aged people from power stands out in even bolder relief.

Fundamentally, moreover, individuals remain more important than institutions in China, and the promulgation of new laws and administrative decrees alone will not change this in any serious way. To alter this situation substantially would require a very basic change in both ideology and psychology.

The question of legitimacy remains another difficult issue.¹⁷ The reformers are trying to walk what may be a very thin line. They are pursuing a program that should encourage the development of pluralistic forces and have decried the kind of political fanaticism that characterized the Cultural Revolution era. But they are still determined to maintain a patriarchal system, where some combination of patriotism, commitment to socialism, material satisfaction, and fear of social instability binds the populace to the polity and legitimizes the system. Legitimacy is hard to measure, moreover, because no methodologically rigor-

17. Frederick Teiwes has wrestled with the legitimacy issue in his *Leadership, Legitimacy, and Conflict in China* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1984), esp. pts. 2 and 3.

ous opinion surveys have been done. Also, the degree to which the current system enjoys legitimacy inevitably varies greatly among different population sectors.

Many peasants have benefited enormously in material terms from the recent reforms; former Red Guards, by contrast, have generally been shunted aside to make way for the better-educated younger generation. To the extent that proposed changes in labor policy are actually implemented, ambitious workers will benefit while others will lose the greatest benefit that the system had given them—total job security. The legitimacy of the system is unlikely to increase for these latter individuals. Numerous additional obstacles to enhancing the overall legitimacy of the system loom on the political horizon. Challenges will arise from the continuing exposure to foreign accomplishments, from increasing inequality in the distribution of domestic resources, from the inevitable tensions of the transition to

an industrial society, and from myriad other sources.

Since 1977 China's leaders have proven willing to test an impressive range of political reform measures to try to cope with the new challenges confronting the largest polity in the world. This task is so daunting and complex that there is no way at this point to specify the degree to which each of these reform initiatives will succeed. Clearly, much will depend on the smoothness of the succession at the top during the coming years. Economic performance will also greatly affect the support that current policies engender, both among the populace and within the elite. On balance, the political reforms have not proceeded nearly as far as have their much heralded economic counterparts. In the future, political rejuvenation will likely continue to trail behind economic change, and the tensions between the two may at some point emerge as the central issue confronting the People's Republic of China.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q (Ralph Goldberg, University of the District of Columbia): What is the present strength of regional influences in China, and how do such influences either help or hinder any of the efforts at central reform?

A: I believe that the current reform effort will, if it is carried through, significantly enhance regional inequality in China. The regions that will grow rapidly and that will become major economic forces throughout Asia are Southeast China, especially Guangdong Province, stretching into Guangxi, which will be primarily energy related; the eastern end of the Yangtze from

Shanghai up to Nanjing and perhaps as far as Wuhan, which will be the center of China's entrepreneurial skills; and then the northern region around Beijing and southern Manchuria, which will be a heavy industrial base and also obviously the bureaucratic center.

People who currently staff leading organs in China in general come not from these regions but from the interior. There is a question of whether, over the longer run, the gradual redistribution of resources in the country will be sustained by a central leadership that largely hails from the areas that will be losing out in relative terms. I have asked

some Chinese about this and one of the comments that I have heard is that, if the current reforms continue, over time we will see more and more people from the eastern regions moved into the top positions, because they are the technocrats in the bureaucracies in central ministries. These technocrats will be able to sustain this type of growing regional inequality.

COMMENT (Lee): One way the Chinese are going to deal with that problem is to centralize the party or parties so that the top level will maintain tight political authority over the provincial party, while at the same time allowing the decentralization of the operation of the government.

Q (Dr. Stiklorius, Wallingford, Pennsylvania): The reforms occurring in China do not change the fact that the government there is a brutal Communist dictatorship that has murdered millions more people than even Hitler and Stalin. The human-rights record of the Chinese regime is atrocious. We frequently condemn the Republic of South Africa for its bad record. Therefore, should we also boycott Communist China, or is our greed for profits from the Chinese market so big that we forget about the beautiful principles of human rights?

A: I would agree that the human-rights record has been pretty bad and that during the height of the Cultural Revolution and at the height of earlier campaigns in China, it reached truly dramatic proportions. It is also important to understand that that record has improved a great deal since the Cultural Revolution.

The United States is always caught, to a degree, in a dilemma when it deals with governments that do not have our political system and that do not respect

human rights to the degree we do; and these are the vast majority of governments of the world, as you well know.

The question is, How much can be accomplished by condemning those governments and using U.S. public resources to try to isolate them in the world arena, versus trying to work with those governments and potentially in some indirect and obviously limited way improving the chances of a more tolerant political system? I think that in the Chinese case we have opted for the latter. My own sense is that that is a more productive approach, and therefore it is one I would support. I do not think that we should totally neglect human rights in China. If repression were to increase again, I think we should certainly take note of that and make representations privately to the Chinese about it. But I believe that the public condemnation should be done by private groups. On a government-to-government level, all sides, including the Chinese people, are better served by a cooperative, reasonable, and non-vituperative bilateral relationship.

Q (Stiklorius): The Chinese Communists are friendly to us because they are eager to get our advanced technology, nuclear plants, computers, and so on. What assurances do we have that they, after having received all our most advanced technology, will not turn back to their old friends in Moscow?

A: I think the simple answer is we have no assurances. We have no credible assurances in part because the current leaders will not still be on the political stage 20 or so years from now, which is the period that you are looking at. I think instead what we have to ask ourselves is, What kind of China do we

want to see 20 years from now, and how do we want to position ourselves with relation to that country. What I fear, frankly, over the next 20 years is not so much a strong China, allied with the Soviet Union, as a weak China that invites aggression from the Soviet Union. I think that will be highly destabilizing, and that is a concern that I think should be high on our political agenda.

I suspect that 20 years from now, if China's modernization proceeds in a reasonably smooth and consistent way, that it will be a country that we find uncomfortable to deal with. It will be more assertive in the international arena, and it will still have values and priorities that are not totally in line with our own. But I do not see any reason for assuming that the Soviets will be any more comfortable with the Chinese or that Soviet and Chinese values will be any closer than our values are to either of theirs.

You are dealing with different cultures, with significantly different political systems. They share a long border, and I do not think that that is a situation that will be conducive to future close cooperation or future alliance simply because the Chinese have managed to develop their economy with reasonable speed and efficiency.

Q (Marc Blecher, Oberlin College, Ohio): How would one characterize the Maoist system in terms of combinations of patron-client, patriarchal, bureaucratic, totalitarian, and authoritarian elements?

A (Lee): I have been trying to avoid using any particular labels for the Maoist system and the political system that existed in China after the Cultural

Revolution up to the fall of the Gang of Four. My feeling is that that was a transitional period where the power balance among the factions characterized the system. No faction was in a dominant position to impose one ideological view.

COMMENT (Lieberthal): Let me just draw a couple of distinctions around the terms that you used, Marc. I referred to China as a patriarchal society. By that I did not mean patron-client. To me a patriarchal society is one in which the top leadership presumes that it essentially monopolizes the wisdom on what policies are correct. Decisions therefore flow downward, rather than being developed by a range of reasonably autonomous bodies that compete with each other in some way. In that sense I think China under Mao was patriarchal. China under Deng Xiaoping is, I think, equally patriarchal in that fundamental way. I also noted that China under Mao was totalitarian. In fact, in a strict sense, there are all kinds of problems with that classification, but in relative terms, "totalitarian" to me means that a society has an extremely wide range of things considered to be political. In other words, the boundary between politics and society is not strong; politics pervades almost everything. And while, as all China specialists know, those boundaries shifted at different times under Mao, fundamentally China was a society in which an extraordinarily wide range of things was considered political. I think that has changed very substantially since Mao died; and China is now a more authoritarian society, in which essentially there are a lot of things that the state really does not care about. If a person wants to raise canaries and walk along the street with them, that is not a political statement. If a scientist wants

to advocate a particular theory in nuclear physics, that is not a political statement. Those things were political before.

The patron-client ties, I think, became important because under Mao there was a de-institutionalization of the system. While the level of political coercion was high during the Cultural Revolution, it was not monopolized and institutionalized, but rather was diffused within the society. As normal political institutions broke down, bureaucratic ways of accomplishing things ceased to be effective, and old personal ties became increasingly important for getting things done. It is those patron-client ties that I am talking about.

The current trend is toward a re-institutionalization of the system and a reaffirmation of bureaucratic approaches to accomplishing things. In a top-down system, though, it is difficult to make fundamental progress in that. Once you have a highly faction-ridden system, it is difficult to rout it out. To the extent that it is routed out, there will be an increasing importance of bureaucratic pluralism in the politics of the People's Republic of China.

Q (Lynn White, Princeton University, New Jersey): Are the reforms that are described really consistent? Are they logically unified? They seem to be a reaction to the Cultural Revolution, but the Cultural Revolution might have two very different lessons. From the lesson of its chaos, a Chinese might think there

should now be more centralization, more law and order, more economic control. From a lesson of its intolerance, though, and its lack of diversity, the exact opposite conclusions might be drawn—that there should be more pluralism, more participation, more gathering of information from all sorts of people.

Are the reforms and the modernization ambiguous? Are the legal reforms to protect non-state persons or merely to rationalize and make more predictable—as, for example, Stalin's legal reforms in the 1930s did—a state apparatus? Are the administrative streamlining and the quick turnover of personnel, presumably recruited on a somewhat consistent set of principles, going to make for less diversity? Are these reforms going to increase the scope of people to decide or oppose decisions or will it really increase participation?

A: There are inherent contradictions in the reform effort, and that is one reason I have termed it an effort and not a program. There are a lot of thrusts to what the Chinese are trying to do, some of which require a dispersion of authority while others require a concentration of authority. It is not clear how one reconciles that. The Chinese are trying to make the ideology looser, if you will, more compatible with a wide range of different kinds of initiatives. No one really knows what eventual balances should be struck. At the same time, they are seeking to articulate an ideological framework that would legitimize the whole effort.