

CHAMBERS POLITICAL SPOTLIGHTS

POLITICS IN

CHINA

FROM MAO TO
DENG

IAN DERBYSHIRE

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CHINA
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DENG

Ian Derbyshire
Ph.D. Cantab

Chambers

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About the Series

Chambers Political Spotlights aim to provide a bridge between conventional textbooks and contemporary reporting. Each title examines the key political, economic and social changes of the country, providing, in addition, a brief contextual background to each development discussed.

Preface

The years after 1972 saw Mao Zedong and his able, but ageing, lieutenant Zhou Enlai set about reconstructing China's shattered political system after the chaos of the 'Cultural Revolution'. They were opposed in this work, however, by the ultra-leftist 'Gang of Four' led by Mao's wife, Jiang Qing.

Zhou and Mao finally died in 1976 and a violent succession struggle ensued involving the 'Gang of Four' and a group of Zhouist modernisers led by the elderly Deng Xiaoping. Neither side emerged victorious at first and, instead, Hua Guofeng, a moderate and loyal Maoist, was elected as the CPC's stop-gap leader. Hua proceeded to order the arrest of the 'Gang of Four' and dominated Chinese politics for twenty-seven months.

Hua's authority was, however, progressively challenged by Deng, who, after expanding his power base, finally emerged as de-facto leader of the country after the 3rd Plenum of the 11th CPC Central Committee in December 1978. Deng proceeded to dominate Chinese affairs during the following eight years and radically remodelled its political and economic system, establishing in power a new generation of leaders, effecting a proper balance between the state, party and military, and embarking upon a path of 'market socialism' in agriculture and industry.

This Spotlight examines the key changes in the Chinese political and economic system during the years between 1972 and 1987. It looks at the changing functions of political institutions, at factional struggles within the CPC, at the modernisation programmes of Zhou and Deng and at changes in China's foreign policy.

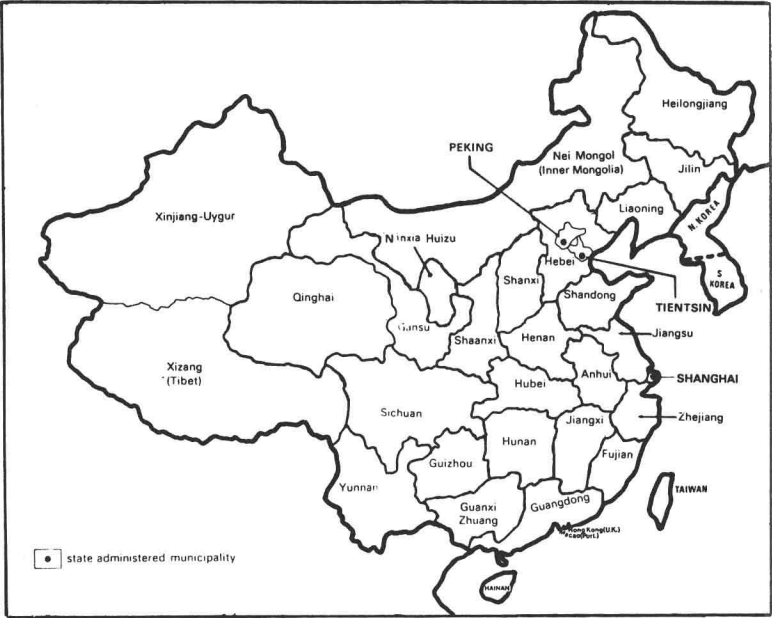


FIGURE 1: The Provinces of China

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Part One

THE CHINESE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Peasants, Mandarins and Emperors: The Chinese Polity Before 1949

The political development of contemporary China has been influenced by three chief factors: the continued economic backwardness and poverty of what remains a predominantly agricultural nation; an inherited cultural system and social tradition which has stressed the virtues of corporatism and obedience rather than individualism and democracy; and the country's longstanding history and experience of unified and bureaucratic administration.

China, with an area of 3.7 million square miles, is equivalent in size to the United States, but boasts a population today in excess of one billion, a figure four and a half times that of America. This dense population, a quarter of the world's total, is crowded into the eastern third of the nation and the vast majority is employed in agricultural tillage. China remains ranked among the poorest nations in the world, with a GNP per capita of barely \$330 per annum in 1985, one twentieth of the figure recorded by the Soviet Union and a fortieth of that of the United States.

During the period before 1600, by contrast, China was at the forefront of world culture and boasted the most advanced and sophisticated administrative and agricultural systems then visible. A unified empire, encompassing much of the area of present-day China, was established as early as 206 BC by the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) which employed educated bureaucrats steeped in the ancient, secular thought of Confucianism. This philosophy stressed the importance of honour and virtue for the nation's rulers and of loyal and deferential respect for tradition, patriarchy and seniority among the general population. From the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD) onwards, these 'mandarin' bureaucrats were recruited

through a competitive and open system of public examinations. They formed a scholar gentry élite which ruled the country in conjunction with a 'divine' emperor and powerful regional potentates in a relatively centralised manner. The stable and sophisticated political systems of the Tang and subsequent Song (960-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties provided a framework within which impressive technical and economic developments took place. Most notable was the construction of a large and advanced communications and irrigation network which criss-crossed eastern China, encouraged the outward extension of cultivation and raised agricultural yields, providing the basis for the tripling in size of the nation's population. It rose from a figure of 150 million in 1400 to 430 million in 1850, a figure equivalent to more than a third of the world's total.

This rapid increase in population served, however, to depress the 'economic surplus' and meant that little quantitative or qualitative increase in per capita national income was registered between 1400 and 1800. Lacking a stimulus to develop, few advances were made in the nation's industrial technologies and inward-looking China found itself falling progressively behind the West from the 18th century onwards. The country's final dynasty, the Manchu Qings (1644-1911), faced mounting internal rebellion, as population pressure increased, and was forced, following military defeats, to make humiliating Treaty Port concessions to Britain, France, Germany, Russia and Japan. A number of Chinese intellectuals, acutely aware of their country's relative decline, saw the need to learn from the industrialising West and to modernise both the nation's economy and its cultural system. However, they were to be blocked by reactionary forces grouped around the Dowager Empress Ci Xi, who dominated Imperial affairs between 1865 and 1889 and 1898 and 1908.¹ It was not until 1911, when the Manchu dynasty was finally overthrown by regional gentry and Western trained leaders of the New Model Armies in a republican revolution, that a genuine movement for reform began to emerge.

¹ The Chinese spellings in this narrative adhere principally to the modern *pinyin* (Chinese phonetic alphabet) style of romanisation, which replaced the traditional Wade-Giles system as the Chinese government's exclusive style of transliteration in January 1979. In the case of political figures most commonly known under the Wade-Giles system, the former style of transliteration is given in brackets. Exceptions are made for the cities of Canton, Peking, Tientsin and Nanking, which are referred to under the Wade-Giles system. It should also be noted that, under Chinese convention, surnames/family names precede Christian names.

From Revolution to Revolution: 1911 – 1949

The years between 1911 and 1949 were a time of inter-dynasty struggle which was finally resolved by the establishment of a Communist regime which, governed by its party-trained and educated élite, mirrored in a number of respects the preceding Confucian-based bureaucratic system. This inter-revolutionary period also saw a significant conflict between, and intermingling of, Chinese and Western philosophy and political thought which eventually resulted in the new regime grafting the concepts of Marxism-Leninism on to a novel political system.

Initially, the October 1911 revolution saw the installation of a modernising regime under the leadership of Dr Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-Sen). Sun, a Western-educated politician born near Guangzhou (Canton) in 1866, the son of a Christian-convert peasant farmer, gained strong support in the eastern and south-eastern seaboard cities which had long been open to Western influences. He aimed to establish a liberal, Western-style, moderately socialist democracy with an elected parliament and a codified legal system. He was opposed, however, by conservatives, drawn particularly from the more isolated north and west, led by the military commander Yuan Shikai, who was installed as president in March 1912 and proceeded to subvert the 1911 revolution's democratic reforms. Following Yuan's death in 1916, power devolved to regional military commanders during a decade which became known as the 'Warlord Period' (1916-26).

Sun Zhongshan retained significant authority in the Canton region of southern China during these years and established the *Guomindang* (Kuomintang — KMT) or Nationalist party. However, a growing number of Chinese intellectuals, anxious to recover the nation's lost pride and greatness, turned instead to communism, being deeply impressed by the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and by the new Soviet government's decision in 1919 to relinquish the Tsar's territorial concessions in China. A Chinese Communist Party (CPC) was thus founded in the French concession of Shanghai in July 1921, with a separate overseas branch (the Young Communist Party — YCP) being formed in Paris in June 1922 by students who included Zhou Enlai (Chou En-lai) and Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-p'ing).

The Guomindang and communists, encouraged by Moscow, worked closely together in south-east China's cities during the early 1920s and sought to reunify the country through a 'northern expedition' from Canton. This plan was implemented in 1926/7 and

met with significant success, with the fertile Changjiang (Yangtze) valley, including the cities of Wuhan and Shanghai, rapidly falling to the Guomindang and communists. However, the death of Sun Zhongshan (March 1925), a year before this expedition commenced, meant that the Guomindang was now led by the Japanese-trained, military general Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975), a conservative-minded man, who, with close links with businessmen, landlords and industrialists, abhorred the communists. Chiang thus staged a coup against the Communist Party in Shanghai in April 1927 and established his own right-wing Nationalist government in Nanjing (Nanking). He then proceeded to defeat the warlords of Beijing (Peking) and became the recognised head of China's central government. Chiang's actions forced the communists into hiding in the rural hinterland of the south and it was here that they developed a distinctive new form of communism.

China's early communists were divided into three groupings during the 1920s. On one wing there were the Shanghai and Canton-based intellectuals led by Chen Duxiu, the head of the Chinese Communist Party until 1927, Li Lisan (party boss 1927-30) and Wang Ming, who were well versed in the theoretical works of Marx and Lenin and who enjoyed close contacts with the Russian Communist Party and its Comintern (Communist International) agents. They favoured an urban and industrial trade-unionist led revolution, adhered closely to the orthodox Moscow line and retained firm control over the CPC executive until 1935. On the other wing stood, Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung: 1893-1976), a middle peasant's son from rural Hunan province, whose educational attainments and reading of communist literature were less impressive. Mao had served as a library assistant at Peking University and taught as a headmaster in Changsha but was more an intuitive communist who believed, heretically, that in agricultural China revolution would emanate from the countryside as poor peasants rose up in revolt against the oppression of their gentry landlords. A third group, the sophisticated Paris-trained 'work study' intellectuals led by Zhou Enlai, bridged these two wings and worked with whichever was the more dominant.¹

¹ The 'work-study' scheme had been devised by Chinese and French educational officials to enable bright Chinese students, who had passed special examinations and who could provide 200 silver dollars for the travel expenses, to take a 1 – 2-year course in Paris free of all tuition fees on the condition that they devoted part of their time to factory work in the labour-short French economy.

The forced flight of the communists into the countryside from 1927 strengthened the Maoist wing of the party. In the inaccessible mountain stronghold of Jinggangshan on the Hunan-Jiangxi border, Mao Zedong began to devise a unique brand of rural-based Third World communism. He initially introduced fair rents and a measure of land reform and established genuine public support for his People's Red Army by ensuring that his troops dealt fairly with local citizens, paying proper prices for articles taken or used. He then, in combination with his military commander Zhu De (Chu Teh), devised an effective system of mobile guerrilla warfare, based to a large degree on the ancient and popular Chinese texts of the 'Water Margin' and Sun Tzu's 'Art of War'. Mao's position within the Chinese Communist Party was strengthened after 1931 when the Moscow-dominated underground party in Shanghai, whose strategy of fomenting urban-based revolution had patently failed, was purged in the 'White Terror' by Chiang Kai-shek and forced to flee to Jiangxi. From this period on, Mao's strategy of building up popular support in rural *soviets* (workers' republics) and establishing politically motivated guerrilla units was to form the basis of Chinese communism.

In the short term, however, Mao's Jiangxi soviet had to encounter the growing military threat posed by Chiang Kai-shek's one million strong, German-trained, KMT forces. During 1932 Chiang had launched a 'Bandit Encirclement Campaign' with the aim of exterminating the CPC's rural soviets in central China one by one. By the autumn of 1932 he had liquidated He Long's Hunan-Hubei soviet and had forced the evacuation of the large Oyuwan soviet (located on the borders of Hunan, Henan and Anhui) and during 1933 began to impose an economic and military blockade of the Jiangxi soviet. Faced with the alternatives of surrender or starvation, the CPC leadership at Jiangxi decided to concentrate their forces, break out from Jiangxi and head on a zig-zag north-westerly course towards isolated Shaanxi in northern China in what became known as the 'Long March' of 1934-36. During this march Mao, a natural leader who had been pushed into the sidelines between 1932-35, established his ascendancy within the CPC and wrested executive power away from the dominant Shanghai-based Moscow faction. He was elected party chairman at the Zunyi conference in February 1935, having gained the support of Zhou Enlai, who had formerly been allied with the Moscow faction. The 'Long March' was an epic journey covering 6000 miles of harsh, often mountainous, terrain in twelve months and involved more than 100 000 men, women and

children. It represented a desperate retreat from the Guomindang forces and resulted in casualty losses in excess of 85%. By 1936, however, the Red Army had reached the safe haven of Yanan in northern Shaanxi with 1000 of its original force and 30 000 men and women in all. The party had survived, and had become battle hardened; it had spread its message throughout the countryside and had developed a strong leadership grouping composed of figures who were to dominate Chinese politics during the half century ahead.

At Yanan Mao and the Communist Party established a new base in the north of the country and rapidly built up popular support among the oppressed peasants of Shaanxi province. Mao formed a new 'people's republic', rebuilt the Red Army and began studying and formulating his own new communist theories. The period in Yanan was important in establishing northern support for what had previously been a predominantly southern-based Communist Party. Yanan was, however, of even greater significance, being adjacent to Dongbei (Manchuria), which had been annexed by Japan in 1931. This enabled Mao, a fervent nationalist by nature, to declare war on Japan and call on Chiang Kai-shek to end his 'Extermination Campaign' against the communists and join instead in a united front against the foreign enemy. Chiang initially rejected this offer, but was forced into a humiliating climb-down in December 1936 following the mutiny of former Manchurian troops at Xian, the capital of Shaanxi province. The internal civil war was finally halted and the autonomous communist 'border state' around Yanan was recognised as the CPC gained new respectability.

Within seven months, following the Japanese storming of Peking, the Guomindang-Communist pact came into operation and the war between China and Japan commenced. The conventional and urban-based forces of Chiang Kai-shek were rapidly overwhelmed by the Japanese, who captured Tianjin (Tientsin), Nanking and the Yangtze valley. Chiang's gentry-led troops were eventually driven into hiding in remote Sichuan province in the far west of the country. The Red Army, by contrast, fought an effective mobile and rural-based guerrilla campaign and proved difficult for the Japanese forces to pin down and defeat.¹ They retained control of hinterland areas in a large swathe of northern China stretching across Hebei, Shanxi, Shandong,

¹ During this period the Red Army was divided into two groupings: the Eighth Route Army, centred in the north, led by Zhu De and comprising 30 000 troops in 1937 and the 10 000-strong New Fourth Army, based in the south-east and led by Ye Ting.

Shaanxi and Henan provinces and emerged as popular 'freedom fighters', whose just treatment of the local population contrasted starkly with the brutality of the Japanese forces. After 1942 Japan's attention became diverted by American and Allied troops elsewhere in Asia, so the CPC's control of north-central China deepened and the Red Army expanded, with the new recruits being inculcated with the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao.

When the war with Japan ended in August 1945, Chiang Kai-shek was rapidly airlifted by the American airforce to take control over Manchuria, which had briefly been held by Russian troops. He declared himself head of the Chinese government; however, he was faced with tremendous economic problems and with mounting communist opposition during a civil war which commenced during the early summer of 1946. The burgeoning Red Army (now renamed the People's Liberation Army) cut Chiang's supply lines, before decisively defeating the 550 000-strong Guomindang forces at the battle of Huai-Hai in December 1948. Chiang fled to Taiwan and on 1 October 1949 the People's Republic of China was proclaimed. The nation's 40-year succession crisis was over as this new regime became firmly established with a distinctive ideology and system of organisation.

Communist China: Political Organisation and Philosophy

Communist China's political system replicates in many respects the Soviet Union model. It functions as a one-party state, dominated by the Communist Party of China (CPC), which represents the vanguard of the working class and the guardian of a revolution which had taken place, contrary to Marxist tenets, in a backward, almost feudal, nation.² The CPC provides policy ideas and leadership and oversees the work of the state channel of government. Its members are disciplined and controlled from the top downwards through the system of 'democratic centralism'.

¹ Eight minor parties — the China Association for Promoting Democracy (chairman, Ye Shengtao), the China Democratic League (chairman, Hu Yuzhi), the China Democratic National Construction Association (chairman, Hu Juewen), the China Zhi Gong Dang (chairman, Huang Dingchen), the Chinese Peasants' and Workers' Democratic Party (chairman, Ji Fang), the Guomindang Revolutionary Committee (chairman, Zhu Yunshan), the Jiu San Society (chairman, Xu Deheng) and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League (chairman, Su Ziheng) — are allowed to operate in communist China, but they have no real influence or role in the political system.

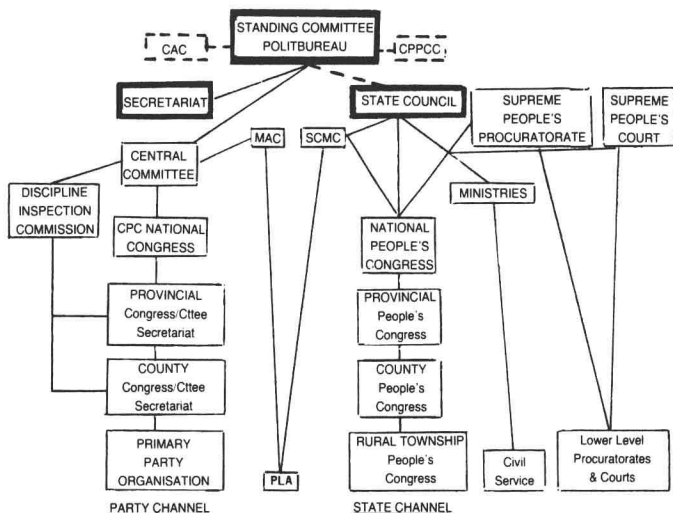


FIGURE 2: The Chinese Political System

The Party Hierarchy and Machine

Membership of the CPC has expanded from barely 0.3 million in 1934 to 1.2 million in 1945, 4.5 million in 1949, 17 million in 1961 and 44 million today — a figure which represents 4% of the total population.¹ Each member is carefully selected, following recommendation by at least two serving party workers, and serves a probationary period which includes dutiful study of the teachings of Marx, Lenin and Mao.² Members, once fully accepted, then rise by seniority to positions of leadership (*cadres*) in a slow, almost Confucian, fashion.

The party is organised hierarchically and constructed in the shape of a huge pyramid. At the lowest level are the basic units, or Primary Party Organisations (PPOs), which are set up in every farming community, factory, office, school and army unit where there are three or more party members. Their tasks consist of implementing

¹ This contrasts with a figure of 6.5% of the total population for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

² Membership of the CPC is invariably preceded by a period in the Communist Youth League (YCL), an organisation open to those between the ages of 15 and 25, which presently boasts 48.5 million members and is headed by Song Defu. The YCL, in addition, supervises the work of the Young Pioneers, a body for children between the ages of 9 and 15 which operates in schools and has a membership of 50 million.

the decisions of higher party bodies, 'guiding and supervising' workplace units, passing on upwards reactions to party directives and increasing ideological awareness among ordinary workers. They act as the eyes, mouth and ears of the CPC at the local level.

Above the PPOs, CPC organisation units are to be found at the prefecture, district/county, municipality, provincial, autonomous region and national levels (see Figure 2) and operate along classic Leninist 'democratic centralist' lines. Under this system, policies are supposed to be frankly and democratically debated during their formulation stage, but must then be implemented with disciplined obedience once they have been agreed upon. This system, also, entails the subordination of lower level units to superior bodies, which pass on orders which must be dutifully followed and which determine the membership of organisations below through a system of 'recommended elections'.¹

Party Congresses are elected at the county (*xian*) level triennially and at the province (*sheng*), autonomous region and autonomous municipality levels at five-yearly intervals. Real authority rests, however, with the smaller party committees, standing committees and secretariats which are selected, following guidance from above, by these congresses. The First Secretaries who head the standing committees in the country's 21 provinces and three autonomous municipalities are particularly powerful individuals, acting as important links and 'brokers' between the localities and the centre.²

The National Party Congress is the highest organ of the CPC. Members are elected by a series of indirect delegate conferences up the different rungs of the party ladder. The congress is in theory elected every five years. In practice, however, terms have varied. The Congress met six times between 1921 and 1928, three times during the next 41 years (in 1945, 1956 and 1969) and a further three times (in 1973, 1977 and 1982) in the period after 1969 (see Appendix B). The National Party Congress is, on paper, a most powerful organ which is supposed to elect the party's Central Committee and

¹ Under 'democratic centralism' the formation of factions is strictly forbidden and minorities are expected to accede to the superior wisdom of the majority. Since 1982, however, provision has been made within the new party rules (see articles 14-16) for individuals to refer matters for a second opinion to the next party level, though in the meantime they must continue implementing the agreed decision.

² A list of China's provinces and autonomous municipalities (that is municipalities subordinate only to the central government) is given in Appendix A.