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BASES OF POWER IN
CHINESE POLITICS:
A Theory and an Analysis of the
Fall of the "Gang of Four"

By LOWELL DITTMER*

ONE of the principal claims made on behalf of Mao Tse-tung as an innovator in the development of Marxism-Leninism derives from the relative importance Mao ascribed to ideology in inducing historical change. "True, the productive forces, practice, and economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist," he wrote in 1937. "But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory, and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role."¹ Indeed, a strong case can be made that Marxism's ideological penetration of China via a discontented stratum of intellectuals both anticipated and helped to precipitate the revolution it had forecast on the basis of sometimes missing material preconditions. That revolution's successful consummation enabled the Communist Party to impose a sweeping transformation on Chinese society, forcing history to conform to the Party's ideological preconceptions of socio-economic development. Not only has ideological change been in the forefront of materialist change, but Mao Tse-tung's own brilliance in formulating the variant of Marxism-Leninism that took into account the salient peculiarities of the Chinese situation played a considerable role in his own rise to leadership and to international renown. All of these factors have led Western analysts to attribute great weight and autonomy to ideology as a political force in China.²

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¹ Mao Tse-tung, "On Contradiction," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, I (Peking: Foreign Languages Press 1965), 336; emphasis added. Many years later, Mao made the following highly critical comments on Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism* (1952): "From the beginning to the end, this book of Stalin's has not touched upon superstructure. It has not considered man. It saw things but not man." *Mao Tse-tung ssu-hsiang wan-sui* [Long Live Mao Tse-tung's Thought] hereafter cited as *Wan-sui* (1967), 156. Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Chinese are my own.

² There are two conceivable reasons for this heavy emphasis on the importance of the ideological superstructure. First, those who look at Chinese history from the perspective

In this paper, I will argue that the somewhat special circumstances of the revolution have led many scholars to overstate the independent importance of ideology in the People's Republic and to neglect its underlying material substructure. Perhaps nowhere is the folly of such an imbalanced focus more evident than in the overestimation of the strength and staying power of the radical ideologues Wang Hung-wen, Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, Chiang Ch'ing, and Yao Wen-yüan, now polemically referred to as the "Gang of Four." The arrest of these Four with their closest collaborators on October 6, 1976 (even before the end of the official 40-day mourning period for Mao), seems to have precipitated a sudden and total collapse of active support for them. It proved wrong those of us who had predicted either a continuing *modus vivendi* of some sort or a prolonged "two-line struggle" similar to that of the Cultural Revolution.³ How is it possible that the Four could have so little power even after having occupied seats on the leading Party and government councils for the past several years, whereas Teng Hsiao-p'ing continued to exert influence and exact deference from the leadership even after having been shorn of all leadership positions for a second time? Underlying this question is a more basic one: What is the source of power in Chinese politics? Previous attempts to explain the fall of the Gang of Four have failed to come to grips with this question, preferring to treat the episode as a sort of political *chronique scandaleuse*.

In the first part of this paper, I advance a theory of the substructure of Chinese politics. I will attempt to show how political power—which is under normal circumstances the *prerequisite* to ideological influence in a system in which the communications media are monopolized by elites—is generated, cultivated, and mobilized. In the second part, I show how this theory enables us to understand the situation of the Gang of Four from the time of their spectacular rise to their no less spectacular fall. I shall contend specifically that the unusual "backgrounds"

of the 20th century as a whole and from the perspective of Chinese tradition cannot help but be impressed by the salience of ideology. Those who look at Chinese politics at close range in a shorter time frame will tend to downgrade its importance. Second, the scarcity of reliable sources inclined earlier analysts to seize upon the most readily available data—i.e., the works of Mao. The large volume of materials to have emerged since then, particularly since 1966, naturally directs our attention to the darker side of politics.

³ The Chinese authorities have subsequently maintained that supporters of the Gang of Four fomented unrest in a number of cities, but this seems to be an oversimplification of a situation that has sporadically characterized China's industrial sector ever since the Cultural Revolution. Cf. Oskar Weggel, "‘Bewaffnete Unruhen’ in China: Wirklichkeit oder Propagandamunition im Kampf gegen die ‘Vier’?" *China Aktuell*, vi (February 1977), 46-56.

of the Four (a term to be more precisely defined) placed severe constraints on their activities and left them vulnerable in spite of their high positions and temporary powers. The Four are of interest, then, not as unique personalities or even as participants in certain crucial historical episodes, but as role occupants in a particular elite structure; as such, they help to define the potentialities of the roles they played and to illuminate the developmental propensities of that structure. The roles they played combine aspects of the autocratic "favorite" with aspects of the populist demagogue, just as the structure in which these roles were situated combines autocratic and populist tendencies. The Four emerge as ambiguous and perhaps transitional figures in the ongoing institutionalization of the Chinese revolution.

THE BASES OF POWER

Although China is not in any meaningful sense an electoral democracy, political power does rest ultimately on an *influential constituency*. It may be an elite or a mass constituency, organized or diffuse, armed or civilian; but to be "influential," it must possess two characteristics: it must be mobilizable—that is, it must be capable of expressing (or withholding) its support; and it must be relatively indispensable—that is, its support must be considered crucial to the effective functioning of the political system. These two criteria can be only partially defined on the basis of objective indicators, such as troop strength or proximity to the capital. They are also defined by the general political milieu, which includes such intangibles as the relative power and perceived self-interest of rival constituencies, the standard of living and mood of the public, and the prevailing international climate. For example, the power of the People's Liberation Army as a constituency was magnified by the destruction of the Party and state apparatus during the Cultural Revolution and by the Sino-Soviet border clashes of the spring of 1969, both of which enhanced the army's indispensability and mobilizability. But it was later impaired by Lin Piao's attempt at a coup and perhaps by the poor harvest of 1972;⁴ the influence of professional bureaucrats was concomitantly enhanced. The mobilizability of young people was reduced by the T'angshan earthquake and by the generally depressing economic situation of the summer of 1976, as well as by the persistence

⁴ The New Year's *People's Daily-Red Flag-Liberation Army Daily* joint editorial (January 1, 1973) revealed that after ten good years, the harvest of 1972 had fallen short by 4%, mainly because of drought. China had to buy five million tons of grain in 1972, chiefly from Canada. Industrial growth had not increased at the pace expected, either.

of a divisive factionalism that hampered them from coordinating their efforts toward common goals.

According to politically conscious Chinese, there are two different *types* of power in Chinese politics, each resting on a particular political constituency.⁵ *Ch'üan-li* represents official power—the power that automatically accompanies certain ranks and posts in the Party or state hierarchies; *shih-li* represents personal influence, which accrues to a leader by dint of his prestige [*wei-hsin*] and qualifications [*tzu-ke*]. Though somewhat evocative of the Weberian distinction between *Herrschaft* (authority) and *Macht* (power), the most precise analogy to these Chinese terms is the distinction drawn in organization theory between “formal” and “informal” power.⁶ Both formal power [*ch'üan-li*] and informal power [*shih-li*] demand compliance, allocate benefits, and thereby engender constituencies; but the constituencies are bound to their leaders by different bonds of loyalty and have correspondingly different utilities. Formal power provides an official with access to a constituency of *t'ung-shih kuan-hsi* and *shang-hsia kuan-hsi*, referring respectively to collegial relationships and superior-subordinate relationships. The latter include functionally or geographically specific client-publics at the mass level who are dependent on the patron agency for policy outputs.⁷ These horizontal and vertical relationships are specific to a given bureaucratic role and are therefore relatively brief and expediential, easily passed on to the next occupant of the same role. Informal power, on the other hand, rests on an *ad hoc* group of supporters that the Chinese call a “political base” [*cheng-chih chi-ch'u*], a term that corresponds roughly to what Western scholars have referred to as a “loyalty system” or “informal group.” This base consists of the long-term, diffuse, and relatively disinterested alliances that an actor collects along his recruitment path into the central decision-making arena.

Formal and informal power are conceptually distinct in the sense

⁵ Much of the following is based on interviews conducted in Hong Kong with refugee (or legal emigrant) informants from the People's Republic of China in the spring of 1977.

⁶ For Weber, the distinguishing property of authority is *legitimacy*, which refers to the probability of compliance without resort to coercion. But according to my Chinese informants, *ch'üan-li* without *shih-li* commands less legitimacy (in this sense) than *shih-li* without *ch'üan-li*. Cf. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, “Modern and Traditional Administration Re-examined: A Revisionist Interpretation of Weber on Bureaucracy,” unpub. paper presented at International Political Science Association, Montreal, August 23, 1973, pp. 17-24.

⁷ For example, the client public of the Central Committee's Department of Culture and Propaganda is China's community of intellectuals; the client public of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee is the city of Shanghai, etc.

that a high official in a figurehead position may have the former without the latter, just as a secret society chieftain or faction leader may have the latter without the former. Yet they are closely interdependent, and a prudent political actor will strive to acquire both. An actor's formal career will to a considerable extent be prefigured by the strength and dimensions of his informal power base.⁸ Thus Liu Shao-ch'i was consistently identified with the Party apparatus from 1949 until his purge in October 1968, not because of the formal positions he held (in fact, his highest post, that of Chairman of the People's Republic, was a state rather than a Party position), but because he had been the leading organizer of the network of Communist Party branches, labor unions, and various student and "front" organizations in the "White" or enemy-occupied areas during the second and third civil wars and the War of National Resistance; these organizations formed the skeleton onto which the civilian Party organization was later grafted. Similarly, Mao Tse-tung was consistently identified with China's peasant masses and with a peasant-based Red Army, largely because his own rise to leadership was accompanied by a reorientation from an urban insurrectionist to a rural guerrilla strategy; he expressed his confidence in the continued reliability of that base in his occasional threats to desert the established leadership and raise another guerrilla army. Mao's later tendency to become alienated from the civilian bureaucracy and to resort to mobilization of the masses and the army may in part be attributable to the location of his informal power base, and to the greater allegiance the Party *apparatchiki* rendered to Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing. Chou En-lai's primary political base was of course the State Council and the government apparatus under it—partly because of his 26-year tenure as Premier, but also because the organization of the People's Government was a direct outgrowth of Chou's wartime efforts to hold the second united front together in Chungking. However, Chou's background also included a stint as the leading Communist student organizer in France, a prominent role in the founding and early leadership of the Red Army, and several decades as China's leading representative on the world stage (long antedating his ten years as Foreign Minister). In each of these positions Chou established informal constituencies on which he was able to rely as bases of support. Similarly, Chinese political actors with professional military experience have tended to remain identified with the Field Armies in which they served

⁸ Tang Tsou has called attention to the importance of the "transformation of informal rules, groups and processes into formal ones" in his "Prolegomenon to the Study of Informal Groups in CCP Politics," *China Quarterly*, No. 65 (March 1976), 98-114.

during the long and unbroken series of wars preceding the Party's accession to power.⁹

Just as an actor's formal power base rests to a considerable extent on his informal power base, his informal power base consists of an accretion of the alliances forged during his tour of duty in a series of formal positions. This series of positions is known among Chinese as an actor's "background" [*pei-ching*]. As in any life history, some background experiences are more crucial than others in forming strong ties: the trust established through years of shared sacrifice for a cause and the camaraderie engendered by risking death together or owing one's life to another have forged bonds of great durability;¹⁰ other, less celebrated but equally adhesive background factors include kinship ties, common geographic roots, and early patron-client obligations.¹¹ But these bonds, once forged, must subsequently be cultivated if they are to develop. This necessity places certain constraints on the policy or ideological positions an actor may safely adopt in the formal decision-making arena: in deciding where to throw his support, he must give some consideration to serving the interests of his constituency. He may serve those interests by supplying it with patronage, funding, or other material benefits; he may also provide legitimation by formulating ideological programs that attribute broad, systemic significance to that constituency, or by celebrating its status in ritual ceremonies.¹² These acts

⁹ Cf. William Whitson, "The Field Army in Chinese Communist Military Politics," *China Quarterly*, No. 37 (January-March 1969), 1-30; and Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1929-1971* (London: Macmillan 1973). The general accuracy of the Field Army hypothesis was borne out by the pattern of purges following the fall of Lin Piao; the overwhelming majority of those affected had been Lin's close followers since the days of the Fourth Field Army. However, as William Parish has pointed out, the Field Army loyalty system has greater impact on recruitment patterns and factional behavior during a crisis than during more stable periods. See Parish, "Factions in Chinese Military Politics," *China Quarterly*, No. 56 (October-December 1937), 667-99; and Whitson's gracious reply, "Statistics and the Field Army Loyalty System," *China Quarterly*, No. 57 (January-March 1974), 146-48.

¹⁰ These sentiments have been memorialized in two collections, *Hung-ch'i p'iao-p'iao* [The Red Flag Waves] (Peking: Chinese Youth League 1958), and *Hsing-huo liao-yuan* [A Single Spark Can Light a Prairie Fire] (Peking: People's Publishers 1962).

¹¹ There seems to be some continuity of the ties referred to in the traditional Chinese bureaucracy as the five *t'ung* (same) relationships: *t'ung chung* (same surname, therefore presumably the same ancestors), *t'ung chu* (same clan or kinship network), *t'ung hsiang* (same native place, which may be district, county, or province), *t'ung hsüeh* (attendance at same school, or study under same teacher, not necessarily at the same time), and *t'ung shih* (members of the same department or having similar career affiliations). Cf. Andrew J. Nathan, "'Connections' in Chinese Politics: Political Recruitment and Kuan-hsi in Late Ch'ing and Early Republican China" (paper delivered at the 87th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, New Orleans, December 1972).

¹² The commemoration of various anniversaries and some holidays may be used to celebrate the prominence and solidarity of those involved in the original event. For ex-

of cultivation are referred to as making a “contribution” [*kung-hsien*] to the constituency in question. A political actor’s ability to cultivate a constituency depends on his ability to serve its interests through the provision of favors, and hence *inter alia* upon a successful formal career; conversely, his ability to rise in the hierarchy depends to a considerable degree on the strength of his informal constituency. It should be emphasized, however, that an actor’s political stance on a particular policy issue cannot be predicted with any confidence on the basis of a direct extrapolation of the interests of his political constituency: if he has accumulated sufficient power, he may ignore the interests of his own constituency and support decisions favorable to the interests of another constituency whose support he may wish to court. He may even make decisions on the basis of ideology, morality, or some other universalistic and disinterested criterion, though to do so frequently in utter disregard of the availability of constituencies would court disaster. A certain modicum of attention to cultivation is dictated by the need for survival, and beyond this modicum there is considerable variability according to the nature of the situation and the temperamental, policy, or ideological proclivities of the actor. Mao Tse-tung was particularly noteworthy for the nonchalance with which he abandoned successive constituencies, as well as for the political skill and *éclat* with which he constructed new ones.

The fact that formal and informal power, though interdependent, are based upon different types of political constituencies means that each has its own respective set of utilities. Power proves itself when contested, and the relative utility of formal and informal power depends upon the intensity of such a contest. If the issue is routine, it is usually allocated to the official in charge of the appropriate functional “sys-

ample, December 9, the anniversary of the founding of the 1935 student movement in Peking, became an occasion to give high visibility to the Liu Shao-ch’i/P’eng Chen group. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao’s 30-*li*, 65-minute swim in the Yangtze (July 16, 1966), the posting of Mao’s first big-character poster (August 5), and the formation of the Red Guards (August 18) all became affairs to remember. During the early 1970’s, however, the sole commemoration of the Cultural Revolution’s “new-born things” was the anniversary of the writing of Mao’s article, “Talks at the Yen’an Forum on Literature and Art” (May 23, 1942); on that date, Chiang Ch’ing presented her latest revolutionary theatrical works. The celebration of anniversaries of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 seemed to presage a radical effort to revive it (e.g., on May 16, the 10th anniversary was commemorated by a joint article by the editorial departments of *People’s Daily*, *Red Flag*, and *Liberation Army Daily*, and the 10th anniversary of Mao’s meeting with Red Guards on August 18 was celebrated in many cities and provinces). The first anniversary of Chou En-lai’s death (January 8, 1977) became an occasion for big-character posters calling for the rehabilitation of Teng Hsiao-p’ing, Chou’s former heir apparent.

tem" for resolution.¹³ If there are tractable jurisdictional or substantive disagreements on an issue ("nonantagonistic contradictions"), an official may mobilize his bureaucratic constituency on behalf of shared interests. But if the issue defies routine decision-making procedures and provokes intractable opposition, it is likely to be defined as a "contradiction between the enemy and ourselves" [*ti-wo mao-tun*], in which dissent is deemed illegitimate; those who agree form a broad coalition to isolate and impose sanctions on the dissenter(s). In such an instance, only the dissenting actor's *informal* political base is likely to be of any avail. Members of his bureaucratic constituency are relatively superficial acquaintances who share certain bureaucratic interests, but in terms of such interests it is irrational to defend a colleague or a policy whose legitimacy has been placed in question, because any defense of the target is certain to implicate the defender as another potential target. The fact that routine criticism and self-criticism is conducted within the organization's basic leadership and work units tends to inhibit the growth of informal ties of solidarity in these units; an implicated target actor is usually abandoned quite promptly. Only those ties that precede or otherwise transcend rational calculations of interest can justify commitment under risky conditions.

Thus there are two sets of circumstances in Chinese politics which justify the mobilization of two distinct types of political constituency: in routine "bureaucratic politics,"¹⁴ an actor may mobilize his formal bureaucratic constituency to fight for interests shared on the basis of similar organizational perspectives (e.g., budgetary allocations, jurisdictions, policies); under circumstances of crisis, when an actor's own political survival is at stake, he may resort only to the informal alliances that constitute his political base. These informal bases seem to have little direct relevance to policy, for they are not mobilized until a disagreement escalates into a power struggle. At that level, policies and

¹³ According to Doak Barnett, there are about ten vertically integrated "general systems" [*hsi-t'ung*] with representatives on the State Council and in the Departments of the Central Committee, including "political and legal affairs" (or "internal affairs"), "propaganda and education" (or "culture and education"), "industry and communications," and "finance and trade." See Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Political Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press 1967), 8. A Politburo member who controls a functional system seems able to initiate the drafting of an authoritative central document concerning that issue area on his own authority. Cf. Kenneth Lieberthal, *Central Documents and Politburo Politics in China*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, No. 33 (Ann Arbor, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1978).

¹⁴ Cf. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown 1971), and Morton H. Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, D. C.: The Brookings Institution 1974).

ideological positions assume an instrumental character, and may be rather freely adapted to tactical exigencies.

To mobilize an appropriate constituency in a rapidly changing situation requires a felicitous combination of foresight, judgment, and luck. To mobilize one's bureaucratic constituency for an issue that may later be defined as "antagonistic" (as Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing did during the "Fifty Days" of June-July 1966) is to risk the erosion of much of that constituency as the high stakes of the struggle become visible; to mobilize one's informal base prematurely for an issue defined as "nonantagonistic" is to forfeit one's legitimate formal constituency and lay oneself open to charges of "factionalism," thereby running the risk of exacerbating the contradiction to an antagonistic level. The difference between antagonistic and nonantagonistic contradictions is essentially one of intensity, but intensity is defined by such incalculable factors as the capability of one side to mobilize sufficient forces to prevail versus the determination of the other side to resist. Thus, even to the protagonists themselves, it is never clear—except from hindsight—whether the issue at stake will be antagonistic. The actors involved in an approaching confrontation must therefore compete to impose favorable ideological definitions on the dispute even as they mobilize constituencies appropriate to that persuasive definition—all the while remaining poised to switch strategies if the balance of power shifts. During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution (October 1965 to March 1966), for example, Mao deliberately obscured his public stance vis-à-vis P'eng Chen, apparently in order to give P'eng sufficient leeway to implicate himself in errors of "antagonistic" magnitude; Mao would then be justified in mobilizing his vast formal constituency (on grounds of P'eng's violation of the organizational rules), and P'eng would be abandoned by all but his own much smaller informal base. During this period of ambiguity, Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing and most other members of the central bureaucratic establishment supported P'eng in his efforts to stifle radical cultural criticism, presumably acting on the basis of a shared bureaucratic interest in maintaining the integrity of established inner-Party disciplinary procedures. But as soon as Mao unveiled his antagonistic opposition to P'eng in spring 1966, Liu and Teng deserted P'eng. However, his ties to the other members of his constituency were based on more durable informal bonds, and they retained their cohesion to the end, necessitating a sweeping purge of the Peking Municipal Party Committee and the Central Departments of Propaganda and Culture. Throughout the summer and fall of 1966, Chou En-lai attempted to define the emerging confrontation between

Mao's "proletarian revolutionary line" and Liu's "bourgeois reactionary line" as a contradiction among the people—presumably in defense of the bureaucratic interests they shared; many members of Chou's State Council had also participated in implementation of the "bourgeois reactionary line" (the dispatch of work teams) in the spring of 1966 and were vulnerable to criticism on the same charge. But once the contradiction had been defined as antagonistic (in the wake of the February Adverse Current in February-March 1967, when all lesser targets were exempted and criticism was confined to Liu and Teng), Chou reversed his position and joined in the public criticism of Liu Shao-ch'i.

The distinction between types of power and constituency is an analytical rather than a synthetic one, but it is a distinction drawn by the actors themselves in deciding how to wage and construe political conflict; it is not superimposed by outside observers. Purges thus tend to proceed along lines of real or suspected networks of informal alliance, not according to current bureaucratic relationships. If the bureaucratic constituents of a target actor agree to draw a "clear line of demarcation" and repudiate their former colleague, they can usually escape further sanction, for there are no deep commitments between them. But if a person is known to be an "old comrade-in-arms" [*lao chan-yu*] of the actor in question, he is far more likely to be adversely affected by that actor's disgrace.

In practice, the identification of an actor's constituencies is rarely so clear-cut, for an actor (particularly one who has enjoyed long tenure in a particular office) may have taken advantage of his powers of patronage to appoint his cronies to positions under his aegis; the result is extensive overlap between his bureaucratic constituency and his informal political base. The Chinese call this an "independent kingdom" [*tu-li wang-kuo*] (or, in the military realm, a "mountain stronghold" [*shan-t'ou-chu-i*]), wherein the coincidence of bureaucratic interests and informal loyalties is "so tight you cannot stick a pin in." Even without evidence of opposition, formation of an independent kingdom constitutes *prima facie* cause for purge.¹⁵ An independent kingdom not

¹⁵ Parish (fn. 9) presents evidence that formation of an independent kingdom was the most telling charge against Yang Ch'eng-wu when he was purged in the spring of 1968; Mao made the same charge against Lin Piao: "When soil is too compressed it cannot breathe. If you mix in a little sand, then it can breathe. The staff of the Military Affairs Committee was too uniform in its composition, and needed to have some new names added. This is mixing sand in the soil." "Summary of Chairman Mao's Talks with Responsible Comrades at Various Places During His Provincial Tour: From the Middle of August to 12 September 1971," in Stuart Schram, ed., *Chairman Mao Talks to the People, Talks and Letters: 1956-1971* (New York: Pantheon 1974), 295.

only tends to isolate the unit in question from the masses and from its superior leadership (thereby violating democratic centralism), but also to result in a narrow departmentalism [*pen-wei-chu-i*] that subordinates revolutionary objectives to departmental interests.¹⁶ Yet in the Chinese Communist Party, the stable personnel policies and relatively high degree of isolation between parallel units make the formation of independent kingdoms almost endemic. They offer a certain degree of security by foreclosing the possibility that an opponent will play differing bureaucratic interests off against each other in a *divide et impera* strategy; an actor who commands such a compact political base, however, remains vulnerable to a strategy of isolation from without, followed by siege or storm tactics. This is the way P'eng Chen was laid low.

The way power is normally mobilized in Chinese politics is by convening meetings. "Every two months, every province, municipality, and autonomous region should convene a meeting to make an investigation and summarize the findings. . . . The regions must also hold a meeting every two or three months," Mao instructed in 1958. "The movement changes greatly, and there must be exchanges of information."¹⁷ Chinese officials convene frequent meetings of every variety: there are meetings with as many as seven thousand and as few as seven participants; there are formal and informal meetings; some meetings have institutional labels, such as Party congresses, enlarged Politburo meetings, or Central work conferences; others are known only by the place and time they were held, such as the Peitaiho conferences in the summer of 1955 and June 1956, and the Ch'engt'u conference of March 1958. Though they are held for different reasons and have different functions, they all provide a means—really the sole legitimate means—for mobilizing constituencies. After proceeding through a reasonably well-established sequence of selecting delegates, holding preparatory meetings, attaining consensus on an agenda, arranging for the presen-

¹⁶ Red Guard tabloids have indicated that inhibited coordination and friction between parallel units arose as a consequence. For example, when a member of the Ministry of Petroleum was criticized by a provincial Party committee chairman, Yü Ch'iu-li (then Minister of Petroleum) allegedly retorted: "This man belongs to my ministry. Who dares to touch a hair on his head?" "Fundamental Criticism of the Collected Crimes of Yü Ch'iu-li," in *Hsien-feng* [the Reef] (published by the United Committee of Revolutionary Rebels in the First Ministry of Machine Building, Peking, January 1967), 5. Lü Cheng-ts'ao, then Minister of Railroads, allegedly refused to work with Lin Piao on the question of troop transport because Lü was a friend of Lo Jui-ch'ing, whose security bureau was at this time in rivalry with the PLA. "Down with Lü Cheng-ts'ao, the Biggest Friend of the Capitalists in the Railroad Ministry," *Hung-t'ieh-tao* (a Red Guard periodical, February 1967), 4.

¹⁷ Mao, "Talk at the Ch'engt'u Meeting" (March 1958), in *Wan-sui* (fn. 1, 1969), 167.

tation of reports, and so forth, a leader is able to convene a meeting in which he can be fairly certain of mobilizing the support he requires for a desired policy outcome.¹⁸

An official may choose (within the limits set by his rank and position) from an array of possible forums those most appropriate to mobilize the type of advice and support he desires. The expedient of “enlarged” conferences grants him sufficient latitude to mobilize functional experts and assorted informal supporters outside the designated meeting.¹⁹ Although Mao’s complaints have indicated that this procedure is not considered legitimate,²⁰ the privileged access to a specific range of meetings to which a given leader’s rank and position entitle him enable that leader to convene such meetings in order to defend himself—at least during the initial stages of a power struggle when such activity is not yet defined as oppositional. Thus in the preliminary skirmishing between P’eng Chen and Mao Tse-tung in the spring of 1966, P’eng convened meetings of the Five-Man Cultural Revolution Group, the Peking Municipal Party Committee, and the Standing Committee of the Peking Party Committee; Liu Shao-ch’i (in Mao’s absence) convoked the Politburo Standing Committee in support of P’eng; Mao convoked the Politburo Standing Committee, the Politburo, and the full Central Committee; Lin Piao convened the Military Affairs Committee and a special military forum on the arts in support of Mao and Chiang

¹⁸ An annotated index of central meetings is provided in Kenneth Lieberthal, *Research Guide to Central Party and Government Meetings in China, 1949-1975* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press 1976).

¹⁹ Similar informal arrangements can be made at lower echelons of the administrative apparatus to accommodate changes in the roster of participants. For example, the “administrative conference” [*pan-kung hui-i*] appeared at all levels at the beginning of the 1960’s and became an important leadership forum. By combining the Party leadership with selected professionals from various offices, it permitted decisions to be made in small groups outside the cumbersome Party committee. The Red Guards called this an “underground Party committee” [*ti-hsia tang-wei*] and complained that it regularly enabled “White” professionals to convert Party members to their opinions. See Report on the Seventh Ministry of Machine-Building, in “Down with Liu Hsüan, the Capitalist-Minded Traitor and Agent in a Responsible Party Position,” *Fei-ming ti*, May 20, 1967, p. 3.

²⁰ In May 1953, Mao issued a directive, ostensibly in criticism of Liu Shao-ch’i and Yang Shang-k’un, that “From now on, all documents and telegrams sent out in the name of the Central Committee can be dispatched only after I have gone over them, otherwise they are invalid.” *Selected Works*, V (Peking: Foreign Languages Press 1977), 92; emphasis in original. In 1966, he again complained about his lack of control of the policy process: “I was not satisfied with the Wuchang Conference; I could do nothing about the high targets. So I went to Peking to hold a conference, but although you met for six days, you wouldn’t let me hold mine for even a single day. It’s not so bad I am not allowed to complete my work, but I don’t like being treated like a dead father.” “Talk at the Report Meeting” (October 24, 1966), trans. in Schram (fn. 15), 266-67.

Ch'ing; and Teng Hsiao-p'ing convened the Central Committee Secretariat in support of Mao.²¹

If and when the dispute becomes antagonistic, the target actor forfeits his power to convene meetings (or, at lower echelons in the hierarchy, his access to the process of transmission of central documents); he is isolated (perhaps even placed under house arrest), and may be subjected to mass "struggle." The only means whereby he may conceivably mobilize his *informal* constituency is through public self-criticism. Inasmuch as this is a highly ritualized form of communication, any appeal for support must be esoteric—but the fact that the critics tend to blame the target actor for any surviving pockets of resistance illustrates the Chinese conviction that he can somehow mobilize support through confession. In point of fact, the target has no further control over his constituency. It is impossible to ascertain the reliability of an informal base in advance because the very existence of such a base is at the penumbral margins of legitimacy; a crisis is thus the moment of truth for the network of support that the target has been cultivating for just such a contingency. Putative members of this network must now choose among three options.

(1) They may forswear old loyalties and repudiate the target actor even more vehemently than his original critics did, in hopes of allaying suspicions based on objectively certifiable background connections. Examples include P'u An-hsiu's public criticism (and subsequent divorce) of her husband, P'eng Te-huai;²² Liu T'ao's "self-examinations" of December 1966–January 1967, in which she repudiated her parents, Wang Kuang-mei and Liu Shao-ch'i;²³ Lin Piao's appeal in July 1971 for mass criticism of his erstwhile ally, Ch'en Po-ta;²⁴ and Lin Li-heng's betrayal, to Chou En-lai, of her father's emergency escape plans.²⁵ Such treachery may disembarass a crony of his immediate difficulties or even bring fleeting renown, usually at the price of subsequent political oblivion.

(2) They may join the target actor in a clandestine organization

²¹ Lieberthal (fn. 18), 11–12. In all, P'eng Chen's downfall can be delineated as a sequence of ten meetings.

²² "Investigate P'u An-hsiu" (a Red Guard pamphlet), in *Tsu-kuo*, No. 89, August 1, 1971, p. 2.

²³ Liu T'ao, "Rebel Against Liu Shao-ch'i, Follow Chairman Mao to Make Revolution for Life—My Preliminary Self-Examination," *Ching-kangshan*, December 31, 1966; trans. in *Current Background*, No. 821, March 16, 1967, pp. 1–25. Liu T'ao's revised self-criticism is translated in Fernand Gigon, *Vie et mort de la révolution culturelle* (Paris: Flammarion Éditeur 1969), 201–14.

²⁴ *People's Daily*, July 21, 1971. Ch'en Po-ta in turn revealed incriminating information about Lin Piao, linking him to the "May 16 Group."

²⁵ Cf. Jaap van Ginneken, *The Rise and Fall of Lin Piao* (Harmondsworth, England: Pelican 1976). Lin Li-heng is perhaps better known by her nickname, Tou-tou.

designed to “reverse the verdicts” on his case in some way, and thus attempt to legitimate the entire group. This involves the participants in what is referred to as “factionalism” [*p'ai-hsing*], which is specifically denounced as illegitimate and subject to severe sanctions.²⁶ The illegitimate and hence hazardous nature of such undertakings precludes the use of open communication channels and forces its participants underground, placing them at a considerable disadvantage. Yet, according to Chinese Communist sources, dissident leaders have repeatedly resorted to factional solutions when forced to the wall. Examples include Ch'en Tu-hsiu's leadership of a Trotskyite “Leftist opposition” following his ouster from the Party leadership in 1927;²⁷ Chang Kuo-t'ao's organization of a rival Central Committee during the Long March; P'eng Teh-huai's organization of a “Military Recreation Club” prior to launching his challenge to Mao at Lushan; P'eng Chen's collusion with members of the Central Departments of Culture and Propaganda and his own Municipal Party Committee to sidetrack Mao's attempts to mobilize a campaign of criticism against his vice-mayor; and of course Lin Piao's putative conspiracy with the “four big generals” and other high-ranking military personnel (mostly from the headquarters units in Peking) to assassinate Mao Tse-tung and launch a military coup d'état.²⁸ Subsequent research may reveal the fall of the Gang of Four to have been the successful culmination of a factional conspiracy among Teng Hsiao-p'ing's supporters to reverse the verdict on their patron.

(3) They may attempt to compromise—refusing to join with the target actor in an illegitimate conspiracy, but still seeking a safer and more discreet (and efficacious) means of supporting their patron. Examples of this option include Chou En-lai's acquiescence in the purge of a considerable proportion of his State Council officials in 1967–1968, only to rehabilitate them to equivalent positions several years later; the refusal of many provincial and regional Party leaders to join in criticizing Liu Shao-ch'i and Teng Hsiao-p'ing during the Cultural Revolution; and the refusal of most military and provincial officials to join in the criticism of Teng Hsiao-p'ing in the spring of 1976.²⁹ Such com-

²⁶ Cf. Andrew Nathan, “A Factionalism Model for CCP Politics,” *China Quarterly*, No. 53 (January–March 1973), 34–67. Nathan's model seems to fit the Cultural Revolution very well, but in my view he tends to overgeneralize it. Cf. Tang Tsou's critique (fn. 8), and Nathan's reply in the same issue.

²⁷ Thomas C. Kuo, *Ch'en Tu-hsiu and the Chinese Communist Movement* (South Orange, N.J.: Seton Hall University Press 1975), 206–16.

²⁸ Cf. Michael Y. M. Kau, *The Lin Piao Affair: Power Politics and Military Coup* (White Plains, N.Y.: International Arts and Sciences Press 1975).

²⁹ The provincial leadership manifested their lack of enthusiasm by failing to convene plenary sessions of their Party committees to support the campaign, failing to send work teams to the local levels, and failing to carry campaign polemics in the provincial

promise maneuvers are often quite effective, and help to account for the tenacious resilience of well-based Chinese politicians. Yet they are far from foolproof since they are likely to be visible to the target's die-hard opponents, whose wrath is apt to come down upon the would-be compromiser. During the Cultural Revolution, the "revolutionary masses" obscured the distinction between active and passive support in order to criticize and purge nearly all members of Liu's and Teng's political base as if they were factional co-conspirators; even Chou En-lai's more subtle efforts to shield members of his State Council bureaucracy from criticism did not escape the notice of the radicals, who in the summer of 1967 vowed to "burn Chou En-lai alive" for just this reason. During the spring of 1976 the radicals sought (unsuccessfully) to expand their critical scope to include "people *like* Teng Hsiao-p'ing" who might otherwise protect or later rehabilitate Teng—such as the commanders of the Peking, Canton, and Sinkiang Military Regions.³⁰

The point of the foregoing discussion has been to demonstrate the importance of background factors in determining a central official's chances of political survival. *Ceteris paribus*, an official with a broad, deep, and well-cultivated political base has better prospects in a crisis than one who has none: not only can this informal constituency be mobilized to resist the purge of the official, it can serve as a forbidding deterrent to any emergent threat. Although Liu and Teng refrained (or were prevented) from actively mobilizing support, the passive resistance of their political base succeeded in imposing a very high cost on the Cultural Revolution; the radicals would have had to reckon with a comparable cost had they persisted in their efforts to expand the *p'i-Teng* campaign in the spring and summer of 1976. The formidable cost that would surely have been incurred in any attempt to mobilize mass criticism against an alive and resisting Lin Piao is one of the factors that has led many observers, both Western and Chinese, to discount the official version of that incident.³¹

THE BASES OF THE "GANG OF FOUR"

The backgrounds of the "Gang of Four" were significantly different from those of other central political actors in China; that is one of the

media they controlled. Only four provincial units (Heilungkiang, Sinkiang, Shanghai, and Peking) held inter-unit criticism rallies.

³⁰ According to the Taiwan *CNA*, 15 of the 29 provincial First Party Secretaries were attacked in local wall posters in connection with Teng.

³¹ Cf. Tai Sung An, *The Lin Piao Affair* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books 1974). My refugee informants also expressed considerable skepticism about the *chiu i-san shih-chien* [September 13th Incident].

reasons it proved difficult to form an accurate estimate of their strength. From the perspective of a bureaucratic career, their backgrounds were both *narrow* and *shallow*. By “narrow,” I mean that their career experiences had been highly specialized, giving them a potential political base in only one functional system, that of culture and propaganda. In contrast, a central official such as Chou En-lai (whose career was admittedly exceptionally broad), had experience that provided him with a political base in the army, the Party, and the government, as well as the bourgeois democratic parties and the liberal intellectuals who moved in that ambience. Whereas the narrow/broad dimension refers to the functional scope of an actor’s career experience, the shallow/deep dimension refers to its temporal duration, which may be indexed on the basis of his age and the number of years he has spent in the Party. Most central cadres have “deep” backgrounds that provide them with potential supporters scattered through every echelon of the hierarchy, but particularly at its upper levels; the background experiences of the Four was mainly confined to the lower ranks of the bureaucratic hierarchy. The reason for the relative shallowness of the base of the Four is that, bureaucratically speaking, they were all what Teng Hsiao-p’ing called “helicopters”: before 1966, they had been relatively low-ranking officials; not until the Cultural Revolution did they become nationally prominent, and not until the Ninth Congress was their position at the summit of Chinese politics officially confirmed. At that time, three of the four acceded to full Politburo chairs without even having served previously on the Central Committee. Chang Ch’un-ch’iao, the member of the Gang with the most extensive conventional bureaucratic experience, had by the start of the Cultural Revolution risen only as far as full membership on the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee and the directorship of the committee’s propaganda department.³² Both

³² Chang Ch’un-ch’iao joined the Party during the Long March and in his writings supported the Red Army during the Second World War. After the Liberation, he became Director of the East China General Branch of the New China News Agency in March 1950, Director of the Shanghai *Liberation Daily* in May 1954, a member of the Shanghai Party Municipal Committee in June 1958, and of its Standing Committee in April 1959; he became Director of the Propaganda Department of the Shanghai Committee in April 1963, and a member of the Secretariat of the Committee in March 1965.

Chiang Ch’ing claims to have joined the Party in Tsingtao in 1932, though there is reason to doubt that she actually became affiliated before her marriage to Mao in Yanan in 1940. In 1948 she became head of the Film Office of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (known after April 1949 as the Central Film Administrative Bureau). But when this body was dissolved at the Second National People’s Congress in September 1954, Chiang Ch’ing retired from the cultural scene until 1962. In 1963 she began to appear as First Lady (she accompanied Mao to entertain Madame Sukarno), and in September 1964 she was elected a deputy (from Shantung) to the Third NPC.

Yao Wen-yüan, born in 1925 in Shao-hsing, Chekiang, spent his entire career as a

the narrowness and shallowness of the political base of the Four are evident in the parvenu character of the personnel appointments they made and those they allegedly planned.³³

Notwithstanding the narrowness and shallowness of their bureaucratic backgrounds, the Gang of Four did command a strong political base even before 1966; the Cultural Revolution offered them the opportunity not only to strengthen their existing base but to acquire a new one. Their initial base consisted of one man, Mao Tse-tung; they later sought to include the "revolutionary masses" of students, workers, and peasants who rose against the bureaucratic establishment in response to the Chairman's call to "bombard the headquarters." I shall first examine the position of the Gang of Four before 1966, and then proceed to show how they attempted to enhance their power during the Cultural Revolution, thereby profoundly affecting the Chinese political system.

In their primary reliance on the Chairman as a base of support, the Four played a role comparable to the "favorite" in European court politics: the royal advisor whose place depends solely on the favor of the crown.³⁴ The purely personal basis of the favorite's power inclines him to be more royal than the king himself; and the *ad hoc*, provisional nature of his appointment motivates him to attempt more innovative, high-risk ventures on behalf of his patron than a career bureaucrat would. The Chinese imperial court had its retinue of favorites, consisting of imperial wives, concubines and eunuchs; that contemporary Chinese tend to view the Four in their image is suggested by the recurrent (but apparently baseless) rumors to the effect that Yao Wen-yüan or Wang Hung-wen was Mao's son-in-law, that Chou En-lai was poisoned by Chiang Ch'ing, and so forth.³⁵ Though the role of favorite

writer on ideological/cultural themes, never holding any important administrative positions until joining the Central Cultural Revolution Group in October 1966.

Wang Hung-wen, born in 1937 to a poor peasant family in Kirin, joined the PLA as a youth and served after discharge as a junior cadre in the Security Department of the Shanghai No. 17 Cotton Textile Factory, where he became involved in mobilizing worker support for Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's power seizure in Shanghai in January 1967. Thus, until 1966, the base of the Four was limited to Shanghai; according to the most recent findings, their support was never very strong even there. Cf. Andrew Walder, *Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and Shanghai's January Revolution*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, No. 32 (Ann Arbor, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan 1978).

³³ Cf. *Ming pao*, December 27, 1976, p. 1, for a complete list of the "cabinet" allegedly submitted by the Four.

³⁴ Rasputin was of course the most notorious of imperial Russian favorites, but his peasant origins and charismatic powers made him atypical. More characteristic were Alexander Mikhailovich Bezobrazov and Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich, both of whom advised Tsar Nicholas in the Siberian exploits that were to culminate in the Russo-Japanese War. For a study of the role of the favorite in the formulation of Russian foreign policy, cf. Helen Dittmer, "The Russian Foreign Ministry Under Nicholas II, 1894-1914," Ph.D. diss. (Department of History, University of Chicago 1977), 211-50.

³⁵ The classic pattern for such figures is to eliminate rival claimants by assassination

has won greatest formal recognition in the form of various court titles and orders in monarchical systems, it is by no means unique to monarchies (*vide* Sanjay Gandhi, or for that matter the role played by White House advisors Haldeman and Ehrlichman in the Nixon Administration). A favorite may become powerful in any organization with a strong monocratic executive who chooses to isolate himself from his official advisors and to rely on personal advisors whose loyalty to him is implicit. The executive may so choose for any of a number of reasons: a falling out with his official staff, susceptibility to flattery and aversion to direct contradiction, prolonged illness, or a reclusive disposition are among the more typical. It is in the interest of the favorite to promote his patron's isolation in order to make his own role as go-between indispensable.

In Mao's case, an increasing reliance on favorites accompanied his turn from the frustrating problems of economic reconstruction to a preoccupation with various basic ideological issues—for instance, the critique of East European-Soviet style revisionism and the attempt to launch a revolution in socialist culture that would forestall a similar development in China. Leaving the rest of his Politburo colleagues on the “first front” to cope with the problems of recovery from the depression and the budgetary deficit left by the Great Leap Forward, Mao selected a handful of cronies to join him on the “second front”: his former secretary Ch'en Po-ta and Chiang Ch'ing's old patron K'ang Sheng apparently specialized in writing anti-Soviet polemics, while Chiang Ch'ing and the group of young literati she sub-recruited formed his liaison with the cultural world. In pursuit of his ideological *qua* polemical interests, Mao required a combination of research assistance, secretarial help, and intellectual cross-fertilization; his favorites ably filled these requirements while at the same time feeding Mao's hunger for deference.³⁶

Chiang Ch'ing was Mao's original favorite; that she did not parlay this role into a personal power base until the mid-1960's seems to have been due to a combination of interference from resentful official advisors, problems with her health, and the fact that Mao took only sporadic interest in the cultural causes she championed. Reports from Yen-an

in order to put their own children in the line of succession. References to Chiang Ch'ing as the “Empress Dowager” had already become popular in Canton at the time of Mao's death. After her fall, the analogy formed the basis for her public indictment: like Tzu Hsi, she was accused of squandering state resources for her own pleasures. Cf. David Bonavia in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Vol. 94, No. 45 (November 5, 1976), 17.

³⁶ Cf. Michel C. Oksenberg, “Policy Making Under Mao, 1949–1968: An Overview,” in John Lindbeck, ed., *China: Management of a Revolutionary Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1971), 94.

indicate that she functioned as Mao's secretary as early as 1939, taking charge of his personal correspondence, writing down his speeches, copying materials, and going on miscellaneous assignments for him to distant regions.³⁷ She first began to play an active role in cultural controversies in the early 1950's, when she lobbied for suppression of the film "Inside Story of the Ch'ing Court" and led an undercover investigation team to Shantung to gather material on the Wu Hsün case before launching a successful assault on the film "The Life of Wu Hsün."³⁸ She operated incognito in her forays into the countryside, allegedly at the insistence of suspicious colleagues, who thereby blocked her from building a personal following.³⁹ Her involvement in these early controversies failed to endear her to the doyens of the cultural world; in fact, by the end of 1951 she had lost her directorship of the Cinema Department and even her nominal post in the Sino-Soviet Friendship Association. In the winter of 1952, she left for Moscow for medical treatment, relinquishing her positions as Chief of the Secretariat of the General Office of the Central Committee and as Mao's private secretary. When Mao's attention turned from the cultural world to the problems of socioeconomic construction in the later 1950's, she virtually dropped from view, plagued by chronic physical ailments.

As Mao became increasingly isolated from his official advisors following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, Chiang reappeared on the cultural front, determined to defend her husband's faltering reputation and to carry the attack to his intellectual critics. Her reappearance she ascribed (no doubt somewhat elliptically) to her own recuperation program:

I was ill for several years. In order to recover my health, I took part on a doctor's advice in some cultural activities to train my hearing and eyesight. In this way I was able in a relatively systematic manner to get acquainted with some of the problems in literature and art. Alas! I found that there were big problems!⁴⁰

Operating in a style characteristic of the traditional favorite, Chiang Ch'ing banked on her patron's prestige and on the intrinsic merits of her proposals. She flouted bureaucratic procedure, thereby antagonizing the officials formally assigned to the cultural realm and deliberately

³⁷ Peter Vladimirov, *The Vladimirov Diaries* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday 1975), 12, 83, 101, 143-44, 155-57; see also Roxane Witke, *Comrade Chiang Ch'ing* (Boston: Little, Brown 1977), 224.

³⁸ Cf. Chung Hua-min and Arthur C. Miller, *Madame Mao: A Profile of Chiang Ch'ing* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute 1968).

³⁹ Witke (fn. 37), 224.

⁴⁰ Chiang Ch'ing, "New Arts of Socialism Occupy All Theaters," *Hung-se wen-i*, May 20, 1967.

jeopardizing the patron-client ties they had cultivated with the artistic and intellectual community. She also tried to monopolize access to Mao, albeit without complete success. Although her name does not appear before 1966 among Mao's interlocutors named in the three *Wan-sui* volumes,⁴¹ she laid plausible claim to having had close rapport with the Chairman:

For many years I have been working as Chairman Mao's secretary, mainly to study some international problems. In the field of culture and education I act as a roving sentinel. My job is to go over some periodicals and newspapers and to present some things, both positive and negative, to the Chairman for reference—[things] that are in my opinion worthy of note. This is the way I have done my job for many years. Beginning last year my job was expanded, [giving] me the extra duties of Secretary of the [Politburo] Standing Committee.⁴²

Thus in 1962, she carried out an investigation into the background and intent of Wu Han's play, "Hai Jui's Dismissal," and found it to have "serious political problems," initiating a successful behind-the-scenes campaign to have it barred from the stage.⁴³ By the winter of 1962, she had completed an extensive review of more than a thousand Peking operas then being staged, roundly criticizing them for the feudal influences she found there. In 1963–1964 she started a reform movement of Peking opera and ballet. When she gave speeches at various cultural forums, she made no serious attempts to clear her efforts through the central cultural authorities; she inclined to suspect their motives even when they eventually acceded to her demands. Indeed, she made a direct appeal to artists and writers to join her in creating a more revolutionary art form.⁴⁴ In this way she had by 1965 succeeded in producing the Peking operas "Spark Amid the Reeds" (later retitled "Shachia-pang" at Mao's behest), and "The Red Lantern," and in revolutionizing the contemporary ballets "The Red Detachment of Women" and "The

⁴¹ *Wan-sui* (fn. 1, 1967 and 1969), I, II, III, passim. It is, however, conceivable that she participated in private discussions, or participated *anonymously* in these recorded sessions: 139 of the 222 total responses to Mao (63%) in the January 1960–December 1965 period were made by "XX" [*mo-mo*], a much higher proportion than between January 1966 and December 1968 (7%). During the latter period, Chiang Ch'ing made 14% of the identified Chinese responses to Mao.

⁴² Chiang Ch'ing, "Do New Services for the People," *Tung-fang-hung*, June 3, 1967. She illustrated her conception of her gatekeeping responsibilities in the following account: "One day a comrade gave the Chairman a copy of Wu Han's *Biography of Chu Yuan-chang* for him to read. I said, 'Don't, the Chairman is very tired. The author only wants a fee for the manuscript or a name for himself. Let him publish it. We'll review and criticize it after publication. I want to criticize the same author's "Hai Jui's Dismissal," too.'" Chiang Ch'ing (fn. 40).

⁴³ *Hsin Pei-ta*, May 30, 1967.

⁴⁴ Chung (fn. 38).

White-Haired Girl.”⁴⁵ Chiang Ch’ing’s ambitious reforms received public recognition at the PLA’s Third Literary and Art Festival in April 1964, and at the Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes three months later.

Chiang Ch’ing, however, still felt that her efforts at full-scale radicalization of the arts were being subtly undermined by the Peking cultural establishment; so, early in 1965, she moved to Shanghai to work in the congenial political atmosphere created by Mao’s supporter K’o Ch’ing-shih, then Shanghai Municipal Party Secretary. There she began her collaboration with Yao Wen-yüan and Chang Ch’un-ch’iao; the three secretly drafted the article that was to initiate P’eng Chen’s undoing. “Comrade Chang Ch’un-ch’iao and comrade Yao Wen-yüan took a great risk and in addition, undertook to keep the matter secret,” she later recalled. “The secret was kept for seven to eight months during which the article was revised countless times.”⁴⁶ The article, “On the New Historical Play, ‘Hai Jui’s Dismissal,’” was published in Shanghai on November 10; three weeks later, Peking was finally goaded into reprinting it and lending its reluctant support to a campaign of cultural criticism. The following spring, Chiang Ch’ing (at Mao’s direction) drafted the “May 16 Circular,” which lambasted P’eng Chen’s erstwhile leadership of the movement and called for a more iconoclastic approach. The two documents were the opening volleys in what would shortly be known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution; in it, Chiang Ch’ing and her protégés found a dramatic new opportunity to expand their political base.

This opportunity inhered in a unique set of circumstances. Mao’s “great strategic plan” to revitalize revolutionary values in China called for extensive mass mobilization. In itself, this was not novel, for the masses have always played an integral role in Chinese politics; but heretofore the masses had always been mobilized through a process of *organizational mediation*. The Chinese Communist Party would first convene a series of “transmission meetings” [*ch’uan-ta hui-i*] to apprise elites at various levels of the objectives of the coming campaign, and then the masses would be mobilized through a series of “rallies” (for instance, oath-taking rallies, regional broadcast rallies, pledge rallies, mobilization rallies, meetings to exchange experiences).⁴⁷ Although mobilization was conducted by such non-Party agencies as the work and

⁴⁵ By 1968, eight revolutionary *yang-pan hsi* (model theatrical productions) had been staged, including four Chinese operas, two ballets, the Yellow River Piano Concerto (for which Chiang Ch’ing gave special dispensation to use a Western piano), and “The Rent Collection Courtyard,” a series of sculptural tableaux done in socialist realism.

⁴⁶ Chiang (fn. 40).

⁴⁷ Cf. Lieberthal (fn. 13).

residential units, the mass media, the mass organizations, teams of activists, and *ad hoc* meetings of various formats, the Communist Party retained firm control of the mobilizational process at every stage and level. However, Mao paralyzed this system of organizational mediation at the very outset of the Cultural Revolution—first by prohibiting Party cadres from using sanctions to maintain discipline over the masses, and second by turning the “spearhead” of mass criticism against many of the Party leaders who were officially qualified to preside over strategic meeting forums. He thereby reduced the leaders’ incentive to give organizational guidance to the movement. This organizational paralysis, born partly perhaps of the *apparatchiki*’s support for their beleaguered chiefs, but mainly of their panic and confusion, was decisive in setting the subsequent course of the movement: it created a power vacuum that the radicals could fill.

Lacking leverage within the existing system of meeting forums,⁴⁸ the radicals initiated a form of organizationally *non*-mediated mobilization of the masses, purveying a different version of Marxist-Leninist ideology through the mass media that they now controlled. They supplemented it by secret informal contacts with selected activists (such as Nieh Yuan-tzu, K’uai Ta-fu, and T’an Hou-lan)⁴⁹ and by frequent personal appearances before *ad hoc* rallies.⁵⁰ Thus the Party apparatus was temporarily replaced by a congeries of spontaneously assembled voluntary

⁴⁸ For example, Ch’en Po-ta’s vigorous protest at the Party meeting in early June at which the “Eight Articles of the Central Committee” were approved (most of them designed to keep student activities under close supervision) was overruled by Liu Shao-ch’i, who chaired the meeting. And when the case of the rebel K’uai Ta-fu’s resistance to the work teams was brought up in a high-level Party meeting in early July, K’ang Sheng came out in defense of K’uai; he argued that “forbidding K’uai Ta-fu to bring his complaint to the Central Committee at least is not in accord with state law and is in contravention of Party regulations,” but he was overruled. Cf. “Down with Liu Shao-ch’i—Life of Counterrevolutionary Revisionist Liu Shao-ch’i,” Red Guard pamphlet, trans. in *Current Background*, No. 834 (August 17, 1967), 27.

⁴⁹ For example, when Kao Hsiang, who later became leader of the Canton Third Headquarters, visited Peking on June 24, 1966, he wrote a letter back to his friends in Canton saying that the chief target was the power-holders taking the capitalist road in the Party. Hong Yung Lee, “The Political Mobilization of the Red Guards and Revolutionary Rebels in the Cultural Revolution,” Ph.D. diss. (Department of Political Science, University of Chicago 1973), 110-20.

⁵⁰ Mao gave authoritative sanction to this practice by making a number of public appearances at the outset of the movement, before reverting to his customary seclusion. He also initiated public criticism of the central leadership in his first big-character poster. The fact that this poster is dated August 5 suggests that he decided to take this step, the significance of which he cannot fail to have realized, after things had not gone his way during the first stage of the Eleventh Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (August 1-12, 1966). The first of the Red Guard demonstrations, which were seen as a way of putting direct pressure on the Central Committee, occurred on August 10, while the Plenum was still sitting; Mao attended and urged those present to carry the Cultural Revolution through to the end. *Peking Review*, No. 33 (1967), 9; see also Livio Maitan, *Party, Army, and Masses in China* (London: NLB 1976), 99-101.

associations activated primarily by ideological commitment and hunger for celebrity, rather than by long-term career considerations such as relative rank and status. The youthful members of these radical associations were not integrated into the bureaucratic reward structure and lacked tolerance for the patronage networks and hierarchically distributed perquisites they discovered there; their criticisms of deviant officials tended to expand into a systemic critique of bureaucracy as a whole. Occasionally they went as far as to discuss conceivable alternatives,⁵¹ but they usually left the question of eventual replacement quite vague. In short, anarchism was implicit in both the ideology and in the organizational dynamics of such a movement. The Four ultimately backed away from its anarchist implications, but as the most salient beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution they were blamed for the movement's every excess by die-hard opponents of the whole notion of mass criticism of authority. By making Mao's Thought the measure of all things, the Four managed not only to threaten those whose thoughts were demonstrably deviant from this standard, but also to derogate the thinking of all others in a leadership that had once called itself "collective." The Four thus attracted a good deal of the resentment from which Mao was shielded by his enormous prestige; its breadth and intensity became fully manifest only after Mao died and the Four fell.

THE BASE ERODES

A favorite is sooner or later inclined to seek a secondary base in addition to his personal one, for otherwise he will perish when his patron does. In turn, the patron, originally attracted by the prospect of a personal servitor without competing organizational vested interests, tends to view a favorite's attempt to build his own power base as a relapse or a betrayal. During the mobilization stage of the Cultural Revolution such a conflict was not apparent; indeed, Mao's desire to promote a revolution in political culture seemed to correspond perfectly with the radicals' interest in mobilizing a mass constituency that might compensate for their lack of a more conventional (bureaucratic) base. The ideology "Mao Tse-tung's Thought" seemed to reconcile the antinomy between the autocratic nature of the primary base of the Four and the populist nature of their secondary base by equating Mao's

⁵¹ Still the most articulate and systematic of these discussions is the manifesto by Sheng-wu-lien (a Hunanese rebel organization), reproduced and annotated in Klaus Mehnert, *Peking and the New Left: At Home and Abroad* (Berkeley: University of California, Center for Chinese Studies 1969). See also Ting Wang, ed., *Li I-che ta-tzu-pao* [The Big-Character Poster of Li I-che] (Hong Kong: Ming Pao Yueh-k'an 1976).

Thought with the aspirations of the broad masses. But as the anarchist and factional tendencies implicit in the movement's rhetoric gathered momentum, members of the Central Cultural Revolution Group (CCRG) felt an increasing tension between their fealty to the Chairman and their commitment to the ideals and interests that inspired their mass following. This tension first became apparent in the summer of 1967, when Red Guards attempted to extend the Cultural Revolution to the People's Liberation Army and to "drag out the small handful" of conservative military officers; this provoked a military retaliation (notably at Wuhan) that threatened the nation with civil war. Pointless though it is to search for the specific source of a decision that flowed so directly from the immanent logic of the radical rhetoric, it seems clear that all members of the Maoist "revolutionary headquarters" were implicated in the value-added process that culminated in armed Red Guard raids on military units.⁵² But Chiang Ch'ing and Yao Wen-yüan publicly repudiated the conspiracy, purged the junior members of their own CCRG (Wang Li, Kuan Feng, Mu Hsin, Chao Yi-ya, Lin Chieh, and eventually Ch'i Pen-yü), and reaffirmed their loyalty to Mao Tse-tung. In September 1968, when feuding Red Guards were subdued by worker-and-soldier "Mao Tse-tung's Thought" propaganda teams, the CCRG's leaders (albeit with obvious misgivings) publicly endorsed the demobilization and rustication of their mass constituency.⁵³ They did not break ranks when Ch'en Po-ta, having succumbed to the allure of a secondary power base to enter a dalliance with the ill-starred Lin Piao, was subjected to mass criticism. All told, whenever the Four were pressed to choose between their primary and their secondary bases, they opted for the former and forsook the latter.

By the summer of 1968, Mao seems to have forsworn his experiment with organizationally non-mediated mass mobilization, essentially because he could find no way to turn the energies unleashed thereby to constructive account. The new revolutionary associations were indeed more effective organs of mass representation (and of ideologically

⁵² Cf. Barry Burton, "The Cultural Revolution's Ultra-Left Conspiracy: The 'May 16 Group,'" *Asian Survey*, xi (November 1971), 1029-54. For a definition of "value-added," see Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior* (New York: Free Press 1963).

⁵³ Yao Wen-yüan's article, "The Working Class Must Exercise Leadership in Everything," *Red Flag*, No. 2 (August 1968), heralded and legitimated the dispatch of these propaganda teams to demobilize the radical factions. When completion of the establishment of Revolutionary Committees at the provincial level was celebrated on September 7, 1968, Chiang Ch'ing spoke after Chou En-lai, noting caustically that she had been informed only at the last moment that the meeting would be held, and making a final plea for leniency to the Red Guards. No further speeches by Chiang Ch'ing have been published, though her model theatrical productions continued to receive favorable notice.

mediated interest articulation), but less effective at maintaining public order and routine administrative functions. For policy implementation, Mao sought recourse to his (now presumptively purified) organizational apparatus, bargaining away specific features of his radical program (such as the personality cult) in order to appeal to a shifting coalition of bureaucratic interests. Under these circumstances, the following factors appear to have been salient in determining the political fortunes of the Four:

(1) The Four had managed to convert their political capital among the “revolutionary masses” into high formal positions: three of them had won Politburo seats at the Ninth Congress, and Wang Hung-wen was catapulted beyond them from the Central Committee to the CCP’s vice-chairmanship at the Tenth Congress. These positions provided access to collegial alliances and to bureaucratic constituencies. The Four used their new powers to achieve some rather impressive policy gains. Despite the strong recovery made by the bureaucracy after Lin Piao’s demise, they succeeded in imparting a leftward cant to policy beginning with the Tenth Party Congress; to wit, they consecrated the popular rights and freedoms won during the Cultural Revolution in both Party and state constitutions,⁵⁴ withstood pressure for the reintroduction of wage raises, bonuses, and other material incentives, and significantly increased mass representation on Party and government committees at all levels.

Nonetheless, the Four were not able to consolidate their own formal positions either by building strong collegial alliances or by cultivating bureaucratic support networks. The formation of bureaucratic coalitions was inhibited on the one hand by their colleagues, an increasing number of whom were “liberated” cadres who had been criticized and purged during the Cultural Revolution and tended to harbor deep misgivings about any prospect of a recurrence. “More than 75 percent of the old cadres inevitably turn from members of the democratic faction into members of the capitalist-roaders’ faction,” estimated Chiang Ch’ing.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the Four themselves continued to assume a public

⁵⁴ The “four great weapons” [*ssu ta wu-ch’i*] that Wang Hung-wen proposed in his report on the revision of the Party Constitution at the Tenth Congress in 1973—“big blooming and contending, big-character posters, and big debate” [*ta-ming, ta-fang, ta-tzu-pao, ta pien-hua*—were also included in the Constitution of the Fourth National People’s Congress in 1975. However, in the nationwide study of the NPC documents, the “four great” were ignored: *People’s Daily* made reference to them in only one of its hundreds of articles (January 24, 1975, p. 2). In the provinces there was a general silence, except in Shanghai and the Northeast.

⁵⁵ *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, December 14, 1976, and January 22, 1977; as cited in Hong Yung Lee, “The Politics of Cadre Rehabilitation since the Cultural Revolution” (unpub. 1977), 41.

posture of principled opposition to the informal rules of exchange on which bureaucratic politics was based. They vigorously condemned Lin Piao for trafficking in patronage and favors,⁵⁶ for example, and turned the “bourgeois rights” campaign against the “back door” allocation of special privileges (of which cadres were predominantly guilty). Whereas at best the seasoned bureaucrats looked upon the radicals as future successors who should quietly serve their apprenticeship, the radicals did not hesitate to chide their senior colleagues publicly for revisionist backsliding, without offering viable alternatives.⁵⁷ The ill will they thereby engendered helps to account for the setbacks to which their personnel strategy was subjected: although they were able to appoint their followers to Party and government (i.e., Revolutionary Committee) positions at various levels, the tendency of the internal leadership was to confine the radicals to showcase positions on the plena while reserving most executive positions and key committee assignments for veteran officials.⁵⁸ Within the leadership, the Four themselves seem to have been increasingly isolated during Mao’s final years: important conferences were convened to which they were either not invited or in which they were consigned to passive roles.⁵⁹ Thus the radicals re-

⁵⁶ The Mass Criticism Group of Peking University and Tsinghua University, “Lin Piao and Doctrines of Confucius and Mencius,” *Red Flag*, No. 2 (February 1974), 8-16; Yao Wen-yüan, “Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Renegade Lin Piao,” *Peking Review*, June 27, 1975, p. 8.

⁵⁷ See, for example, Wang Hung-wen’s speech to a meeting of the Party Center on January 14, 1974, at the time of the launching of the campaign to Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius. “The real problem is to be found in our own ranks, [among] cadres who, after seven or eight years, still misunderstand the Cultural Revolution,” he warned. “There are places where the Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius movement has not gotten off the ground. . . . It is necessary to train millions of successors of the revolution, but in the regions, particularly in the army, there is great resistance to this. I propose to seek out young men aged about 30 to become the commanders of the Great Military Regions.” *Chung-kung yen-chiu*, No. 96 (December 1974), 93-100.

⁵⁸ Thus, although the percentage of mass representatives on the Central Committee increased from 26% at the Ninth CC to 34% at the Tenth, most of these representatives no longer appeared after August 1973, and none were able to gain positions of real influence. Part of the reason was the lack of a provincial base: none of the mass representatives at the Tenth Party Congress were First or Second Party Secretaries of the provincial Party committees, and 28 of the total of 48 did not even have positions on the Standing Committees of their provincial Party committees. Similarly, although in preparation for the Fourth NPC in 1975 the radicals managed to place no less than 90 leftists on the Presidium (whose chief function is to elect the NPC Standing Committee), only 31 of these were actually elected to the Standing Committee, and only one of the 12 vice-premiers on the State Council (viz., Chang Ch’un-ch’iao) was a radical, while three others could be considered radical associates.

⁵⁹ For example, the Four were not given prominent roles at either the Fourth NPC in January 1975 or at the first Tachai conference in September 1976. They evidently responded by attending (or sending their protégés to attend) meetings to which they were not invited, then seizing the floor to give speeches denouncing the capitalist-roaders in the Party.

mained *in* but not *of* the bureaucracy, trenchant critics of its *modus operandi* without operational responsibility.⁶⁰

(2) The Four had succeeded in mobilizing a vast and formidable popular base, with which they temporarily eliminated a great number of bureaucratic and some military officials. But they had also acceded to the forced demobilization and rustication of the bulk of their followers, and whether they still retained their allegiance under those circumstances was at best problematic. In order to consolidate their base, they either had to adopt conventional techniques of organizational mediation to “cultivate” their followers, or attempt to resume the mass movement through which the base had been assembled in the first place.

The former alternative came to naught primarily because the Four were so completely outclassed in the skills and resources of organization building. The early 1970’s witnessed repeated bids by the Four to claim a particular network of meeting forums as their link to the masses, only to find that network co-opted or blocked by bureaucratic interests.⁶¹ The “Paris Communes” proposed early in the Cultural Revolution were eliminated from consideration by February 1967 because they excluded bureaucratic and military interests; but once the latter had been given representation on the Revolutionary Committees, they proceeded to dominate them and to purge any Red Guards who would not toe their line; ultimately, the Revolutionary Committees themselves were eviscerated and subordinated to the Party committees. The Poor-and-Lower-Middle Peasants’ Associations, which had introduced the Cultural Revolution to the countryside in 1969–1970, were subordinated to the Tachai-type counties that were promoted nationwide beginning in 1971. The mass organizations *were* revived in 1973 and contained a considerable amount of “new blood,” including many former leaders of rebel mass organizations; but although provincial meetings were completed in 1973 and national preparatory meetings were convoked be-

⁶⁰ See Dittmer, “The Radical Critique of Political Interest, 1965–75,” unpub. paper delivered at the Workshop on the Pursuit of Interest in the PRC (Ann Arbor, Mich.), August 1977.

⁶¹ The initial strategy had been to set up new mass associations to replace the old ones that had become bureaucratized. But the various assemblies (*viz.*, Workers’ Assemblies, Poor-and-Lower-Middle Peasants’ Associations, and so forth) began to languish following the Ninth Congress, when organizational energies were shifted to the convention of various types of activists’ meetings. In the absence of Party congresses and people’s congresses, these mass meetings served many of the same functions.

Beginning with their recovery of influence in 1973, the civilian radicals proceeded to introduce a series of model organizations in rapid succession. Whether because they had no organizational or coercive apparatus to back up to their adjurations, or because the new organizations themselves provided inadequate intrinsic rewards to participants, none of these initiatives ever became the sort of institutionalized model for emulation that Tachai or Tach’ing had become.

tween February 26 and March 20, 1975, the national congresses themselves never came to pass—and have not been held at this writing. (The principal function of such congresses would be to elect a new central leadership for the mass organizations; without them, the organizations were relegated to the status of uncoordinated, headless constituencies.)⁶² The urban workers' militia, first developed by Wang Hung-wen in Shanghai but given nationwide impetus only after the Tenth Congress, fell under the sway of the regional and district military unit commands in most places.⁶³ Beginning in 1975, the Four seemed to abandon all hope of establishing independent channels of organizational mediation and assumed a spoiler's role, infiltrating the central hierarchy with their followers in order to give premature and adverse publicity to the new economic programs of Chou En-lai and Teng Hsiao-p'ing.⁶⁴

Effectively shut out from the channels of organizational mediation, the Four found recourse only in their prior formula of direct mass mobilization. But here they were frustrated both by the subtlety of their opposition and by weaknesses in their own position. During the Cultural Revolution, the central organizational apparatus had been paralyzed by the indictment of its leaders; but the survivors and rehabilitated cadres who staffed the reconstructed bureaucracy had learned from their experience how to resist radical attacks with greater flexibility. If radical demands were not too damaging to the bureaucracy or to its economic substructure, timely concessions could be granted to placate the more issue-oriented leftists while at the same time disarming those who hoped to use official intransigence as an excuse to purge the elite.⁶⁵

⁶² Cf. Henry Bradsher, "China: The Radical Offensive," *Asian Survey*, XIII (November 1973), 989-1001; also Helmut Martin and Wolfgang Bartke, *Die Massenorganisation der Volksrepublik China*, Mitteilungen des Instituts für Asienkunde, No. 62 (Hamburg: Institut für Asienkunde 1975), 145-54.

⁶³ Teng Hsiao-p'ing opposed the militia from its inception in 1973, encouraging only its defense and production tasks to the exclusion of class struggle. (Cf. *People's Daily*, June 19, 1976; Hofei Radio, April 6 and June 19, 1976; Harbin Radio, August 25, 1976; Shanghai Radio, June 19, 1976; and Peking Radio, June 20, 1976.) Teng's fears of conflict between armed factions were borne out in Chekiang province in 1974-1975, when armed clashes occurred between militia groups in Hangchow, Wenchow, and Chinhua. The militia was officially disbanded in March 1975, but hostilities continued until July, when Teng sent in the army to disarm the militiamen. Though the militia seemed to re-establish its reputation by restoring order at the T'ienanmen riots in April 1976 (whereupon the radicals called for its use in "struggle against the bourgeoisie in the Party"), militia units were disarmed and kept under military surveillance. They apparently played no role in helping to alleviate the effects of the Tangshan earthquake in July 1976, and did not react adversely when the Four fell three months later.

⁶⁴ Lieberthal (fn. 13).

⁶⁵ For example, when moderate revisions of Cultural Revolution educational innovations surfaced at the Tenth Congress, the educational authorities immediately abolished

The radicals' control of the media, while more successful than their attempts to exert influence over other central organs, never went uncontested;⁶⁶ if radical demands were deemed excessive, the moderates could utilize their continued access to the media to defuse the inflammatory implications of the rhetoric. Thus the moderates amended the slogan, "going against the current" (coined by Mao himself prior to the Tenth Congress), to read "going against the *erroneous* current" [emphasis added], which they alleged to be "completely consistent with observing Party discipline."⁶⁷ Mao's denunciation of a "bourgeois style of life" was used by the Party leaders at whom it was probably aimed to suppress "bourgeois factionalism," just as the campaign against the hidden "counterrevolutionaries" who instigated the T'ienanmen "incident" was used by provincial leaders to justify "tracking down" their leftist critics for "sabotage activities."⁶⁸ To the masses, this continual juxtaposition of contrasting interpretations must have been quite confusing (in the spring of 1975, differing construals of "proletarian dic-

the cultural college entrance test and readmitted those candidates who had been rejected after failing to pass the test.

⁶⁶ There seems to have been an understanding at the center that both sides in the "debate" pursued from 1973 to 1976 should have equal access to the media. Thus, when the radical journal *Study and Criticism* [Hsüeh-hsi yü p'i-p'an] was first launched in Shanghai in September 1973, the cover bore Mao's inscription of the title. But on January 16, 1974, Mao's inscription was replaced by one by Chou En-lai. It seems unlikely that Mao withdrew his imprimatur at his own initiative, or that the radicals would withdraw it; there must have been strong pressure from the moderates that the Chairman's support should not obviously be given to one side.

Moreover, it seems that the most authoritative categories of communication were off limits to the radicals and could only be employed when a consensus had developed among the leadership. For instance, when the campaign to criticize Lin Piao and Confucius began in February 1974, and again when the campaign to study the theory of proletarian dictatorship was launched in February 1975, or to study *Water Margin* in late August 1975, they were all heralded by *People's Daily* editorials and *Red Flag* commentaries, by Party committee meetings, mass rallies, editorials, and commentaries in local newspapers and on provincial radio stations, signifying elite consensus. But during the campaign to criticize Teng Hsiao-p'ing, only one editorial or commentary on the movement appeared in *People's Daily* or *Red Flag* between January 2 and April 5, and this editorial (in *People's Daily*, February 24, 1976) devoted equal space to the need to criticize the capitalist-roaders and the need to promote spring planting. Many articles appeared in *People's Daily*, *Kuang-ming jih-pao*, and *Red Flag*, but nearly all were signed by individuals or criticism groups, and only a few by low-level official organizations and equally low-level PLA units; there were no reports of Party meetings, mass rallies, or editorial comments from the provinces.

⁶⁷ Fang Yen-liang, "Going Against the Tide Is a Marxist-Leninist Principle," *Red Flag*, No. 1 (December 1, 1973), 23-27.

⁶⁸ Yünnan Radio, April 30, 16, and 28, 1976; Kiangsi Radio, May 3 and 5, 1976; Honan Radio, April 25, 27, and 28, 1976; Chekiang Radio, April 25, 1976; Kwangsi Radio, April 10, 1976; Hunan Radio, April 28, 1976; Hupeh Radio, April 10, 1976; Shensi Radio, April 10 and May 7, 1976; and Szechuan Radio, May 9, 1976, all reported serious incidents against local Party leaders and stressed the need to suppress counter-revolutionaries.

tatorship” appeared within a few days of each other in the same paper),⁶⁹ but the revolutionary implications of the rhetoric were thereby blunted.

The leftist forces were also beset by grave internal weaknesses, which resulted in two unintended and apparently contradictory consequences: mass apathy and factional violence. So far as can be determined from interviews with refugees, conducted after the fall of the Four, the revolution in culture that the Four sponsored contained a number of weaknesses. Chiang Ch'ing's eight revolutionary “model theatrical productions” [*yang pan hsi*], while initially very well received, began to pall in the absence of new productions; they finally grew so obviously tiresome that Teng Hsiao-p'ing could jeer about the difficulty of selling tickets.⁷⁰ Similarly, although the radicals were able to control the supply of materials for the study meetings that were held routinely (after the Cultural Revolution, these usually consisted of selected articles from the press), the meetings were held much more frequently than ever before (from two to five times a week, and during campaigns sometimes twice a day), and the participants became bored with the proceedings. The same study materials were used repeatedly, and the more democratic atmosphere that prevailed after the Cultural Revolution allowed people to manifest their boredom with relative impunity.⁷¹ There are several reasons for this reaction. The delicate political balance at the center induced the radicals to disguise their polemics in arguments over historical periodization and other arcana of little apparent relevance to the average worker or peasant. Except to political activists eager for fame and higher appointment, participation in the mass campaigns promised few rewards—it did not really increase productive efficiency or raise unit income, and usually imposed sacrifices on the participants. The Four themselves ceased to provide inspiring models for the masses, abandoning their nationwide speaking tours and exemplary participation in manual labor, and becoming locked into the intra-elite political game in Peking and Shanghai.

⁶⁹ One article emphasized that the “masses” should be involved in “exposing the dark side from the lower level upwards.” Nan Yü, “The Vast Masses of the People Must Be Relied upon to Consolidate Proletarian Dictatorship,” *People's Daily*, March 16, 1975, p. 2. Five days later, an article emphasized that the Communist Party must lead all other organizations. Li Hsin, “The Proletarian Dictatorship Is Led by the Communist Party,” *People's Daily*, March 21, 1975, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Survey of the People's Republic of China Magazines*, No. 926 (May 23, 1977), 8-30.

⁷¹ According to my refugee informants, participants in the study groups did not even bother to conceal their apathy: “During the meeting, people would do other things—write letters, knit, chat—sometimes the chatting was louder than the person making the report, and the leader would have to ask people, ‘Don't talk so loud!’ People would go to sleep. Some people didn't even bother to attend.”

Since October 1976, the Hua Kuo-feng regime has seized the opportunity of the political demise of the Four to blame them for all the incidents of disruptive factionalism, labor unrest, and general disorder that have occurred since the Cultural Revolution. This is of course unfair, but the persisting moderate-radical cleavage did contribute to such disruptions in at least three ways. First, factionalism at the central level tended to foster factionalism at every subordinate echelon of the hierarchy, as lower-level officials perceived a need to join an informal group with some "connection" with higher powers in order to protect themselves and to advance their interests. Although the Four had permitted most of their mass base to be rusticated, they had managed to insert some radical leaders into staff or legislative positions throughout the hierarchy.⁷² These young and ambitious cadres were always excluded from executive responsibility and usually unable to ingratiate themselves with their senior colleagues (who tended to seize every pretext to send them back down to work). It is plausible that many of them criticized their seniors when mass campaigns provided an appropriate occasion—and that their purges after the fall of the Four were thus not coincidental.

Second, by defeating plans for a wage adjustment and calling for workers to perform "voluntary labor," the Four may have inadvertently contributed to the rash of strikes and slowdowns that afflicted several branches of industry late in 1974 and during most of 1975. Despite widespread expectations that the Fourth National People's Congress and Second Plenum of the Tenth Central Committee would hold discussions leading to wage revisions, the radicals launched a media campaign against "capitalist restoration" three weeks after the NPC's adjournment. Reportedly, this campaign resulted in a wage freeze and the elimination of bonuses (which had been quietly reinstated toward the end of 1971).⁷³

⁷² Because of the location of the radical base at the lower echelons, some young leftists were able to achieve spectacular rises. Chang Li-kuo, a former Red Guard, became vice-chairman of the Hupei Revolutionary Committee in 1968, for example, and in 1973 became secretary of the Communist Youth League in the same province.

⁷³ The first and most basic wage legislation had accompanied the currency reform introduced on June 16, 1956. Since that time, there have been four further adjustments of wages, in which the system of bonuses played a central and controversial role. During the economic relaxation of 1956, wages were raised by 14.5%, only to be cut back during the Great Leap Forward; in the early 1960's wages were raised again, but during the Cultural Revolution they were cut. After the fall of Lin Piao there was another period of relaxation during which bonuses and other disputed material incentives reappeared, and toward the end of February 1975 a central document inviting further concessions on wage revisions and work grades was reportedly circulated among Party and government cadres. The radicals' campaign to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat successfully blocked these plans. Cf. Chien-jen Chen, *Die Lohnstruktur in der Volksrepublik China* (Bern 1972).

Third, in view of the fact that control of the Party-government apparatus and control of the propaganda machine had fallen into the hands of opposing elite factions, the *apparatchiki* below saw little reason to cooperate in leading campaigns that might result in their being criticized themselves. The PLA withdrew its propaganda teams sometime after Lin Piao's purge; according to my informants, the Party no longer dispatched propaganda teams after the "Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius" campaign wound down in late 1974. Attempts to mobilize the masses in the absence of any supporting institutional framework resulted, on the one hand, in rather localized, small-scale participation;⁷⁴ on the other, it permitted mobilization to pass into the hands of informal groups, who were difficult to coordinate and tended to clash with the authorities and with each other. Under these circumstances, whenever the Four attempted to mobilize a mass base, a threshold would quickly be reached beyond which unacceptable factional violence ensued, forcing them to demobilize.⁷⁵

(3) If all else failed, the Four could hope to remain the Chairman's favorites, currying favor by carrying out projects that were dear to Mao's heart but unattainable by bureaucratic means. This was the least desirable alternative from the point of view of the Four, as it entailed abandoning all hope of surviving Mao's demise. Yet despite a certain amount of friction, they seem to have succeeded in that role—though it is now vehemently denied. Mao's failing health seems to have allowed them to monopolize access to his person more completely than before,

⁷⁴In most places, the debate was confined to a few higher institutes of learning and to individual departments within these institutes. The major participating schools tended to be confined to Peking, Shanghai, and Liaoning provinces, and only Shanghai permitted big-character posters in the public places as well as in the schools. This reduced scale of mobilization in 1975 and 1976 contrasts starkly with the nationwide reaction to Mao's first big-character poster in August 1966.

⁷⁵In the spring of 1974, the ban on public display of posters was briefly challenged for the first time since the Cultural Revolution. The Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius Movement was intensified in February, following publication of the February 2 editorial in *People's Daily*, "Carry the Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius Movement Through to the End." According to an edict sent down in February for implementation of the movement, it was not permitted to criticize leaders by name, to engage in armed struggle, to conduct illegal "link-ups" [*ch'uan-lien*], to take revenge, or to post big-character posters in the streets. But on May 5, Mao said: "I see nothing wrong with posting big-character posters in the streets, and if foreigners want to read them, fine; if the Chinese want to read them, even better." Thus on May 18, the center issued its *Chung-fa* No. 18, permitting cadres to be criticized by name and posters to be posted in the streets. The first critical poster appeared opposite the door of the Peking Revolutionary Committee on June 13, and was followed by many others. This "blooming" lasted less than a month before it was curtailed by *Chung-fa* No. 21 on July 1, which for the first time acknowledged that the movement was having an adverse effect on industrial production. Wang En, "What Does the Promotion of Big-Character Posters Mean?" *Chan-wang*, No. 299 (July 16, 1974), 9-11; and "The Changing Political Situation of the Chinese Communists in 1974," *ibid.*, No. 311 (January 16, 1975), 9-11.

particularly after Chou En-lai was hospitalized in 1974.⁷⁶ Chiang Ch'ing continued her avid pursuit of the revolutionization of Peking opera and ballet, and the Chairman continued to support these endeavors,⁷⁷ whatever his reactions may have been to her interviews with Roxane Witke. Mao also gave his public endorsement, in the form of some brief but widely publicized quotations,⁷⁸ to the series of campaigns launched by the radicals between 1973 and 1976. Finally and perhaps most importantly, although rhetorical tributes to the "new-born things" of the Cultural Revolution were not totally missing from the political remarks of other leaders, only the Four demonstrated a sustained and sincere commitment to these values in the face of possible sacrifices of economic productivity.

In sum, the base of the Gang of Four on the eve of their political eclipse consisted of the following: (1) A bureaucratic constituency of young, ambitious, and inexperienced cadres, most of whom were former Red Guard leaders, and none of whom held responsible executive positions. These were effective allies when the Four were on the offensive against other targets, but lacked the bureaucratic "indispensability" to exert leverage when the Four themselves became targets. (2) A residual mass constituency of radical students and a few teachers at what had been China's elite schools, along with certain relatively deprived categories of workers. The former were mobilizable but isolated and dispensable; the latter were economically indispensable but not mobilizable because of the disruptive effects that mobilization precipitated. When confronted with the *fait accompli* of the arrest of the Four, their small mass constituency found itself stripped of central symbolic legitimization and possibly implicated in a counterrevolutionary coup d'état; because the members of this constituency were for the most part have-not elements, they lacked the resources to resist such a symbolic turnabout. (3) The primary base remained the aging but still peerless Chairman, whose prestige protected the Four from the con-

⁷⁶ Mao made his last public appearance to the Chinese masses in May 1971, and his last appearance to Chinese leaders in August 1973; thereafter his only appearances were to foreign guests, accompanied by a few selected Chinese leaders. Consequently, audiences with subordinates not on familiar terms with him were sharply reduced. His relationship with Chiang Ch'ing reportedly cooled after 1973, but many of his other personal retainers (such as Mao Yüan-hsin) sympathized with the radicals.

⁷⁷ In July 1974, at the tenth anniversary of the Peking Opera Festival, Chiang Ch'ing was hailed as an "expounder of Mao Tse-tung's Thought," an honor previously reserved to Lin Piao and Chou En-lai alone. *People's Daily*, July 16, 1974.

⁷⁸ Brief quotations from Mao figured in the campaign literature of the Criticize Lin Piao and Confucius Movement, the Movement to "Go against the Current," the Movement to Consolidate the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Criticize the Bourgeois Right, and the Movement to Criticize *Water Margin*.

sequences of their errors for as long as he lived, perhaps giving them illusions of invulnerability. This prestige was however the product of Mao's unique charisma and proved to be nontransferable.

CONCLUSION

Beginning with the exposition of a theory purporting to elucidate the underlying political substructure of Chinese leadership disputes, I have attempted to show how the fate of the Gang of Four conformed to the immanent logic of this substructure despite arduous attempts by the Four to change the rules of the game. There is perhaps an inherent tendency for proletarian dictatorships with strong prerevolutionary theocratic traditions to undergo what might be termed "autocratic involution," in which the supreme leader seems for a time to transcend the political laws of gravity and, in his own right, to become a power base from which an autonomous factional constituency may grow. However, the favorites who attach themselves to such a leader are always faced with the problem of succession—and to a magnified degree, because of the uncertainty endemic to crises of succession in proletarian dictatorships.⁷⁹ Impaled on the horns of this dilemma, the favorites must expand their base and find ideological legitimation for expansion without jeopardizing their privileged relationship to the original patron. The fate of the Four illustrates the perils inherent in such a situation. While they irritated the Chairman in their sometimes clumsy attempts to win a popular following,⁸⁰ the Four were not able either to cultivate a mass base or to mollify their colleagues. They managed only to frighten the military-bureaucratic establishment without being able to destroy or to replace it, and to mobilize a mass constituency without being able to protect it or to satisfy its aroused aspirations. Thus they were easily expendable as soon as their powerful patron died.

The failure of the Four underlines the profound importance of broad and deep backgrounds and reliable political bases in contemporary Chinese politics. It may also illuminate the situation of Hua Kuo-feng, whose background is somewhat broader than that of the Four, but not really much deeper. Hua rose to central leadership no less suddenly than Wang Hung-wen; but in contrast to the Four, he pursued

⁷⁹ Cf. Myron Rush, *How Communist States Change their Rulers* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press 1974).

⁸⁰ Most notably, Chiang Ch'ing's interviews with Roxane Witke, through which she apparently hoped to build an international reputation for herself similar to that created for Mao by Edgar Snow.

a strategy of accommodation with established military and bureaucratic elites while assuming a calm, paternalistic stance toward the masses. As Mao's allegedly handpicked successor, he seems least likely to repudiate his ideological legacy explicitly, although his alliance of convenience with the leaders of the military and bureaucratic establishment ensures that he will give it an innocuous interpretation. His quietly equivocal maneuvers during the long crisis of succession and his tactical brilliance in launching the coup that consolidated his position already mark Hua as a power politician *par excellence*. At the same time, his lack of any firm political base makes him more vulnerable than might appear from his occupation of the nation's three highest leadership posts; if he were to commit a serious political blunder, it is not inconceivable that he could vanish as tracelessly as the Gang of Four.⁸¹

Assuming Hua realizes his precarious position, it should lead him to pursue an extremely cautious, consensus-building "line" that will under the best of circumstances avoid catastrophes and under the worst of circumstances implicate all potential rivals in any mistakes. By pursuing this type of bureaucratic politics, Hua could minimize the necessity to resort to informal bases (where he is weakest) and emphasize the construction of a strong institutional framework, where discussions would be conducted and consensus attained in adherence to formal rules. Besides serving Hua's interests, such a policy might coincide with the functional need of the Chinese political system for a period of consolidation, for respite from a decade of internecine civil strife. At the same time, the tendency to avoid conflict or controversy and to suppress adverse popular feedback in the name of order may permit the rise of cumulative problems of bureaucratic rigidification and gerontocracy, from which future political generations may wish to break free.

⁸¹ Hua's position is superficially similar to that of Hsiang Chung-fa, who served as a figurehead Party secretary from 1930 until his death a year later at the hands of the KMT. But Hua's political environment is more stable, and his more solidly based colleagues are old (at this writing, Yeh Chien-ying is 79; Li Hsien-nien, 72; Teng Hsiao-p'ing, 74) and seem to support him as one who can maintain stability and policy continuity after their deaths.