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Patterns of Elite Strife and Succession in Chinese Politics

Lowell Dittmer*

Elite strife is the Achilles' heel of the Chinese political system, the event most apt to inspire elite-mass cleavages and other crises threatening the stability of the regime – nay, its very existence. All the major crises to have shaken the regime seem to have been instigated by or coincided with bouts of relatively severe elite conflict. Yet at the same time such strife offers one of the few opportunities for political innovations taking a fundamental departure from an elite consensus which otherwise tends to rigidify. Thus we find that many of the classics of the Chinese variant of Marxism-Leninism, from Mao's "On Contradiction" to Liu Shaoqi's "On Inner-Party Struggle," display ambivalence, on the one hand lauding the self-validating, revitalizing functions of "struggle," while at the same time warning that it must be handled "correctly."

In practice, the leadership's attempts to resolve this ambivalence resemble nothing so much as the Chinese tale of the "man who loved dragons": the virtues of struggle are heartily praised but little provision is made for genuine conflict of interest, and if it dares to emerge it is sharply censured. Thus when conflict appears it tends to take the form of a "real dragon," upsetting all institutional constraints erected to contain it and precipitating "chaos."¹

Until only recently China scholars have displayed a charitable impulse to consign the above characterization to the Maoist past. During the Maoist period, particularly during the Cultural Revolution, elite strife was admittedly violent, chaotic and unpredictable; under the reform regime of Deng Xiaoping, conflict has become more institutionalized, less socially disruptive. This seachange is attributed to various factors: Parris Chang argues that Deng Xiaoping's relative lack of power has allowed a more collective leadership to evolve; Esherick and Perry distinguish between charismatic and non-charismatic eras in Chinese politics.² Since the demotion of Hu Yaobang in January 1987, however, the assumption of a sharp break in the pattern of CCP intra-elite relations has come to appear more open to discussion: no doubt there are continuities as well. Thus it seems particularly useful at this juncture, when the future of the reforms seems to hang in the balance with the mortality of a handful of ageing revolutionary veterans, to review the whole pattern of elite strife and

*I would like to thank the Center for Chinese Studies of the University of California for financial support.

1. The locus classicus for an analysis of the psychogenetics and psychodynamics of "chaos" in Chinese political culture is Richard Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and The Chinese Political Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). See also the seminal contributions of Lucian Pye.

2. See Parris Chang, "From Mao to Hua to Hu to Chao," *Issues and Studies*, January 1989, pp. 56–73; Joseph W. Esherick and Elizabeth J. Perry, "Leadership Succession in the People's Republic of China: 'Crisis' or Opportunity?," *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (1983), pp. 171–77.

cleavage in the post-Mao era as open-mindedly as possible in search of whatever insights such an inquiry can provide concerning the future.

Structure

Politics among CCP elites remains so free-wheeling and explosive as to defy prediction. The patterns of intra-elite conflict and coalition may, however, be conceived for purposes of analysis within a simple matrix, which varies along two axes: the distribution of (substantive) agreement, and the distribution of power. This results in four permutations:

Distribution of Agreement

		Cleavage	Solidarity
<i>Distribution of Power</i>	Hierarchy	Disciplinary measures	<i>Primus inter pares</i>
	Collegiality	Factionalism	Collective leadership

Let us look first more closely at the distribution of power. This is contingent upon two factors: formal office, and the informal web of elite connections that Chinese refer to as one's "political base" (*zhengzhi jichu*). Formal office normally creates a set of bureaucratic associates either at coeval rank (referred to by Chinese as *tongshi guanxi*, or collegial relations), or subordinates (referred to as *xiangxia guanxi*, or relations of super- and subordination). These associates, sharing as they do the interests of the bureaucratic organ to which all are attached, may normally be expected to defend any member in the case of threat from an outside organizational interest or mass constituency. This strengthens the organizational integrity of the unit in the face of efforts at control or reorganization from above or demands for patronage or favours from below. If however a member is accused of a potentially career-crippling ideological/moral "error," official associates are likely to be intimidated; in any such "antagonistic contradiction," or "contradiction between the people and the enemy," those closely associated with the target are apt to be grouped together as co-conspirators, unless they "draw a clear line of distinction" and join the critique. Only those with more personal, long-term ties to the target are likely to honour their commitment as the risks mount.

A "base" consists of this circle of loyal supporters who may be relied upon to render aid when political survival is at stake, when official colleagues desert to avoid self-incrimination. A base may be roughly gauged by whether it is wide or narrow, shallow or deep: an

official with a network of cronies widely dispersed throughout various functional and regional divisions of the civilian and military bureaucracy has a “broad” base; an official whose connections date from the Party’s founding, or from the early recruitment waves (Jiangxi, Long March, Yan’an), has a “deep” base (i.e., one whose constituents will be highly placed, by dint of seniority). Members of a leader’s base will expect help from their patron in promoting their careers, while the patron in turn will expect protégés to render deference and support. Thus an upwardly mobile leader will often appoint as many base members as possible to formal positions from which their mutual career needs can be served, thereby conflating formal and informal bases and creating an “independent kingdom” (*duli wangguo*).

But to retain the analytical distinction for the moment, informal connections still eclipse formal office in effective political importance, despite all attempts at institutionalization, a point underscored by developments since 1986. Previously it was deemed a necessary (but not sufficient) condition to have a seat on the committee where relevant decisions are made, but no longer: now it seems possible to retain power indefinitely with no formal office at all (*vide* Peng Zhen, and now Deng Xiaoping). Still, formal office remains a prerequisite to building a base, which is normally done by transforming those official connections acquired en route to ascending the bureaucratic hierarchy into a personal retinue. The long and the short of it is that in any given Politburo, whether the distribution of power is hierarchical or collegial can be determined not merely by examining the distribution of formal offices (after all, in this respect everyone is equal, each having but one vote), but also by comparing bases. If one member’s base is significantly broader or deeper than that of the others, the distribution of power may be characterized as hierarchical (particularly if the latter are found to be the former’s base-members); if several members have comparable bases, a more collegial relationship may be expected to obtain.

Notwithstanding formal equality in terms of voting rights, the vertical relationship among top leaders is typically hierarchical, as indicated by the punctilious observance of protocol in public appearances.³ Certainly the Maoist period has been characterized since the Cunyi Conference essentially as a *primus inter pares* arrangement, although there have been periodic challenges (e.g., the “returned students” and Zhang Guotao groupings of the 1930s and 1940s, Gao Gang–Rao Shushi and Peng Dehuai in the 1950s) and periods of ambiguity (e.g., the division of the leadership into two

3. This punctilious observance is manifest in efforts to retouch old photos, or to stage manage ceremonies to alter appearances. For example, there were allegations that Jiang Qing conspired after her husband’s passing to have the photo of the succession lineup arranged so that she was one step ahead of the line, with Hua Guofeng on the far right and herself in the centre of the picture. See Andres D. Onate, “Hua Kuo-feng and the Arrest of the Gang of Four,” *The China Quarterly* (CQ), No. 75 (1978), pp. 540–566.

“fronts” in the early 1960s, the inconclusive factional strife of the 1970s).⁴ Since the death of Mao, although a more collective arrangement was endorsed from the beginning by the Deng Xiaoping forces, it seems clear in retrospect that only during the 1976–78 period, when the succession was still in flux, did a collective leadership really exist. This was due to the unequal distribution of formal and informal power: in the wake of his sudden coup against the Gang of Four Hua Guofeng had managed to monopolize all key formal leadership positions, but his informal base was relatively narrow and shallow.⁵ Thus power was shared between Hua and those with more formidable bases, including Ye Jianying and (after their rehabilitation in the summer of 1977) Deng Xiaoping and Chen Yun.

Due to a convergence of policy disagreements and political rivalry, this collective leadership soon degenerated into factionalism. By dint of a series of adroit organizational “reforms,” Deng was able to divest Hua and his supporters of their official posts by the summer of 1982. Thus Hua was first persuaded to resign his premiership in the name of separating Party from government (i.e., as Party leader he should not also be government leader), whereupon the abolition of the chairmanship system (consisting of a Central Committee chairman and a series of ranked vice-chairmen), ostensibly for the sake of precluding the re-emergence of a personality cult, detached Hua from this position as well. Having eliminated his major rivals, Deng proceeded to assume de facto leadership without the corresponding official status. This was feasible because his organizational reforms had so dispersed executive power that no formal position disposed of sufficient power to challenge him. For example, the Party general secretary displaced the CC chairman, but the former was authorized only to chair meetings of the Secretariat, and to convene, not to chair, meetings of the Politburo or its Standing Committee. Further contributing to this diffusion was the creation of new executive offices, such as the chairman of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CDIC), chairman of the Central Advisory Commission (CAC); revival of the chief of state post, and reinvigoration of the chairmanship of the NPC Standing Committee.

To consolidate his primacy, Deng next moved to appoint base members to key formal positions – Hu Yaobang to a series of positions culminating in Party general secretary; Zhao Ziyang to the premiership – and at the same time to undermine the position of those senior veterans whose bases made them potential rivals. Again he advanced under the banner of reform, specifically the need for leadership rejuvenation: appointing the young and well educated while superannuating the old. As a senior cadre himself, Deng led by example,

4. Details of which need not detain us here. For a relatively definitive analysis, see Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms, 1950–1965* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1979).

5. As pointed out in L. Dittmer, “Bases of Power in Chinese Politics: A Theory and an Analysis of the Gang of Four,” *World Politics*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1978), pp. 26–61.

simultaneously moving in the direction of retirement, albeit at a somewhat slower pace. The scheme seemed to have run aground in December 1986, when student protests provided veterans with a convenient pretext for a telling counterattack. When Hu became a legitimate target due to his insufficiently vigorous suppression of this protest, 17 CAC members and two CDIC members came out of limbo to help decide upon his demotion and Zhao's appointment as acting general secretary.⁶ Nonetheless Deng shortly resumed his campaign with the support of Zhao Ziyang, achieving a major breakthrough at the 13th Party Congress in the autumn of 1987 with the retirement of 90 veteran CC members and 11 Politburo members.⁷ Yet once again these retirements were nullified during the prelude to Tiananmen, as a small group of political immortals emerged to play a major role in the decision to declare martial law and then to use lethal force against the demonstrators. They have continued to pull strings from behind the scenes since then, particularly during summer planning meetings at Beidaihe.

This has given rise to a situation in which the division between formal and informal power becomes unusually clear-cut. At the top we find two interlocking leadership groups, one having titles but no real power, the other holding power without official responsibility. The former consists of the membership of the Politburo Standing Committee, whose structural pre-eminence was restored by the 13th Congress.⁸ The latter consists of an informal group of advisers, many of whom have positions in the CAC, some of whom have no formal posts at all, all of whom are over 80 years of age.⁹ The organizational device through which the two are joined is the "enlarged conference,"

6. *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*), 17 January 1987, p. 1. The meeting was convened and chaired by CMC and CAC chair Deng Xiaoping, while Bo Yibo, who was not a member of the Politburo, presented the summary of complaints. For an analysis and critique of this meeting, see Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang: A Chinese Biography* trans. William A. Wycoff (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1988), pp. 155–160.

7. The Politburo members involved were Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Li Xiannian (former members of the Politburo Standing Committee); Peng Zhen, Yu Qiuli, Yang Dezhi, Xi Zhongxun, Hu Qiaomu, Fang Yi, Ni Zhifu, and Chen Muhua (alternate).

8. Under the constitution adopted by the 12th Party Congress the Politburo, the Politburo Standing Committee, the general secretary and the Secretariat were all to be elected by the CC, making the Secretariat and the Politburo competing sources of power. The Secretariat was in position to supervise regional Party organs and the functional departments of the Party. At the 13th Congress the Secretariat was reduced in size from ten members to only four full members (including the general secretary) and one alternate and has been made the working office of the Politburo and its Standing Committee. Its membership is now nominated by the Politburo Standing Committee and approved by the CC. Tony Saich, "The Chinese Communist Party at the Thirteenth National Congress: Policies and prospects for reform," *Issues and Studies*, January 1989, pp. 11–40.

9. In estimated rank order of influence, these are Deng Xiaoping (born in 1904), former CMC chair; Chen Yun (born 1905), CAC chair; Yang Shangkun (born 1907), chief of state and first vice-chair of the CMC; Li Xiannian (born 1909), chair of the National Committee of the CPPCC; Wang Zhen (born 1908), vice-chief of state, also a CMC vice-chair; Bo Yibo (born 1908), executive vice-chair of the CAC; Song Renqiong (born 1909), vice-chair of the CAC; Peng Zhen (born 1902), retired chair of the NPC Standing Committee; and Deng Yingchao (born 1904), former Politburo member and former chair of the CPPCC National Committee.

which authorizes the chair to invite *ad hoc* participants to attend meetings on a discretionary basis.

The relationship between the two groupings is however not collegial but hierarchical. This can be seen in the fact that the “sitting committee” seems capable of overruling the Standing Committee on any given policy decision. Super-ordination appears to be based not only on the seniority norm, but on the fact that senior leaders exacted as their price for “retirement” the right to name their successors, who were then expected to remain in thrall. Thus Yao Yilin was beholden to Chen Yun, Zhao Ziyang was beholden to Deng Xiaoping, Li Peng was beholden to Deng Yingchao (but also to Chen Yun), Hu Qili was loyal to Hu Yaobang (later “adopted” by Zhao), and so forth. As the cases of Hu and Zhao illustrate, these appointees serve at the pleasure of their patrons, and can be dismissed at any time should a consensus of the immortals deem that appropriate. The arrangement is analogous to the relationship established between first and second “fronts” during the Maoist era: the senior group functions essentially as a board of directors, relegating routine business matters to the first front while intervening selectively on strategic decisions. The major difference is that whereas the second front previously consisted of Mao alone, it now comprises a small group. Aside from strengthening the hand of the immortals should a rift develop, this considerably complicates succession scenarios.

The distribution of agreement seems to be much more difficult to discern than the distribution of power; whereas protocol indicators may express the latter, any public disclosure of elite policy disagreements tends to have divisive social ramifications and is hence strictly proscribed. Such divisions can sometimes be determined on the basis of Aesopian language and other such signals, however, and during exceptional periods the veil of anonymity lifts (e.g., Red Guard raids on files to collect “black materials,” or selective elite leaks during the Cultural Revolution). Based on such evidence it would seem that there has been a general shift since the death of Mao from ideological to economic issue areas, although ideological questions still occasionally take priority, especially when the economic merits of an issue are ambiguous. Since elimination of residual Maoist loyalists at the 12th Party Congress in 1982, the membership has divided itself into roughly three groupings.

(1) The palæo-Maoist conservatives hearken back to the golden age of Chinese Communism before the Eighth Party Congress (September 1956), when the elite remained united in support of an adapted Soviet model. These veterans reject not only democratically oriented political reforms in the Party or state, but criticize many already implemented economic reforms for leading the country back to “capitalism” via “peaceful evolution.” Thus the “opening to the outside world” invites “spiritual pollution”; the Special Economic Zones are neo-colonialist enclaves, and so forth. Among representatives of this point of view are “retired” Party veterans such as Peng

Zhen, Wang Zhen, Li Xiannian, and Bo Yibo, along with an indefinite number of members of the central and provincial-level CACs. The advantage of this group lies in their faith in an ideological bedrock, which enables them to act decisively during crises when more pragmatic politicians become uncertain; their disadvantage is that relatively few among the younger generation share this faith, threatening the group with eventual extinction.

(2) The moderates are direct descendants of the “revisionists,” led by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in the early 1960s. Politically, they reject any form of democratization that might deviate from the Leninist “leading role of the Party,” though they are willing to give at least lip service to a clearer division of labour between Party and government. Economically somewhat more flexible and eclectic, they endorse the responsibility system, the opening to the outside world, and other early reforms, but remain cautious about further departures from central planning, adhering to Chen Yun’s “bird in cage” model of the plan-market relationship. Among the supporters of this perspective are Chen Yun, Li Peng, Yao Yilin and Jiang Zemin. Although Deng Xiaoping has on occasion taken a somewhat bolder approach to economic reform (for example, he seems to have promoted wholesale price reform in the spring of 1988), since Tiananmen he seems to have retreated to more modest within-system reform rather than fundamental transformation. Zhao Ziyang’s tacit backing for “new authoritarianism” in 1988 (i.e., NIC-style marketization under dictatorial auspices) suggests that he at one point toyed with some of these assumptions, though if so he certainly defected in early May 1989 when he adopted a conciliatory approach to the demonstrators. The so-called “princely party” (*taizi dang*), consisting of scions of high cadres, also generally subscribes to this point of view, which protects its vested interests and provides ample opportunity for corruption.

(3) The radical reformers endorse much more sweeping marketization and privatization than the moderates, including price reform. More significantly, they hold that reform cannot be restricted to the economic realm, but must include political reform if it is ultimately to succeed. This apparently means not only the separation of Party and government functions, but movement toward democratization and expanded human and civil rights (how much and in what form remains moot, as debate was truncated). Radical reformers probably include the late general secretary, Hu Yaobang; his successor, Zhao Ziyang; former Secretariat and Politburo Standing Committee member Hu Qili; Vice-minister Tian Jiyun, NPC Standing Committee chair Wan Li, and current Politburo member and CC Propaganda Bureau chief, Li Rihuan. The advantage of the radical reformers is their economic flexibility and an impressive 10-year record of growth in GNP and national income; their disadvantage is ideological, as every one of their major reforms does in fact point in the direction of what the CCP has always referred to as “capitalism.”

Attached to these three elite opinion groups are three corporate interest groups: the People's Liberation Army, whose instinctive predilection for law and order seems apt to be enhanced by their complicity in the 3 June repression; Qiao Shi's security apparatus, heavily reinforced since June 1989; and the state planning and ministerial bureaucracy, whose responsibilities have also expanded significantly. Although each of these corporate interests is disposed to support the conservatives or the moderates, there are also two more loosely organized functional interest groups whose sympathies lie with reform: the intellectuals, and the urban working classes. This is so despite the fact that their reliance on fixed salaries makes them acutely vulnerable to price reform.

Given the basic dimensions of alignment and cleavage within the CCP elite, how does the distribution of agreement intercalate in practice with the distribution of power? All other things being equal one would expect issue cleavages to reflect the seniority-based distribution of power, and this indeed seems normally to be the case. But under exceptional circumstances a discrepancy may arise between the distribution of power and the distribution of agreement.

First, a member of the second generation may split with his patron over a decision that is damaging to his own political base. This was true of Peng Zhen in 1965–66, for example, when Mao was pressuring him to move against Wu Han and other members of his municipal Party committee, and it seems to have been equally true of Zhao Ziyang in the early spring of 1989, when the immortals were pressuring him to suppress the intellectuals who signed the “three petitions” in support of the release of “political prisoners” (including Wei Jingshen) and to curb Shanghai's *World Economic Herald* (which supported them).

Secondly, the fact that the immortals have divested themselves of the formal trappings of power means that they dare not appear to be manipulating the situation from behind the scenes—the role of the “backstage backer” is a familiar villain in Chinese political theatre. Thus when Zhao revealed to Gorbachev in their televised meeting on 16 May 1989 that “a decision was made at the First Plenum of the Party's 13th Central Committee to the effect that Comrade Deng's guidance was still needed in dealing with most important issues,”¹⁰ Deng was reportedly furious. The immortals prefer to appear to be reluctantly responding to their protégés' cries for help in unsnarling the difficulties their inexperience has brought upon them, not simply reasserting their will over disobedient subordinates. Yang Shangkun's discussion of the role of the immortals in the dismissal of Zhao Ziyang is revealing, suggesting that the “expanded” membership lacks formal voting rights (“the decision was made by the majority of the Standing Committee”), but tacitly conceding that it wields decisive influence

10. *Ta Kung Pao* (Hong Kong), 17 May 1989, p. 2.

(“enjoy the highest prestige . . . how could they remain silent?”).¹¹ This ambivalence about wielding ultimate power does not seem to inhibit their actions in a crisis or when their vital interests are perceived to be at stake, but it does constrain them to assume a lower profile otherwise.

Thirdly, a cleavage is more likely to emerge if the patron is absent from the scene. For reasons alluded to above, the immortals do not always play an active role in decision-making – although they attend the Beidaihe meetings, which are conveniently close to their summer vacation residences, there is reason to believe that they otherwise allow their protégés to function rather independently. This permits cleavages to appear when decisions autonomously arrived at by the second generation diverge from the preferences of their patrons, as occurred in the cases of both Hu Yaobang in December 1986 and Zhao Ziyang in May 1989. When the immortals then step in to set things right, they may find that their protégés have already committed themselves to a different course.¹²

If a discrepancy should arise between the distribution of power and the distribution of agreement for these or any other reasons, this will create strain and quite possibly confrontation. One might assume such confrontations to be resolved in favour of those holding highest positions in the power hierarchy, but this is not inevitably the case – after all, the immortals were manipulated against their will into retirement, despite their seniority and formidable bases. As we shall see, the nature of the substantive issues at stake in such confrontations also plays an important role in sorting out winners and losers. These issues change over time, in concert with changes in the overall political-economic environment. We thus turn now to an analysis of the dynamics of change.

Change

The following look at the dynamics of change in patterns of elite strife in China will be subdivided into three subsections. In the first,

11. “After Zhao Ziyang’s resignation request was passed UTC to outside people, rumours circulated and people doubted that these old people in their 70s and 80s could properly solve problems. Here I would like to say that this question can be answered very easily. The decision was made by the majority of the Standing Committee members. The many old comrades enjoy the highest prestige inside the Party, because they have the highest seniority in the Party and have made major contributions to the Party and the state. At such a critical juncture of the Party and the state, how could they remain silent?” Speech given by Yang Shangkun at an emergency meeting of the Central Military Commission (24 May 1989), in *Ming Bao*, 29 May 1989, pp. 1–2.

12. Zhao Ziyang’s pained embarrassment when Deng forced a decision to impose martial law over his objections is evident in his locutions, in which he at once pledged his obedience to Deng and expressed his deep-seated reservations: “Let comrade Deng Xiaoping make the final decision.” “My thinking is different from yours and does not measure up. My continued participation in work would be an obstacle to the standing committee’s implementation of ideas put forward by the several elder comrades.” *Ming Bao*, 30 May 1989.

the inner dynamics of the cycle of elite conflict will be dissected. The second explores the correlates of conflict, emphasizing economic vicissitudes. The third looks at longer-term conflict dynamics, specifically as related to the struggle for leadership succession.

The Conflict Cycle. Comparison of the four major power struggles that have occurred since the death of Mao (resulting in the arrest of the “gang of four” in September 1976, gradual elimination of the Hua Guofeng grouping in 1979–81, the demotion of Hu Yaobang in 1987, and the purge of Zhao Ziyang in 1989) with the “10 big struggles” of the Maoist period reveals both continuities and discontinuities in the pattern of conflict; let us first look at the basic pattern, then consider the issue of continuity. Such confrontations may vary in length from a few months to several years, but nevertheless tend to go through a certain process, which may be broken down periodically. This periodization cannot be mechanically applied, as its constituent stages sometimes overlap or occur out of sequence. With all due caveats, then, conflict tends to unfold as follows:

(1) The first phase is one of open and legitimate disagreement, of “blooming and contending” when differences of opinion are sanctioned as “contradictions among the people.” These periods of tolerant “opening” (*fang*) are necessary to permit opposition to manifest itself, to allow “snakes” to come out of their “holes” (as viewed in retrospect). The archetypal example is that of the original Hundred Flowers movement, followed by the anti-rightist movement. The June 1959 confrontation at Lushan between Mao and Peng Dehuai was preceded by at least half a year’s tolerance of criticisms of the more radical Leap programmes, and by a pragmatic and on the whole forthcoming response to these criticisms.¹³ In the post-Mao era, the arrest of the “gang of four” was preceded, if not by official tolerance, by a period of 18 months in which public opinion whipsawed from left to right with increasing frequency due to the inability of any faction to control it. The political demise of Hua Guofeng and his retinue was preceded by the “criterion of truth” campaign and by Democracy Wall, the only such instance of grassroots activism that Deng unequivocally endorsed. The summer of 1986 was one of unprecedented intellectual openness marked by the 30th anniversary of the “double hundred” (let a hundred flowers bloom, let a hundred schools of thought contend), the 20th anniversary of the publication of the “May 16 Circular” (which inaugurated the Cultural Revolution), and the 10th anniversary of the end of the Cultural Revolution; public debate ultimately culminated in the student protest movement that precipitated Hu Yaobang’s demotion.

13. See *The Case of Peng Teh-huai 1959–1968* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1968); also Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 384–411.

Tiananmen of course marked the climax of the most broadly based instance of mass “blooming” in the history of the People’s Republic.

(2) This stage is marked by transformation from “non-antagonistic” to “antagonistic” conflict, from “contradictions among the people” to “contradictions between the people and the enemy.” The major difference between the two seems to be that whereas the former involves relatively impersonal discussion of problems, in the latter blame for these problems is affixed to specific persons, turning the debate into a fight for political survival. In the case of Peng Dehuai, Peng’s personification of his critique remained implicit, due to the superior status and power of his target, while Mao’s counterattack was direct and personal. The Cultural Revolution did not conform to type in the sense that its principal targets never admitted intentional opposition to Mao, but it was preceded by six years in which these people discreetly but unmistakably held Mao responsible for the catastrophic errors of the Great Leap Forward. In the cases of both Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang there is reason to suspect that this phase was reached even before the “blooming” period provided a more suitable pretext for a coup. Hu Yaobang, leading force in an ambitious drive to retire veteran cadres (who advised Deng at a summer 1986 Beidaihe meeting to set an example by retiring from the Politburo),¹⁴ first encountered resistance at the Sixth Plenum of the 12th Party Congress in September, which (with Deng’s explicit backing) subtly shifted the Party line from political reform to the critique of “bourgeois liberalization.” Peng Zhen gave speeches criticizing Hu’s alleged ideological laxness in October and November, and in December Deng boycotted Hu’s speech to the enlarged meeting of the CC’s Central Military Commission (CMC). Zhao Ziyang, thanks to his insufficiently vigorous response to the “three petitions,” came under repeated fire from Chen Yun, Li Xiannian, Bo Yibo, and Wang Zhen well before Hu Yaobang’s death brought the masses into play.¹⁵ Zhao then antagonized Deng, his last pinion of support, by excessive obeisance to Hu (whom Deng had purged) at his funeral,¹⁶ and by implicitly fingering Deng as backstage stringpuller in his 16 May talk with Gorbachev.

(3) The third stage involves the political destruction of the target. It goes through three sub-phases: the imposition of military constraint, disarming the target’s political base, and public degradation ceremonies.

Immediately after transformation of the conflict to an antagonistic contradiction (sometimes even simultaneously), the military is called in to surround and disarm the target, who is then usually placed under

14. Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang*, p. 155.

15. See *Ching Pao*, 10 April 1989, pp. 22–23; and *Zheng Ming*, 1 April 1989, pp. 6–9, and 1 March 1989, pp. 6–9.

16. Zhao insisted over Deng’s objections that Hu be honoured as a “great Marxist–Leninist,” and that the memorial meeting be held in the Great Hall of the People. *Zheng Ming*, No. 142, 1 August 1989, pp. 9–10.

house arrest. During the Cultural Revolution, the capital was reportedly surrounded by troops prior to the 11th Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee (Fernand Gigon, *Vie et mort de la Revolution Culturelle* (Paris: Flammarion Editeur, 1969), pp. 50–65). Liu and Deng were apparently placed under house arrest shortly after the October 1966 work conference and confined to their official residences at Zhongnanhai for the duration, to be brought out only for “struggle” meetings. In his analysis of the purges of Peng Dehuai, Liu Shaoqi and other Cultural Revolution targets (including Lin Biao), Pillsbury takes note of a series of military transfers clearly designed to physically isolate and intimidate the victim.¹⁷ This pattern of troop movement and military intimidation can also be documented in the case of the “gang of four.”¹⁸ No evidence of military intimidation against Hua Guofeng has been found, on the other hand, perhaps because Hua’s military connections were so tenuous. In proceeding against Hu Yaobang, however, Deng announced a military alert, and Peng Zhen surrounded Beijing with the People’s Armed Police that he commanded.¹⁹

In Zhao Ziyang’s case the PLA became more extensively involved than at any time since the Cultural Revolution, and their movements have been fully documented.²⁰ Although generally assumed to be mobilized for crowd control, there is reason to believe that they were first called in to resolve an elite conflict and only deployed against the masses when their suppression seemed prerequisite to the purge of Zhao. When Zhao returned from North Korea and announced that he had different views on the 26 April editorial, Deng secretly directed the Ministry of State Security to put him under “internal control.” Deng then moved to a military base in the Western Hills of Beijing to convene the CMC and direct the movement of several hundred thousand troops into Beijing over different routes, leaving Zhongnanhai evacuated except for Zhao and his family.²¹ He had been misled to anticipate that someone was planning a coup with the help of the Beijing Military Region Command, Deng later confided to Chen Yun.²² Whereas Zhao had already rescinded his resignation and now

17. These include the shift of the Beijing Garrison commander, shift of the Beijing Military Region commander, transfer of officers or troops associated with the target out of the capital, replacement of the public security minister and vice-ministers, and the transfer of loyal troops into the capital arena. See Michael Pillsbury, “Patterns of Chinese power struggles: Three models,” unpublished paper prepared for university seminar on modern China, Columbia University, New York, 27 March 1974.

18. In which case there may have been real risk that the target might mobilize military counterforce: Mao Yuanxin allegedly attempted to mobilize 10,000 troops in the Shenyang Military Region based on his position as political commissar, and there were apparently unsuccessful intrigues to arm Shanghai’s urban militia. See Andres D. Onate, “Hua Kuo-feng and the arrest of the ‘gang of four,’” *CQ*, No. 75 (1978), pp. 540–566.

19. Yang Zhongmei, *Hu Yaobang*, pp. 156–58.

20. See for example Harlan Jencks, “China’s military after the Beijing massacre,” *Air Force Magazine*, November 1989.

21. *Zheng Ming*, No. 142, 1 August 1989, pp. 8–9.

22. *Asiaweek*, 9 June 1989, p. 26.

defiantly refused to resign, he was placed under house arrest on 19 May, and all troop commands were instructed to disregard his orders.²³

Disarming the target's base must proceed with great delicacy, usually using divide and conquer tactics, buying off those who can be bought and defusing those who cannot. Lin Biao's base was particularly formidable,²⁴ and Mao moved against him with all the deliberation of a military campaign. His first moves were designed to undermine Lin's support in the CC, the CMC, and the Beijing Military Region, which he proudly described in metaphor:

One was to throw stones, one was to mix in sand, and the third was to dig up the cornerstone. . . . My method was to get hold of these stones and give critical comments, and then let everyone discuss them – this was throwing stones. When dirt is too tightly packed, no air can get through, but if a little sand is mixed in, air can circulate. When work groups of the Military Affairs Commission did not have enough people mixed in, more were added – this is called mixing in sand. Reorganizing the Peking Military Region is called digging up the cornerstone.²⁵

Similarly, Deng proceeded to move against Hua shortly after his second rehabilitation. After the dismissal of Wu De and Chen Xilian and their replacement by Deng supporters Lin Hujia and Qin Jiwei, he proceeded to reduce further the number of Hua's men on the Politburo Standing Committee between the 11th Party Congress and the Fourth Plenum of the 11th CC from seven to three to two while increasing the number of his own supporters from 7 to 13 or 14.²⁶

Public degradation ceremonies are designed to prepare public opinion for the invocation of severe sanctions against a once honoured leader, so that the target becomes "like a rat crossing a street and everyone shouts, 'Kill it!'" Degradation begins by elaborate indirection, using figurative language and pseudonyms that still permit a face-saving retreat should the sally fail to mobilize sufficient backing (*zhi sang mai huai*, as the Chinese put it: "pointing at the locust while cursing the mulberry"). Thus Liu Shaoqi first came under fire early in the Cultural Revolution as "China's Khrushchev," while Deng Xiaoping was criticized as "the number two Party person in authority taking the capitalist road"; these charges were then repeated for a full two years before his attackers were ready to convene a CC

23. *Ming Pao*, 21 May 1989, as cited in British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcasts, Part III: The Far East, 25 May 1989.

24. Lin's Fourth Field Army loyalty group dominated five provinces, held a strong position in two, a weaker position in six others, whereas 14 provinces were under the control of his opponents and two under the domain of the Cultural Revolution left. Juergen Domes, *China After the Cultural Revolution*, pp. 130–31, as cited in Schattschneider, p. 124.

25. "Summary of Chairman Mao's Talks to responsible local comrades during his tour of inspection" (mid August to 12 September 1971), in Michael Kau, *The Lin Biao Affair: Power Politics and Military Coup* (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975), p. 62.

26. Domes, *Government and Politics of the PRC: A Time of Transition* (Boulder: Westview, 1985), p. 163, as cited in Schattschneider, p. 124.

Plenum and bring formal charges. The purpose of the polemic in this case was not merely to prepare public opinion for the victim's fall but to provide a symbolic antipodes to Maoist values in the cultural transformation of the Chinese masses.²⁷ In the Mao–Lin imbroglio, Mao signalled his displeasure shortly after the Ninth Congress by assailing the “theory of genius” that Lin Biao had been publicly espousing, then launching an oblique critique of “Liu-type swindler” Chen Boda. Deng initiated his campaign against Hua at a PLA “National Political Work Conference” (27 April to 6 June 1978) by attacking “whateverism” and introducing the contrasting thesis that “practice is the sole criterion of truth.”

Such attacks on policies easily identifiable with a specific leader function as low-risk probes of the strength of the potential target's base.²⁸ Following a settling of accounts, a second phase of polemics may be conducted in which the target's identity becomes explicit and additional “black material” is brought to light. The Cultural Revolution critique of Liu Shaoqi became explicit after the 12th Plenum of the Eighth Party Congress in the autumn of 1968. The criticism of Lin Biao became explicit after the 13 September incident, now grouping Lin with Confucius (read: Zhou Enlai) as symbols of feudal reaction.

(4) A “settling of accounts,” or formal disposition of the case, takes place at a meeting or series of central meetings, always culminating at least in a CC Plenum, perhaps even a Party Congress. Prior to the formal meeting, a special investigation committee is named to sift through relevant documentary material (in Zhao's case, this consisted of Yang Shangkun, Li Peng, and Qiao Shi). Depending on the nature of the indictment, the attitude of the accused, and the overall political climate, verdicts may range, in ascending order of severity, from forced retirement, to an ouster from all Party and government posts, to eviction from the Party, to trial under criminal charges. In some cases (e.g., Gao Gang and Rao Shushi, Lin Biao) death may be the ultimate outcome, but not as part of the formal sentence. Peng Dehuai's (relatively mild verdict) was decided at the Eighth Plenum of the Eighth CC in August 1959; Liu Shaoqi's relatively harsh verdict and a somewhat milder one for Deng Xiaoping at the 12th Plenum of the Eighth CC; Lin Biao's posthumous condemnation was effected at the 10th National Party Congress in August 1973; Hua Guofeng's removal from his several leadership positions proceeded in stages, culminating in his removal from chairmanship of the CC and the CMC at the Sixth Plenum of the 11th CC in June 1981 (though he remained in the Politburo until the 12th Party Congress the following year). Hu Yaobang's “resignation” from the position of Party general secretary was accepted by a work conference of dubious legal standing

27. See L. Dittmer, *Liu Shao-ch'i and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

28. See Eberhard Sandschneider, “Political succession in the People's Republic of China: rule by purge,” in Peter Calvert, (ed.), *The Process of Political Succession* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 110–135.

in January 1987, whereas Zhao's dismissal was more properly formalized by the Fourth Plenum of the 13th CC. In all cases, the settling of accounts is a rather anti-climactic formalization of a political *fait accompli*.

The policy ramifications of a settling of accounts, depending on the political thrust of the target's parried challenge, may involve a radical departure from the *status quo ante*; generally speaking, a rightist challenge will provoke a leftist lurch, and vice versa. Peng Dehuai's purge was followed by a temporary reaffirmation and extension of already discredited radical policies. The purge of Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in 1968 was followed by radical changes in political and economic policy, though not all of them lasted very long; Lin Biao's death resulted in the dismantling of military radicalism and a partial return to more moderate policies. Whereas the early post-Mao purges (of the "gang of four" and Hua Guofeng) were associated with a rightist tilt, the later ones (of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang) shifted policies leftward (i.e., towards reaffirmation of Maoist values).

Since the death of Mao, this basic pattern of elite strife has held true *strictu sensu* only in the case of the purge of the "gang of four", which might be considered transitional as it took place under the auspices of neo-Maoist Hua Guofeng. Not even this case fully conformed to type, however, for although the Gang received public degradation backed by harsh sentences, their case was resolved in a formal judicial proceeding designed to affirm the rule of law. While the first two stages of strife still apply, the Deng regime has tended to modulate the stage of political destruction. The Dengists have for instance essentially eschewed the use of public polemics against elite targets, consistent with their greater emphasis on institutionalization and an anti-populist orientation. Hua Guofeng retained a token seat on the CC, while Hu Yaobang even remained within the Politburo until his death. Even the case of Zhao, which is more redolent of the Maoist purges than any other since the "gang of four,"²⁹ stopped short of public polemics, trial, or eviction from the Party.

Epicycles. As epicycles are cycles contingent upon other cycles, our concern in this section is to relate cycles of elite strife to changes in the political and economic environment. There are two patterns of short-term change which seem to have significantly affected leadership dynamics: the business cycle, and waves of spontaneous mass participation.

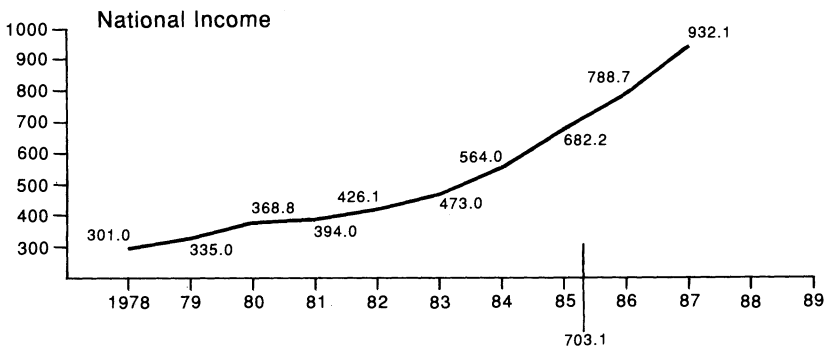
The business cycle in post-Mao China has not been characterized by periods of growth followed by periods of recession, as growth in both GNP and national income has been sustained at a very high level

29. For one thing, it was the closest call since the contest between Lin Biao and Mao Zedong, with an unprecedented defection rate among high political and military elites prior to the bloodbath.

throughout the reform era, at least until the post-Tiananmen retrenchment (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).

The economy has however been beset by stubborn inflationary tendencies and, due to a combination of these and the somewhat erratic regime attempts to cope with them, seems to have fallen into a cyclical pattern. To simplify considerably, the cycle may be said to have two phases: vigorous expansion (“booms”), and monetary and fiscal contraction (“busts”). Booms are characterized by loose money policies, greater emphasis on material incentives, intensified commercialism and consumption (“getting rich through labour”), overheated investment, domestic budget deficits and a negative balance of foreign

Figure 1: National Income (Rmb bn)



(703.1) *Chinese Statistical Yearbook 1988*.

Figure 2: Total Industrial and Agricultural Output Value (Rmb bn)

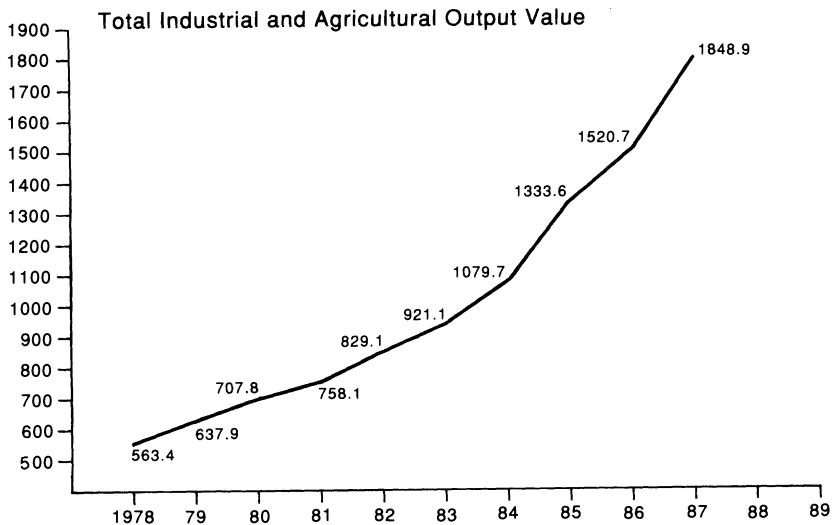
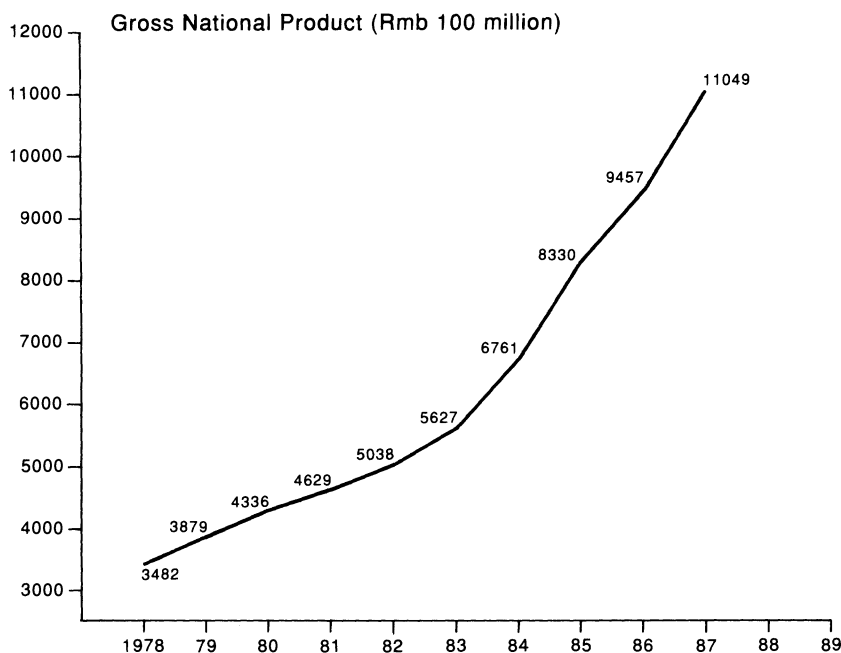


Figure 3: Economic Indicators (annual)

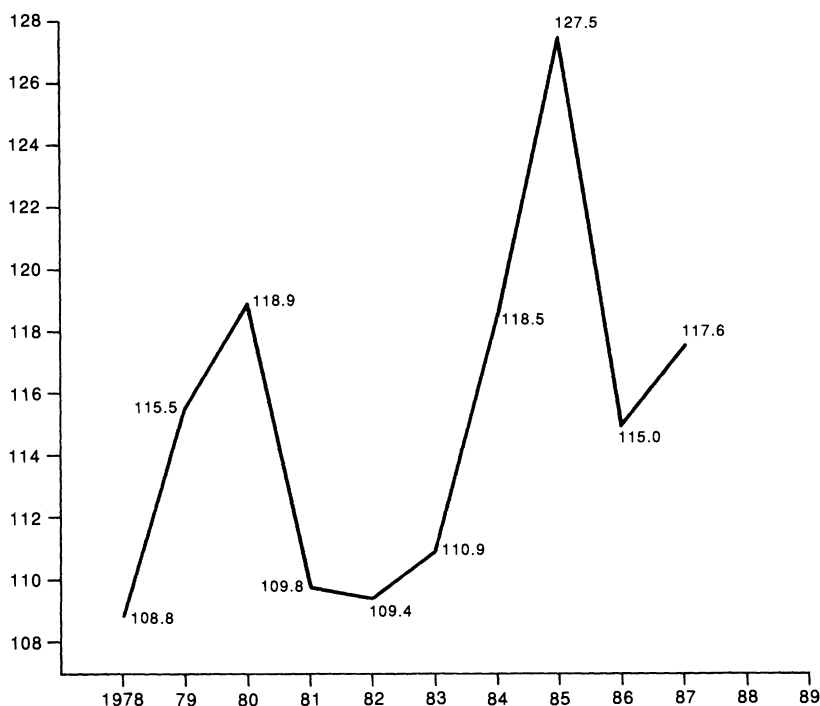


trade, all of which contribute to marked inflationary tendencies. Inflation precipitates a bust, which is characterized by tight money policies, contraction of commercialism and consumerism, the cutting of bonuses, ideological encouragement of saving and self-denial.

One of the main forces driving booms has been the market, which provides opportunities for investment by collective and private enterprises, which make up the most vigorously expansive sector of the post-Mao economy. Busts on the other hand call into play central governmental intervention to restrain capital expansion (usually through administrative measures) and reassert the values of thrift and planning (*viz.*, “self-reliance and hard struggle,” Lei Feng). In terms of the factional divisions adumbrated earlier, booms thus favour the political interests of radical reformers, *ceteris paribus*, whereas busts serve the interests of the central planning authorities and ministries, who see this as an opportunity to retrench the private and collective sectors and redress the economic balance in favour of the planned state sector (still the source of 75 per cent of government revenues).

In the course of the reform era, there have been three booms and three busts, roughly calculated: the periods from 1978–80, 1982–85, and 1986–88 have been booms, while the periods 1980–81, 1985–86, and 1988–90 have been busts. As indicated in figures 4 to 8, booms tend to be characterized by relatively high indices of inflation,

Figure 4: Indexes of Total Value of Retail Sales (Preceding year=100)

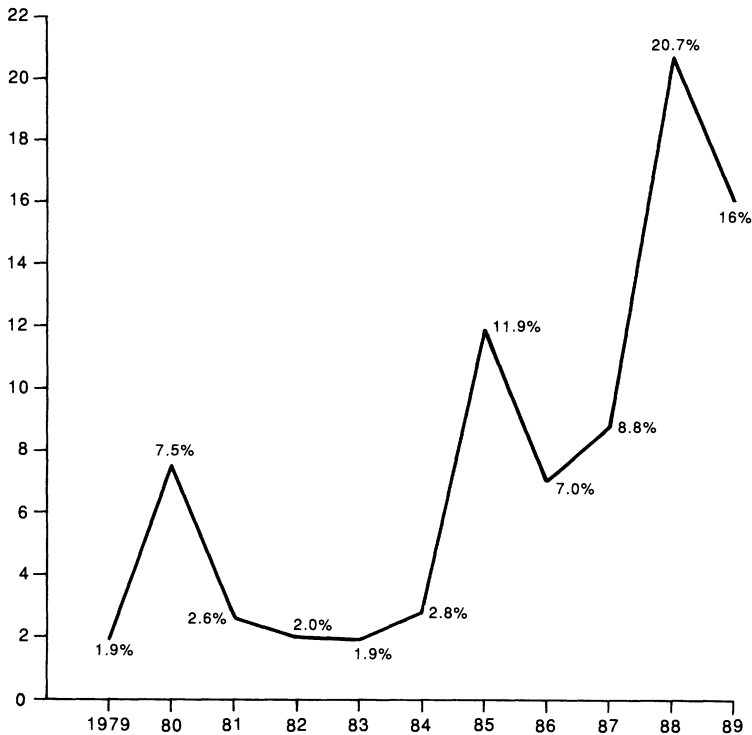


commercial activity, and indebtedness, both foreign and domestic; busts tend to counteract these trends.

Spontaneous mass protest activity does not (so far as can be determined at this time) coincide precisely with the business cycle, although the popular echo it evokes may be related to perceived economic opportunities and the standard of living. Nor do mass protests necessarily coincide (again, so far as can be determined) with periods of intellectual “opening” (*fang*) and “closing” (*shou*) (which do tend to coincide roughly with booms and busts, respectively),³⁰ though protesters may draw intellectual inspiration from the former. Mass protest is triggered rather by the haphazard occurrence of incendiary incidents, the presence of political entrepreneurs, and the availability of symbolically appropriate holidays or anniversaries, when mass activity is officially sanctioned.

30. My tentative periodization of intellectual *fang* and *shou* phases is as follows: from the death of Mao to December 1979, *fang* (i.e., the “wound” literature, “emancipation of the mind”); from January 1980 through December 1983, *shou* (including the criticism of Bai Hua, “bourgeois liberalism,” and “spiritual pollution”); from January 1984 to December 1986, *fang* (the “cultural fever,” critique of feudal tradition, discussion of alienation, existentialism, psychoanalysis, etc.); from December 1986 to March 1987, *shou* (critique of “bourgeois liberalization”); from the spring of 1987 to June of 1989, *fang*; from June 1989 to this writing, *shou*.

Figure 5: Consumer Price Inflation (%)

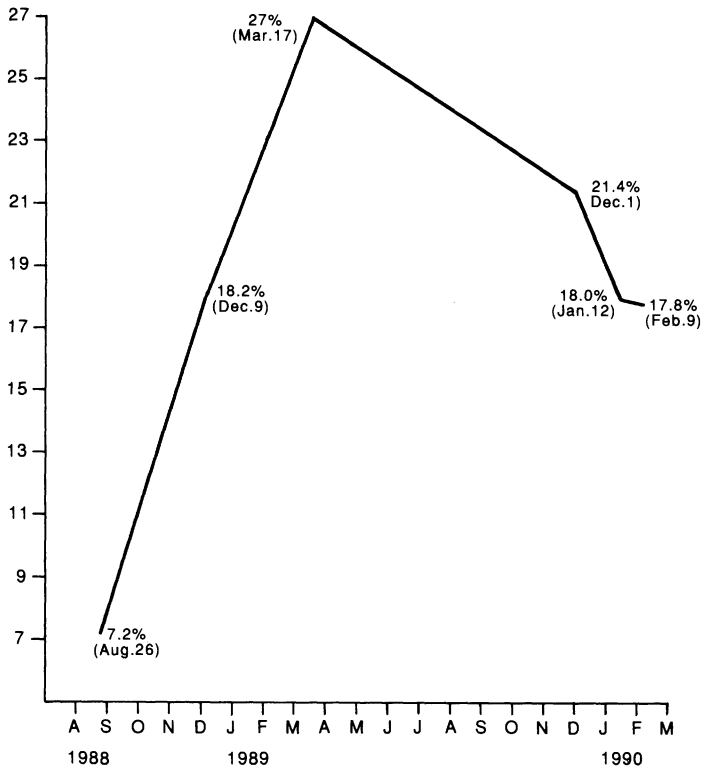


Source: *Quarterly Economic Review, Country Report China, North Korea, No. 4 (1989)*

A mass protest may occur either during a boom or a bust. If it occurs during a boom, however, there appears to be less likelihood of a crackdown than if it occurs during a bust. Thus the Democracy Wall movement began the spring of 1978 and some of its manifestations (i.e., the self-published tabloids) lasted through early 1981, arising in a boom and surviving with difficulty well into a bust, until a harsh crackdown put the underground papers out of business. The autumn 1985 student protest movement against the Japanese commercial invasion arose during a boom, was handled with kid gloves and died a quiet death by the end of the year. The student protest demonstrations of December 1986 and the democracy movement of April–May 1989 both occurred during busts, on the other hand, and both were met with violent repressive tactics that included the purge of those leaders accused of supporting the demonstrators.³¹

31. In 1987, these included Hu, Propaganda Department director Zhu Houze, his deputy Teng Teng, and Lu Jiayi, president of the Academy of Science. In 1989, these included Zhao, Su Shaozhi (president of the Society for the Study of the Theory and Practice of Mao Zedong Thought), Wang Meng (Minister of Culture), Hu Qili (member of the Politburo Standing Committee and the Secretariat), Secretariat members Rui Xingwen and Yan Mingfu, and the leadership of *Renmin ribao*.

Figure 6: Inflation CPI (%)

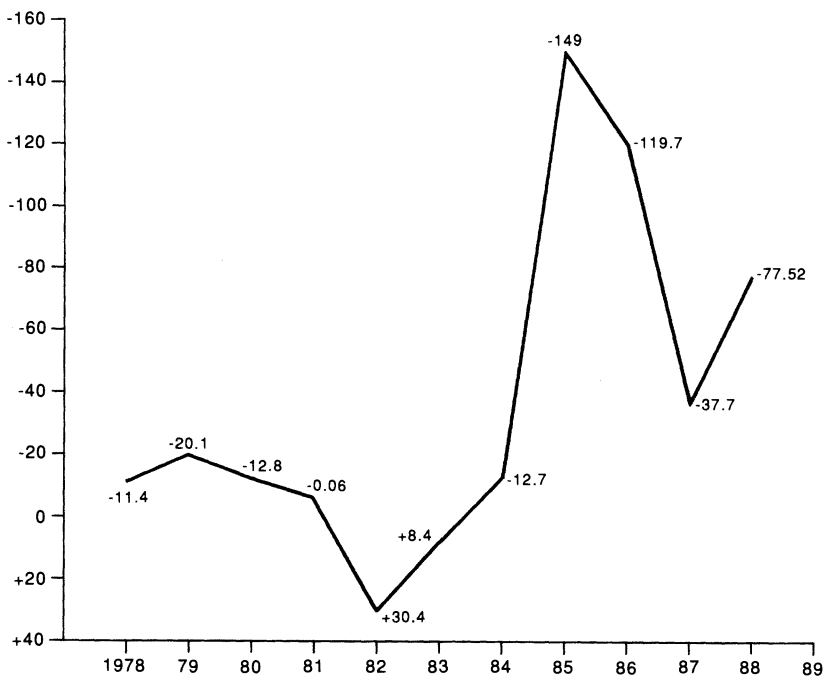


Source: *Asiaweek*, Key economic indicators (Aug 26—Feb 23, 1990)

There are at least two reasons for this variability in elite response to spontaneous mass mobilization. First, the radical reformers may be assumed to have the upper hand during a boom, pushing their policies of loose money, economic reform, and vigorous market expansion. They dislike suppressing the student entrepreneurs who lead the mass protests and the intellectuals who inspire them, all of whom are part of their natural constituency. Secondly, a harsh repression of protests is functionally inappropriate for economic reform and expansion, tending to have a chilling effect that spills over from the political arena into the economy. During a bust, on the other hand, the conservatives and moderates are in ascendancy. Mass protest provides both pretext and opportunity to attack the reform constituency, scapegoat and if possible purge radical reformers for their alleged excesses (confounding mass protest with economic inflation). Moreover, such a repression, with its attendant chilling effect, is fully compatible with an economic counter-inflationary policy.

The political upshot is that radical reformers are most vulnerable to purge when spontaneous mass activism happens to coincide with a bust, whereas conservatives are most vulnerable to purge or “retirement” during boom phases if mass activity remains quiescent. Thus

Figure 7: Balance of Imports and Exports (US \$ 100 million)



Source: China Yearbook 1988.

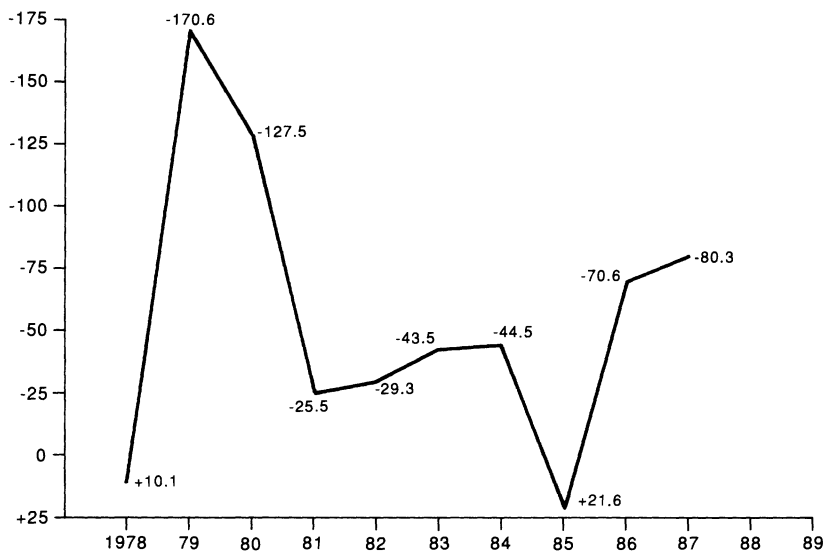
the retirement of conservatives took place in three waves in 1980, 1985 and 1987, periods which fit both criteria.³² Moderates are best positioned on the spectrum to survive either contingency. Graphically depicted:

		<i>Business Cycle</i>	
		boom	bust
<i>Mass Activity</i>	high	tolerance	purge reformers
	low	purge conservatives	chill

It is conceivable that the present “chill,” in which the most prolonged retrenchment yet is compounded by military suppression,

32. The first wave, retired in February 1980, included Chen Xilian, Chen Yonggui, Wang Dongxing, Ji Dengkui, and Wu De. The second wave, retired at the special Party conference in September 1985, included Deng Yingchao, Li Desheng, Nie Rongzhen, Song Renqiong, Ulanhu, Wang Zhen, Wei Guoqing, Xu Xiangqian, Ye Jianying, and Zhang Tingfa. The third wave, retired at the 13th Party Congress, has been partially listed in footnote 7.

Figure 8: Balance of Financial Revenue and Expenditure (Rmb 100 million)



Source: *China Yearbook 1988*.

purge of the reform leadership, and an unprecedented economic slowdown, may finally bring inflation to heel and permit reform to resume on a more stable economic footing. A more realistic prospect, in view of the indefinite postponement of further privatization or price reform, is for an easing of tight money to be followed by resumption of the inflationary boom–bust cycle. This may be expected eventually to create new openings for surviving reformers and mass entrepreneurs.

Life Cycles. Succession is both important and problematic in all Communist Party states. It is important because power is so concentrated and political action is highly variable with the incumbency of top posts. It is problematic because no reliable means for the transfer of power has yet been devised in any Communist regime. The two main types of succession arrangement are pre-mortem succession, in which the departing incumbent attempts to install an heir apparent and invest him with power before his demise, and post-mortem succession, in which the incumbent leaves a last will and testament or not even that, letting the chips fall where they may.³³

China has had only one completed succession, yet succession has loomed unusually large as an occasion for elite strife. At least five of the major elite conflicts reviewed above (*viz.*, Mao vs. Liu, Mao vs. Lin, Hua vs. Deng, Deng vs. Hu, and Deng vs. Zhao) have at least

33. See Myron Rush's classic analysis in *Political Succession in the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), and *How Communist States Change Their Rulers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

tangentially involved succession arrangements. In most other Communist systems the typical pattern is one of post-mortem succession (as in the succession to Stalin, Khrushchev, or Brezhnev): the incumbent avoids making pre-mortem arrangements out of (justifiable) concern that the heir apparent might seek to succeed him pre-emptively (as in the case of Ulbricht, or Gheorghiu-Dej). The Chinese are distinctive in the strength of their attachment to pre-mortem succession arrangements, one consequence of which has been to multiply the occasions for succession disputes.

In theory, the attraction of pre-mortem succession is that it offers the best way of reducing the uncertainty of the transition, allowing the successor to consolidate his (or her) power with the assistance of the retiring incumbent. It also gives the incumbent a determining role in the selection of a successor—though scarcely omnipotent, as the fate of Malenkov illustrates. In late 1975 a cancer-stricken Zhou Enlai attempted to arrange for Deng Xiaoping to succeed him as premier, which would have also put Deng in position (as first vice-chair of the CC) to succeed Mao; but these plans were upset when Mao outlived Zhou, and proceeded to demote Deng within weeks of Zhou's funeral. Aside from the risk that well-laid pre-mortem plans might go awry amid unpredictable post-mortem circumstances, the Chinese are scarcely immune from the suspicions inherent in the relationship between incumbent and heir apparent. Experience has demonstrated that on the one hand the incumbent is apt to change his mind (as in the case of Liu Shaoqi), and that the heir apparent is liable under certain circumstances to try to pre-empt succession (as in the case of Lin Biao). In any event, though Chinese leaders are drawn to pre-mortem succession as a way of stabilizing the transition and precluding crisis, while bestowing honour and respite to a declining incumbent, they have not yet arrived at a foolproof arrangement.

Although succession is apt to precipitate a relatively raw form of power struggle, concerned at bottom with who rules and not how or what for, the policy implications are apt to be profound and long lasting, as the succession to Lenin illustrates. Before taking up the question of how to predict who will prevail in such a contest, we should examine the impact of the succession struggle itself on the political system. To simplify considerably, we may say that there are two possible answers to this question: one is that succession incapacitates the system (the "succession crisis" school), the other that succession renews and invigorates the system.

The succession crisis scenario implicitly deals with an unresolved post-mortem succession, finding the system to be paralysed by indecision, rift and deadlock, as every major issue presupposes an answer to the moot question: who may decide? Yet having just emerged from one oppressive incubus, the surviving members of the Politburo are not eager to throw themselves beneath another one, and the leadership finds itself torn between fear of renewed tyranny and the need for strong leadership. Until such a leader emerges (which is

presumed), decisions can be arrived at only through a process of circuitous and time-consuming consultation and compromise known as “collective leadership.” While the leadership becomes at least temporarily more consultative, even pluralistic, the system tends to stagnate.³⁴

Bunce and, with some important qualifications, Roeder, argue that succession crises stimulate political innovation rather than paralysing the system’s capacity, as young and more imaginative successors seek to consolidate a new regime with policies calculated to attract a politically significant constituency.³⁵ Thus succession in socialist countries is, according to Bunce, an opportunity for change analogous to electoral turnover in bourgeois democratic systems. There are certain similarities between Rush and Bunce—both agree that succession is inevitably followed by a return to strong personal rule—but for Bunce this poses the danger of stagnation (as the competitive impetus for innovation is removed), while for Rush (and Roeder), the new monocratic leadership may be expected to proceed with whatever innovations were originally intended.

In the Chinese case, only one of the five succession struggles listed above has been post mortem (*viz.*, Hua vs. Deng, 1976–81). In this contest, the evidence appears to bear out the Bunce thesis, for no sooner had Deng gained dominance at the Third Plenum of the 11th CC than a series of boldly innovative programmes, and national endorsements for experiments carried out locally, began to issue forth from the Centre; in short, Deng did not consolidate his power before proceeding, but utilized reform as a way of consolidating his power. The slackening in the momentum of reform that has set in since 1986 is perhaps due only in part to the objective difficulties encountered by the reform programme, and partly to the reduced incentive of a fully consolidated regime to take bold risks.

The more typical Chinese pattern is however what might be referred to as the “pre-mortem succession crisis.” How can we call this a succession crisis when succession is blocked? What distinguishes a pre-mortem crisis from a mere power struggle is that the incumbent has already manifested his intention to pass the sceptre and set a succession regime in motion. This regime approximates that of a monarchical *regency*: the incumbent announces a wish to retire, designates an heir apparent, and invests this princeling with plenary powers. The incumbent then steps into the wings to think about more profound matters, ready however to reappear if needed. This arrangement often takes the form of two leadership fronts, the first led

34. *Ibid.*

35. See Valerie Bunce, *Do New Leaders Make a Difference? Succession and Public Policy Under Capitalism and Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), and Philip G. Roeder, “Do new Soviet leaders really make a difference? Rethinking the ‘succession connection,’” *American Political Science Review*, 79 (1985), pp. 958–976. Roeder argues in contradistinction to Bunce that the innovative capacity of a new leader tends to be low, with the result that early years tend to be focused around consolidation, and reform is postponed till afterwards.

by the regent, who looks after routine business, the second by the retiring incumbent.

The first regency was established by Mao Zedong in the late 1950s, setting the stage for a pre-mortem succession crisis that was to last almost two decades. The recurrent pattern was for the incumbent to designate an heir, grow disillusioned with him over time as various inadequacies become manifest (among them the failure to consult with the incumbent), and then in a climactic episode to become sharply disappointed with some initiative undertaken by the regent and on that basis to kick him out and find a new favourite. In the case of Liu Shaoqi this was the dispatch of work teams during the first hundred days of the Cultural Revolution; in the case of Lin Biao, manoeuvres around the chief of state position; in the case of Jiang Qing, her attempt to act as “slate”-maker for the Fourth NPC in January 1975. Since 1986, Deng Xiaoping seems to have fallen into the same pattern, becoming disappointed first with Hu Yaobang and then Zhao Ziyang over the same basic issue—their handling of spontaneous mass protest. Although the basic dynamic is dyadic, other players may also play a role: any rival contender for power will find both pretext and opportunity to help queer the relationship between incumbent and heir apparent, in hopes of arranging another regency. Thus Zhou Enlai proved useful in the derailment of Lin Biao’s ambitions, Zhao Ziyang in the demotion of Hu Yaobang, and Li Peng in the ouster of Zhao Ziyang.

The systemic implications of this Don Juan pattern of fickle succession arrangements conform to the Rush model. There are conflicts of interest not only between the heir apparent and other potential successors, as in a post-mortem struggle, but between the incumbent and the designated successor. The incumbent’s goodwill toward the successor’s success is apt to be tinged by fear of death and eclipse, in the context of which the would-be successor’s attempt to establish an independent base or to take initiatives departing from “principles laid down” is liable to evoke jealousy—as well as competitive bids from rival contenders. The pattern is not one of a paralysis of will but a sequence of innovations, none of which can strike roots before being replaced by another, quite different one. This vacillation is tolerated under the tacit understanding that the incumbent’s tenure is nearing its natural end and that cynical discretion is preferable to downward mobility.

From this perspective, prospects for the third regency of Deng Xiaoping do not appear rosy. The newly designated leadership “core,” general secretary Jiang Zemin, has a political base neither broad nor deep, portending friction with Li Peng, Qiao Shi, or Li Ruihuan. The leadership is afflicted by a gerontocratic overhang in the form of the gang of immortals, who will continue to intervene unpredictably with peremptory advice. The situation is in many respects analogous to that of the CPSU Politburo near the end of Brezhnev’s tenure. This implies that the succession to Deng Xiaoping

is apt to have a false resolution, with real power still residing in the sitting committee. The relationship between formal and informal power seems for the time being hopelessly befuddled. Only in the wake of a generational succession does the situation seem likely to sort itself out sufficiently to permit a new leadership to emerge and articulate a fresh "line."