

NUANCES IN CHINESE POLITICAL CULTURE

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The purpose of this essay is to identify and explore some themes in Chinese culture that may enrich our understanding of Chinese political behavior. We will largely be dealing with sentiments, not behavior, and therefore our points should be read for their possible value in sensitizing analysis to marginal, but at times critically important, considerations. For purpose of exposition, we shall make our statements appear to be more unqualified than we mean them to be taken, but we trust that readers can appreciate the tentative character of our remarks.

### DECEPTION

Chinese literature on strategy from Sun Tzu through Mao Tse-tung has emphasized deception more than many other military doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

Sun Tzu wrote:

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem inactive: when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away we

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This essay is based upon conversations between the authors at Rand in August 1969. The starting point was Lucian W. Pye's *Spirit of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1968). The themes developed ranged far afield, but in this report we shall deal with only those that are related in some degree.

<sup>1</sup>See Barton Whaley, *Strategies: Deception and Surprise of War* (New York: Praeger, forthcoming).

must make him believe we are near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him.<sup>2</sup>

And, of course, the themes of surprise and deception run throughout Mao's writings on revolutionary warfare.

Chinese deception is oriented mainly toward inducing the enemy to act inexpediently and less toward protecting the integrity of one's own plans. In other cultures, particularly Western, deception is used primarily with the intention of ensuring that one's own forces can realize their maximum striking potential; one masks one's intentions so as to make them more effective, but the payoff continues to depend upon one's own capabilities. On the other hand, the prevalent payoff of deception for the Chinese is that one does not have to use one's own forces. As Sun Tzu said, "The highest form of generalship is to baulk the enemy's plans."<sup>3</sup> And, "What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Chinese deception is oriented to the failure of the enemy; Western deception is oriented to the success of the self. In the military field, the paradigm of deception for the Chinese is the ambush in which surprise can put the enemy in disarray; for Westerners, it is the feint that gives the opening for the main forces to strike.

#### COMMITMENT

Politically, the Chinese feel freer to profess their intentions, for statements of intentions do not commit much, and it is expected that intentions will change with circumstances and in response to the behavior of the enemy. In contrast, in Western politics statements of goals tend to be moral imperatives, and leaders feel threatened by having to confess changes in their intentions. On the other hand, Chinese tend to shroud their means in secrecy and not publicize the day-to-day activities of those in power; for surprise and deception are assumed to be vital.

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<sup>2</sup>*Sun Tzu on the Art of War*, translated by Lionel Giles (London: Luzai and Company, 1910), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

In Chinese political culture, leaders will proclaim their intentions, hoping to influence their enemies or their subjects, but if their ploy fails they can casually ignore what Westerners would assume to have been commitments critical to the continuing self-esteem and reputation of the leaders. For the Chinese, declarations of intentions thus became maneuvers designed to probe or provoke the behavior of others.

Westerners often feel that it is important to make their intentions unambiguous, to ensure clarity of communications. Chinese tend to assume that efforts to "clarify intentions" must be a ruse or an act of simple-mindedness because the intentions of all actors must change with circumstances.

These differences are important for projecting the long-range course of Chinese relations with other powers. The Chinese still attach less importance to commitments to announced objectives than to making the best of existing opportunities. In recent years, for example, the Peking regime has on numerous occasions declared unattainable goals -- such as the conquest of Taiwan, catching up with Great Britain, or even such objectives as the holding of the non-aligned conference in Algiers -- without any sense of risking its reputation. In the years ahead we can expect the Chinese to frequently announce objectives but then appear to do little to realize them, or at other times to hide their objectives behind extensive activities that may appear to have another purpose.

All of this does not mean that Chinese leaders are insensitive to the pronouncements of others, for, as we shall see, they do expect those in power to try to use words to influence others and to make declarations that will, it is hoped, change people's perceptions. Our point here is only that the Chinese do not attach a moral character to declarations about goals of policy. In spite of Mao's vicious pronouncements about the evil and opportunistic qualities of "revisionism," he has casually sanctioned border negotiations with the Russians, and in spite of declarations about the importance of spontaneous, open revolutionary behavior in the Cultural Revolution, the victories of the Maoists can be followed by unabashed assertions about the need for law and order and for the punishment of those who were "ultraleftists."

#### RIDING WITH EXTERNAL FORCES

The Chinese style of deception and their view about commitments is related to their extreme sensitivity to the limited power under the direct command of all actors and their notion that infinite power lies external to the command of any actor. (The opposite beliefs are equally strong in the Chinese tradition, but shall not be treated at this point.) Thus, all actors are seen as potentially weak, and the self as always vulnerable, but on the other hand, events are governed by forces such as "fortune," "luck," "nature," "virtue," "history," etc. One therefore acts not on the basis solely of one's immediately available power, but also in such ways as to benefit from such external forces.

In the West, one's sense of power is linked more to one's own capabilities, to the resources one commands, and to one's internal organization, whether psychically as an individual or administratively as a group. Desires for benefits from power beyond the control of any actor is seen as faith in the supernatural and inappropriate in all worldly activities. For the Chinese one does little things so as to benefit from being in tune with big forces as in the Taoist principle of triumphing by "non-effort." This Taoist concept of the weak self conquering by being in harmony with the external force, the Tao, is matched by the Confucian notion that if one adheres completely to the "right rules of conduct" one gains infinite powers. The locus of power in both cases is external to the self. With the Communists there is also the belief that success comes from discovering the right formula for tapping the powers of history, or as the *People's Daily* said, "Riding on the Wind to Break Through the Waves."

#### PREFERRING BIG ENEMIES

There seems to be a Chinese notion that one can improve one's position not so much by taking on weaker foes and triumphing as by making a major foe and not losing. For the Chinese, one is known not only for the company one keeps, but also by who one's enemies are; and the more powerful the enemy, the greater the self. Between the 1840s and the 1930s, the Chinese do not seem to have been much tempted to compensate for setbacks at the hands of the West's major powers and Japan by defeating lesser ones, say, Portugal, Italy, or Austria. Similarly, in the Communist world their main thrust has been against the Soviet Union and not just the expansion

of influence among the lesser Communist parties. To the extent that they have sought control over such parties, it has been almost entirely a function of their sense of competition with the Soviet Union.

BUNGLING

The Chinese notion that power lies external to the self is related to the view that effectiveness comes from being able to perceive the logic of the situation. Clear calculations thus call for clear perceptions of circumstances. As Arthur Waley has noted, the Chinese word for "to think" accents perception; that is, directs attention to external reality, rather than to something going on within oneself. Among wise men there is then a sense of shared perspectives about reality, which in human affairs is largely made up of specific social and political relationships. It is the fool who fails to perceive the vividness and concreteness of human relationships. Westerners, with greater ambivalence about the durability of human relationships, tend to stress more than Chinese the importance of intentions and subjective considerations.

The Chinese consequently expect that a given situation will be responded to by a certain conduct. As long as actors perceive the situation clearly, they will react in predictable and similar fashion, since all people employ essentially the same calculations to divine behavior -- except, as we shall see, there is the difference that stems from the assumption some people are good and others evil.

Individuals may find themselves in difficulty because they are confused or have been deceived about their situations. Among wise men there is a shared perception of the reality base of actions, but among competitors there is the need to deceive others about their circumstances. The fear Chinese feel of misreading one's situation can be seen from the emphasis in Chinese humor about "foolish" behavior and bungling that results in failure. In any culture there is humor in observing incompetence -- note the pleasure that Americans derive from the Peter Principle -- but Chinese humor is particularly responsive to the failings of fools, especially if their actions bring suffering upon themselves.

This link between deception and humor can also be seen in the spirit of "fun" and not just "games" with which the Chinese have tended to describe strategies of deception. While Western analysts have been prone to view conflict situations as "games," the Chinese have found

amusement from contemplating how enemies have been led to their self-destruction. Much of the pleasure Chinese gain in reading such popular classics as the *San Kuo Ching* and the *Shui Hu Chawng* derives from the picture of clever heroes causing, through deception, their foolish enemies to produce their own undoing. The reader, along with the hero, can appreciate the situation while it is the enemy, the butt of the humor, who bungles about damaging himself by bumping into the realities of the situation. Thus, the pleasure of victory for the Chinese involves being able to laugh at the enemy for his stupidity.

Possibly this is so because children in China, as in France, are made to feel a good deal of shame for doing what is wrong in the situation, while adults take pleasure in teasing them and observing their frustrations. An important childhood experience in France is being viewed as silly by adults; one then ameliorates adulthood by proving that it is not I who am silly, but my enemy; instead of being silly, I make him silly; surely if I have the capacity of doing that, I cannot be silly myself.

In the Chinese case, teasing is used to teach the child that he does not comprehend his situation and act properly. With adulthood comes the capacity to perceive circumstances and not be deceived, which also means that one is no longer vulnerable to teasing but instead has acquired the capacity to tease others. In short, the greater the man, the greater his capacity to understand situations and to manipulate, and thereupon to tease others.

In Chinese culture it is not only proper to laugh at fools; there is an urge to do so. This is possibly related to the unwritten rule that, although one cannot make fun of those with whom one is bound in some valued relationship, one need not feel inhibited when this is not the case. Hence the tendency to make fun of foreigners.

#### SINGLEMINDEDNESS

The Chinese stress on comprehending one's situation and not being confused by reality is related to the cultural variant of giving great emphasis to the power that comes from singlemindedness and complete concentration. While much in Chinese culture is given to denying the

value of specialization and to extolling the generalist -- whether it be the Confucian scholar-official or the Communist cadre -- there is also a countertheme that suggests that the ultimate technique for exploiting the power external to actors and for avoiding deceptions is to focus all of one's mind and energy on an extremely limited segment of reality.

The classic example of this Chinese belief in the powers of singlemindedness is the story told by Chuang Tzu of the man who displayed perfect skill in catching crickets. Asked how he was able to do this, he explained that when he set about catching crickets, the universe became cricket wings for him.

Numerous distinctive activities, ranging from Chinese boxing to the manner of painting and calligraphy, testify to the Chinese belief that the successful execution of an action calls for severe mental preparation in order to achieve singlemindedness. In present-day China extensive campaigns prepare policies involving mass participation. The Chinese army is in the habit of making prolonged psychological preparations before any form of combat.

The more complete the concentration, the higher the degree of success expected in the execution. Power is thus tapped by constricting one's attention, by insisting through will that the segment of events one is concentrating on is the only important reality. Thus, the capacity to ignore, to leave some of the painting blank, is productive of power.

Thus the allegation or the fact of preparing for singlemindedness can be used as a threat. The more one prepares to be singleminded, the more one's foe should sense fear, lose the capacity to concentrate, act blindly, hence foolishly and thus defeat himself.

Conversely, there is a Chinese tendency to assume that nothing of importance can be accomplished without first getting oneself into a state of singlemindedness. Therefore, rituals of preparation are essential. But since action should be initiated only when the situation is favorable, much of Chinese preparation is not followed by consummation. Thus, Chinese gentlemen could interminably prepare themselves for government service.



PRACTICE

The Chinese stress practice and the rote behavior ensuing from it as the principal avenue to skill. If there is but a single correct way of behaving, then the only way of achieving perfection is through repeated practice, which also demonstrates singlemindedness.

There is a difference between Chinese notions concerning the linkage between practice and perfection and the Western concept of practice for experimentation. In Chinese culture it is taken for granted that the child or the novice can and will make mistakes until eventually he achieves the well-defined perfection that is always in the mind of the teacher. In the West, it seems not only possible that one may learn through errors, but also that one may through them arrive at something novel.

This distinction reflects in part the difference between what we may call a "technique culture" and a "technological culture." In a technique culture there is the assumption that technology will remain constant; skill is therefore required to master given activities. For the Chinese, the written characters do not change, only one's ability to read or write them. On the other hand, in a technological culture there is a choice between investing in presently appropriate skills and seeking to change technology so that skills have higher effects.

Much of Mao's insistence on practice and experimentation would suggest that he would like to change the Chinese from a technique culture to a technological culture. Yet for most Chinese, Mao's praise of practice may suggest that as adults they can recapture the relative impunity of childhood when errors could be made without great embarrassment or loss of face while now working to achieve the standards that already exist in the mind of Mao, their teacher. The Chinese fear of making a mistake in the eyes of others is based in part upon their feeling that only children can make mistakes without damaging themselves as they engage in "practice." The process of "Learning from the Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung" is thus a return to a period when one could make mistakes as long as one was seeking perfection.

This notion is related to the Chinese view, which we have already identified, in which the self is seen as weak and vulnerable, but

capable of gaining great power by getting in tune with forces that lie external to it. The key to omnipotence is learning how to act so as to achieve an idealized state that exists ahead of time.

There is, however, a fine line between committing oneself to learning what will eventually be possible and trying to do the impossible, which makes one the fool unable to comprehend his situation. One gains power by carefully doing the right thing as the result of singleminded practice, or by having enemies who fail because they singlemindedly try the impossible. We have in the traditional imagery (amply used by the Communists) of "ants who try to shake the tree" and "lice who try to raise the blanket" expressions of the Chinese contempt and even hostility toward those who would try to achieve what is for them impossible. These are cautionary tales to reduce one's ambitions: the ant who does not try to shake the tree or the louse who does not try to raise the bed-covers is an acceptable actor, not deserving of scorn.

Hence, although it may be gratifying to the Chinese to be told that they can recapture the privileges of childhood by being allowed to practice without embarrassment what is called for to achieve ambitious goals, the risks are high, for failure can bring scorn upon both him who tries and the leader who suggests what comes to appear as the impossible. If there is going to be but little sense of self or collective improvement, or a feeling of unjust tradeoff between self and collective improvement, then the hypersensitivities of the Chinese about being made the fool for trying the impossible may turn people against the Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung.

#### MIMICRY

The Chinese like to use mimicry in aggressive fashion. This practice ranges from being a central feature of modern Chinese youth culture to the tendency of using one's enemies' slogans and valued concepts in ways that debase them, as for example "waving a red flag to oppose the red flag." The most common form of schoolboy humor among Chinese is imitating the peculiarities of another, an activity that also reveals the importance Chinese attach to style and the dramatic posture. Historically, a telling example of the

politically destructive power of mimicry was the Japanese-sponsored government of Wang Ching-wei in Nanking, which, while not intending mimicry, in fact employed all the symbols and slogans of the Kuomintang and of Sun Yat-sen and thus eroded the authority and legitimacy of the Nationalists.

In most if not all cultures the art of imitating the peculiarities of others is seen as an aggression against the other's dignity and self-esteem. Chinese use the tactic widely, in spite of having a very low tolerance for laughing at themselves. In part, this may be related to the Chinese sense of the theatrical, their enjoyment of the exaggerated but vivid gesture, and the propensity common to technique cultures of embellishing routine and essentially tedious motions with a sense of style -- Chinese carpenters don't just hammer nails, they do it with rhythm and flair. In part also, the Chinese may have tended to discover powerful and not always subtle uses of mimicry because they have had few other diversions in their mass culture; thus, they have been attracted to exploring and exploiting the pleasures and gratifications that can be derived from observing others. What becomes gossip with elders, done behind the backs of others and hence not quite as aggressive, becomes mimicry among children and can be done to the target's face because one can be bolder when young.

Chinese parents frequently tease their children, often mimicking their undesired actions. When the child cries, the mother will pretend to wail; when the child has a tantrum, the mother will also pretend to have an emotional outburst; and then the child is asked whether it was a pretty sight. This use of the mirror tends to undermine the original act, shows that acts can be divorced from emotions, and teaches that one should not act spontaneously but rather from calculations. Chinese are not taught to respect the sentiments of others, but rather their dignity. One proves one's feelings by behaving in an exemplary way, that is, by controlling one's emotions. Hence, when emotions are shown it is easy in Chinese culture to bring them into question and to suggest that their display is at best irrelevant and perhaps deceptive. When one Red Guard group "waves the red flag" before another it brings to mind what all Chinese know; that displays of emotions are no test of the sincerity of sentiments.

### INSPIRATION

In Chinese culture a negative value is customarily attached to spontaneously expressed emotions, as contrasted with proper responses to external stimuli. Just as the individual gains power by correctly relating to an external source of strength, so is his effectiveness presumed to depend upon his capacity to make the proper responses to external cues.

The Chinese belief that individuals gain power from external forces is so strong that there is often no need for being precise as to how this is done. At present, no explanation needs to be given as to how the Thought of Mao Tse-tung produces particular successes, though there is no obvious way to derive from it a guide for growing melons or for winning Ping-Pong matches. Still, one talks as if there were logical and pragmatic links between moralistic statements and applied actions calling for skill. The link, in fact, lies in the unspoken Chinese belief that inspiration comes from concentration which generates enthusiasm.

### EMOTIONS LAST

Chinese believe that feelings can be long sustained, and with time gain in legitimacy. For somebody, particularly a subordinate, to respond immediately to humiliation is to show that he has lost control and thus has acted improperly; to bide one's time is proper. The longer the waiting, the more legitimate the revenge, and presumably the greater the evil of the initial humiliation. Events of the moment do not carry emotional saliency; to emphasize the depth of the damage to one's esteem, it is necessary to stress how long ago it happened. In contrast, the Western view is that emotions are most intense shortly after provocation, that feelings should die down with time, and that to harbor revenge over a prolonged period is not admirable.

For the Chinese, actions committed under the influence of intense and uncontrollable emotions can be complex, involve many details that call for cognitive calculations, and extend over a prolonged period. In the West, such actions are seen as "blind" outbursts,

involving few cognitive processes and taking up little time. Thus the Chinese, while extolling the control of emotions, yet believe that when people are carried away by feelings, it can be for a prolonged period during which they may execute elaborate actions. In a classic law case a father, in a fit of anger over the unfilial behavior of his son in striking him, buried the lad alive. Apparently it was taken as plausible by the court that a man could go through the actions of finding a shovel, digging a hole, putting his son in it, and covering him up while remaining all the time in a towering rage.

Emotional states are thus seen as apt to be enduring. Enmities are assumed to be permanent; it is proper to cite events of a distant past to justify current sentiment; bad relations are never entirely put to rest; unpleasant events may be ignored for a time, but they can always be reintroduced as relevant to current feelings.

#### ENERGY, EXHAUSTION AND IMMORTALITY

In Chinese culture it is assumed that people need external inspiration to achieve the concentration necessary to make their limited energies effective. One of the authors has already noted the tension in Chinese culture between the stress on willpower and concern over the limitations of human energy.<sup>5</sup> The search is for an external means to bring success, but the danger is that one will dissipate one's limited store of strength.

In political behavior, these underlying views contribute to the Chinese sense that there are two kinds of power: one that, like willpower, is not easily exhausted; the second, that must be husbanded, for it is finite and its exhaustion brings death. Here we find one of the several bases for the Chinese tendency to talk aggressively while acting cautiously.

With Maoism has come the suggestion that when the individual loses himself in the "masses" he is no longer in danger of exhausting himself physically, but rather will partake altogether of the potency of

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<sup>5</sup>Pye, op. cit., pp. 193-198.

infinite willpower. This is in the Chinese tradition of seeking strength through aphrodisiacs or searching for elixers of life to gain immortality.

Robert Jay Lipton has suggested that the Cultural Revolution is, in part, Mao's search for "revolutionary immortality." There is a pronounced coexistence of opposites in the Chinese reaction to death. On the one hand, there is a tendency toward anxiety about health and the feigned hope that select people may "live for ten thousand years." On the other hand, there is the Confucian gentleman as well as the peasant living for years with his coffin in his room, polishing it every day, which suggests a more relaxed vision of death.

While in traditional Chinese culture there was a high degree of articulated agreement from the top levels of the society to the bottom as to ideals for this world, there was very little elaboration, particularly at the top of the society, about what comes after death. At the same time, however, within the folk culture -- by no means entirely rejected by the scholar-officials -- there was a highly elaborated structuring of the other world in the image of the one one knew; funerals tended to include details of what was to be expected in the after-life. This was, however, never brought into the formal culture where Confucius' statement that he could not be bothered with speculating about the after-life set the tone.

Thus, there have been in Chinese culture two extreme ways of dealing with mortality: by constructing an after-life that in minute details would be little different from the present one, or by claiming to reject the possibility of any after-life at all. Yet in a distinctive manner the Chinese easily blended abstract rejection and the comforts of concreteness by formally denying knowledge about the after-life while engaging in elaborate preparation for death that would seem to presume a belief in an after-life. Even the agnostic made careful decisions about what objects should be buried with him. This tendency to verbalize sophisticated abstractions while acting in terms of pragmatic concreteness is a common Chinese mode for dealing with uncertainty.

CONTROL AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Chinese culture there is a general lack of precision about the extent to which those in power are expected to control events and, hence, there is uncertainty in accountability. Superiors tended to leave considerable freedom to their subordinates. Both emperor and father were expected to pretend to be omnipotent, while at the same time they were not expected to rule but only to reign. Fathers were to allow sons some scope while nurturing their growth. Fathers and emperor could be furious with the incompetence and self-destructive ways of their sons and ministers, but, except in extreme cases, there was not much that they felt they could do about it. In Chinese business organizations, owners practically never fired an employee for incompetence; they bemoaned their bad fortune for being stuck with such help.

Ultimate authority thus does not have to be continually in charge or administratively responsible for all that happens. There can be periods in which subordinates misrule without bringing discredit upon the superior if he subsequently intervenes to reassert his powers. There is little sense of incongruity in a leader presiding over failures in intervals between achieving successes; his authority is not particularly compromised by these periods in which he is hardly effective.

This pattern continues under Mao. For example, both Western analysts and the Chinese themselves accept the view that periodically Mao has not exercised full control over the regime, but rather that he has intermittently intervened to correct situations that his subordinates had created and to bring about new departures. Neither he himself nor his followers seem disturbed by the feeling that he should be held accountable for what happens between his periods of direct command, that he should be held responsible for not controlling his subordinates. In the Maoist presentation at the Lu Shan conference of August 1959, Mao scored a "signal victory" over Right deviators within the Party; he did the same again at the Central Committee Plenum in September of 1962; and he performed the identical feat at the subsequent Plenum of August 1966. Between these "victories," it is asserted as if this were natural, the "freaks and demons were dancing," and in control. During those periods, the ultimate authority -- the emperor, the

grandfather -- was able to withdraw without any apparent loss of authority or prestige. In coming back he demonstrates his powers. The intervening period is one when others misbehave, not he. No one seems to ask why he waited so long, why he permitted what happened to occur.

This behavior is analogous to that of the grandfather in the traditional family who allows the sons to carry on and only intervenes when things go seriously wrong. His intervention usually consists only of correctly defining the situation and of giving subtle guidance so that the sons can properly carry on. In this sense Mao's relationship to his subordinates is much the same as the situation described by Martin Yang in *A Chinese Village* in which the grandfather gathered the family together and indirectly reprimanded one of the sons whose behavior seemed to him about to bring ruin to them all.

Thus, the Chinese are not inclined to trace all responsibility to the top authority, in contrast with the West. The contrast between Chinese and American attitudes is even more dramatic when it comes to expectations as to the degree of pressure that a superior can place on a subordinate. In American culture it is assumed that effective performance of an organization may call for harsh and continuous pressures by superiors and that failure to perform justifies firing. Leverage produces action. In Chinese culture, superiors can act as though they belong in a different world, but there are severe limits to the pressures they can apply. Successful action calls for pleading, cajoling, and for providing inspiration. People are not removed for failure, but rather as a result of clashes that may or may not be exacerbated by the fact of failure. Nobody can be automatically fired for failure -- it is easier, in fact, in a Chinese organization for a subordinate to threaten resignation because his work brings displeasure to his superior, a threat which, of course, cannot be easily accepted.

#### BELIEF IN CHANGE, NOT PROGRESS

Parallel to the Chinese acceptance of discontinuity in an authority's responsibilities is the Chinese tendency to treat change as sharply contrasting situations at different times and not as a continuous



sequence of events, in the manner of the accumulation of compound interest. Thus, the Chinese Communists juxtapose past misery with pleasing prospects and assume they have explained progress. When others might expect an indication of causality, they only strive to emphasize the degree of difference.

To heighten the sense of change, Chinese are driven to either exaggerating alleged accomplishments or overstating how bad things once were, or both; and in emphasizing contrast there is little sensed need for elaboration of what the expected changes might mean for those most affected. For example, during the Great Leap when the Chinese were talking about "catching up with Great Britain in ten or fifteen years," they tended to describe the miseries of the past, but they never said what day-to-day life for the common people would be like once China "caught up." The meaning of "catching up" was left vague.

This tendency toward specificity about the past and imprecision about the future means that the Chinese do not customarily use elaborate utopian predictions in making political promises. The Chinese practice in political matters is to assert in abstract terms what the future holds and not to make that future concrete by providing possible details, which, significantly, is precisely the opposite of the way we noted they handle the uncertainty of death; precision is thus reserved for what is knowable, the bitterness of the past and the certainty of death. Before the Communists came to power they never spelled out what precisely their rule would mean for the people. Similarly, Chiang K'ai-shek spoke of "returning to the Mainland" but never felt called upon to announce detailed plans about what his policies would be in such an eventuality.

This practice relates to the Chinese style of command in which leaders make assertions about current or past realities that conflict with common knowledge. It is well understood that such discrepancies need not undermine confidence in the leaders, but rather represent signals as to the true "reality" the people should accept in guiding their behavior. In fact, the greater the discrepancies noted, the greater the urgency of the command. Arbitrary statements are also used as tests of loyalty. Thus, to agree that "China is about to

catch up with Britain" may represent less a statement of personal expectations and more a sign of loyalty to Mao's leadership, irrespective of accomplishments.

The tendency of Chinese leaders is to indulge less in exaggerated predictions or promises, which politicians customarily favor because they cannot be readily disproved, and to use more often exaggerations of alleged accomplishments, which can be empirically challenged; this reversal of expected practices is probably related to the Chinese assumption that the plausible basis for leadership lies with demonstrating masterful skill in describing the political situation and less with claims of being able to foresee the unknowable future. The fact that leaders describe the existing circumstances in ways different from the way they are perceived by non-leaders will be taken as evidence that the leaders' perceptions reach a deeper level than that attained by common people.

On the other hand, for leaders to pretend that they can foresee the future would be seen as fraudulent. Forecasts, to be acceptable, must be highly specific -- but the details of the future are unknowable. So are, as we said above, those of after-life unless they be known in all of their mundane details, which puts after-life in the same category as the past -- that is, possibly bitter but certainly endurable.

#### EXPLOIT THE SITUATION AND AVOID GRAND DESIGNS

The emphasis in Chinese political life is upon exploiting situations rather than adhering to grand designs, to dealing with realities rather than making commitments to abstractions. Future-oriented statements are not truly binding and lack the specificity necessary for guiding action. Since action is geared to circumstances, the time perspective of Chinese politics tends to be the immediate future.

The disposition to refer to the past and the endurance of emotions may incorrectly suggest that Chinese leaders are apt to act according to long-held plans, that the Chinese are masters of the waiting game and show great patience in carrying out carefully conceived plans. In fact, they are highly sensitive to the immediate situation and

disinclined to commit themselves to any particular course of action.

More specifically, the Chinese tendency is to slip into highly aggressive tactical moves, while adhering to a much less aggressive strategic approach. The need to deal with what exists and to discount the uncertainties of the future tends to encourage overstatement and exaggerated actions. In China's relations with many of her neighbors, and particularly with India and Russia, we have seen examples of this propensity.

#### CRUDE WORDS BUT SUBTLE INFERENCES

The Chinese rely heavily upon slogans as guides for action. Lack of subtlety in the repetition of standardized expressions is, however, matched by sensitivity for what is left unsaid. Any deviation from current usage is quickly recognized, and importance is attached to slight variations, a practice consistent with the Chinese tradition of alluding. Consequently, people who make suggestive remarks and veiled criticisms are frequently charged with shrilly shouting out their opposition.

In the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, Wu Han's and Teng T'o's references to history were presented by the Maoists as blatant charges against Mao.

#### STRESS THE OBJECTIVE AND AVOID THE SUBJECTIVE

Although the Chinese emphasize that feelings are critical and that correct behavior without sincerity is not enough, there is in Chinese culture little explicit analysis of sentiments. The Chinese recognize the existence of feelings but they do not tend to examine explicitly the dynamics of how such sentiments develop or change. For example, in Chinese literature attention is always directed to the objective factors that may influence feelings, and almost nothing is said about the development of even powerful sentiments. It is enough to say that a hero saw a beautiful face and hence fell in love. Sentiments are instantly arrived at. Almost no attention is given to the psychological development of the characters. Novels are almost

entirely devoted to human relations and their circumstances, while motivations are rarely the subject of detailed treatment. There is thus a jerky quality in Chinese novels as events follow one upon the other with little sense of subjective causation. Decisions that are of major consequence occur with little forewarning: a character at one moment may appear to be consumed with love for another, and then he may suddenly decide to go somewhere else with no explanation as to the emotional basis of the decision. Similarly, in the Chinese tradition of biography and autobiography, objective events are stressed and psychological growth and change ignored.

In the political realm, Chinese tend, in much the same way as they rely upon crude slogans but respond sensitively to hints of what is unsaid, to use objective standards for testing personal commitment but to react strongly to any hints of subjective change. The refusal to treat the process of change in feelings means that when change has to be acknowledged, it is done either by assuming that the now manifest sentiments always existed and the person had previously been masking his true feeling, or by believing that some external force had compelled the person to change his views. The possibility of autonomous change is hardly recognized. The theme of masking sentiments, of using disguises, is strong in Chinese folk culture; one may recall the notion that evil spirits frequently disguise themselves by entering the bodies of mortals.

The character of a person is thus taken to be stable, but since people are assumed to have the ability to disguise their sentiments, ostensible change is usually believed to mean that the person is at last revealing his true character. The suspicion prevails that people may all along be masking their sentiments.

Thus, while there are attitudes in Chinese political culture that on first examination would appear to reduce suspicion -- a refusal to dwell upon the complexities of human psychology -- precisely because there are so few recognized rules for judging psychic states the tendency is to believe easily that there is a gap between appearances and the private state of mind. The result is considerable suspicion accompanying the stress on appearances.

On the one hand, the Chinese place great importance upon environmental factors; for example, upon education and ensuring that children have proper associates. Yet on the other hand, there is also a belief that people are inherently divided between those who are fundamentally good and those who are evil. Circumstances may render the truly good man unable to reveal his worth, and, conversely, the evil person may feign to be good, but in the end even the environment cannot overcome the truth. Chinese faith in the power of education is not great enough to overcome their fear that an evil person may be able to hide his true sentiments instead of being changed by education.

These basic Chinese attitudes have been reinforced with the advent of Communism -- stress upon environment has been translated into attaching decisive importance to class background; faith in education has become the belief that everyone can be won over -- yet there remains a suspicion that those who are evil may only be feigning their support of the regime. At one moment they act as though they believed in their abilities to convert any and every one, yet at the next moment they stress the persistence from a generation to the next of "black" attitudes. Inherently "evil" actors may at times, because of the objective situation, act more or less correctly without changing their character.

#### THE LIMITS OF TOLERABLE CONTROL

Our analysis has focused largely on leadership characteristics and, therefore, by way of conclusion, it may be useful to end on the question of the limits of legitimacy, more specifically on the line that exists in Chinese culture between an acceptance of dependency upon authority and the feeling that authority has become intolerable. Authority is acceptable so long as it protects, benefits, and avoids humiliating. In order to appreciate the line the Chinese recognize between an acceptable authority that may make great mistakes and an unacceptable authority that is arrogant, it may be useful to reflect for a moment on the ways in which Mao accepted the superiority of Stalin and his mistakes, but found Khrushchev intolerable.

Stalin was the one person Mao ever consistently submitted to,

and to this day Mao has never harshly criticized Stalin. The entire body of literature on the years 1927-1934 stresses the extent to which Stalin damaged the Chinese Communists, yet in spite of this Mao has never felt it appropriate to criticize him. What has not been generally noted is that Stalin for his part never made a major issue over the failures of the Chinese to obey him. Time and again Stalin gave guidance that the Chinese Communists did not accept. The fact that he was wrong more often than not still does not explain why he never publicly called Mao to task. Whatever the reasons that made Stalin behave as he did toward the Chinese Communists, his behavior was remarkably consistent with what would be expected in the Chinese cultural context of a father figure. For example, he always showed a certain contempt for the Chinese Communists and never seemed to place great confidence in their abilities, just as is the practice of Chinese fathers toward their sons. At every juncture he seemed to judge the forces of their enemies as the stronger. Thus, Mao was always in the position of trying to prove himself toward a skeptical father. The fact that Stalin did not try to punish the Chinese Communists or reprimand and humiliate them in public -- or even in private -- when they ignored his orders showed that he balanced his contempt with allowing subordinates to find their way. Stalin thus maintained a degree of distance from Mao that was consistent with the traditional Chinese concept of authority. Had Stalin been completely supportive of Mao, Mao could never have achieved his "independence."

Mao has suggested this when, in his speech at the Tenth Plenum, he cited the long record of Stalin's failures to support the Chinese Communists, and ended without bitterness by asking: "When did Stalin begin to have confidence in us? It began only in the winter of 1950, during the Resist-American Aid-Korea campaign." At last Mao had become the successful son who had gained his father's confidence.

At the same time Mao must have experienced resentments, just as the traditional Chinese child did toward the rules of filial piety, and as with other modernizing Chinese this hostility was turned against the father that fails, Khrushchev. After what Mao had experienced with Stalin, he felt it was impossible now to submit to Khrushchev

who, he said, attempted to "make us dance to his music and yield to his baton." In actual fact Stalin had been more demanding in setting the tune and Mao had yielded more to his baton, but he had been the legitimate father-figure who had maintained his distance.

In Chinese culture, which stresses clannishness, family and cultural ethnocentrism, there is a peculiar attachment to distance. In Chinese poetry, it is the beauty of distant landscapes; in painting, the appeal of distant mountain peaks; in social life, the nostalgia for distant friends; and generally, there is the Chinese approach to long trips or marches, of excitement nicely tinged with anxiety. Stalin doubly suggested distance, for Moscow was far removed and Stalin himself was "distant." Khrushchev could never claim the role of father, and therefore his assertions of authority were those of an usurper. Stalin's behavior had been tolerable; his mistakes were those of a father.





