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Mobilisation

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[Translated by William SIMA]

Mobilisation' (*dongyuan*) is a fundamental concept in contemporary Chinese politics. It denotes the use of an ideological system by a political party or regime to encourage, or coerce, members of society to participate in certain political, economic, or social objectives, in order to achieve large-scale centralisation and deployment of resources and manpower. In China, the modern understanding of politics by mass mobilisation originated in the First United Front between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party (*guomindang*, hereafter GMD) in 1923. Believing that the success of the Chinese Revolution depended on close unity between the government and all social organisations, Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the GMD, stressed the importance of awakening the masses, advocating a policy of 'alliance with the Soviet Union, alliance with the Communist Party, assistance for the peasants and workers.' With this policy, Sun sought to fashion the GMD into a modern political party rooted in mass mobilisation. Yet, it would be the CCP that eventually came to exemplify and refine mobilisation politics in modern China. During the War of Resistance against Japan, the Civil War of the late 1940s, and in successive social movements after 1949, mass mobilisation was a critical ideological mechanism through which the CCP achieved its political ambitions.

In their classic study *Politics in China*, James Townsend and Brantly Womack describe the advent of a 'Chinese model' or 'Maoist model' in Western political science since the 1970s, which emerged in response to a recognised need to view China's political system as *sui generis* rather than with reference to 'developing country' models, the Soviet Union, and other imperfect comparative paradigms.¹ They identify four key elements in the Chinese/Maoist political model. First, it aims to achieve national independence and self-reliance, avoiding economic or political dependence on other states (see Yang's essay in the present volume). Second, it seeks comprehensive development of all sectors of society and the economy, with emphasis on agriculture, through centralised planning.

Third, it emphasises mass mobilisation and participation as techniques for achieving social, economic, and political goals. In such a context, the destabilising effects of mass campaigns on bureaucratic institutions are regarded as healthy, or at least acceptable, as is any damage to intellectual and technical skills that accompanies the glorification of mass movements. Finally, the Chinese political model insists on continuous revolution for the purpose of avoiding the restoration of capitalism, including in cases where capitalist tendencies are evident within the Party itself (see Galway's essay in the present volume). However, rather than conceiving of mobilisation as a distinct element within the Chinese model, as Townsend and Womack do, in this essay I will argue that it would be more fitting to see mobilisation as essential to *all* the elements of the model.

Governance by Mobilisation

The 1937–45 War of Resistance against Japan was the critical period for the ascendancy of the CCP, for Mao Zedong's ideas on the people's war, and the maturation of a political system rooted in mobilisation (see Guan's essay in the present volume). Mao understood war to encompass driving away imperialism and building a new nation out of the old. For this to be realised would require nothing less than the full mobilisation of the Chinese population. In his classic treatise 'On Protracted War,' first delivered as a series of speeches at Yan'an in May and June 1938, Mao described mobilisation in the following terms:

A national revolutionary war as great as ours cannot be won without extensive and thoroughgoing political mobilisation [Mobilisation] is indeed of primary importance, while our inferiority in weapons and other things is only secondary. The mobilisation of the common people throughout the country will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy, create the conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms and other things, and create the prerequisites for overcoming every difficulty in the war. To win victory, we must persevere in the War of Resistance, in the united front, and in the protracted war. But all these are inseparable from the mobilisation of the common people To mobilise once is not enough; political mobilisation for the War of Resistance must be continuous. Our job is not to recite our political programme to the people, for nobody will listen to such recitations; we must link the political mobilisation for the war with developments in the war and with the life of the soldiers and the people, and make it a continuous movement. This is a matter of immense importance on which our victory in the war primarily depends.

Thus, for Mao war was a phenomenon encompassing not only armed conflict, but also national independence, political renewal, and the reconstruction of society and culture. Throughout the War of Resistance and the ensuing resumption of the Civil War with the GMD after 1946, the CCP successfully mobilised large numbers of peasants to enlist in its regular army, or to join people's militias, guerilla detachments, and local-level self-defense groups acting in concert with the regular army. From the early 1940s, the CCP launched a Production Campaign for self-sufficiency in agriculture and

the production of common items, with rectification (*zhengfeng*) and thought reform (*sixiang gaizao*) serving as crucial political mechanisms for achieving consensus among Party members, and unity with the masses (see the essays by Cheek, Mertha, and Yang in the present volume). Self-sufficiency and ideological rectitude safeguarded the CCP's growth during wartime.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the communist regime adapted the ideology and methods of mass mobilisation it had developed during wartime to political administration, the economy, and society. From 1950 to 1953, the Land Reform Movement, the Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries, the Campaign to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea, the Three Antis Campaign (against corruption, waste, and bureaucratism), and the Five Antis Campaign (against bribery, tax evasion, theft of state assets, cheating on government contracts, and stealing state economic intelligence) were all deeply rooted in mass mobilisation. So too were the campaigns of the late 1950s and 1960s, including the Four Pests Campaign (aimed at eradicating mice, sparrows, flies, and mosquitoes), the Great Leap Forward, and the Down to the Countryside Movement at the start of the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, it may be said that from 1949 until the beginning of the reforms in the late 1970s, the communist regime embodied a politics of governance by mobilisation. Below, I outline three key features of this model of governance.

The Mechanisms behind Mobilisation

The Party serves as the core and propellant of mobilisation politics. The late University of Chicago-based political scientist Tang Tsou famously described a 'concentric circle structure' in China's CCP-led political system, with

the Party secretary standing at the center, the Party committee forming the inner circle, and the general membership forming the next one outward. The Party as a whole ... sought to influence, guide, penetrate, and control the social groups and institutions around them, mobilising and organising the social strata, groups, and individuals which had never been actively involved in the political process or had formerly remained passive and inert.²

This concentric circle structure, Tsou writes, 'proved to be an efficacious instrument for carrying through a social revolution and reshaping the social system.'

In the early years of the PRC, the function of mobilisation in carrying out mass movements can be seen in just such terms of a concentric fanning out, from the Central Committee to cadres in provincial- and regional-level Party committees, thence downwards to activists engaging directly with the masses at the grassroots. This is illustrated in a December 1951 report from the CCP North China Bureau to the Central Committee, recommending the Three Antis Campaign to be carried out 'on a grand scale, with tenacity of lightning and the swiftness of wind.'³ Mao circulated this Report as an exemplary text on how the Three Antis Campaign should be enacted nationwide. It stipulated that policies and directives be issued in a top-down fashion throughout all Party representative committees, cadre committees, people's representative committees and in Party and non-Party political, economic, and military

organisations. It recommended that inspection committees made up of Party and non-Party cadres and activists be established at all levels, overseen by a senior Party official; these committees should be responsible for rectifying the sort of 'erroneous thinking' that hindered the project of opposing corruption, waste, and bureaucratisation. The Report insisted that mobilisation spread ubiquitously at all levels, 'leaving out not a single small organisation or individual.'

If we survey movements and campaigns from 1949 up to the Cultural Revolution, it is evident that centre-led mobilisation generally progressed through a number of steps: a) propaganda was formulated and inculcated among the people; b) high-level cadres shaped propaganda and facilitated its spread, mobilising from the centre downwards; c) exemplars of effective political action were fostered and encouraged through inter-group competition and education sessions; d) 'psychological warfare' (*gongxinzhan*) was used to enforce mass education movements; e) short and longer duration political campaigns intersected and overlapped, driven by a process of continual mobilisation.

Mass Mobilisation and the Mass Line

As a mechanism of political action, mobilisation requires efficacious propaganda techniques and a constructive relationship between the Party and masses. Mass mobilisation involves working with the masses to develop the 'mass line' (*qunzhong luxian*), an important concept for the CCP during and after its coming to power (see Lin Chun's essay in the present volume). Mao's thinking on the 'people's war' advocates having faith in the masses, relying on the masses, mobilising and organising the masses to create the 'vast ocean' in which to drown the enemy, as he outlined in his treatise 'On Protracted War' noted above. This attitude of relying on the masses is perhaps what most strongly distinguished the CCP from the GMD in their approaches to war; the GMD, by contrast, emphasised reliance on the standing army, the government, and conventional forms of warfare. Indeed, willingness—or lack thereof—to stir up popular sentiment and mobilise the masses was perhaps the most fundamental difference in the approach to governance between the two parties.

However, having faith in and relying on the masses, learning from and returning to the masses is merely the ideal situation of the mass line. The mass line only works effectively when those in power take account of the best interests and aspirations of the masses, when the masses recognise that the Party is sincerely representing them, and respond by embracing and upholding the Party's policies. While it is the Party that stages mobilisation, the subjective position of the masses—their *feeling* that they really are 'masters of their own affairs'—is the essential basis for successful mobilisation politics. At numerous points in the history of the PRC, the mass line has failed to achieve this ideal.

Administrative Mobilisation in the Era of Reform

China's transformation after 1979 is often expressed in terms of a shift from 'revolution' to 'modernisation.' With the new leadership under Deng Xiaoping pursuing economic reform and bureaucratic professionalisation of the government administration, and as citizens embraced private ownership and individual self-consciousness, politics by large-

scale mass mobilisation gradually became a phenomenon of the past. In contemporary China, the government, at such times when it requires organised popular participation on a large scale, typically issues administrative orders and offers material incentives to participants. Such 'administrative decree-style mobilisation' is especially visible in two main areas.

The first is crisis mobilisation. The state regularly mobilises the Party, government administration, and military to coordinate closely with social forces in emergency rescue and crisis alleviation. The successful response to the 2003 SARS epidemic and the May 2008 Wenchuan earthquake are notable recent examples of administration-driven mobilisation.⁴ In a recent study of the Wenchuan earthquake, Christian Sorace demonstrates how the CCP claims to have engineered a secular 'miracle' (*qiji*) on the basis of mobilising the entire Party-state apparatus and 'Party spirit' (*dangxing*) of its cadres to complete the reconstruction in under two years.⁵ Thus, mobilisation is praised as key to the success of the reconstruction effort, while remaining a carefully controlled and orchestrated affair.

The second is education campaigns. The Party communicates developments in ideology and policy implementation to wider society through what may be termed 'mobilised education drives.' Recent examples include the 2015 Three Stricts and Three Genuines Campaign (*san yan san shi yundong*), which exhorted strictness in 'moral cultivation, the use of power, and in the exercise of self-discipline,' while 'planning and working in genuine ways and genuinely striving to be a decent person.'⁶ In 2016, the Two Studies and One Action Campaign (*liang xue yi zuo yundong*) pressured CCP members to study the Party constitution and regulations, study the serialised speeches of Party leaders, and strive to be good Party members. Designed and directed by the Central Committee and implemented downwards, these education campaigns aim to defuse pressure away from the centre; committees at all levels are required to 'maintain discipline among Party members and effectively lead the rank-and-file.' Whereas during the Maoist period mobilisation was based in mass participation, contemporary campaigns such as those outlined above rely on the media to communicate policy from the centre. While often regarded as a tiresome formality of public life, they are nonetheless an effective means for the Party to shape the behaviour of its members, and of wider society.

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