Retrofitting the Steel Cage:
From Mobilizing the Masses to Surveying the Public

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For the past several decades, the study of contemporary Chinese politics has been dominated by the assumption that Mao's death marked the advent of a new era defined by a popular and elite rejection of the Maoist mass politics, particularly those associated with the Cultural Revolution. In the now famed Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of December 1978, the scholarly consensus reads a fundamental break with the defining features of the Maoist past; others perceive a more gradual evolution from Maoist totalitarianism toward a more consultative, inclusive "soft authoritarianism." Both interpretations cite the more routinized collective decision making and institutionalized politics of the post-Mao era as evidence of a largely successful transition to a post-revolutionary epoch, marked by the rise of a new generation of Party technocrats. In contrast to the Maoist dictum that class struggle is the primary means of "continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat," the Sixth Plenum resolution released in 2006 asserted that it is the goal of "social harmony," and not the perpetuation of class conflict, that resides at the core of "the intrinsic nature of socialism." The resolution's startling assertion that it has been the attainment of a "harmonious society" that has been at the core of the Party's mission since the founding of the PRC[1] signaled that the social revolutionary impetus of the CCP had, at last and irrevocably, succumbed to the Thermidor.

Yet, notwithstanding the Party's "thorough negation" of Cultural Revolution-era mass politics, the post-Mao leadership has by no means repudiated the project of Party-engineered mass transformation. To the contrary, Deng Xiaoping's efforts to construct a "spiritual socialist civilization," Jiang's Zemin's focus on the "comprehensive development of people" (人的全面发展), and Hu Jintao's "socialist harmonious society" can be read as successive iterations of a longer-term agenda that is consonant with the Party's Leninist

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[1] Alice Lyman Miller, "Hu Jintao and the Sixth Plenum," *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 20 (Winter, 2007), pp. 5-6.

roots.[2] In his 1902-03 pamphlet, *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin famously argued that the obligation and duty of the revolutionary party "consists in a *struggle against spontaneity*," because the spontaneous impulses of the masses result "precisely in the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie." Lenin's chief instruction to his elite "party of a new type" was to "*drag* the labor movement *away*" from its spontaneous tendencies, and to mold it from without. Tactically, Lenin's strategy involved developing print media, courting mass organizations and "unifying local activities" to train the popular will continuously in the direction of social transformation, in effect substituting the revolutionary zeal of the Bolsheviks for the heterogeneous and scattered aims of the internally divided masses.[3]

As Mao himself stressed on several occasions, the success of this project rested heavily upon the Party's ability to "construct public opinion" (造舆论)[4] by creating new publics, particularly through the development of new collective entities with shared economic interests.[5] Accordingly, early in its history, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) relied heavily upon two interrelated practices in its efforts to successfully shape popular will: the so-called revolutionary "mass line" (群众路线), and its cultivation by a web of Party-controlled "mass organizations" (群众组织).[6] Relying upon grassroots activists to reinterpret preexisting social tensions as deep-rooted class-based conflicts that required the intercession and continuing oversight of the Party, local cadres honed the particular skill of not only reinterpreting a wide range of pre-existing social issues in terms set by the Party center, but also of building new collectives at the local level subservient to the will of the Party.[7]

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[2] Meisner observed that "At no time in the history of the People's Republic was there so great an emphasis on the Leninist character and leadership role of the Chinese Communist Party as during the reign of Deng Xiaoping." Maurice Meisner, *The Deng Xiaoping Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), p. 164.

[3] Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of our Movement*, translated by Joe Fineberg and George Hanna (London : Penguin Books, 1988).

[4] See, for example, 对中央文革小组讲话（一九六七年一月九日）, 毛泽东思想万岁 （香港： 波文書局,1967), p. 662.; and records of Mao's remarks at the Eighth Plenum in October 1968, for example, 祝庭勋，“ 毛泽东为什么选中李德生," 文史博览 (2007年 08期), pp. 26-27.

[5]Marc Blecher, "The Contradictions of Grass-roots Participation and Undemocratic Statism in Maoist China and their Fate," in ," in Brantly Womack, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 153-179, esp. 133-34.

[6] By "mass organizations" here I refer not only to the Party's own formal structures of representation at the local level, including labor unions, womens' federations, and youth leagues, but more broadly to units of production, including 单位 and communes as well. The former have traditionally been listed as "administrative work units" (行政单位), whereas the others are considered "production work units" (企业单位). However, it is clear that throughout the Mao era and beyond, the "mass line" was a central working principle for both.

[7] Jack Gray noted that the practice of the mass line arose of dire necessity during the Civil War period in response to the broader question of "how to maximize the resources of the Liberated Areas in order to maintain their defence. Political, ideological, and cultural changes clustered around an economic nucleus…the mass line in this, its first sweeping application, served

However, in the decades following the revolution, the Party's own success at grassroots organizing proved a double-edged sword. The revolutionary masses, safely installed in any number of Party or state-sponsored mass organizations, were curiously apt at the articulation and pursuit of collective interests not in keeping with the "mass line" defined by the center. The restive potential of key mass institutions during the Mao era repeatedly took Party leaders by surprise, for example, when the façade of a united proletariat was fractured by the 1957 strike wave in Shanghai described by Elizabeth Perry, pitting state-organized trade unions, and youth leagues, and temporary workers against one another in a virtual standstill that lasted several weeks.[8] Even more dramatic were the conflagrations of the Cultural Revolution of a decade later, in which "revolutionary" and "conservative" mass organizations waged often violent attacks against each other, Party organizations, and even People's Liberation Army units, as they did in the Wuhan Incident in Nanjing in 1967.[9] Even after Mao's demise and the initiation of the Dengist reform program, representatives of official mass organizations, trade unions, and state-organized work units marched to Tiananmen Square in 1989 to declare their support for the on-going student demonstrations. More recently, albeit perhaps less dramatically, leaders of state-created "work units" occasionally mobilize disenfranchised workers to collectively resist the excessive demands of state and local authorities to remand taxes or fees, or to wrest other concessions from superordinate administrative units.[10]

With the erosion of the Party's former bulwark of collective institutions during the reform era alongside the Party's reinvention of itself from a revolutionary into a ruling party, the CCP has likewise retooled its mission and mode of operation with respect to both the mass line and the mass organizations still beneath its control. In 1987, with nearly a decade of economic reforms underway but little evidence of political liberalization, then-Premier Zhao Ziyang proposed reviving the notion of the revolutionary-era "mass line" as a potential vehicle for consultation between masses and elites that he termed "public opinion supervision":

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economic purposes." Jack Gray, "The Two Roads: Alternative strategies of social change and economic growth in China, " in Stuart R. Schram and Marianne Bastid, eds., *Authority, Participation and Cultural Change in China: Essays by a European Study Group* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 124.

[8] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957," *The China Quarterly*, No. 137 (Mar., 1994), pp. 1-27

[9] 董国强，"1967年夏天南京「倒许」风潮的台前幕后，"《二十一世纪》2006 十一月； on the participation of mass organizations in the Cultural Revolution more generally, see Hong Yung Lee. *The Politics of the Chinese Cultural Revolution: A Case Study* （Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978）； and Keith Forster, *Rebellion and factionalism in a Chinese province: Zhejiang, 1966-1976* （Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1990）。

[10] Patricia M. Thornton, "Comrades and Collectives in Arms: Tax Resistance, Evasion and Avoidance Strategies in the Post-Mao Era." In Peter Hays Gries and Stanley Rosen, eds., *State and Society in 21st Century China: Contention, Crisis and Legitimation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 87-104.

> The fundamental principle in establishing the system of consultation and dialog with society is to carry forward the fine tradition of "from the masses, to the masses," and increase the level of openness of the activities of leading organs … through various modernized instruments of propaganda, increasing reports on the activities of state and party cadres, and bringing into play the utility of supervision by public opinion (舆论监督), and by supporting the work of mass criticism of errors and shortcomings, oppose bureaucratism, and all manner of unhealthy tendencies.[11]

In fact, three years earlier, Zhao established one of the reform era's first think tanks, the Chinese Economics Reform Research Institute (CESRRI), and authorized it to conduct a series of ambitious surveys of mass attitudes regarding the progress of on-going market reform. Resistance to the collection of popular survey data was fierce in the initial stages of reform, and arose from both ends of the Chinese political spectrum: remnants of former radical forces from the Cultural Revolution derided the practice of polling as "bourgeois pseudo-science"; and advocates of market reform cautioned against producing "papers full of superficial, empty points based on single facts" that might not convey the complexities of the "actual situation."[12] Publication of the results sparked a barrage of criticism from the Party press as well, including one commentator who warned that while "popular opinion" could be said to reflect an enlightened form of the public interest, "mass opinion" could be swayed by "negative and unhealthy" tendencies interjected by minority factions, and required moderation by higher-level authorities.[13]

Despite the fall from grace of Zhao and his reformist cohort during the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, "public opinion supervision" (舆论监督) has nonetheless emerged as a key concern in contemporary political discourse,[14] albeit in modified form. Liberated from its original tether to the Mao-era mass political practice of popular criticism of those in positions of power, the concept of "public opinion supervision" has come to refer almost exclusively to the anchoring of political work more narrowly in the hands of the Party's technocratic elite, particularly through the supervision of the media and its

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[11] 赵紫阳在中国共产党第十三次全国代表大会上的报告(1987年／10月／25日）, available at http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/64566/65447/4526368.html ,p. 2.

[12] 海东，何斌，“陈崇山和她的‘民意测验’，” 新闻记者，编辑部邮箱 1989年 02，pp. 34-35; Wu Jinglian, "Preface to the Chinese Edition," translated in Bruce L. Reynolds, ed., *Reform in China: Challenges and Choices : a Summary and Analysis of the CESRI Survey* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1987), p. xx.

[13] See Stanely Rosen, "The Rise (and Fall) of Public Opinion in Post-Mao China," in Richard Baum, ed., *Reform and Reaction in Post-Mao China* (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 64-72

[14] Zhao Yuezhi and Sun Wusan, "Public Opinion Supervision: Possibilities and Limits of the Media in Constraining Local Officials," in Elizabeth J. Perry and Merle Goldman, eds., *Grassroots Political Reform in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 300-324.

effects on popular views through the routinized surveillance and polling of public opinion. Likewise, the term "masses" (群众), which connotes a disorganized and largely latent form of political power and expression particularly in relation to the formal hierarchy of power represented by the "government" (政府) or "leaders" (领导), has been largely eclipsed in the previous two decades, and replaced instead by analyses of "society" (社会), a less politically freighted term connoting self-disciplining publics governed by internal rules and logics of differentiation.[15] The contemporary media is replete with references to large-scale public opinion polls and, increasingly, market surveys, denoting strong majority support within Chinese society for a stunning array of elite proposals, including the Beijing Municipal Health Department's current methods of hospital management,[16] a variety of ambitious urban redevelopment projects in Tianjin,[17] and even vigorously enhanced public security efforts in Yangzhou during the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games.[18]

Yet this apparent perpetuation of high levels of approval of the regime and its shifting policies can also be read as a contemporary artifact of the Maoist legacy of "constructing public opinion" (造舆论) through the elite-engineered constitution of particular publics. A handful of critics have rightly charged that the new practice of surveying Chinese public opinion gives undue weight to the preferences of its small but growing upwardly mobile urban middle classes at the expense of underprivileged and underrepresented rural populations,[19] or the "floating population" of migrant laborers unofficially residing in China's cities,[20] perhaps equally as important is the range of broader sociological effects that arise from the technocratic quantification of public opinion, and the public(s) this process constructs. The product of a largely non-transparent process of calculation and aggregation, public opinion survey practices in reform-era China, as elsewhere in the world, reconfigure mass subjects as atomized individuals (generally consumers) with discrete preferences that can be measured and numerically expressed. In contrast to the earlier, Mao-era model of mobilizing popular opinion with its emphasis on the processes of creating collective economic interest and raising class consciousness, modern survey methods instead recast the process of public opinion formation as a highly constrained type of depoliticized choice-making on the part of individualized respondents who select responses from a limited list of pre-screened options. The numeric aggregation of individual choices as a composite of "majority will" serves to

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[15] 从日云, "当代中国政治语境中的"群众"概念分析," 《政法论坛》2005年第2期, pp. 15-25.

[16] 何勇, 王君平, "民意调查要的是群众认可的"满意率," 今日信息报 (2006 年/12 月/4 日), p. 3.

[17] 傲腾, 陈杰, "民心工程惠民生—天津实施二十项民心工程纪实," 人民日报 (2008 年/7 月/25 日), p. 1.

[18] 胡立强, 阳锡叶, "民意调查权重增至30%," 人民公安报, 2008/02/26, p. 2.

[19] Zhang Yong, "Public Opinion Without Public? State Democracy, Middle-Class Consumerism, and Opinion Surveys in Post-Mao China," Paper delivered at the 53rd Annual Conference of the International Communication Association in San Diego, California (May 23-27, 2002).

[20] Tang Wenfang, *Public Opinion and Political Change in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 34.

marginalize more radical or divergent views, and normalize moderate positions, prompting some to argue that public opinion polling creates an "artificial political environment which does not mimic the real dimensions of the public sphere" and furthermore "domesticates" public opinion by structuring it, thereby diminishing its intensity and radical propensities.[21] Alongside the widespread dismantling of the formal collective institutions within which Mao-era political and economic interests were conjoined and nurtured at the grassroots, the new market-friendly practices of "making" public opinion remains a chief resource for legitimating the Party's rule and demonstrating popular support for its policies in a technologically advanced but depoliticized media environment.

Mobilizing the masses

With respect to Western invocations of "public opinion," Mao himself repeatedly expressed an abiding skepticism, if not outright derision. The so-called 1949 "China White Paper" produced by the US Department of State under the direction of Dean Acheson alluded to "informed and critical public opinion," provoking the following response from Mao:

> The Achesons' perspective on public opinion (舆论) has confused the public opinion of reactionaries with that of the people. Towards the public opinion of the people, the Achesons [of the world] are utterly incapable of any "response" (感应), as they and are blind and deaf. For years they have turned a deaf ear to the opposition of the American people, China and the rest of the world to the reactionary foreign policies of the American government. Why does Acheson invoke what he calls "informed and critical public opinion" (有见识的和批评性的舆论) ? This is nothing but the numerous instruments of propaganda controlled by the two reactionary parties in the United States, the Republicans and the Democrats, and their many newspapers, news agencies, periodicals and broadcasting stations that specialize manufacturing lies and threats against the people. Of these Acheson rightly notes that the Communist Party (no, and even the people) "cannot endure and do not tolerate" them. That is why we have closed down the imperialist offices of information, prohibited the imperialist news agencies from distributing their dispatches to the Chinese press, and forbidden them the freedom to go on poisoning the souls of the Chinese people on Chinese soil.[22]

Six years later, during the 1955 campaign to criticize leading CCP author and intellectual Hu Feng, Mao elaborated on some of the same themes, noting that he had heard complaints "unpleasant to the ear" (很难听的) that the CCP

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[21] Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), especially Chapter 2; Susan Herbst, "Surveys in the Public Sphere: Applying Bourdieu's Critique of Opinion Polls," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 4:3 (1992), p. 220.

[22] 毛泽东，"为什么要讨论白皮书，"《毛泽东选集》第四卷，（北京：人民出版社，1966）。

policed a "uniformity of public opinion," or "an absence of public opinion" (没有舆论), or "a suppression of freedom" (压制自由). Mao retorted that, unlike in capitalist countries in which "where under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, revolutionary people are not allowed to do or say what they wish (乱说乱动), but can only be [called] well-behaved" (只叫他们规规矩矩) the opposite was true in the People's Republic, where the dictatorship of the proletariat instead restricted the rights of the exploiting classes, but accorded freedom to the revolutionary masses. Furthermore, in response to Hu Feng's charge that, insofar as the "absolute majority" of his readers lives were being spent "within one organization or another" where they were subject to a "coercive atmosphere" in which they could not express their true opinions, Mao pointed out that prior to the advent of the Party, the fragmented state of the masses (散沙状态) had facilitated only their exploitation by the ruling classes, and that it was only the Party and its arduous victory that made possible this unity of opinion. Dissenting views among the revolutionary masses, Mao remarked, would be reconciled by democratic means of persuasion, with the advanced elements educating the backward ones until all contradictions were resolved.[23] The chief method by which this was accomplished during the Mao era was through the practice of the "mass line."

According to Mao's famed 1943 formulation, the "mass line" refers to an operational principle through which

> in all the practical work of our Party, all correct leadership is necessarily from the masses, to the masses. That is to say, take the ideas (意见) of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study transform them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain them so that they become the mass's ideas, making them persist and translate them into action. In this way, in an endless cycle, each iteration becoming more correct, more robust (生动), and more fruitful than the last. This is Marxist epistemology.[24]

In Liu Shaoqi's 1945 report on revising the Party constitution at the Seventh Congress, he further elaborated upon the perspective (观点) of the "mass line," noting: "It is the perspective that everything serves the masses (人民群众), of holding oneself responsible to the masses, of believing in the self-emancipation of the masses, and of learning our perspectives from the masses, that is the perspective of the vanguard of the people toward the masses."[25] Finally, in the 1956 revision of the Party constitution, Deng Xiaoping reiterated of Mao's classic formulation, adding the following observation:

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[23] 毛泽东，"驳'舆论一律'，《毛泽东选集》第五卷，（北京：人民出版社，1966）。

[24] 毛泽东《关于领导方法的若干问题 1943年6月1..毛泽东选集。第3卷（北京：人民出版社，1966），pp. 854-855.

[25] 刘少奇《论党刘少奇选集》（上卷）（北京：人民出 版社，1981），p. 354.

> The masses are the creators of history. The peoples' fetters can only be smashed by their own hands; the people's happy lives can only be made with their own hands. We begin from this truth and the fundamental method of our work is: the masses and the leaders join together, working together to walk the mass line, freely mobilize the people, with the leaders launching mass movements on a grand scale, gathering the wisdom and ideas of the people, and relying upon the power of the masses to implement the general and specific policies of the Party.[26]

With respect to these various articulations of the Mao-era "mass line," MacFarquhar identifies two central trends: one, a duty on the part of Party cadres to engage in "selfless service" by assisting the people in liberating themselves; and, second, a "leadership method" that involves the Mao-era Party in "studying, coordinating, and systematizing" mass views and then propagating the resulting formulations back to the masses and "popularizing them until the people accepted them as their own."[27] In practical terms, Mao's concept of the mass line is, according to Blecher, a "way of resolving conflict by attempting to define or create collective agreement," that "assigns a vigorous role to leadership, but abjures leaders from acting in an elitist (or to use the Chinese terms, commandist or subjectivist) fashion." [28] Nonetheless, some have argued that the implementation of the "mass line" in practice either amounted to a largely ritualistic and formalized appearance of mass democracy,[29] or that it was used only as a mechanism of control. In his path-breaking book on political participation in Mao's China, Townsend found that the various "institutions designed to encourage mass participation began to decline in effectiveness in 1956," thereafter acting almost solely in an educative or propagandistic capacity. While he acknowledged that the use of the mass line to supervise or control bureaucratic behavior revived temporarily during the Cultural Revolution, by 1969 Townsend concluded that, "as in the past, the tension evoked by mass mobilization has been resolved in favor of elite control."[30] Likewise, in his work on the institutionalization of rural participation, Burns notes the extension of a similar trend during the early reform era, with most rural mass associations

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[26] 邓小平《中国人民大团结和世界人民大团结》中华人民共和国成立十周年纪念文集 (北京: 人民出版社, 1959), p. 64.

[27] Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Volume 1: Contradictions Among the People* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 116-17.

[28] Marc Blecher, "Consensual Politics in Rural Chinese Communities: the mass line in theory and practice," *Modern China* 5:1 (January 1979), pp. 105, 122. See also Mitch Meisner, "Dazhai: The Mass Line in Practice," *Modern China*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan., 1978), pp. 27-62; and Mark Selden, "The Yenan Legacy: The Mass Line", in A Doak Barnett ed., *Chinese Communist Politics in Action* (University of Washington Press, 1969).

[29] See, for example, Martin King Whyte, *Small Groups and Political Rituals in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) on the limited scope and highly constrained nature of participation in political study groups.

[30] James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in Communist China*. Third Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 142-43; for his assessment of the Cultural Revolution, see his "Preface to the Third Impression," p. xii.

exercising only advisory power over the Party-state by 1982.[31] Shi argues that while high levels of mobilization were indeed central to the Leninist program, mass participation was a selective process, shaped by the "elimination of the organizational bases for people to articulate their interests collectively, 'forced departicipation' of previously participatory groups, and political education." The mass line, in Shi's view, "cannot guarantee bureaucrats will listen to people," it did "provide a normative setting for individuals to contact officials of their work units," generally with respect to resource allocation.[32]

However, others argue that the Maoist state indeed developed and successfully institutionalized a broad range of mass line practices designed to encourage the free flow of communication between cadres, particularly at the lower rungs of officialdom, and the masses, including "squatting on a spot" (蹲点), social investigation (社会调查), the "four togethers" (四同), "on-the-spot conferences" (现场会议), and the dispatch of cadre work teams (工作队) to local communities. These practices, while limited in scope, did bring into the public and official realm opinions and ideas that were not expressed through other available channels,[33] provided information about how central policies were being implemented in myriad local contexts, and encouraged policy experimentation.[34] Xu Yong has argued that this mode of close administrative infiltration of the grassroots—frequently mistaken for totalitarianism (极权主义或者全能主义)—was in fact the product of historical necessity arising from a prolonged condition of internal and external military threat. Wartime mobilization through a dense web of Party-established mass organizations, combined with the participatory decision-making of mass line politics, produced a unique but highly resilient hybrid form of democratic centralism at the grassroots,[35] elements of which survive in the contemporary Party-state.[36]

New research on the micropolitics of the land reform campaign, particularly as it was carried out in the revolutionary base areas, illustrates the key role of Party-established grassroots mass organizations in implementing the mass line, and in building a new type of rural governance. Li Lifeng's investigation of the mobilization of "speak bitterness" (诉苦) campaigns in revolutionary base and liberated areas demonstrates how, by relying on mass line

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[31] John P. Burns, *Political Participation in Rural China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 83-85.

[32] Tianjian Shi, *Political Participation in Beijing* (Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 269, 47.

[33] Marc Blecher, "The contradictions of grass-roots participation and undemocratic statism in Maoist China and their fate," in Brantly Womack, ed., *Contemporary Chinese Politics in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 153-179.

[34] Sebastian Heilmann, "From Local Experiments to National Policy: The Origins of China's Distinctive Policy Process," *The China Journal* 59 (2008), pp. 1-30.

[35] 徐勇，"行政下乡"：动员、任务与命令——现代国家向乡土社会渗透的行政机制《华中师范大学学报》2007年第5期

[36] Gang Guo, "Organizational Involvement and Political Participation in China," *Comparative Political Studies* 40 (2007), p. 462.

methods to identify and cultivate both poor peasants and local activists, cadres were able to effectively uncover and reframe preexisting grievances as class-based contradictions. By establishing mass organizations within which to support alliances between activist elements and poor and lower-middle peasants, the Party gradually succeeded in not only in encouraging activists to adopt the Party's mass line, but also in performing it, through a series of emotionally-charged political rituals that unleashed a groundswell of popular support to flow to the Party in advance of the actual land reform campaign. The marriage of mass line politics with the establishment of revolutionary mass organizations in the "speak bitterness" movement, in Li's view, fulfilled four key political functions: the mobilization of the masses, the gathering of reliable intelligence regarding local conditions (获取信息), the construction of legitimacy in local communities, and the successful isolation of potential (and actual) opponents. Furthermore, the Party's formal recognition of local mass organizations and public enactment of mass line policies in areas under their control replaced the old elite power structures with a new activist elite that was loyal to the Party line. That mass organization members were publicly identified through their participation during the campaign, and that grievances congruent with the mass line were aired in public fora, moreover lent momentum to the mobilization of class conflict, as participants found it more difficult to reverse themselves later on. The highly public enactment of such practices, Li concludes, firmly entrenched both the norms and principles of the mass line, and the social composition of grassroots mass organizations in local communities.[37] Likewise, Liu Yu finds that the practice of Mao-era mass line politics generally helped participants to internally justify their individual support for and compliance with revolutionary political goals by legitimizing personal behavior as rational.[38]

In his work on the wartime GMD strongholds of Jiangsu, Anhui, and Hubei, Chen Yung-fa demonstrates how the Party's deployment of mass line tactics through a dense web of mass associations allowed CCP leaders to modulate both the pace and intensity of social polarization. Strategically ambiguous class labels like "basic masses" (基本群众) and "feudal forces" (封建势力) served to selectively downplay or diffuse the "chaos of class alignment" when social tensions were running high, thereby simultaneously minimizing active opposition from the old elite even as the Party stoked underlying class antagonisms.[39] For Tetsuya Kataoka, the Communist success rested heavily upon

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[37] 李里峰, "土改中的诉苦：一种民众动员技术的微观分析," 《南京大学学报》2007年第5期, pp97-109

[38] Liu Yu, "From the Mass Line to the Mao Cult: the production of legitimate leadership in revolutionary China" Ph.D. dissertation (New York: Columbia University, 2006). I am grateful for Elizabeth Perry for bringing this source to my attention.

[39] Chen Yung-fa, *Making Revolution: the Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937- 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). As Tsou Tang also noted, "The mass line was not a mere method of implementing class struggle and cannot be traced exclusively to this concept. In actuality, it also served as a balance to radical policies derived from the notion of class struggle…and led Mao to advocate increasingly moderate policies in many areas." See Tang

the Party's ability to "reshuffle and reintegrate" pre-existing organizations through a highly flexible repertoire of tactical cooperation and suppression in the pursuit of centrally-designed aims. Therefore, Kataoka notes with respect to the "mass line," "a clear distinction must be drawn between what came 'from the masses' and what the Party did 'to the masses'." Masters at cultivating and coopting preexisting village social formations, he concludes that

> The accomplishment of the Chinese Communists was in refining this native source of power and combining it with a thoroughly modern organization imposed from above. Thousands upon thousands of separate, isolated, and cellular units were tied to a frame of steel. It seems as though the cells would have gone wherever the frame would taken them, e.g., the resistance, the civil war, the Great Leap Forward. This was because of the basically apolitical nature of the cells at the bottom. Their units presupposed local interest in 'defending homes and villages.' [40]

In the wake of the Communist victory, new mass organizations of various types—including cooperatives, collectives, and communes in the countryside, and work units in the cities—steadily displaced earlier forms of social organization and created new collectives around shared economic interests that were nonetheless dependent upon the central power of the post-revolutionary state, cementing what Party theoreticians referred to as its basic "organizational line" with its "political line."[41] In rural areas, the restriction and eventual suffocation of rural markets, the gradual but steady elimination of farming-family sideline occupations, and the continued calls from the center to develop "local self-reliance" all contributed to the decline of inter-village linkages and increased the atomization of local communities from the early 1950s onwards.[42] In urban areas, segmentation of the labor force into work units (单位) alongside the

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Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms: a historical perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xliv.

[40] Tetsuya Kataoka, *Resistance and Revolution in China: the Communists and the Second United Front* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 104, 106, 301.

[41] The concepts of the "organizational line" and the "political line" were considered inextricably linked to the Party's practice of the "mass line" in the period leading up the to the Cultural Revolution. As one 1958 People's Daily editorial asserted, "大家都知道，群众路线是我们党的根本政治路线和组织路线…党的组织路线就要保障党的组织和成员那个够密切联系群众为实现党的政治路线。" See "群众路线是我们党的根本路线，" 人民日报（1958/12/11), p. 7; see also 杜李， 群众观点与群众路线 （上海： 上海人民出版社， 1954），especially pp. 50-59.

[42] See, for example, Vivienne Shue, "Emerging state-society relations in China", in Jorgen Delman, Clemens Stubbe Ostergaard and Flemming Christiansen (eds.), *Remaking Peasant China* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1990), p. 77; Pauline B. Keating, "Getting peasants organized: village organizations and the Party-state in the Shaan Gan Ning border region, 1934-1945," in Feng Chongyi and David S. G. Goodman, eds. *North China at war : the social ecology of revolution, 1937-1945* (Lanham, MD ; Oxford : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 20000; Jean Oi*, State and Peasant in Contemporary China State and Peasant in Contemporary China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 230.

institution of the household registration system proved similarly effective tools for segmenting, controlling and managing the urban population beneath a central state administration. [43]

Yet even as the Party's new grassroots forms of mass organization atomized social contact, they created new bulwarks of solidarity for the articulation and expression of collective material interests not always in keeping with the centrally imposed mass line. Periodically throughout the Mao era, organized masses slipped out of the center's grasp to openly challenge Party-state control when collective entitlements were threatened or withheld, particularly during periods when the center relaxed its coercive grip on society. During the six months between October 1956 and March 1957, as many as ten thousand large-scale strikes and demonstrations involving workers and students unfolded across the country; the incidence of petitioning in rural areas also skyrocketed. Seizing the opportunity afforded by the Hundred Flowers Campaign, when Chairman Mao encouraged the airing of grievances hoping to pre-empt revolts like those in Hungary, workers displaced by the socialization of industries carried out more than 1,300 strikes in Shanghai alone. While the official press placed the blame on the excessively bureaucratic workstyle of managers and Party cadres, in fact, workers' demands included higher wages, better welfare, permanent status and guaranteed promotion. [44] In rural areas, communization in 1958 served to militarize agricultural production during the Great Leap Forward; excessive labor demands and dire food shortages did mobilize members of work teams and production brigades to resist, sometimes violently, local leaders.[45] Likewise, the Cultural Revolution generated turmoil partly shaped the Party's own clientelist networks inside workplaces, triggering struggles between the so-called "conservative" mass organizations that were largely comprised of members of the Party's organization, and "rebel" mass organizations that generally drew their membership from diverse groups disadvantaged workers and intellectuals, or those who had been previously persecuted by Party members and leaders alike.[46] In late July and early August of 1967, mobilized mass organizations in many parts of the country raided army depots and barracks, and staged pitched battles in nearly ever province. Although Beijing attempted to stifle this grassroots

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[43] Lü Xiaobo and Elizabeth. J. Perry, 'The Changing Chinese Workplace in Historical and Comparative Perspective', in Lü and Perry, *Danwei:. The Changing Workplace in Historical and. Comparative Perspective* (New York: M. E.. Sharpe, 1997); Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, "The Origins and Social Consequences of China's Hukou System," *The China Quarterly* 139 (Sept., 1994), pp. 644-668.

[44] Elizabeth J. Perry, "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957," *The China Quarterly*, No. 137 (Mar., 1994), pp. 1-27; 沈士光, "想器了1956 年, "改革风云录; 沈士光, "1956 年危机," 党史纵横, 第4, pp. 24-26.

[45] 李若建, "大跃进与困难时期的社会动荡与社会控制, "中山大学学报(社会科学版), 编辑部邮箱 2001年 06期; see also scattered reports in 楊繼繩 《墓碑: 中國六十年代饑荒紀實》(香港: 天地圖書, 2008).

[46] James R. Townsend, *Political Participation in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Charles Bettleheim, *Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organization in China: changes in management and the division of labor* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1974).

radicalization soon thereafter, ultra-leftist factions not only survived, but continued their destabilizing political activities for several years, propagating what came to be called "new trends of thought" (新思潮) highly critical of the Party and its emergence as an exploitative social class in post-revolutionary China.[47] In his research on grass-roots political action in the mid- seventies, Heilmann found that in some areas, radical factions infiltrated and seized control over provincial branches of mass associations, threatening to overtake the Party iteself. In Shaanxi and Jiangsu, factions of radicals argued that "Party leadership is leadership over the general political line…and not organizational leadership," and even attempted to revive slogans of a few years before: "Mass organizations take the place of the Party!" (群众组织来代替党！).[48]

In the foregoing cases, it was rarely the case that entire units or mass organizations banded together to resist state power. Most often, the unity of the mass organizations created and maintained by the Party-state fractured from within, generally along the lines of preexisting inequalities among the mass base. State and Party-created mass associations thus became lightening rods for organizing dissent not only by building new social networks of alliances between individuals, but also by drawing attention to how some of the deep underlying inequalities that characterized state socialism during the Mao era were refracted an perpetuated at the local level. Zhou Xueguang argues that one unintended consequence of the Party-state's stunning success in organizing the masses at the grassroots is that the process created large numbers of individuals with similar grievances, thus easing the barriers for collective action. Furthermore, due to the powerful and overlapping linkages forged between the Party-state and such workplace organizations, otherwise disorganized and fragmented discontent tended to be funneled in the direction of the state.[49] Under such conditions, "mass line" practices of grassroots leadership may have offered opportunities to air grievances and resolve conflicts over the logistics of production and cadre workstyles, but, particularly when managed by low-level cadres and managers, was inadequate for redressing long-standing structural injustices, the sources of which lay with the center itself.

From activist masses to receptive publics

The tumultuous violence of the Cultural Revolution period unquestionably marked a turning point for the practices of mass politics under Maoist rule. In early 1966, then-Premier Zhou Enlai addressed a rally of more than twenty-thousand self-proclaimed revolutionary rebels, noting that, whereas previous

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[47] Wang Shaoguang, "'New Trends of Thought' on the Cultural Revolution, " *Journal of Contemporary China* (1999) 8:21, pp. 197-217.

[48] Sebastian Heilmann, "Turning Away from the Cultural Revolution: Political Grass-roots Activism in the mid-Seventies," *Center for Pacific Asia Studies at Stockholm University, Occasional Paper* 28 (September 1996), p. 8.

[49] Zhou Xueguang, "Unorganized Interests and Collective Action in Communist China," *American Sociological Review* 58: 1. (February. 1993), pp. 54-73.

mass movements had involved a simultaneous movement from top to bottom and bottom to top that mimicked the traditional formulation of the "mass line," the Cultural Revolution, by contrast, was "essentially" a "movement from bottom to top,"[50] with intensely politicized masses directly challenging the primacy of the Party. The resulting cycles of radicalization and retaliation during the decade-long struggle effectively paralyzed the Party's ability to make effective use of two of the chief frameworks of grassroots politics, the mass line and mass organizations, through which it had shaped the mobilization efforts of the previous decades. Deeply factionalized grassroots mass organizations propagated competing mass lines, disarticulating what the Party's "organizational line" from its "political line," thereby undermining the Party's capacity to effect even a rough approximation of popular consensus. In some cases, the level of politicization spelled the effective demise of key mass associations, like the Communist Youth League, which could no longer sustain its functions beneath the weight of internecine struggles.[51] It is therefore hardly surprising that, in the wake of Mao's demise, the emerging Dengist regime identified as its chief tasks a thorough repudiation of the Cultural Revolution, and a sustained campaign to deradicalize and demobilize Chinese society from the grassroots, to be carried out in part by "constructing public opinion" (造舆论) in a manner conducive to these aims.

To this end, the Dengist state moved quickly to enforce a new post-Mao hegemony, but not without lingering resistance from elements inside and outside the Party center: mass activism did not die quickly. The blistering attacks on the theoretical and operational bases of the Cultural Revolution delivered by supporters of the Dengist faction in 1979 were followed by the ruthless suppression of the Democracy Wall movement and outlawing of "big democracy"—the right of the revolutionary people to engage in great debate and to post their views publicly through the medium of "big character posters"-- in 1980. Comprehensive rectification of Party and state offices and mass organizations began in 1983 in order to weed out "three kinds of people" on the left who continued to undermine Party unity and social stability, and to identify a reliable "third echelon" of leaders untainted by the "ultra-leftism" of the Mao era. As the rectification plan was originally conceived, the first stage was to target leading Party organs and the headquarters of army units. The second stage, beginning in the winter of 1984, would extend the process to some 13.5 million prefectural and county level unit cadres housed largely in local party branches, and grassroots mass organizations. With respect to these local branches and mass associations, the chief tasks were to "unify thought" (统一思想), correct workstyles (整顿作坊), strengthen discipline (加强纪录) and clean up

[50] 科技战报 (25 January 1966), as cited by Tang Tsou, *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms*, p. 82.

[51] On the suspension of the Communist Youth League and its organ, the 中国青年during the Cultural Revolution, see James R. Townsend, *The Revolutionization of Chinese Youth: A Study of Chung-kuo Ch'ing-nien*, China Research Monograph No. 1; (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, November 1967), especially pp. 59-71.

organizations (清理组织).[52] In June 1984, the Central Commission for Guiding Party Rectification issued a new circular mandating the complete elimination of factionalism produced by the Cultural Revolution that had materialized in the form of grassroots mass organizations, splitting them down the middle, with forces aligning up internally with both "rebel" and "conservative" factions . Yet, as Forster pointed out in his research on Zhejiang, the identification and excision of the "three kinds of people" envisioned by the reformers at the center necessitated a delicate microsurgery at the grassroots level that few local cadres had either the skill or the political will to perform. In lieu of deciding definitively for one local faction over the other, the solution was to admit that none were wholly without blame,[53] and to adjure future grassroots political activism not clearly spurred by the center. Rather than placing grassroots political mobilization around collectively shaped economic interests at the heart of the mass political practices, discussions of mass line practices from the early reform period onward focused instead on the action of the Party as it served, and responded to the perceived needs and interests of, the masses.[54]

These practical measures were matched by new discursive polemics designed to unravel radical Maoism by first "seeking truth from facts" (实事求是), and progressed to the argument that "practice is the sole criterion of truth" and a new emphasis on Mao's thought as a "scientific system." Methodological debates in the social sciences likewise began to prod, and then to overturn, earlier critical models for social investigation in favor more "scientific" approaches, linking the former to the excesses of the recent past. In 1986, the vice-Premier to the National Forum on Research, Wan Li, boldly asserted that when the Party announced it no longer regarded "class struggle as the key link," it was time to "draw a clear line between political and academic questions." As the experience of the Cultural Revolution demonstrated, the Mao-era "mass line" could and should no longer serve as a guide for rational decision-making or for research in the "soft sciences" (软科学); new, more "scientific" approaches were required that were capable of offering analyses of society untainted by the ideological remnants of

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[52] Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 166-67.

[53] Keith Forster, "Repudiation of the Cultural Revolution in China: The Case of Zhejiang," *Pacific Affairs*, 59:1 (Spring, 1986), pp. 5-27.

[54] See, for example, the 1996 人民日报editorial, which cites a new iteration of the mass line based upon the principle of seeking truth from facts, consonant with the 1981 关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议 that centers on four supposed mass assessments of Party activity: "Does the Party receive the endorsement (拥护) of the masses? Does the Party receive the praise (赞成) the masses? Does the Party make the masses happy (高兴)? Does the Party have the agreement (答应) of the masses?" . 黄国均陈智愚任大立, "群众路线是党的生命路线," 人民日报, (1996/07/02), p. 9. By contrast, a 1958 人民日报editorial bearing nearly the same title argues forcefully against the traditional view that concerted mass (political and economic) action constituted "great disorder under heaven" (天下打乱). "群众路线是党的工作的生命线, " 人民日报, (1958/12/26), p. 7.

ultra-leftism.[55] The Mao-era model of social investigation based upon an examination of "typical cases" (典型调查) in particular came under attack as a vehicle of subjectivism that distorted researchers' attempts to capture and convey popular sentiments. As Chen Chongshan, a member of the Bejing News Study Association (北京新闻学会) established in the early 1980s, argued, a reliance on "representative" (有代表性的) research subjects only captured the views of a select minority of respondents. During the Cultural Revolution's high tide of ultra-leftism,

> the subjective bias (主观随意性) inherent in this research method increased greatly, with researchers frequently using the standpoint of class analysis to draw a priori distinctions between "friends" and "enemies" [of the revolutionary classes], or use political behavior as a yardstick, and draw apriori distinctions to divide people into leftists, centrists, and rightists, using themselves as the core, taking those whose opinions follow their own to be leftists, comrades, and friends, and taking those with contrary views to be rightists, outsiders, and enemies. Data selection carried the same bias, broadcast their views on a grand scale, by attacking those whose opinions differ from their own and emphasizing the unanimity of public opinions, excluding voices that differ. For this reason, [such methods] cannot completely, comprehensively, and accurately reflect the popular will, lead to policy mistakes, and breed tragedies like the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.[56]

Early and ardent advocates of replacing Mao-era practices of social research with more scientific and more objective random sampling methods were centered in the news and propaganda departments of the media. In 1981, An Gang, then associate director of the Beijing News Study Association and a member of the editorial board of People's Daily, published an article entitled "Study our Readers" in which he proposed that the empirical investigation of the reading public be considered the rightful heir the Maoist concept of the "mass line" in propaganda work: "Studying our readers is simply the solution to the problem of how we might make even better our service to the broad masses."[57] Shortly thereafter, the association established its own "Audience Research Group," which initiated the first large-scale audience surveys undertaken in Beijing. The initial poll, undertaken by central Party news media groups and a small number of official mass associations, polled randomly selected Beijing residents to ascertain their views with respect to the reliability of the official media, and their relative levels of interest in the content. The city of Tianjin followed up with its own "ten-thousand household investigation" (千户调查), publishing the results in a 1984 report recommending how to improve the quality of life for Tianjin City residents,

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[55]万里，"决策民主化和科学化是政治体制改革的一个重要课题——在全国软科学研究工作座谈会上的讲话，人民日报（1986／08／15），p. 1

[56]陈崇山，"中国受众研究之回顾（上），"《当代传播》（2001年 01期), p. 13。

[57] As cited in 陈崇山,"中国手重研究回顾（上）" p. 13.

a process that municipal officials repeated annually for the next nine years. In 1986, central department-level officials conducted a large-scale survey of mass views on economic reform during the Chinese New Year holiday season and reportedly found that 87% of the Beijing residents polled reported that "the reforms of the past few years were a success," and 88.7% felt that "although prices were rising, the quality of life is also rising."[58]

As the unsteady course of economic reforms continued during the 1980s, the Party leadership increasingly called upon those engaged in propaganda and ideological work to not only "guide public opinion" during periods of difficulty throughout the reform process, but also to monitor public reception of recent policy developments. Premier Zhao Ziyang's think-tank, the CESRRI, was authorized by the State Council to conduct a series of large-scale national surveys in 1985 to measure the impact of reform policies. From February through November of that year, the new think-tank employed over four hundred statisticians and researchers and tapped resources from twenty-one government and educational or research units to produce 156 reports, all of which reassured elites that there was a high level of popular support for the Dengist urban reform program.[59] The following year, CESRRI conducted another fourteen large-scale social surveys to collect and quantify public opinion with respect to matters of national policy, and, by 1988, CESRRI's success had spawned the creation of another fifteen public opinion institutes in Beijing. Stanely Rosen notes that several of these new "semiprivate" organizations were in fact established by individuals who had practical experience with the turbulent history of "mass line" politics during the Maoist era. The ranks of new think-tank founders included the former top Red Guard leader of Beijing's high school students, as well as one activist who had risen to national prominence as a result of his activities during the 1976 Tiananmen incident, both of whom had been imprisoned during the 1970s for their participation in the mass politics of their day. [60] Yet, despite the earlier experience such researchers have had with the less structured practices of Maoist mass line politics, both the framing of survey questions and analysis of poll results tend to show clear majority support for the policies of the center. Even as social tensions rose precipitously in the late 1980s, and again, in the wake of the traumatic 1989 crackdown following the Tiananmen demonstrations, the People's Daily has reassured its readers that random surveys demonstrate

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[58] 希子，"民意测验在中国兴起，" 《记者观察》 1992年 03期 , pp. 65-66.

[59] Stanley Rosen and David Chu found some bias in the statistical survey results of the Reform Commission, which found that high levels of public concern about inflation in its survey on reactions to price reform, a finding which happened to support the commission's own position at the time that reform should continue, albeit at a slower rate. A group of young researchers at the affiliated CESRRI found instead popular support for price reform was high, and that the public wished reform to speed up. See Stanley Rosen and David Chu, *Survey Research in the People's Republic of China* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1987), p. 7.

[60] Stanley Rosen, "The Rise (and Fall) of Public Opinion in Post-Mao China," In Richard Baum ed., *Reform and reaction in post-Mao China* (Routledge, 1991), pp. 69-70. See also Catherine Keyser, Professionalizing Research in Post-Mao China: The System Reform Institute and Policy Making (New York: Me Sharpe, 2003), especially pp. 19-36.

that vast majority of the Chinese public collectively hold "an optimistic attitude toward the current situation, and future developments"[61]

Who is being represented?

The transition from the Maoist "mass line" dialectical model of intense engagement at the grassroots level to the more mediated process of polling and managing public opinion has been cast in official discourse as a shift in favor of increased mass participation in politics. As one 1986 *Peoples Daily* article explained,

> When 'leftist' guiding ideas held the dominant position, and especially during the 'Great Cultural Revolution,' when the principles of socialist democracy were wrecked and trampled on, there appeared a very strange phenomenon: anyone who put forward views on political issues or undertook any study or discussion on such issues was politically questionable and had to undergo screening, and was even struck to the ground. The Third Plenary Session of the 11th CCP Central Committee opened up a new era in building socialist democracy, and politics regained its original meaning from being the affair of a few politicians it turned into the affair of millions of people.[62]

Likewise, as Swabey argues, the connection between the liberal democratic concept of representation and that of the "representative sample" in quantitative social science research is hardly coincidental: "Plainly, such a conception of government is quantitative…Once we conceive the whole (the state) as composed of the parts (citizens) which are formally distinct but without relative qualitative differences, we are applying the notion in its essentials."[63] More recently, in 2001, the Sixth Plenum of the 15th Central Committee released a decision "On Strengthening and Improving the Building of Party Workstyles," in which it proposed, in part, "to expand democratic recommendation, and the scope of public opinion surveys and democratic discussion, improve methods, and enhance the quality" (扩大民主推荐、民意测验和民主评议的范围，改进方法，提高质量) of the ranks of its cadres; the proposal has been repeated several times since with respect to the use of public opinion polls and other forms of information as a

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[61] "对当前形势和未来发展持乐观态度," 国家科委大规模抽样调查表明 三百多万专业人才潜力待发掘 他们迫切要求通过改革发挥才智," 《人民日报》(1988.05.25)；于长洪，王军，"首次全国社会人际关系现状抽样调查表明 公众对当前形势和未来发展持乐观态度，" 《人民日报》(1992.08.27)

[62] 本报评论员，"政治问题可以讨论，"人民日报 (1986/08/30), p. 1.

[63] Marie Collins Swabey, "The Representative Sample: A Quantitative View," in Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, *Represenattion* (New York: Atherton Press, 1982), p. 85.

method for improving governance and intra-Party decision-making,[64] all offered as evidence that the reform-era Party has undertaken efforts to become more democratic and more inclusive than it was during Mao's reign.

Yet the reconfiguration of Maoist "mass line" politics into the technocratic engineering of public opinion through polling and media supervision arguably reflects not the increasing closeness of the elites to the masses under a gradual evolution toward representative liberal democracy, but the further distancing of the post-Mao state from a social realm increasingly defined as an object for surveillance, manipulation and control. As Jurgen Habermas noted, polls and surveys are not an expression of democratic will but a substitute for it, since they curtail the discursive conditions necessary for the development of opinions in the public realm, most prominently, rational and democratic deliberation involving a "critically debating public".[65] Pierre Bourdieu is even more critical, vigorously asserting that the construction of public opinion by polling and survey instruments is itself an

> *artifact* whose function is to conceal the fact that the state of opinion at any given moment is a system of forces, of tensions, and that there is nothing more inadequate than a percentage to represent the state of opinion... [the public opinion poll] creates the idea that a unanimous public opinion exists in order to legitimate a policy, and strengthen the relations of force upon which it is based or make it possible.[66]

According to Bourdieu, the process of surveying public opinion represents a tightly constrained form of participation that frequently requires respondents to choose among pre-formed responses to a framed question, a process from which "there is every likelihood of creating pure artifact out of thin air. Opinions are made to exist which did not pre-exist the question." In the oft-recorded high rates of refusal and abstentionism among those targeted by pollsters, Bourdieu reads not only a degree of popular skepticism concerning the act of polling, but also a rejection of the implicit political philosophy of public opinion polling, "which credits everyone with not only the right but also the power to produce...a judgment" on any range of issues. On the basis of his study of nonrespondents, he concludes that their apparent indifference to the pollster is a manifestation of their disenfranchisement within a political system in which technical expertise

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[64] 中共中央关于加强和改进党的作风建设的决定（2001年9月26日中国共产党第十五届中央委员会第六次全体会议通过）《人民日报》(2001.10.08), p.1"中组部采取措施贯彻落实十五届六中全会精神 推动领导班子和干部队伍党员队伍作风建设，" 《人民日报》(2001.10.12)， p.4； 贾德臣，"扩大民主 完善办法 突破难点 健全用人机制的重要环节，）《人民日报》 "(2003.02.13) p.9；中央组织部印发实施《体现科学发展观要求的地方党政领导班子和领导干部综合考核评价试行办法》，）《人民日报》(2006。07。07), p.1。

[65] Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995). Habermas's discussion of "the manufactured public sphere and nonpublic opinion" appears on pp. 219-221.

[66] Pierre Bourdieu, "Public Opinion Does Not Exist," in Armand Mattelart and Seth Siegelaub, *Communication and Class Struggle*, Vol. 1. (New York: International General, 1979), p. 125.

and perceived competence is equated with political power.[67]

Indeed, the shift from Mao-era "on the spot" social investigation to large-scale random polling techniques reflects the very different orientation of the post-Mao leadership toward the construction of knowledge about society that is considered useful to the state. Furthermore, Mao-era social investigation drew clear distinctions between the use of statistics to explain natural phenomena, and those used in the social sciences, deriding the latter as "a poison of the capitalist class" (资产阶级的毒素). The primary reason for this was the Marxist critique of the notion of randomness in social, and particularly economic, phenomena, the fundamental nature of which can only be fully explained through historical materialism and Marxist laws of political economy.[68] Social investigation based on random sampling methods might fail to reflect accurately the class nature of a given society, thereby obscuring exploitative relationships beneath a cloak of numeric equivalence. Accordingly, Mao-era statistical surveys tended to rely on "typical example investigation" (典型调查), in which data is collected from cases selected to represent various social groups or classes, not unlike Western models of stratified non-random sampling, in order to highlight the contrasts, contradictions, and antagonisms between them.[69] The replacement of class-based analyses involving on-site direct engagement with social subjects with large-scale random sampling deliberately creates distance between the researcher and the subject or subjects under investigation, and dramatically depoliticizes the broader context within which social investigation takes place.

Popular skepticism in China regarding the nature of polling and resistance to the constrained participation it requires arose even before public opinion surveys were formally legitimated by Zhao Ziyang's 1987 call to allow public opinion supervision to supercede the role of the "mass line" in policy formulation. According to the coordinator of the Beijing News Study Group that conducted the first large-scale "audience survey" in 1982, as soon as the project team finalized its research plan, members of the editorial board at the People's Daily began receiving ominous phone calls reporting that someone was planning to undertake "a bourgeois public opinion poll" (资产阶级民意测验). Other critics quickly pointed out that random sample polling was not how social investigation was historically conducted in the People's Republic, and in fact constituted "an attack on so-called 'class-based analysis'" (丢掉了所谓"阶级分析方法). Another accused the research group of "specializing in collecting rightist opinions" (专门搜集右派意见).[70] In 1985, similar large-scale "audience surveys" conducted by China Youth magazine and a 1988 poll by People's University came under a torrent of

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[67] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 398-413.

[68] 邹依仁，"试论统计学的性质及其与数理统计学的关系" 《经济研究》 1 (1980), p. 70.

[69] S. Lee Travers, "Bias in Chinese Economic Statistics: The Case of the Typical Example Investigation," *The China Quarterly*, 91, (Sept., 1982), pp. 478-485.

[70] 海东， 何斌， p. 35.

criticism, with one department head deriding public opinion polls in general as "the pseudo-science of the capitalist class" (资产阶级的伪科学); one university-based researcher expressed his skepticism that in the political climate of the early reform period, respondents would answer any questions honestly.[71] One poll of scientific and technical personnel in Jilin Province purportedly received a "cold reception," with fully a third of the respondents refusing to fill out the questionnaires. Several of these drew "a tiger's head and a snake's tail" (虎头蛇尾) on the form, suggesting that despite a promising beginning, the process would likely come to no good end. Some even took the opportunity of the poll to express their anger that repeated calls to improve the situation of intellectuals had amounted to nothing but empty promises.[72]

As Zhong Yang has argued, in the Party's attempt to reconfigure the relationship between the masses and the official media one early step was the introduction of the depoliticized concept of a passive media "audience" (受众) to replace the (potentially activist) "masses" in academic and media policy discourses.[73] While both the mass line associated practices of the Mao era and the frequent public opinion polling of today provide central leaders with telling information about the degree and depth of social grievances, the embrace of polling in official discourse is indicative of the underlying post-Mao shift away from direct and potentially conflict-ridden engagement with the masses in favor of more mediated forms of indirect political representation in the era of reform. In this still-emerging discursive framework, the public opinion poll – with its ability to reduce profound social cleavages to broad aggregates – serves to mask socioeconomic divisions, and reduces complex political engagement to a simpler, more easily digested set of metrics. Through the new practice of polling, the reform-era public is more readily assembled as a legible aggregate subject that thinks and desires without contradiction, and whose pluralities are largely overwritten in the search for monochromatic majorities in the construction of a "socialist harmony society."

The End of the Mass Line?

Historically, one chief resource of the Mao-era party-state was its considerable power to mobilize mass participation and enlist the resources and energies of social forces to achieve ideological and practical ends. Yet with the onset of market reform, the party-state's reinvention of the notion of participation has been largely divested it of its ideological and political content, and purged of references to the class struggle that preceded and helped to shape it. Seen in this light, the governing practices that define China's neoliberal policies of market reform represent an ambitious attempt to create new nonclass forms of identity and more highly mediated forms of representation that have

[71] 希子, "民意测验在中国兴起," 《记者观察》 1992年 03期 p. 66.

[72] 科技日报, April 4, 1988, as cited by Stanley Rosen (1991), p. 75.

[73] Zhang Yong. "From Masses to Audience: changing media ideologies and practices in reform China ." *Journalism Studies* 1:4 (November 1, 2000), pp. 617-635.

largely succeeded in disarticulating social conflict from the material relations of power.[74] Over the course of the reform era, the Party-state has sought to appropriate and transform Mao-era methods of mobilization in order to generate a depolitical politics that serves to elide the contestation and antagonism intrinsic to mass democracy in action, and therefore, ultimately, undoing of the core Leninist project of revolution to effect social democracy.[75]

On-going market reforms continue to be mediated by existing class relations and political structures, and are carried out in no small part through the repertoire of elite governing practices inherited from the Maoist era. Largely emptied of their ideological content by the post-Mao leadership, these practices have been reinvented as a form of technocratic "social engineering" that sometimes aims to alleviate, but more generally to displace and to conceal, the very rising inequalities that result from marketization. Contemporary neoliberal forms of governance generally operate through a calculative logic that seeks to align the rational economic interests and limited political freedoms of subjects in such a way that individuals are mobilized to participate voluntarily in their own self-regulation. Whereas the mass mobilizations of the Mao era aimed to impose a new socialist order and to rectify the cadre ranks, mobilization during the post-Mao era is no longer seen as an end in itself, but instead, when it is permitted, serves as a mechanism for achieving better—meaning, more efficient and more effective-- technocratic policy outcomes. These notions of participation shape the contemporary practices of depoliticized governance that elide the contestation and antagonism that represent the very core of direct democratic and mass participatory politics.

As I have argued, the transformation of these practices reflect deeper epistemological shifts that have important political consequences for the survival and adaptability China's authoritarian regime. From the early Dengist rallying cry to "seek truth from facts" (实事求是), to the argument that "practice is the sole criterion of truth," Party theoreticians deftly maneuvered its "criterion of practice" with the so-called "criterion of productive forces," thereby granting to rationalizations based upon economic productivity an unprecedented degree of official "truth."[76] This deeper epistemological shift, which places economic production for the market at the center of the reform era project, is reflected in the shift from post-the Mao-era model of social investigation based upon an examination of "typical cases" (典型调查) to the random survey methods now used for public opinion polling. In Mao's conception of scientific social investigation, notions of class and class struggle determined how "representative" (有代表性的) cases were to be selected for study. When exemplary cases were uncovered, they were elevated as norms, propagating more widely the moral

[74] Wu Yiching, "Rethinking 'Capitalist Restoration' in China," Monthly Review 57:6 (Nov. 2005).
[75] On the role of contestation in deliberative democracy, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 8: 25/26 (1990), pp. 56-80.
[76] Michael Schoenhals, "The 1978 Truth Criterion Controversy," *The China Quarterly*, No. 126, (June, 1991), pp. 243-268

propositions they espoused through the "point to surface" (由点到面) method lucidly described by Sebastian Heilmann,[77] with the goal of creating what Borge Bakken refers to as an "exemplary society" governed by social revolutionary ideals.[78] However, the post-Mao abandonment of "class struggle as the key link" and the apparent acceptance of the role of randomness in social and economic events, have paved the way for new epistemologies of social knowledge, and new "ways of seeing like a state"[79] more conducive to the logic of depoliticized politics[80] associated with neoliberal globalization.

This strategic effort to depoliticize Chinese society from above during the reform era, beginning with the "thorough negation" of the Cultural Revolution, has proved the key to the adaptive authoritarianism of the current regime. The successes of the Maoist regime in organizing and mobilizing the grassroots ultimately proved its own undoing: revolutionary radicalism under state socialism attracted, condensed and overdetermined the very sort of widespread social disaffection that Western-style market capitalism successfully deflects, disperses and disengages from the institutions in which power inheres. The PRC was by no means the only society to have experienced profound social turmoil during the 1960s; nor was it alone in adopting broad sociopolitical and economic reforms at the end of the 1970s that served to disperse, fragment and redirect social tumult.[81] To a lesser extent, the Keynesian welfare arrangements of the capitalist West likewise served to mobilize and direct popular dissatisfaction against the institutions of the state, tendencies that the waves of privatization that originated by under the governments of Reagan and Thatcher also defused and mitigated. As Wang Hui rightly notes, the periodic return of mass protest over the course of the 1980s, culminating in the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations, represented the final series of great mass eruptions pressing for a more genuinely egalitarian politics that arguably had its origins in the Red Guard movements of the 1960s.[82] What is perhaps most remarkable is that the Party-state was so successful in swiftly re-channeling the energies of the generation that gave birth to the Tiananmen protests in the direction of market-

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[77] Sebastian Heilmann, "From Local Experiments to National Policy: the Origins of Chian's Distinctive Policy Process," *The China Journal* 59 (January 2008), pp. 1-30.

[78] Borge Bakken, *The Exemplary Society: Human Improvement, Social Control, and the Dangers of Modernity in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[79] James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[80] Wang Hui, "Depoliticized Politics, from East to West," *New Left Reeview* 41 (September-October 2006), p. 41.

[81] For the shift from group-based forms of articulating public opinion to its the wholescale replacement by quantitative public opinion polling in the US, see the work of Susan Herbst, especially "On the disappearance of groups: 19th- and early 20th-century conceptions of public opinion," in Theodore L. Glasser. and Charles T. Salmon (eds..),*Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent* (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), pp. 89-104; and *Numbered Voices how opinion polling has shaped American politics* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[82] Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*, edited by Theodore Huters (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

driven economic modernization.[83] In a consumer-driven market society like the one the current leadership is assiduously constructing, dissent, too is privatized, most often melting away into a vast sea of suppressed anxieties, personal inadequacies and an inchoate sense of dissatisfaction that serves to lubricate the global machinery of capitalism.

[83] I wish to thank Sebastian Heilmann for this insight.