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Who, Why, and How? Creating a Political Leader in China

In an increasingly globalized world, nations and individuals find themselves interacting with other states and peoples that they do not share a natural relationship with. China and the United States are separated by the world's largest ocean. However, this has hardly hindered the development of one of the worlds' most important trade relationships. As the People's Republic of China opens itself to the world, outside analysts have come forth interested in examining the politics of the most unique and interesting nations. How does one find themselves leading the most populous country on the planet? What factors can be found in examining who is capable of becoming a leader? This paper seeks to examine the multitude of factors that influence who is capable of and who succeeds in pursuit of political office and identify the strategies in place to sustain the leading party's hold on power. Through magnifying the historical and cultural foundation on which modern Chinese society builds itself, as well as researching the literal policies of the state, the questions of who, why, when, and notably, how individuals become political officials, can expectantly be answered. By defining the dynamics that go into creating a leader, this paper will also analyze how this system affects U.S.-China relations and foreign policy.

Currently, across China, there are numerous groups, individuals, and organizations protesting in result of their dissatisfaction with Party leadership. While the U.S. would expect this to be a sign of linear democratic and capitalist progression, these

principles are not the primary goals of the movement. In general, although the youngest generation admires democratic principles, the major issue taken by those frustrated with the CCP is of moral leadership and unethical behavior. The principles employed in protest against the CCP can be understood in the context of Chinese traditional society.

At the advent of Chinese dynastic society, certain ideals were promoted and developed as essential tenets of governing philosophy. Arguably the most important of all of these is the Mandate of Heaven, (天命-*tiānmìng*). The Mandate of Heaven, since its conception in ancient dynastic monarchies, has written that a ruler is granted a divine right to rule based on their status as a just individual. This is a core belief of Heaven worship, the primary spirituality that permeated traditional Chinese society and remains culturally embedded still today. As a just ruler, the emperor is supported by the spiritual forces that govern the Earth and life. However, as a ruler can act in accordance with moral principles, so can they act unjust, therefore necessitating the Heavens to intervene until power is handed off to another individual. Famine, disease, agricultural failures among numerous other disasters were often taken as evidence that a ruler had 'lost the Mandate', and consequentially must compulsorily be removed from power by a populist uprising, and power restored to a just and moral ruler.

Moral leadership remains important today, as the public remains vigilante of a politician's behavior in respect to both traditional and modern moral sensibilities. While the populous will likely continue in its' passive participation in governance, unethical or immoral behavior would be the most likely cause of uprising, as evidenced by the current trend towards dissatisfaction with Party leadership. Among many, corruption is high on the list of issues taken up by the people. President Xi Jinping's current work

fighting corruption has as a result made him hugely popular with the public, who consider morality to be of the utmost importance. Beyond the main concern of moral leadership, social stratification and income inequality remain among the top threats to China remaining a one party system. As income inequality grows, the movement of China's wealthy, business elite into political positions is considered a potential source of contention for the people, and thus also a threat to Party maintenance of power. The Chinese public is highly aware of extremely wealthy individuals becoming high ranking Party officials, and when seemingly related issues begin to affect the populace, an uprising becomes more likely. One can see the remnants of the Mandate of Heaven in the attribution of seemingly disparate factors like a business failure to immoral leadership. However, most experts agree that a populist uprising is unlikely as long as the government is able to continue economic growth and it's improvement of individual circumstances. (James T. Areddy, 2012)

Starting from the roots of Chinese society according to Mao, the rural populations engage in one of the few examples of direct voting in Chinese politics. The smallest form of politician, the village committee members, are voted to their position by the local residents. Beyond the Village Commission, China also houses two other institutions that remain involved in the localities through strict elections. These are China's most democratic institutions, as the officials who hold these offices are elected strictly based on democratic elections. Although they are elected based on democratic principles, the elections are still governed by Chinese election law, which is different than the election laws of western nations like the United States. The electorate is made up of individuals over 18 and by principle is not limited by race, sex, religion or other social determinants.

The law also dictates the principles of anonymous balloting, multiple candidacy, equality, direct elections, and also the principles that guarantee the voting rights of the electorate as well as the ability for the election to be supervised and or recalled. Local and provincial residents also vote in two other elections: the Township People's Congress, or TPC, and the County People's Congress, or CPC. (Liu)

These elected officials represent groups of rural residents based on town or township, village, and county levels. They elect a representative every three years on the Township and Village level every three years, and the County level delegate is elected every five years. The TPC affords each locality a base number of 40 delegates, with additional delegates being given for each additional 1,500 residents. (Liu) These numbers are designated each election year by the CPC. This is representative of the hierarchy of delegations in the Chinese local, provincial and country wide bureaucracies. These delegates have the potential then to move up by internal promotion into the National People's Congress, or NPC, in Beijing, which according to its own statement of purpose, is "the highest organ of state power". (China Internet Information Center, 2015) All high ranking officials in the People's Republic of China are chosen by those already holding elected office. The equivalent in power and responsibility of the American President is the General Secretary of the Communist Party. However, this position is chosen by a body of individuals already working in a political position as the Chinese Communist Party's leadership. As a collective body, they singularly decide whom to promote to the highest of positions. This means that while any American within certain requirements can run for president, it takes many prerequisites to be even considered for higher office in China.

In theory, the opportunity for local elections ought to afford a new opportunity for normal citizens to get in to government on the ground level. This would mean that the demographics of potential rulers could change drastically, based on their ability to be Party sanctioned, or seconded by at least two other voters, the rules demanded for someone to be considered a candidate. (Liu) However, in practice, these often do not afford a radically different opportunity for any individual to seek and win a government position. In reality, the Party has the final say.

The delegations are designed in their founding documents to allow for the NPC to have interventional abilities all the way down to the smallest form of government, the Village Commissions and Township People's Congress. This is exemplary of larger trends in policy and foundation that allow the Chinese Communist Party the ability to exert control on all factions of government. This is indicative of the founders', including Mao Zedong, who shared a desire to secure the Communist Party's ability to rule and govern even the smallest aspects of Chinese society. Although the founding documents allow for intervention in elections, the same founding individuals identify in their philosophy that the rural residents are the most important of China's population. In Maoist philosophy, unique from Marxism, the rural individuals are the ones who bring about the socialist revolution, and are promoted as the truest form of the Chinese individual.

One can see the influence of this rural-centric Maoist ideology in the current electoral system, which awards the residents in rural China the most agency to directly elect the officials that are put into the three electable positions. Although the local elections have only been implemented since 1989 (Levy, 2010), the elections still

include some, but not all, of the Maoist principles of rural revolutionaries. According to NewPolitics writer Richard Levy, these elections are often concluded in control of the Communist Party officials who put themselves at the center of the rural power structure and sometimes decide the results of the local elections. This occurred in Guanmen Village, where the Party Secretary intervened in the election in order to get a “desirable outcome”. (Levy, 2010)

The example of Party intervention in Guanmen Village demonstrates the overarching theme of Chinese politics: the desire of the Party to have the ability to exert control from top to bottom of Chinese society. The leadership of the CCP has always agreed that it needs to institute measures to ensure they remain in control. The plan remains to keep the struggle for power not a struggle, in the sense that rebellion is impossible, criticism is silenced, and elections with unfavorable results are cancelled. At the center of this plan is the awareness of the need to placate the people to prevent uprising. These elections, in theory, could perform this function. They are able to create the illusion of democratic choice, although whether this choice matters or not is not a guarantee. As a general principle, everyone who holds political office in China begins as a member of the Chinese Communist Party, which is evolving rapidly.

Now more than ever, membership in the Chinese Communist Party, or CCP, is open to more demographics of individuals. Since 2001, private businessmen have been eligible for membership. Only in the past few decades have ethnic minorities, women, and entrepreneurs been able to apply for party membership. Eligible individuals, which today includes most Chinese citizens, work their way through the complex process of becoming a member of the CCP. As young children, most join the

Young Pioneers of China, run by the Communist Youth League. After age 14, a smaller percentage move on to the Youth League, which is a more serious organization that seeks out potential members of the Party and primes them for membership. After these obligatory steps, those interested can endure a complicated and difficult application process to join the CCP. Most are denied. Although it is the largest political party in the world, it makes up only 6% of Chinese nationals. (Yuen, 2013)

As The Atlantic reported in 2013, party membership remains the best way for residents, businessmen, students and government workers to boost their resume. (Yuen, 2013) This is especially true for aspiring politicians, who almost exclusively come from the CCP. Explained simply, most politicians rise through the ranks of the CCP and are promoted from lower to higher positions as some find themselves placed in top positions. Through the creation of new members to the policies that ensure their ability to influence virtually all aspects of society, the CCP is working diligently to maintain their security.

As the Communist Party seeks out potential threats to their stronghold on the politics of the world's largest nation, they have developed multi-faceted approaches to marginalizing the people who threaten the one party system. Censorship, after the dawn of the digital age, has become one of the most utilized means of controlling information, and thus, the people. Many western nations take issue with the government's widespread use of censors to prohibit freedom of speech, something nations like the U.S. consider fundamentally vital to society. Historically, censorship has varied as different ruling regimes take varying sides on the issue of free speech and criticism. In the past, academic and popular critique of the government has even been

encouraged, as in the 100 Flowers Campaign of the Mao era.¹ The goal was to regain the support of academics, young people and students who were dissatisfied with their inability to discuss government, societal and policy issues. Predictably, the Chinese people embraced this opportunity, but the government quickly reversed its stance, leading to bullying and prosecution of those speaking out.

The anonymity awarded to internet users has created a forum for government critique, wherein the people are able to bring up issues that could potentially otherwise put them on the bad side of the ruling party. Currently, the internet offers a fleeting chance at political dialogue, although it is usually removed by censors within a few days, or even hours of posting. The issue of censorship, something young people are generally opposed to and able to circumnavigate through the use of technologies like Virtual Private Networks, or VPNS, will become a debated policy issue as the new generation of Chinese citizens are employed in political positions.

Censorship exemplifies the priorities of the Chinese Communist Party in that they demand the ability to govern absolutely. The founding documents and policies have guaranteed them the right to interfere in issues from all corners of society, with generally limited restrictions. Their use of censorship to consolidate power also promotes the exclusion of certain types of individuals from engagement in politics. Rarely today are academic types promoted to positions of power in the CCP. Those who are explicitly engaging in political discourse and criticism of the government regardless of policies disallowing it are guaranteed no chance at promotion or even

¹ In 1956, the CCP leaders encouraged open expression of the publics' opinions related to the government.

Party membership. In many ways, censorship has been a successful policy for maintaining absolute control by the Communist Party. Limiting critical discussion of the policies in the one party state has ensured that no populist uprising can gain footing by anything other than very quiet word of mouth. This in turn limits those potentially able to govern to those already willing to support the CCP.

Like the censorship initiated under Mao Zedong, Maoist philosophy also generated the concept of constant revolution. A proper socialist nation should never stop examining itself to find issues that threaten the socialist system. This philosophy led to many of the Cultural Revolution's most notable tragedies, such as struggle sessions, where mobs of citizens would form an ad-hoc trial and punishment system used against hundreds of individuals who were accused of any number of crimes against the socialist system. This idea also created the conditions for the removal and in some cases prosecution of political officials who did something to anger the CCP's leadership, especially Mao Zedong. Prominent cases of this include Peng Dehuai, an official who angered Mao by writing a letter cautiously critical of some of his policies and was completely removed from his position and faced criminal prosecution. Lin Biao was another important supporter of Mao who was later labeled by Mao as self-serving and untrustworthy, and was removed from his position and was in danger of retaliation or prosecution. On a flight out of the country, his plane crashed, and Lin Biao's death served to shock the nation into ceasing the behaviors initiated during the Cultural Revolution.

While certainly no single official is granted the ability to do what Mao was willing and capable of, the legacy of constant revolution can still be seen today. Looking at a

timeline of Chinese politics and policy, one can see the sweeping changes instituted as new officials gain power. It is almost expected of high ranking officials that they will change direction of national politics and institute an agenda that is individual to their regime. Consequentially, the propensity for newly elected officials to enact intense changes also leaves them vulnerable to swift replacement, as happened often during the Mao era. Since decisions of whom is given political positions is decided by incumbent members of the CCP, politicians often face the possibility of being removed from office and having their political career ended by angering any number of individuals granted power over their position. This can change those who are put up for high office in that a new direction is often sought after a previous regime ends and the system itself allows for potentially quick replacement.

China has undergone a series of large reforms and policy changes that coincide with the series' of individual leaders and the policy bodies under them as new party secretaries have been elected. Arguably the most important changes China has undergone since the creation of the People's Republic is the evolution from command economy to market economy. Many of these changes occurred under Deng Xiaoping, who rose to the top of Party leadership in 1978, and continued to affect change until the 1990's. Famously quoted as saying "Whether a cat is black or white makes no difference. As long as it catches mice, it is a good cat.", Deng Xiaoping was willing to engage in discussion over topics considered political taboo under the Maoist era. He rejected the principles that it was better to be poor under socialism than rich under capitalism, pointing out that "Poverty is not socialism." He in turn promoted policies that lead to the creation of a market economy, which blossomed into the economic boom

which evolved China from a rural, agricultural and developing nation into the world's second largest economy. Whereas Mao Zedong rose to prominence as a revolutionary and communist hero, Deng Xiaoping was granted legitimacy through the commonalities of his experience with the public's own lives. As opposed to revolutionary fervor, Deng Xiaoping was valued for his genuine desire to make China great. Deng Xiaoping was one of the first and most important examples of people from outside a Communist revolutionary background could be elected to high positions in politics. (Cable News Network, 2001)

In consequence of his own policies, he also paved the way for a new demographic of potential leaders to be given that chance. Deng Xiaoping's economic policy created the demand for those engaged in the economy to involve themselves in politics. This signified the change from the 'comrade' generation under Mao to the 'citizen' generation China experiences today. (Goldman, 2005) Previously, Mao-era policies dictated that all economic institutions with government involvement, which was essentially all aspects of the economy under the command economic system, must be represented by a Party Committee, with elected representatives governing decisions related to those economic institutions. Today, since the development of the market economy, there are many economic institutions which the government has little or no control over. This shift in power has coincided with the shift in generational attitudes, as principles of good Communism and Maoist ideals were replaced as the primary prerequisites for political office.

Although the shift in economic policy came during the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the inclusion of entrepreneurs and private businessmen in Party membership

and thus, political leadership was not changed until 2001. China has changed rapidly from attempted economic independence under Mao to massive global interactions between industrialized and non-industrialized nations and increasing economic interdependence. Since the beginning of the major economic reforms in 1978, both in policy and in practice, the private enterprise and business has regained its place in the Chinese economy and culture. From 1978 to 2001, China's private businesses grew from zero to over 38 million firms employing 160 million people and producing more than one third of China's industrial output. (Hongbin Li, 2006) As the role of private enterprise and business changed the nation from a rural, agricultural nation to an urbanizing, globalized business economy, the business elite became increasingly important as they played a larger role in various aspects of society. While in general it is true that the economic reforms in China have not been followed with political reforms, it has become impossible and illogical to exclude the ever more vital economic actors from Chinese politics.

As of the past few decades, a variety of China's top businessmen and women have played an increasingly active role in politics in the nation. Beyond simply initiating their membership in the CCP, the business elite have found roles in increasingly high ranking political institutions, such as the National People's Congress or the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, or CPPCC. There are many reasons why someone from a background in business would seek out membership in a political organization or attempt to hold political office in China's highest governing bodies. "Members can obtain resources which are not accessible through markets; they can circumvent government regulations; they can secure tax deductions and obtain legal or

non-legal protection for their businesses.” (Hongbin Li, 2006) In Economic Inquiry’s 2006 article, they found multiple factors influencing the likelihood of a businessperson to participate in politics. Among the most important were excessive government regulation, a high informal tax burden, underdeveloped markets with little credit, and a weak legal system. (Hongbin Li, 2006) This explains the need for China’s economic participants to develop their role in a political system increasingly taking notice of them as potential leaders. Similarly, these same reasons why businesspeople want to enter into politics, some citizens may oppose their inclusion, which can and undoubtedly has influenced who is supported for political office as well as general attitudes about the people’s representation.

In practice, wealthy or powerful businesspersons take a variety of generally indirect routes into party leadership. Since their promotion and appointment as a political official is made by incumbents, businesspeople and entrepreneurs hoping to find a way in often have to placate the individuals who have the ability to appoint or promote them to political office. Although the current President Xi Jinping has promoted a crusade against corruption, the issue remains pertinent in China currently. In the past, some businesspeople planning their way in to government office may have considered direct bribery to be a serious option. However, the Anti-Corruption Campaign has proven that corruption among Chinese officials is complicated and often shows officials who all publicly denounce corruption, but in action do not follow their pronouncements. One example published in the Wall Street Journal shows how a consultant worked to get a businessman into power by taking an assistant to a high ranking official out for lavish recreation, including dinners and foot massages. They

even mailed a traditional Chinese painting, worth thousands of dollars, to the official anonymously, but separately included a certificate of authenticity that left no room for doubt on who the gift was from. (James T. Areddy, 2012) This exemplifies the necessity for political hopefuls to engage in unethical behavior so as to win the affections of the party leaders who have the potential of awarding them a position.

The United States and China have had oft-changing relations over the past century especially. As this paper has pointed out, China has become a major player in a globalized economy, wherein China plays a massive role as both a producer and consumer. The modern globalized economy has created a demand for increased interaction between nations who previously, because of geography, politics or otherwise, did not have a natural relationship. After the previously discussed economic reforms after 1978, China has increased trade with the U.S. exponentially. Around the same time that China's Communist Party changed its policy to allow for the inclusion of private businesspersons and entrepreneurs, the United States made a large step in effecting change on their relationship. Under President Bill Clinton, the U.S.-China Relations Act of 2000 was signed, effectively normalizing trade relations between the two nations. During the last two decades of the 20th century, U.S.-China trade rose by more than \$200 Billion, from \$5 Billion to \$231 Billion. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2015) As the second largest trade partner of the United States, China has seen the growth potential that was generated after the economic reforms during the 1970's and 1980's. This has created greater justification for political participation from entrepreneurs and private businesspersons, as the highly important trade relations between the two countries demands also a high-level political interaction.

In the same way the U.S. decides its agenda for other foreign nations regarding what will be discussed and what will not be, the U.S. has set an agenda with China. The agenda largely ignores discussions of political policy, as the United States generally recognizes the unflinching rigidity of the Chinese Communist Party, which has a clear grasp on the power in the nation. In consideration of this fact, the U.S. demotes the importance of certain political and social issues that they likely have an opinion on to achieve greater stability in their economic relationships and growing interaction on other fronts. The United States and its officials have not completely ignored issues of policy on social issues, however. In 2006, a speech given by Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick called upon China to use its' influence as a global power to encourage isolated nations that China has interactions with such as North Korea, South Sudan and Iran to participate in the international system. In some ways, there are many examples of officials promoting or denouncing certain policies for domestic consumption as opposed to a purposeful avocation of policy intended to actuate. In some ways, speeches such as these are indicative of a two-level game. The U.S. public has remaining fears of a growing China, capable of taking over the world economy, with the world's largest standing army and a remaining example of socialist government. Similarly, the Chinese people, in some demographics, have reservations about increasing western interaction, involvement and its' potential to influence a traditional Chinese society that many place high value on. In concurrence with these domestic ideologies, the state officials have some obligation to show the public that they are indeed setting an agenda that addresses the concerns that they may have. However, in

practice, neither nation genuinely has a true desire at this moment to force change on some topics they understand to be internationally contentious.

There are, nevertheless, remaining issues that both states are incapable of ignoring. Rising tensions over China's involvement in the South China Sea threaten to become an ever more difficult issue for the nations to work around. The U.S., in accordance with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's essay for *Foreign Policy*, has begun an "Asian Pivot", wherein the United States increases its' involvement in Asia on all levels; "investment, diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise." (Clinton, 2011) This demands that the U.S. devote more attention to its allies in the region, which include nations besides China, and support the issues most important to them. The South China Sea issue is an example of this.

As she writes in her essay, Clinton outlines the U.S.'s role in an Asia that is eager for the leadership of the U.S. and whose role cannot be replaced by another nation. Clinton writes that the policy goals include "economic productivity, social empowerment, greater people to people links, open markets, and universal human rights." (Clinton, 2011) An active participation from the United States includes involvement on issues beyond economic growth, as Clinton recognizes. This means that the United States will be forced to act on issues related to freedom of speech, human rights and especially political dissidents. The case of Chen Guangcheng is a particularly illustrative example of a U.S.-China policy issue that has remained relevant over the past few years. As a blind lawyer and activist, Chen escaped house arrest and was taken in by the United States after seeking refuge at the Beijing embassy. Hillary Clinton, who was visiting China at the time, found this issue too important to ignore, as

the United States' views on free speech, promotion of democracy and advocating of human rights demand that they take issue with Mr. Chen's treatment. (Foster P. , 2015) While this remains an issue high on the list of contentious issues discussed between China and the U.S., it is almost completely unlikely that the U.S. or China would seek to continually push on these issues for fear of damaging the relationship between two nations with such crucial interactions.

After evaluating a multitude of topics related to political leadership in China, this paper concludes that while the historical legacy of cultural ideas such as the Mandate of Heaven, continual revolution, and promotion of rural revolution remain influential, policy remains one of the most important determinants of political success. The policies of the Chinese Communist Party that allow it to intervene in almost all aspects of society, law and politics, dictate mandatory membership to be considered for political promotion, and promote ideals in candidates based on the Party's historical and current philosophy are primarily important when establishing the foundation of who is capable of gaining political office. Beyond the policies of the CCP and the PRC's founding documents, major reforms, especially those instituted by Deng Xiaoping, have paved the way for economic actors to play an increasingly important role in politics are unavoidable in modern government. Also at work are the CCP's tactics of censorship and disenfranchisement, which threaten to push ignored demographics of citizens to demand representation. Summarily, the priorities of who can hold political office maintain a steady influence on U.S.-China relations, which today are largely concerned with economics and less with philosophical differences. Creating a leader in the world's

largest state is hardly easy, and through the evidence provided in this paper, is shown to be composed of a complex web of factors, history, policies, and opinions.

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