

Campaign-Style Mobilization as a Mechanism of Governance in China¹⁾

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In this article, I focus on an important and prevalent mechanism in Chinese state governance—campaign-style mobilization (CSM), especially in the form of political campaigns and large-scale mass movements. The relationship between the Chinese state and the Chinese bureaucracy involves both interdependence and tensions. The scale of governance and the long chain of command lead to the plague of bureaucratic problems in China's governance. Campaign-style mobilization, as this article will show, is a political tool for the centralized authority to tighten up political control during struggles against bureaucrats and it is an effective mechanism during shifts among different modes of governance, from decentralization to centralization, and vice versa.

I examine the phenomenon of political campaigns in the larger context of Chinese history and in the framework of comparative bureaucratic institutions in order to interpret their historical origins and institutional implications. This article is organized as follows. First, I situate the political campaign phenomenon in an episode in Chinese history to search for clues about the tensions in the Chinese bureaucracy. I then focus on an institutional analysis of political campaigns, including their basis of legitimacy, their characteristics in contemporary society, and the challenges they face today.

1) I thank Professor Haifeng Li for her great hospitality during my visit at Yamaguchi University in 2012, which greatly facilitated my preparation of the first draft of this paper. This paper is an excerpt from my forthcoming book *The Logic of Governance in China: An Organizational Approach* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

SOULSTEALERS, THE GREAT LEAP FORWARD, AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION: CAMPAIGN-STYLE MOBILIZATION REVISITED

To put CSM in a historical perspective, let us first turn to an episode during the Qing dynasty in Kuhn (1990). In the year 1768, during the era of Emperor Hungli, a sorcery crisis called “soulstealing” erupted in southern China and quickly spread to other parts of the country, triggering intensive interactions between the emperor and the bureaucrats.

The soulstealer episode was as dramatic as it was short-lived. It began in March 1768, with some reports or accusations of sorcery acts of soulstealing by unknown travelers that led to hysteria among dwellers in urban and rural areas. These rumors were interpreted by the emperor as a disguise for rebellion against the regime, so local bureaucrats tried to evade their responsibilities by covering up these incidents. Convinced of his suspicions, the emperor launched a political campaign to mobilize all levels of the Chinese bureaucracy to engage in a search for the leaders of the rebellion as well as to penalize those officials who shirked their responsibilities. The political campaign quickly reached a climax, with many officials, who were accused of collusion and evasion of responsibilities, being penalized severely. However, by November 1768, it had become clear that there was simply no evidence of rebellion or of an insidious conspiracy. In the end, the emperor had to call off the political campaign and symbolically punish some high-level officials as scapegoats.

This was not an isolated event. From time to time Chinese history has witnessed such political campaigns targeting officials in the Chinese bureaucracy (Levenson 1965). Government responses to other crises such as famines also showed similar patterns of the emperor’s direct intervention, of the disruption of routine bureaucratic practices, and of mobilization through political campaigns (Will 1990). As Kuhn (1990:187) puts it: “These stories are

layered one upon another, several texts written on a single historical page. Beneath them lies another story, the hardest to read: how local events—including the sorcery scare—served as fuel for running the political system.” Such dramas belie the hidden code to decipher the institutional logic of governance in China.

We observe similar instances of political campaigns in contemporary China. In one account, during the 27 years of the Mao era (1949-1976), there were 25 political campaigns that took place in different arenas.²⁾ Zhou Feizhou (2009) examines the political campaign to overcome bureaucratic resistance that Mao Zedong launched during the Great Leap Forward. During the mobilization process, Mao took several steps to replace reluctant officials, launch propaganda campaigns, and induce competition among workplaces, administrative jurisdictions, and different arenas (Li 1999, Song 2002). As a result, local officials at different levels were induced or coerced into the swirl of the fanatic rhythm of mobilization, and their behavior moved in a highly synchronized manner on a national scale (Research Office of CCP History 2006, Research Office of CCP History 2002).

Campaign-style mobilization takes place not only in the political arena but also in areas such as economic development, village elections, and so-called “social stability maintenance,” among others (Di 2010, Perry 2011, Wu 2007, Zhe and Chen 2011, Zhou 2010). Feng (2011) describes such this type of “national mobilizations” that cover a wide range of areas, including those initiated by government agencies for the purpose of specially targeted political, economic, and other policy targets, such as the political campaigns against the ‘anti-rightists’ or the ‘Cultural Revolution,’ as well as those related to workplace safety and the cleansing of cities. Indeed, such waves of political campaigns

2) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_campaigns_of_the_Chinese_Communist_Party.
 Last checked on March 5, 2022.

and campaign-style mobilization have occurred off and on, on both large and small scales, and they have never disappeared.

Feng (2011) proposes a “revolutionary indoctrination polity” framework that sees national mobilization since 1949 as the continuation of the revolutionary movements after the CCP took power. In the English-language literature, Whyte (1973) associates the use of CSM with the organizational failures of the Chinese bureaucracy and regards CSM as Mao’s critique of the Chinese bureaucracy. CSM is invariably launched by the higher authorities, through top-down processes, and it is often directly based on the will of the top leader. But the outbreak of CSM is by no means arbitrary or random; rather, it is rooted in stable organizational bases and symbolic resources. Moreover, political campaigns, both in history and today, such as the soulstealer episode during the Qing dynasty and CSM during the People’s Republic, show so much resemblance that they call our attention to the broader historical, institutional context in which CSM is cultivated and reproduced.

I argued elsewhere that there is a fundamental tension between centralization and effective, local governance and that CSM serves as one of the mechanisms in responding to this tension and to the related organizational failures and crises (Zhou 2022). I will further develop this line of argument in this article. My central argument can be summarized as follows: CSM arose in response to the tensions and challenges in the governance of China. In the face of the large scale and huge diversity in governance, a routine-based bureaucratic mechanism is often ineffective, overburdened, and results in a loss of control by the higher authority. CSM arises in response to failures of bureaucratic routines and it plays the role of (temporarily) disrupting and suspending these routine processes and reorienting the course of action at the will of the top leaders.

In this light, CSM and bureaucratic routine are two distinct mechanisms

that coexist, but they have a different saliency at different points in time. During most periods and under most circumstances, the routine-based bureaucracy is the prevalent, normal state of governance. But in some specific episodes and under certain circumstances, CSM becomes the key operational mechanism and the routine mechanism becomes subordinate to the former, is suspended, or becomes the target of a CSM. One key proposition to be developed in this article is that CSM is not only rooted in history but its basis of legitimacy also experiences a process of routinization of charisma, thereby resting on the basis of formal organizations in contemporary China. The frequent appearance of CSM in Chinese history has not been accidental nor has it merely reflected the will of the top leaders. Rather, it has been based on a set of institutional arrangements and it has been an integral part of the institutional logic of governance in China.

ROUTINE VERSUS MOBILIZATION MECHANISMS : THE DUAL BUREAUCRATIC PROCESS

From the lens of organizational analysis, bureaucratic routines and CSM are two distinct mechanisms of organizing, whereby there are tensions, incompatibilities, and substitution effects between the two. Bureaucratic routines are part of a stable organizational structure, with a clear division of labor, with well-defined spheres of activities, and with everyday activities routinized on the basis of rules and procedures. In contrast, CSM takes place in the form of mobilization that goes beyond bureaucratic routines and beyond existing departmental boundaries. For example, CSM is typically associated with rushed organizational processes, the imposition of more restrictive measures, and heightened pressures for attention and penalties for violations. In so doing, the bureaucracy shifts into a different gear and bureaucratic routines are replaced with politics-in-command as the central driving force.

To wit, CSM is the antithesis of bureaucratic routines.

Tensions between the routine mode and the mobilizational mode lie in the fact that maintenance of the former strengthens the stability of the organizational structure and a clear delineation of its boundaries, hence imposing barriers on the operation of CSM. In contrast, the CSM mechanism and related processes inevitably disrupt rules and routines and weaken bureaucratic stability. The very significance of CSM is to disrupt the routine and normal pace of the bureaucratic process, forcing it to become a tightly-coupled system with a high-response pace. The dual process of routines and CSM and the relationship between the two are not arbitrary; rather, they are the result of specific organizational structures and authority relationships. These observations raise questions about the causes of CSM and the conditions under which it pushes aside the routine bureaucratic mode.

Below I draw on Weber's theory of bureaucracy to highlight the distinctive attributes of the Chinese bureaucracy and the implications for CSM, and I draw on transaction cost arguments to discuss alternative modes of organizing, in particular the shift between routine organization and CSM.

To explore the characteristics of the Chinese bureaucracy and the tensions within, let us revisit the soulstealer episode during the era of Emperor Hungli. As Kuhn (1990) shows, the soulstealer incidents broke out due to rumors and hate crimes by ill-intentioned persons in isolated events and localities and they aroused temporary fears among the people, but they did not cause major disturbances in these localities. They became major political events that shook up the entire bureaucracy only after the emperor's involvement and the resultant, tremendous political pressures in the form of direct decrees, stern critiques, imposition of penalties, and launch of mobilizational efforts.

Information was central to this process. The soulstealer episode fully exposes the information and communication problems in the Chinese

bureaucracy. Kuhn (1990) illustrates in great detail how information regarding those rumors about demon magic was collected, processed, and interpreted, and how such information was transmitted across hierarchical levels at county, region, and provincial levels and eventually to the emperor. Several characteristics stand out.

First, local officials faced the dilemma of how to interpret such incidents and whether to report upward those incidents in their respective jurisdictions. In the bureaucratic hierarchies, it was the local officials who directly dealt with those reported incidents. Compared with high-level officials, these local officials had richer, more accurate information. During the early phase of this episode, local officials made the appropriate judgment that these incidents were isolated cases with no political implications, and they recognized and corrected the coerced confessions. As Kuhn (1990, 27) observes, “The way provincial officialdom handled the spring sorcery cases suggests that they felt awkwardly balanced between dutiful caution and agnostic scorn.” Yet, whether and how to report to their superiors information about these incidents presented a dilemma: if one reported falsely accused incidents, it could cause trouble for nothing, and the superiors could see these as unjustifiable false alarms that reflected poorly on the officials; however, if one did not report, he may be later accused of covering up problems and hiding critical information from the emperor, and “... covering up information was a serious matter between emperor and bureaucrat. The troublesome business of local sorcery could have been kept from Hungli’s attention only at some risk of his hearing about it through the rumor network” (Kuhn 1990, 77).

Second, there was deep suspicion and mistrust between the emperor and the bureaucrat. “The Throne presumed that the interest of the field official was always to reduce his risk of failure by underreporting the problem at hand” (Kuhn 1990, 129). The presence of information asymmetries and manipulation

cast a cloud on the motives of local officials and led to overreactions on the part of both sides. It should be noted that information was ambiguous—the emperor and the local officials would have very different interpretations of the same piece of information. The barriers of information flows, diverse interpretations, and mutual distrust led the emperor to conclude that there were serious organizational failures; that is, the local officials were shirking their responsibilities and withholding information about a major crisis. As a result, the emperor disrupted the routine bureaucratic process and turned to a CSM mechanism so as to mobilize attention and pursue an intended crackdown. As high political pressure built up with the top-down directives that defined the incidents as an insidious conspiracy of rebellion, officials at all levels abandoned their own judgments and merely followed the decrees, either enthusiastically or passively, and looked for conspiracy plotters and rebellious leaders, thereby promoting the political campaign and bureaucratic behavior to absurdity.

What caused this major blunder and organizational failure? Let us return to the year 1768; at that time, the Chinese emperor exercised rule over a large country,

By the standards of the eighteenth-century world, Hungli's province chiefs in 1768 ruled immense populations. In the three-province jurisdiction of the Liangkiang governor-general lived more than seventy million people, a population more than twice that of France at the time. The governor of Kiangsu, the largest province in this group and the most populous in the nation ruled perhaps thirty million, at least triple the contemporary population of the United Kingdom. (Kuhn 1990, 121)

The Chinese bureaucracy emerged and matured early in history. Since

the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC) when the governance system of the county and the prefecture was first established, the polity of centralization was perpetuated over time, running through most of the more than 2,000 years of Chinese civilization (Creel 1964). Historical research has documented an elaborate set of institutions on which such centralization was built, with the civil-service-examination system as one of the pillars. Candidates were selected into officialdom by elaborate rules, ceremonies, and hierarchies, and they honed their skills, acquired knowledge about rules and procedures, climbed the bureaucratic ladder, and governed on behalf of the emperor. Officials were appointed, transferred, and allocated nationwide by the central government, serving an important function in sustaining the centralized authority and integration of the territories (Yan 2010).

The Weberian bureaucracy of the 19th century emerged in a markedly different historical and institutional context. In Weber's writings, modern bureaucracies arose in response to the demand for precision, promptness, and efficiency in capitalist economies, and they rested on the basis of a legal-rational authority. This is in sharp contrast to the behavior of those bureaucracies under the traditional, informal organizations or those built on personal charisma. In the Weberian organization, the management of employees is largely carried out through formal rules (Gouldner 1964) and employees appeal to the formal rules to resist the arbitrary power of the managers (Crozier 1964). These rule-based, rule-following characteristics provide routine-based mechanisms for the internal operation of formal organizations (Cyert and March 1963).

Stable organizational structures and processes induce corresponding organizational behavior. Sociologist Merton (1968, 252) points out: "... the bureaucratic structure exerts a constant pressure upon the official to be 'methodical, prudent, disciplined.' If the bureaucracy is to operate successfully, it must attain a high degree of reliability of behavior, an unusual degree of

conformity with prescribed patterns of action.” From Merton’s point of view, “adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself; there occurs the familiar process of displacement of goals whereby ‘an instrumental value becomes a terminal value’ (253). As a result, routine-based organizations have their own problems, namely, they are risk-averse, there is red-tape, and they are trapped in a “iron cage.”

Unlike the legal-rational basis of the Weberian bureaucracy, the Chinese bureaucracy is based on a patrimonial mode of domination (Zhou 2021). At the core of this institution is an upward accountability system, that is, officials in different localities exercised their power on behalf of the emperor, and the emperor held arbitrary power to intervene in their decisions and their career development. Moreover, this arbitrary power had to be delegated to top officials at each level of the bureaucracy. That is, top officials at each level had arbitrary authority to intervene in the work of their subordinates. In contrast to the Weberian bureaucracy, to a much greater extent Chinese officials depended on the subjective evaluation of their bosses for performance evaluations and career advancement.

These characteristics of the bureaucracy gave rise to the pervasiveness of informal institutions. That is, informal social relations played a larger role in performance evaluations and career advancement. As Kuhn points out, there were two types of instructions that regulated officials: the first was formal rules, and the second was particularistic relations. These particularistic relations were an integral part of the bureaucracy rather than a byproduct of the bureaucracy. A striking contrast between the Weberian bureaucracy and the Chinese bureaucracy lies in the role of formal rules. Formal rules are the basis of organizational operations and behavior, and they impose both top-down constraints on bureaucratic behavior and bottom-up protection of employees. As Merton (1968) points out, in the Weberian bureaucracy there is excessive

attention to rule following, rule elaboration, and rule enforcement. In contrast, at the core of the Chinese bureaucracy there was upward accountability based on personal loyalty, trust, and patronage relationships. In this sense, the Chinese bureaucracy was not only an organization but also an institution involving multiplex social relations.

On this basis grew the salient characteristics of the contemporary Chinese bureaucracy. First, officials take a risk-averse disposition. Risk-averse attitudes apply to bureaucrats in all kinds of offices, but the same phenomenon may have different sources and different consequences. In the Weberian bureaucracy, rules constrain individual behavior, but in the Chinese bureaucracy, it is the lack of rules for protection that causes officials to be extremely cautious in their behavior so as to avoid stepping on the boundaries imposed by the superior. Second, officials tend to make excessive efforts to cultivate social relations and patronage ties for self-protection because of the lack of formal, protective mechanisms within the organization. As shown in the soul-stealing episode, frequent upward reporting ran the risk of leaving the impression that the official lacked judgment or ability; if one did not report, one would be seen as hiding critical information, thus resulting in a serious penalty. In this context, dense social relations can help channel information, soften tensions, and lower potential risks in principal-agent relationships. All these are at the expense of the formal institutions.

Whereas the Weberian lens emphasizes distinct modes of domination and ensuing bureaucratic consequences, contemporary organization theories provide conceptual and analytical tools to make sense of bureaucratic phenomena. In particular, transaction cost theory sheds light on the shift between routine-based and CSM-based mechanisms (Coase 1937, Williamson 1985) in governance. Because parties to a transaction have different interests and different information, any organizational form (i.e., formal organizations,

contracts, markets, etc.) has its own specific transaction cost, such as the cost of contract specification and the cost of inspection, coordination, or incentive provision, and so forth (Milgrom and Roberts 1992). Minimizing transaction costs is an important consideration in the choice of an organizational form. If the routine form of organizing encounters serious problems in terms of transaction costs, it will trigger a search for, and the rise of, new, alternative forms of organization in order to lower the transaction costs. This perspective helps us make sense of the shift between routine-based and CSM-based forms of governance.

The routine mode of the Chinese bureaucracy has its own transaction costs, and at times it is overburdened with staggeringly high costs of coordination and incentive design. Let us consider information flows across hierarchies. Problems in information collection, processing, transmission, and interpretation are always present in any organization. Issues related to principal-agent relationships were present between the emperor and the bureaucrat as they are between the supervisor and the subordinate in any organizational setting. The relationship is asymmetric in that one side has more information for strategic use than the other. The organizational design aims at devising mechanisms to alleviate the negative effect of asymmetric information on organizations. In contemporary societies, formal organizations, such as firms and other types of organizations, make use of different mechanisms to address these issues (Hirschman 1970), such as exit, voice, incentive design, and changes in the authority relationships.

In the Chinese bureaucracy all such potential problems tend to be amplified and intensified. First, the nature of a monopoly and the closeness of the government bureaucracy render market mechanisms ineffective. Problems within the bureaucracy cannot be resolved through competition, and over time these problems accumulate and become more challenging. Second, the

hierarchical structure and the division of labor accelerate the difficulties in information flows, and these difficulties are amplified due to the large scale and long chain of command in the Chinese bureaucracy (Deng, Cao and Pingtianmaoshu 2012). Third, diversity in local conditions produces flexibility in policy implementation, which leads to deviations, and induces suspicions between top officials and street-level bureaucrats. Fourth, the scale of the organization accelerates the burden of supervision and inspection, which can hardly be addressed satisfactorily through monitoring and surveillance technologies (Qu, Zhou and Ying 2009).

Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, these bureaucratic problems loomed large. As we see in Mao Zedong's repeated efforts and the ensuing waves of political campaigns—the “three antis” in 1951, anti-bureaucratism in 1953, the party rectification campaign of 1957, to name but a few. During the Mao era, tensions between the bureaucracy and the top leaders were intense, erupting from time to time, and bureaucratic rectification was a main theme running through state governance (Harding 1981).

Not surprisingly, as the routine mechanism of governance became overburdened and inertia accumulated, associated transaction costs become too high to continue as usual. These conditions were likely to induce crises and to trigger a search for an alternative mode of governance to temporarily disrupt and replace the routine mechanism of the bureaucracy. An alternative mechanism, CSM, arose in response.

The characteristics of routine-based mechanisms and the ensuing organizational failures led to the rise and reproduction of the CSM mechanism. As noted above, the CSM mechanism takes the form of top-down directives and political means to disrupt and halt routine bureaucratic operations and to mobilize resources and attention to pursue policy targets. In Chinese history, we see that these two mechanisms—routines and CSM—coexist symbiotically,

and they take turns in dominating at different points in time. I now turn to examine the origins, forms, and consequences of CSM, and the shift between routine and CSM mechanisms.

CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY, ARBITRARY POWER, AND THE MOBILIZATIONAL MECHANISM

In this section, I elaborate on the relationship among charismatic authority, arbitrary power, and the role of CSM in the Chinese setting. The key argument is that the mode of domination based on arbitrary power provides the emperor (or the top leaders) with arbitrary power to intervene in bureaucratic processes, to replace a routine mechanism with a political mechanism, and to develop institutional arrangements that facilitate the exercise of arbitrary power.

To address the above issues, let us revisit the soul-stealing episode during the Qing dynasty and seek clues from the historical events. Along with the unfolding of this episode, we find an alternating activation of routine and CSM. During the early phase, a routine mechanism was used to attend to these local incidents, and local officials dealt with these cases or pushed them aside as usual. If no unexpected circumstances erupted, these everyday events, both large and small, would disappear quietly in the routine operation of the bureaucratic machinery. Mannheim (1936) observed that the fundamental tendency of all bureaucratic thought is to turn all problems of politics into problems of administration (p. 105). But the persistent social turmoil incited by the soul-stealing incidents eventually spilled out of the closed bureaucratic process, touched the suspicious nerve of the Hungli Emperor, and triggered the activation of the CSM mechanism. As a result, bureaucratic operations shifted gears from a routine mode to a campaign mode, superiors repeatedly exerted heightened pressures, subordinates followed the directives excessively, and the entire bureaucracy provided a stage on which a fast-evolving drama

unfolded, with many careers wrecked and many heads rolling.

Why did the emperor have the power to disrupt the bureaucratic routine and replace it with CSM? Why did Chinese bureaucrats not resort to rules and procedures to resist these interventions? We have already encountered clues to the answer in our preceding discussion. Both routine and CSM mechanisms are derived from the patrimonial mode of domination in the bureaucratic monarchy, whereby the emperor's arbitrary power and bureaucratic power coexist. In this mode of domination, bureaucratic hierarchy and rules shaped the routine process, with an elaborate personnel management system from entry, mobility, and promotion to performance appraisal and evaluation (Chu 1962, Yan 2010, Zhu 2006). Bureaucratic machines, once in operation, had their own pace and rhythm, and they did not always respond to the will of the emperor, thus presenting a threat of loss of control. Moreover, rules, once they were made, may also have constrained the emperor. As Kuhn observes (1990, 190): "The monarch had to regulate his thousands of bureaucratic servants by written codes, to ensure that everyone struck to the administrative procedures that underlay his own wealth and security. At the same time, he was naturally concerned to maintain his own distinctive position, his extra-bureaucratic power and autonomy. Consequently, he had to struggle unceasingly to avoid becoming bureaucratized himself."

CSM was an effective weapon of the emperor in this regard. In the patrimonial mode of governance, the CSM mechanism was at the disposal of the emperor's arbitrary power; that is, the emperor could use CSM to disrupt bureaucratic routines and to shift the bureaucratic machine into a different gear based on his will.

The upward accountability system gave rise to heightened mobilizational capacities. Upward accountability cultivated the dual features of the bureaucrats: on the one hand, the exercise of cautiousness in everyday work,

risk-aversion, and responsibility shirking; on the other hand, once the intentions of the superiors were made clear and opportunities appeared, they were actively followed in order to capitalize on the opportunities and to cultivate or strengthen patronage ties. It is not surprising, then, that the officials were extremely sensitive to their superiors' preferences and followed directives actively and excessively, thereby greatly enhancing the effectiveness of the CSM mechanism.

If routine-based power comes from hierarchical positions and rules and procedures, where does arbitrary power come from? What are the forces that can push the officials to forgo the protection of rules and procedures and to participate in the political processes? The arbitrary power of the bureaucratic monarchy rested on the dual basis of the traditional authority and the charismatic authority as "the son of heaven." Eisenstadt (1968) points out that in the charismatic authority, the role of the followers is critical. It is the followers' recognition and acceptance of this social order, and the expectation and acceptance of this charismatic authority, that provide the basis for its authority. In the relationship between the charismatic leader and his followers, the former does not represent or express the will of the latter but it points out their duties and responsibilities; bureaucratic institutions become a machine that follows the will and directives of the charismatic leader.

But even under a mixed traditional and charismatic authority, the exercise of arbitrary power is not without constraints. This shift from a routine mechanism to CSM requires excuses and opportunities. As Kuhn (1990) observes, a "political crime" provided such an opportunity. A political crime, especially one committed by those officials holding bureaucratic power, indicated the failure of a routine mechanism and provided an excuse to replace it with CSM so as to effectively and speedily implement the will of the charismatic leader. Here, manufacturing a political crime is an important

intermediate step in this shift. “Just as the bureaucratic monarchy lived on the economic surplus of China’s society, it depended on society for the ‘events’ that served as raw material for the operation of its internal relationships. The internal machinery of the bureaucratic monarchy processed all such ‘events’ and transformed them into power and status” (Kuhn 1990, 220). The soul-stealing episode reflected the activation and operation of the CSM mechanism. As a result, “the overall impetus of a political crime like soulstealing was to shake bureaucrats out of patterns of routine behavior that they used, so effectively, for their own protection; and to give Hungli a context in which to confront his problems with the bureaucracy head-on” (211). Here, the very power to define and convict a political crime came from the arbitrary power based on the charismatic authority.

Fast forward to contemporary society, where the routine mechanism provides the basis for everyday operations of public administration, and the bureaucracy has been expanding and strengthening along with the scale and scope of the nation-state. After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in the early 20th century, traditional legitimacy withered and gave way to a legal-rational authority. Similarly, the heaven-delegated charismatic authority seemed to have become obsolete with the bygone age of the monarchy.

But this was not the case. During the short history of the People’s Republic, there were frequent instances when arbitrary power disrupted and halted the routine-based processes, as evidenced during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution as well as during other political campaigns. As we shift our gaze from the late Qing dynasty to contemporary China, we are confronted with the following question: What is the source of CSM in contemporary China in relation to the legitimate basis of domination by the party-state?

ROUTINIZATION OF CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY AND THE CSM MECHANISM IN THE CHINESE PARTY-STATE

The routinization of charisma in office in contemporary China

In contemporary China, charismatic authority did not retreat and disappear from the historical stage; rather, it went through a routinization process and survived in new forms during the state-building process. It has continued to play an important role in China's governance. I now discuss how charismatic authority has been routinized to provide a new basis of legitimacy for arbitrary power. The routinization process and the state-building process became intertwined over time, providing clues for us to understand the institutional logic of governance.

Weber points out that an important channel for the routinization of charismatic leadership is the "charisma of office"; that is, some organizational apparatus acquires an extraordinary character and becomes the embodiment of a charismatic authority. Weber uses the concept of charisma of office "to denote the process through which the charismatic characteristics are transferred from the unique personality or the unstructured group to orderly institutional reality" (Eisenstadt 1968, xxi). In this process, some designated institutions acquire symbolic representation of the charismatic authority and become the stable foundation for the charismatic authority. In traditional China, Confucian values and the piety-based social order played such a role. Social institutions are reflected partly in these values and norms and partly in the stable organizational basis on which authority is exercised. "It is this double aspect of social institutions—their organizational exigencies on the one hand, and their potential close relations to the realm of meaning on the other—which may provide us with clues as to how the ordinary and the charismatic are continuously interwoven in the process of institution building" (Eisenstadt, xxxviii). Unlike in those traditional societies where the charismatic

authority is attached to a single person, in contemporary societies charismatic authority goes through a process of charisma of office and is attached to stable organizations as institutions infused with corresponding values and norms.

In the People's Republic, the party-state has become the embodiment of the routinization of charisma. In symbols, the ruling party has acquired sacred characteristics such as "greatness, glory, and righteousness" that resemble the charismatic authority—an irreplaceable and intrinsic ability in leadership that is invincible, self-correcting, and self-renewing. Moreover, the hierarchical organization, tightened discipline, and mobilizational capacity of the Leninist party have provided a strong organizational basis. When the party-state and its top leaders are projected with a charisma of extraordinary ability and they can recognize and master the law of human society, they naturally acquire a leadership role, the capacity to override routine power, mobilize resources, and develop a top-down design to pursue their goals. Furthermore, they can push aside any alternative form of rational-legal authority and subordinate bureaucratic power as their organizational weapon and disrupt and halt bureaucratic processes at will. The charismatic authority is no longer intertwined with traditional authority; rather, it is built directly on the basis of the bureaucratic organizations, with the charismatic authority of the party-state providing the legitimacy for the exercise of arbitrary power.

This leads us to recognize the importance of ideological control in the hands of the party-state. The routinization of charisma not only requires a stable organizational basis but also needs to be built at the societal center of values and norms. If pluralism and liberalism in the public arena were allowed, doubts about and challenges to the charismatic authority would inevitably arise and undermine its basis of legitimacy. It is not surprising, then, that political indoctrination and ritualization are an important part of the logic of governance under the party-state rule.

Institutional bases of CSM

The preceding discussion on the routinization of the office of charisma leads us to further consider the institutional basis of CSM, which includes the following elements: the coexistence of party-state dual authority, corresponding red-expert personnel management, and the routinization of mobilizational mechanisms (Schurmann 1968). I discuss these issues below.

First, the party-state dual authority. In contemporary societies the routinization of charismatic authority takes place on a stable organizational basis. We can reinterpret the party-state dual authority structure in this light. The CCP has inherited the charismatic authority in Chinese history, and has updated it to a contemporary version of historical materialism with the Marxist vision of the historical law of human societies. At the same time, the exercise of charismatic authority is routinized in the organizational apparatus of the CCP, parallel to but dominant over the routine power-based government offices. This dual party-state apparatus has established the organizational basis for routine-based versus CSM-based mechanisms, which becomes clear once we put these two side by side. On the “government” side, we observe functional offices, such as for public health, transportation, energy, education. Such functional lines reflect specialization and division of labor, and their institutional setups are similar to their counterparts in other societies. This organizational apparatus suffers similar organizational problems and transaction costs but these problems and costs tend to be much higher in China due to the scale and the reach of the state apparatus. The CMS mechanism becomes an effective means to addressing these problems by the party-line organizational apparatus, to which we now turn.

Second, as the institutional basis for the chain of command, the party line follows direct directives from the top leader(s) of the ruling party, and its behavior is characterized by political mobilization. Party organizations span

the boundaries of the administrative offices in the government line, thereby facilitating coordination and mobilization across boundaries. For example, the party's political and legal commission (zheng-fa-wei) at different levels of the party headquarters leads and coordinates all government offices in the legal area. Similarly, the party's agricultural commission plays an anchoring role in all affairs related to the rural areas. Political campaigns and rectifications were often launched to target bureaucratic problems in routine processes. In contemporary China, the dual power of the party and the government alternates over time and across different areas along with the interplay between routine versus CSM mechanisms. During the post-Mao era, the dual authority in functional offices has been largely unified into one leadership, whereas in the territorially-based jurisdictions, the party headquarters has its own powerful organizational apparatus in order to enforce top-down directives. In the Xi Jinping era since the early 2010s, the party line has been greatly reenforced and (re)entrenched into different areas and corners of society. In so doing, the top leaders have greatly strengthened the top-down mobilizational capacity and the tools of political campaigns.

Third, the CSM mechanism is also reflected in personnel management practices. The party-state has long adopted the so-called "red and expert" (you hong you zhuan) principle. That is, the criterion for selecting and promoting officials emphasizes both "red" (loyalty to the party line) and "expert" (competence) qualities, but political loyalty is deemed more important for appointment to positions in party lines (Walder 1995). In the same government office, party and administrative lines coexist, each attending to their respective responsibilities, but the former overrides the latter. Different career trajectories in the Chinese bureaucracy coexist based on their party and government lines of jobs, which is in sharp contrast to Weber's emphasis on professional training and careers. In view of the routinization of office discussed above, the red-

expert criterion ensures the coexistence of routine and CSM mechanisms in the party-government dual authority. An official is expected to perform his/her duties in routine positions and at the same time to be receptive to top-down mobilization.

Fourth, political mobilization and CSM have been weaved into everyday work activities. It is a common observation that CSM is part of routine practice in the party-state at different levels of the government and in different functional areas. For example, during the period of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, in the province of my fieldwork, the provincial government dispatched a large number of officials from provincial-level offices to every township in the local areas surrounding Beijing to ensure the so-called “maintenance of social order” (weiwen). The county leadership adopted the same mobilizational measures and sent officials from county-level offices into every village in these regions. This mobilization exercise lasted for several months.

To sum up, the coexistence of the party-government dual authority in different types of organizations reveals a contemporary version of the historical coexistence of arbitrary power and routine power in governance. The party line provides the stable organizational basis for CSM, which is sustained by the upward accountability system and the “political crime” ideology and related institutions. These institutional arrangements provide the party-state with an effective mechanism for political mobilization to disrupt routine bureaucratic processes, to pursue its policy goals, and to strengthen political control.

Over time, the party and government apparatus become diffused with each other. In actual bureaucratic processes, personnel move back and forth across party and government lines. For example, in the territorial governments the administrative head of a county or a prefecture is at the same time the vice party secretary of the same administrative jurisdiction, and administrative officials may be promoted into party head positions. In such cases, the “red and

expert” criterion requires that one must be competent, loyal, and responsive to the arbitrary power of the higher authority. Moreover, the party and government institutions become mirror images of each other. On the one hand, the party organization has become bureaucratized, leading to the ritualization of political mobilization; on the other hand, the administrative offices have become politicized and they make use of CSM mechanisms to get things done.

My discussion above has emphasized the arbitrary power of the highest authority over the routine power of the bureaucracy. But this does not mean that such arbitrary power is unconstrained. The bureaucrats also develop various strategies to respond to and to buffer the arbitrary power of the highest authority, increasing the costs of exercising arbitrary power and the costs of CSM. One such cost is the danger of the loss of control. Once the CSM mechanism is activated, officials may take the opportunity to pursue their own interests and impose their own interpretations, leading to a spillover out of the intended boundaries. Emperor Hungli fully understood this, as he remarked: “When We are lenient in one or two cases in which leniency is appropriate, then all the officials scurry to be lenient. When We are strict in one or two cases that require strictness, then they all scurry to be strict” (Kuhn 1990, 199). In the upward accountability system, officials do not take initiatives and they are likely to take the opportunity offered in the CSM process to exercise their own arbitrary power, targeting their opponents, settling scores, and pursuing their own interests. Such instances abound during the episodes of political campaigns in China. They increase the costs of activating the CSM mechanism and they impose constraints upon the top leaders, forcing them to return to the routine mode of operation.

CSM and the shift in the modes of governance in the Chinese bureaucracy

Thus far, my discussion has focused on the historical origins of CSM, its relationship to the mode of patrimonial and party-state domination, and its

institutional basis in contemporary China. I should also point to another important role that CSM plays—in the shift across modes of governance under different allocations of control rights.

Under pressure from the fundamental tension, there is variable-coupling in central-local government relationships or in relationships across levels of the bureaucratic hierarchy, from tight coupling, subcontracting, to loose-coupling or federalism. Zhou {, 2022 #11853} discusses the discrete modes of governance associated with the different allocation of control rights along three dimensions: goal setting, inspection, and the provision of incentives. What remains unaddressed is the issue of how the shift across these distinctive modes is possible.

I argue that CSM plays an important role in inducing or pushing such a shift across different modes of governance by mobilizing attention and resources to overcome bureaucratic inertia in a given state. For example, CSM based on the claim of a “political crime” plays the role of producing a tightly-coupled system across levels of the bureaucracy such that all control rights are (temporarily) held in the hands of the higher authority. In so doing, the top leaders can shift a loosely-coupled routine processes to a tightly-coupled mode of governance, as Hungli did during the soul-stealing episode. We observe a contemporary version during the Peng Dehuai episode during the Mao era and during Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption campaign in recent years. In all these episodes, the use of CSM built up tremendous pressures for officials at all levels for “politics to take command” and to adhere to the political logic, resulting in strong and effective implementation of the top leader’s agenda.

We should recognize that CSM is not only used for political control but it also is used for the liberalization of political control, as in the case of the early phase of the post-Mao era. The ideological liberation movement of the 1980s allowed the Deng Xiaoping leadership to push for “reform and opening

up” policies and for a relaxation of the political control of the Mao era. In this case, CSM induced a shift from a “tight-coupling” to a “loose-coupling” mode of governance in the early 1980s.

Similarly, CSM has been used in the economic arena for top-down efforts to pursue policy targets, such as during the Great Leap Forward or in the advocacy of a market economy during the post-Mao era.

These instances demonstrate the central role of CSM in China’s governance and also remind us that CSM has been associated with the political processes in China both historically and in the contemporary era, and it has functioned in different areas and for different policy orientations. We need to gain a better understanding of CSM phenomena within a broader comparative perspective and over a longer historical dimension.

Characteristics of CSM

As an important mechanism of governance in China, various forms of CSM have existed throughout history, but becoming more prevalent in the mode of party-state domination. I now summarize the key characteristics of CSM in the Chinese setting.

First, one defining characteristic of CSM is its disruption of a routine bureaucratic process and its replacement with a political process and a redefinition of the boundaries of appropriate bureaucratic behavior. CSM is effective in mobilizing attention and resources, but it incurs other risks and costs. As a result, CSM tends to be short term, intermittent, and in that sense “un-routine.” But as CSM becomes intertwined with routine processes in the party-state, we observe its occurrences becoming more frequent and more routinized; as a result, it is likely to be transformed by the routine processes and to become less effective as a mobilizational weapon.

Second, recognition of CSM as an institutional response to the failure of routine mechanisms sheds light on the conditions and opportunities for its

activation: (1) when there are major exogenous changes, such as crises or disasters to which bureaucratic routines cannot respond effectively; or, (2) when major crises expose problems in bureaucratic routines, which trigger CSM as a corrective mechanism, as in the soul-stealing episode; or (3) when there are major endogenous policy reorientations to which the existing bureaucratic routines are ill-adapted; in such cases, CSM is activated to push the bureaucracy toward a new course of action. Much CSM in contemporary China can be understood in this light, such as the Great Leap Forward (Zhou 2009), the ideological liberation movement of the 1980s, and the anti-corruption campaign of Xi Jinping's era since 2012.

Third, a salient characteristic of CSM is its great fanfare in heightened propaganda rhetoric and scale. This is because the key to disrupting the routine rhythm at different levels of the bureaucracy is by mobilizing the attention of officials and changing their dispositions, thereby producing a (temporarily) tightly-coupled system so that officials will suspend their habitual responses and shift to a different gear or to a different course of action. In so doing, the CSM mechanism provides an effective mechanism to transmit the intention and the resolve of the higher authorities to all levels of the bureaucracy.

Fourth, an important purpose of CSM is to redefine the boundaries of what is appropriate behavior in response to local initiatives and flexibility, often under the disguise of a "political crime." It is often observed that the penalties for CSM are especially harsh and arbitrary. The main purpose of CSM is to set examples as signals to warn others. In fact, so-called "bureaucratic deviations" and "implementation flexibility" are often different labels for similar behavior. That is, the same type of behavior is interpreted differently under different circumstances. Bureaucratic behavior may be interpreted as a local adaptation in a positive light or as a deviation of the intended policy, depending on the political environment. The latter takes place when the centralized authority

sees such behavior as challenging or undermining its authority. But the purpose of CSM is not to eliminate such behavior but to refine its appropriate boundaries from time to time and in the process to reinstate the power of the centralized authority.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article focuses on a central and prevalent mechanism—campaign-style mobilization—in China’s governance practices and examines its origins, characteristics, and implications. We highlight the coexistence and interplay between routine-based and CSM-based mechanisms in the Chinese bureaucracy and in its practice of governance, and the role of CSM as an integral part of the institutional mechanisms in the logic of governance. The discussion is situated in the larger context of the party-state mode of governance and institutional arrangements in terms of the routinization of charisma.

As the discussion in this article shows, CSM arose in part as an institutional response to organizational failures in the overreach of the bureaucracy and the ensuing agency problems and in part as a mechanism for the mobilization of resources and attention to meet policy targets. CSM disrupts bureaucratic routines and reorients their course of action. In many ways, this is indeed an effective means to mobilize attention and resources to achieve policy goals. Moreover, CSM is not arbitrary but built into a set of institutional arrangements, such as the party-state dual authority structure and red-expert personnel management practices. In other words, CSM is a highly institutionalized mechanism of governance and a repair mechanism. Its contemporary version is a major update and qualitative transformation over its historical precedents as a result of the organization of the Leninist party-state as a double-edged sword in alleviating or exacerbating the fundamental tension in Chinese governance and in maintaining or disrupting a delicate balance between the centralization

of authority and effective, local adaptation.

Finally, as noted in previous discussions, CSM also plays a major role in political transitions in China, as evidenced in the ideological liberation movement in the early phase of the post-Mao era, which shifted from a tight-coupling system to a loosely-coupled system, or in Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign that induced a reverse shift from a loose-coupling to tight-coupling system. These major changes and reorientations were accompanied by, indeed pushed by, large-scale CSM.

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