

HOW YUGONG MOVED THE MOUNTAINS: The Rise and Decline of Mass Mobilisation Campaigns in China

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When Chairman Mao called the youth to work in the countryside, we participated enthusiastically. Nobody wanted to be left behind. Now thinking about it, I feel very sorry for myself. I wasted my life's best time for nothing."

Liu, a 47-year old male high school teacher, in a personal interview.

"The Chinese people can now choose the food they eat. During Mao's time, China was a country with only one taste."

Lu, a 36-year old female journalist and writer, in a personal interview.

While mass mobilisation campaigns during the Maoist era led to several undesirable impacts on Chinese culture, they do present some useful lessons for campaign planners. Small group-based communication can play an important role in audiences' attitude and behaviour changes, especially through the practice of collective commitment and peer surveillance. If members in a community, through participatory methods, can take decisions on the collective well-being of the entire community, behaviour enactment and reinforcement can be exercised through peer pressure and support.

In late 1996, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) launched a "Spiritual Civilisation" mass mobilisation campaign to revive values of civic responsibility, self-sacrifice, and spirituality among the Chinese people. However, this campaign, which included intensive mass media publicity, group meetings, and extensive interpersonal contact, was relatively ineffective in mobilising the Chinese people when compared to previous campaigns launched during Mao's era (between 1949 to 1976). Why were mass mobilisation campaigns during Mao's time more influential than the more recent campaigns?

Research on the influence of mass mobilisation campaigns in China is limited. Of what research exists, most was conducted prior to China opening its gates to the outside world in the late 1970s. These past

investigations centered mostly around gauging the effectiveness of various mass media channels, the role of organisational networking to influence state employees, and the impact of cadre-based group criticism sessions on peoples' behavioural compliance (Cell, 1977; Chu, 1977; 1979; Chu et al., 1976; Chu and Hsu, 1979; Yu, 1964, 1967). Because China was cut-off from the international scholarly discourse for over three decades (from 1949 to about 1980), these research investigations primarily drew upon available official documents, CCP party publications, and press and broadcast materials. Rarely were researchers able to collect empirical data from the Chinese people to evaluate the effectiveness of mass mobilisation campaigns.

In recent years, despite China's more open stance toward the outside world, research investigations on mass mobilisation campaigns have been rare, primarily for the fear of political repercussions. In 1986, a large survey was conducted in the city of Shanghai to measure changes in Chinese cultural patterns during the previous four decades. Results suggested certain indirect, long-term impacts of mass mobilisation campaigns in China. For instance, the previous Chinese practice of submitting to authority seemed to have weakened. The Confucian way of the "golden mean" and the value of being discreet for self-preservation were viewed as being relatively less salient. Also, ancestor worship and Buddhist principles were on the decline (Chu and Ju, 1993). While mass mobilisation campaigns continue to be launched in China in the late 1990s, aside from White's (1990) study of the "one-child" campaign in China, few empirical research studies exist that gauged the effectiveness of these state-initiated mass mobilisation campaigns.

The present article seeks to investigate the nature of mass mobilisation campaigns in China during (and after) Mao's era in order to better understand their impact on Chinese society. The political, cultural, and socio-economic context in which mass mobilisation campaigns were implemented during Mao's reign (from 1949 to 1976) are analysed. The role of mass media, group, and interpersonal communication channels in the campaign process are investigated. Reasons for the declining influence of mass mobilisation campaigns in present-day China are discussed.

Research Questions

We organise our investigation around three research questions:

- Research question 1: What was the nature of mass mobilisation campaigns in China during Mao's era?
- Research question 2: How were mass, group, and interpersonal communication channels strategically utilised in the mass mobilisation campaigns launched in China during Mao's era?
- Research question 3: What factors contributed to the decline of mass mobilisation campaigns in the post-Mao era?

Method and Data-collection

Our study draws upon various data sources in answering our research questions. First, we draw upon library archival materials on mass mobilisation campaigns in China, including several research publications on the expansion of China's communication infrastructure. Second, we conducted about a dozen in-depth personal interviews with various male and female Chinese respondents who had experienced first-hand several mass mobilisation campaigns during and after Mao's era. Half of our interview respondents were male and female residents of Pengzhou City, Sichuan Province, ranging in age from 48 to 80 years. The other half of our interview respondents were Chinese students/scholars at a mid-western U.S. university, ranging in age from 26 to 36 years. Some of them had previously worked in the Chinese mass media system prior to coming to the U.S.; these respondents especially contributed to our understanding of media's role in the mobilisation campaigns in contemporary China. Third, we draw upon a random sample survey that we conducted on Chinese media habits in 1999, gauging the penetration of television, VCRs, VCDs, and other new media technologies in urban, township, and rural areas. Finally, we draw upon one of the present authors' personal experiences as she grew up in China (both during Mao's time and later).

Mao's Mass Mobilisation Campaigns

Research question 1 asked: What was the nature of mass mobilisation campaigns in China during Mao's era? Mao's political reign (from 1949 to 1976) was marked by a plethora of mass mobilisation campaigns in China, each designed to further Mao's socialist goals (Chu et al. 1976; Chu 1977; Bishop 1989). The story of Yugong ("the foolish old man") was often cited by Mao Zedong, founder of communist China in 1949 and its paramount leader until his death in 1976, to illustrate the capacity of human beings to change the world. Yugong was a popular folklore character in China who believed that, with persistence, he and his endless descendants could remove the two mountains that blocked the path to his house. Yugong's untiring perseverance touched God's heart, who sent two giants to remove the mountains. Mao summarised the moral of this folk story in a stirring 1945 speech titled "How Yugong Moved the Mountains":

Now there are two big mountains lying like dead weight on the Chinese People. Imperialism and feudalism. The Chinese Communist Party long made up its mind to remove them. We must work persistently, work ceaselessly, and we too may be able to touch God's heart. This God is no other than the masses of the people through China. And if they rise and dig together with us, why can't we dig these two mountains up? (Yu, 1976)

Because Mao believed that the transformation of China to a Socialist state depended heavily on gaining compliance of the Chinese masses, mobilisation campaigns during Mao's era employed a non-elite communication strategy, emphasising direct contact with the Chinese masses (Singh, 1979). Communication activities were geared to engender indoctrination of the common Chinese citizens in both thought and action. As Zhou, a 48-year old female respondent recalled: "In the countryside, we had to do three things before going to work. First, we offered good wishes to the longevity of Chairman Mao. Then we had to recite the three old articles by Chairman Mao. Finally, we took three bows before his image. In school, we began our day by doing the loyalty dance". Mao viewed mass mobilisation campaigns as "organised mobilisation of collective action aimed at transforming thought patterns, class and power relationships, and economic institutions and productivity" (Red Flag quoted in White 1990). Campaigns, implemented from the top-down by an elaborate Party apparatus, were directed to advance socialist causes by targeting a particular socio-cultural obstacle (White, 1990).

In his early days as a rising communist leader (in the 1920s), Mao realised that creating an "ideal" China required dramatic socio-structural and socio-cultural changes, which could be brought about by the skillful use of communication. He also knew that the traditional Chinese peasant society was not very amenable to change. After considerable experimentation, Mao spelled out (in his 1927 "Report on the Investigation of the Peasants" "Movement in Hunan") the effectiveness of using simple slogans, peasant's associations, mass meetings, and attacks on landlords for mobilising people (Yu, 1979). In the border regions and revolutionary base areas where the CCP was active during the anti-Japanese war (from 1937 to 1945) and also during the civil war with Jiang Jieshi's Nationalist government (from 1945 to 1949), mass mobilisation campaigns were highly effective in indoctrinating new Party members. Due to the lack of media technology and the low credibility of the available mass media, Mao, in a 1943 speech, advocated his well-known "mass line" strategy in mobilising masses:

We should go to the masses and learn from them, synthesise their experience into better, articulated principles and methods, then do propaganda among the masses, and call upon them to put these principles and methods into practice so as to solve their problems and help them achieve liberation and happiness (quoted in Chang, 1989).

On October 1, 1949, Mao Zedong officially proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China. A new China was in the making. However, the task of the new government was daunting, given the rampant poverty, food shortages, and a highly inadequate public health infrastructure. Long periods of government corruption, mismanagement, and inefficiency; eight debilitating years of the anti-Japanese war; and the civil war between the Nationalist and the Communists had taken a heavy toll of the Chinese economy (Hung, 1976). Mao believed that the

reconstruction of China had to be engineered through the participation of its 400 million people, rather than from the use of materials and capital, which were in short supply. Communication was viewed as the primary vehicle to mobilise the masses to achieve the revolutionary reconstruction of China.

As China's paramount leader, Mao realised the important role communication played in ideological conversion. The new Chinese Socialist state was based on Mao's conception of the new Chinese "man". He believed people's attitudes, opinions, ideas, and thoughts must be altered to cultivate the new Socialist citizen. Mass information must be manipulated, controlled, and disseminated to structure the individual's perceptions, values, beliefs, and behaviours in a new ideological framework. Interpersonal channels were critical to mass mobilisation campaigns in order to ensure that the masses accurately interpreted the mass campaign messages, engendering the desired ideological change (Yu, 1976).

Mobilising masses was a primary preoccupation of the CCP; at least 10 major campaigns were launched in China during Mao's era, including the Marriage Law Campaign (1950), the Land Reform Campaign, Three-anti (1951) and Five-anti (1952) Campaigns, the Public-Private Partnership Campaign (1955 to 1956), the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), and others (Table 1). These campaigns, individually and collectively, brought dramatic socio-structural changes in China, transforming the ideology of its people over a period of several years. In addition to the communication inputs (in the form of mass, group, and interpersonal channels), these "reformist" mobilisation campaigns also used coercion as a means of altering social institutions. The use of force in Mao's China was justified to remove the barriers to adopting a new revolutionary ideology (Chu, 1977).

The CCP's socio-structural and ideological reforms were first targeted at the poorest and most populous base of the Chinese people, the peasantry, representing an estimated 80 percent of the population. Then they focused on the commercial and industrial sectors, followed by the intelligentsia. Meanwhile, the Party also transformed itself with reformist campaigns. For instance, the Land Reform Campaign (1950 to 1952) redistributed the land among the peasants, launching an all-out attack on the prevalent landlord-based feudalistic system. Considerable force was employed during the process. As Shen, an 80-year old female respondent, recalled: "The local landlord who refused to hand over the land was beaten up badly.....He later died".

The Three-anti Campaign (1951) was self-directed to Party cadres, focusing on the elimination of corruption, waste, and bureaucracy. The Five-anti Campaign (1952) was directed at eliminating the five ills of bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating, and financial speculation in the society. In a broader sense, this campaign placed controls on industry and commerce in China, paving the way for the Public-private Partnership Campaign, which curbed the capitalist

Table 1
Major Mass Mobilisation Campaigns in China in Mao's Era (1949-1976)

Year	Mass Mobilisation Campaign	Goals
1950	Marriage Law Campaign	To publicise and ensure the implementation of the marriage law
1950-1952	Land Reform Campaign	To redistribute land among poor peasants.
1951	Three-Anti Campaign	To eliminate the three ills of corruption, waste, and bureaucracy in the government and the Community Party.
1952	Five-Anti Campaign	To eliminate the five ills of bribery, tax evasion, theft of state property, cheating, and financial speculation.
1955-1956	Public-Private Partnership Campaign	To achieve a socialist transformation of private businesses into public enterprises.
1956-1957	Hundred Flowers Campaign	To elicit criticism of the Party from intellectuals (which later led to an anti-rightist movement that purged the intelligentsia).
1958-1960	Great Leap Forward Campaign	To modernise China in a hurry (it resulted in three years of famine).
1958	Communes Campaign	To establish rural/urban communes to improve agricultural and industrial productivity.
1966-1976	The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution	To dismantle the tradition Chinese value system and the social structures that support it (especially Confucian principles).
1968-1977	Educated Youth to the Countryside Campaign	To send urban students to the countryside to be reeducated by peasants.

Sources: Bishop, 1998; Chu, 1977; Chu et al., 1976

interests in China. Shen, our 80-year old respondent who with her husband owned a private liquor factory, recalled: "During the Five-anti Campaign, my husband was put in jail. He was first taken to the mass meeting in a local theatre and forced to confess the crime of tax evasion.....We were labeled as capitalists and bad elements..... We were fearful and became part of the public-owned system, working for the state."

The Hundred Flowers Movement (1956 to 1957) urged intellectuals to provide suggestions on how to improve the Chinese society. However, when the intellectuals attacked the tenets of the Communist political system, an anti-rightist movement was launched to purge them. When the anti-rightist movement peaked in mid-1958, several thousands of

intellectuals were sent to rural areas to work as manual labourers in order to appreciate proletarian life (Cell, 1977; Hung, 1976; Yu, 1979). An even bigger effort to mix urbanites and rural people was launched in 1968, when tens of thousands of urban school students were sent to work with the peasants in the countryside. An estimated 12 million urban Chinese youths were sent to rural areas between 1968 and 1975 (Bernstein, 1979).

After establishing a new ideological basis, the Great Leap Forward (GLF) campaign (1958 to 1960) — which included a steel-making campaign and others — was launched to realise a "great leap" in industrial and agricultural production. The call to multiply industrial production was more "the product of a vision rather than a plan" (Cell, 1977). Some 90 million people participated in 1958 in the Backyard Furnace Campaign, a massive effort to produce steel in small backyard furnaces. In 1958, one of our male respondents, Bao, a college teacher, helped organise a mass meeting in Beijing to mobilise the peasants to participate in the GLF Campaign. Representatives from different communes openly flouted the "gains" made in grain and steel production. As Bao noted: "There was no logic for what these people were claiming. They were fanatical. What was being done was purely for political reasons.... to show their passion for the campaign and loyalty to the Party". The great leap forward campaign was disastrous to the Chinese economy and was followed by three years of famine (from 1959 to 1962), which resulted in the death of tens of millions (Cell, 1977). Bao calls it as being "not a natural disaster but a man-made disaster".

Then came Mao's infamous Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966 to 1976), launched by a directive of the Central Committee of the CCP. Several analysts believed that this campaign arose out of a power struggle within the Party; others saw it as an assault on the privileged and the bureaucracy, i.e. a Maoist "purge" (Cell 1977). The Red Guards, comprising self-organised youths committed to the goals of Mao's cultural revolution, attacked Confucian values, authorities, and Chinese arts and literature. Mao orchestrated this upheaval despite the chaos it unleashed, emphasising that destruction preceded construction. When a decade later, the cultural revolution ended with Mao's death and the arrest of the "The Gang of Four", including Mao's wife Jiang Qing, the Chinese society was at the edge of collapse. The institutions undergirding Chinese industry, commerce, judiciary, and education had either broken down or were in paralysis.

The Role of Communication in Mass Mobilisation Campaigns

Research question 2 asked: How were mass, group, and interpersonal communication channels strategically utilised in the mass mobilisation campaigns launched in China during Mao's era?

Under Mao's leadership, multi-modal and multi-directional strategies for communicating with the masses were developed, including the use of mass media channels, group and interpersonal influence, and the use of arts, literature, and the party apparatus (Singh, 1979). The state-directed mass media forged a link between political leaders and the masses, while group and interpersonal channels helped forge a cadre-people and people-to-people link. The state-controlled press disseminated ideas in order to create a climate for change.

The primary role of communication during the Chinese mass mobilisation campaigns was to aid (1) policy formulation; (2) information dissemination; (3) mass participation; and (4) summation and evaluation (Cell, 1983). Based on feedback provided by grassroots cadres, leaders of the CCP learned of the people's problems. Policy proposals were drafted, circulated and refined, calling for topical mass mobilisation campaigns to solve the problems. The campaign was usually launched through a public directive, as an editorial in the Party publications like *People's Daily*, *Red Flag*, and/or radio broadcasts. The need to mobilise people's participation was communicated by the mass media, organisational, and interpersonal communication channels. Letters to the editor, big character posters, mass meetings, criticism and self-criticism study groups, and other campaign mechanisms were put into play. The summation and evaluation of the campaign was carried out when the campaign declined in intensity. Sometimes in the evaluation phase, new inadequacies and contradictions were brought to the cadres' attention, which in turn could spur a follow-up mass mobilisation campaign.

Tapping Mass Media Channels

When the CCP came into power in 1949, the mass media infrastructure in China was limited. A majority of the Chinese people did not have media access. To reach its people, spread over a vast territory, the Chinese government built a massive mass media infrastructure (radio, newspapers and television) to link the central government to the grass-root cadres and the rural people. The Chinese mass media system subscribed to the communist theory of Soviet media, which viewed mass media as instruments of the state and the party. They were to be used to achieve unity of knowledge, and to serve as "a collective agitator, propagandist and organiser" for the masses, helping them gain acceptance and understanding of the state-sponsored ideology (Schramm, 1956). Mao often spoke of four tasks for the Chinese mass media. The media existed to propagate the policies of the Party, to educate the masses, to organise the masses, and to mobilise the masses (Bishop, 1989).

The mass media system in China during Mao's era was controlled by an elite group in the CCP (Chu, 1979). The group had pervasive influence and made efficient use of available technology. Messages appeared in multiple forms in a campaign atmosphere. Newspaper articles, editorials, and various campaign documents were read and

discussed in small groups. Wired radio loudspeakers were used at home and in work places. Popular songs, dance performances, poems, cartoons, and the Peking Opera were used to carry a political message. One of our respondents, Zhou, who worked in the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, recalled the pervasive and influential nature of the Party propaganda: "I was impressed by the glorified image of the educated youth presented in the movies, posters, songs, and magazines. I used to say to myself how nice that these highly-spirited young people are driving these huge tractors and harvesters on the boundless plains!". In addition to the propagandistic media messages, new values were promoted to the masses by utilising behavioural models that common people could identify with. For instance, Lei Feng, an ordinary People's Liberation Army soldier who grew up in a poor peasant family, was celebrated as a role model for selflessness and dedication to the people. He became known in every Chinese household.

Overall, the mass media system during Mao's time was strategically employed to provide highly selective information to the Chinese people. Messages were consistent across the various media to avoid the impression of conflict, dissent, or divergence from party lines. A vigil was maintained to ward off messages that could contaminate people's perceptual reality. For instance, the circulation of Reference Information, an internal Party newspaper, was increased from 2,000 to 400,000 copies in 1957 by Mao to "vaccinate" the cadres against alternative political ideologies (Yu, 1979).

Tapping Group and Interpersonal Channels

To ensure behavioural compliance at the local level, the CCP strategically tapped the power of its 20 million highly politicised and resourceful cadres who were skilled at group and interpersonal interaction (Chu, 1979). These cadres guided decision-making at the local level (Schramm et al., 1976). As Howkins (1982) stated: "The CCP was able to use itself as a medium, a real mass medium....The main resources of communications were not wavelengths or printing presses but Party members.... The cadres' main tools are not TV programmes but (group) discussions". Thus the mass communication system in China was backed by an enormous group and an interpersonal-based communication system.

To develop a close interpersonal relationship with the peasants, Mao called upon Party cadres to imitate the peasants' speech, action, and clothing. Traditional folk art forms, popular among peasants, were adopted to foster socialist ideals. Folk songs were turned into anti-landlord and anti-Nationalist ditties, and People's drama troupes toured around the countryside to promote Party policies (Hung, 1993). The Maoist campaigns relied heavily on all kinds of group and interpersonal channels, ranging from casual chatting, story-telling, lecturing, self-criticism sessions, and collective reading and study. By participating in

the central meetings and then organising meetings at local levels, Party cadres' proved to be effective in disseminating information and eliciting political commitment at different levels of society. Dialogues between local Party cadres and the mass base of poor peasants were effective in publicising Party policies and soliciting local support. As Li, one of our female respondents, said: "Everything my parents said or did was to meet the need of local or national politics".

Prior to the launch of the Cultural Revolution (in 1966), some 164 political and social organisations existed in China. A typical example was the Communist Youth League, a political-motivated youth organisation that towed the Party line. Each organisation had a national staff and structure, which was vigorously activated during the mobilisation campaigns (Bishop, 1989). All organisations were led at the top by representatives of the Party, state, and/or military. Clear directives in the form of central government documents were provided to these organisational cadres, especially during the initial stage of a new mass mobilisation campaign. This was to ensure that the cadres could adequately explain the policies to the masses and direct local discussions in the desired direction (Bishop, 1989). The cadres carefully-orchestrated interpersonal communication networks to ensure mass participation, mobilise social pressure to achieve party goals, and to elicit and regulate desired behavioural patterns. If compliance was inadequate, corrective measures were undertaken. For instance, during the implementation of the Marriage Law Campaign in 1950, Mao felt that many cadres did not fully understand or believe in the changes that were being proposed. Their confusion and insincerity led to an ineffective campaign. So Mao simply ordered the cadres to redo the entire campaign. An internal campaign was waged among the cadres, so that they could adequately explain the new marriage law, and communicate their enthusiasm of the campaign elements to the common people. Many such campaign implementation lessons were learned and applied in ensuing mass mobilisation campaigns (Uhalley, 1976).

Study groups were widely used to stir grassroots activity (Whyte, 1979). During Mao's time, the Chinese people were bound to a pre-determined residence area and their affiliations with a commune, a factory, a school, a store, or a street were clearly defined. Work units, communes, and residents' committees represented mechanisms for social and political control. For example, work units provided a range of benefits (housing, retirement pensions, and health care) and served as the basic units of the urban and rural social structure. People's lives were controlled in matters of marriage, birth, and social mobility (Yang, 1994). Citizens attended the local neighbourhood meetings and were under pervasive community surveillance. Often overt coercion was employed to establish new norms of participation. As Zhou, one of our respondents recalled painfully: "They poured manure in his son's mouth and tortured him....He had no choice but to give way".

During group meetings, people listened to scheduled radio broadcasts, read Party documents or newspapers, participated in small group discussions, criticised others and engaged in self-criticism, articulating their ideological conclusions and public commitment. Everybody knew what the others were doing, and if someone did not live up to his/her responsibility or commitment, there was no place to hide (Schramm et al., 1976). In the initial stages of a campaign, small group meetings were held to put pressure on individuals to participate, win early converts, root out dissent, and direct individuals to perform newly-defined roles. Mass meetings followed to give the impression of mass participation. Small group meetings were scheduled regularly for motivational reinforcement (Cell, 1983).

The communication system underlying mass mobilisation campaigns was well integrated, connecting one part of the Party and media apparatus with other parts (Schramm et al., 1976). Little separation was made between entertainment pursuits and the socialist agenda, between technocracy and politics. Campaign activities were universally geared to realising the Socialist ideal. Every CCP member was expected to be a propagandist. All modes of communication — oral, informal, and casual — were brought together to promote mass socialist education.

In sum, communication played a key role in the mass mobilisation campaigns in China during the Mao years, especially in ensuring (1) a rigid political control; (2) selective dissemination of information in society; (3) the mobilisation of a pervasive and powerful cadre system; and (4) community surveillance and collective commitment.

Decline of Mass Mobilisation Campaigns

Research question 3 asked: What factors contributed to the decline of mass mobilisation campaigns in the post-Mao era?

Mass mobilisation campaigns did not completely disappear in China in the post-Mao era; they slowed down. The tradition of mobilising the masses is deeply rooted in the collective memory of the CCP and crucial to the maintenance of its discipline. As Zhou, one of our respondents noted: "The central government is still using mass mobilisation campaigns even though they are ineffective.... They do not know what other better alternative there can be". So cadres at various levels still rely on mobilisational practices, though they have been recast to be palatable to the reformist elite (White, 1990). The implementation of the "One Child" policy (1979 onwards) in China is also subtly couched in this reformist ideology, that is, as a counterpoint to arcane notions such as "men are superior to women" and "the more children, the more happiness". Once the CCP decided to launch the campaign, party activists and propagandists for the One-child policy were pressed into service, medical teams were recruited, and media products were produced to glorify the one-child family.

Table 2
Major Mass Mobilisation Campaigns in China in the Post-Mao Era (1976 to present)

Year	Mass Mobilisation Campaign	Goals
1979 onwards	One-Child Family Campaign	To advocate one child for a couple.
1983-1984	Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign	To crack down on pornography, literature, arts and music deemed as being of "low taste".
1987-1989	Anti-Bourgeois Liberation Campaign	To counter the western materialistic influences.
1996	Spiritual Civilisation Campaign	To reconstruct the spiritual and socialist morality of the Chinese people.

Sources: Bishop, 1989; Pei, 1994

Other mass mobilisation campaigns directed at anti-spiritual pollution (1983 to 1984), countering bourgeois liberation (1987 to 1989), and spiritual civilisation (1996 onwards) represent the Party's efforts at eliminating the unintended results of the reformist era (Table 2). However, these didactic and preachy campaigns have turned people off as negative attitudes toward the state-controlled mass media system have intensified (Bishop 1989; Lull, 1990; Rogers et al. 1985). Party motives are met with skepticism in present-day Chinese society. Li, one of our respondents who previously worked in the Party propaganda apparatus, the Xinhua News Agency, noted: "I feel the loss of faith of the Chinese people in the official media". Li believes that this kind of disillusion is pervasive among the Chinese people. And that this palpable apathy toward CCP-sponsored campaign messages goes hand-in-hand with the increased consumption of the entertainment media, including foreign films, cartoon series, television series, and romance and martial-arts novels.

In the post-Mao era (since 1976), several factors have contributed to the decline of mass mobilisation campaigns in China: (1) a loosening of political control, (2) an expansion and deregulation of the Chinese mass media, (3) a decentralising of the cadre system, and (4) the increased mobility of the Chinese people.

Loosened Political Noose

When Deng Xiaoping became Chairman of CCP's Central Committee in 1979, mobilisational politics took a back-seat to the process of institution building. The Maoist revolutionary phase was ending. China's economic development became the primary goal of the state, which, in turn, resulted in a relatively depoliticised environment. The slogan "Economics in command" replaced the old "Politics in command" adage, and class struggle as a guiding political principle became passe. Political freedom for the Chinese people, though still arguably limited, has increased

substantially in the past two decades. Nonconformity to Party policies now does not automatically lead to political disaster. Encouraged by Deng's famous statement, "To be rich is glorious", the Chinese people strive for a better standard of living. Led by the market force, people no longer watch the political climate to guide their everyday behaviours. In discussing a recent mass mobilisation campaign in China, one of our respondents, Meng, a former producer in the Central China Television Station, said: "Nobody cares about the Spiritual Civilisation Campaign. No body takes it seriously. We make fun of it". Another respondent, Lu, a former journalist and writer in China, echoed a similar sentiment with respect to the declining stranglehold of the political noose: "While the older generations of writers used their pens as tools of the Party, nowadays, the writers write whatever sells". Furthermore, the experience of the Cultural Revolution has made the Chinese people very sceptical about well-intentioned politics (Wang and Singhal, 1991).

Mass Media Expansion, Diversification, and Deregulation

The Chinese government's control on its mass media system has loosened substantially as the country moves from being a planned economy to a free market economy (Chang, 1989; Lull, 1991; Pei, 1994). The shake-up of the Chinese mass media began in the early 1980s as a way to reduce financial losses. Subsidies to media organisations were slashed and market forces were introduced, including some financial autonomy, management decentralisation, deregulation, and business diversification. Market forces multiplied the channels of production and dissemination, reducing the government's censorship of the media. Commercial advertising was permitted on television in early 1979 on the Shanghai Station. A year later, CCTV (China Central Television Station) and provincial stations in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nanjing, and Chengdu were broadcasting commercials; many other stations followed in the early 1980s (Howkins, 1982). According to Pei, by 1992, one-third of China's newspapers was completely independent of government subsidies (1994). The same year, film studios in China were permitted to distribute films independently and form joint ventures with overseas investors. New, financially autonomous television and radio station — such as Dongfang TV station in Shanghai and Xihu Zhisheng Radio station in Hangzhou — quickly became fierce rivals of the government-funded and managed stations, forcing them to improve production quality. Live news coverage of breaking stories, talk shows, call-in programmes, and celebrity interviews of many liberal intellectuals reduced both the incidence and aura of government media censorship.

The Chinese people now enjoy a greater access to foreign media products. Time, Newsweek, the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, Reader's Digest, and South China Morning Post are easily available in major tourist hotels. Closed-circuit televisions featuring Western entertainment and CNN news programmes have also been installed in more than 1,000

tourist hotels. In Beijing, foreign feature films, mostly dubbed in Chinese, have gained about 25 percent of the market share by the late 1990s. Also, foreign publications are increasingly being translated into Chinese. For instance, between 1978 and 1990, more than 28,500 books by foreign authors were translated into Chinese (Pei, 1994).

Access to newer communication technologies has multiplied media choices for the Chinese consumer, providing alternatives to state-supported media dictums (Pei, 1994). The VCR boom has dramatically increased entertainment media choice, free from government control. Some 18 percent of urban households in China had a VCR in 1995, compared to just 7 percent in 1989 (China Statistical Yearbook, 1996). In our 1999 audience survey of Chinese media habits, over 50 percent of urban households reported owning a VCR and a VCD machine. By the late 1990s, an estimated 150,000 commercial "video clubs" for viewing prerecorded movies were being operated by private entrepreneurs and cultural clubs established by local government outposts. Other modern electronic technologies such as cable television, satellite communication, and the Internet have also greatly expanded China's links to the outside world. By the end of 1995, around 3,000 cable stations and networks had been set up, with only 1,200 receiving official permits (Wu, 1996). As a large number of cable operators have little capacity to produce or purchase programmes, it has become common practice for local stations to relay foreign/overseas satellite programmes. The launch of the Asiasat I satellite in April 1990 made its STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region) television programmes available to millions of households; an estimated 100 million viewers in China viewed STAR programming in the late 1990s³. Mobile telephony and Internet services in China have been exploding in recent years, as is computer usage (Jin, 1996; Singhal and Rogers, in press). By 2000, China had an estimated 4 million Internet account holders; further, it is not uncommon for one account to be shared by many users.

In sum, since the early 1980s, the expansion, diversification, and deregulation of the Chinese media system has provided Chinese people alternative channels to check the credibility of government-sponsored initiatives. It is now increasingly difficult for the Chinese government to control information inputs to the society. For instance, during the government crack-down of the pro-democracy movement in 1989, images of the Tiananmen Square bloodbath were relayed outside of China through faxes, Internet, and satellite technology.

Decentralising of the Cadre System

Deng Xiaoping's reformist era eroded CCP's need to mobilise the Chinese society through the fear of retribution or the promise of meaningful political reward. This situation, in turn, has radically altered the relationship of the party center with its far-flung local cadres. As compared to urban audiences, China's rural audiences were relatively

passive during the mass mobilisation campaigns of the Maoist era. Large group meetings made it impossible to monitor individual commitment. Also a low population density in certain Northern and Western provinces reduced social pressure to conform. Small group sessions and dialogues were usually not as effective in rural areas as they were in the cities, since the kinship based community in villages made local cadres less committed to Party policies. In the post-Mao era, since the implementation of the responsibility system in 1978, the pattern of rural organisation has undergone radical changes. Household farming on collectively-owned land replaced the commune system. Township governments and institutions of economic management replaced people's communes. The revival of free markets broke the Party's absolute grip on rural income. The subsidies for non-productive rural cadres have been substantially reduced. These structural changes diminished the political and economic power of rural cadres. The original politically-driven incentives for grassroots-level cadres have become less attractive compared to material rewards of household production (White, 1990).

In urban areas, private enterprises have been encouraged since 1984. Non-state-owned enterprises such as joint ventures, wholly-owned foreign companies and factories, and township enterprises have emerged since the 1980s. The diversified social and economic structures have flourished and undermined the once pervasive and powerful cadre system. Furthermore, the decentralised government system led local governments to place higher priority on their own development rather than the central government's directives.

Also, the rampant corruption among cadres in recent years taints the previous somewhat more "honest" image of Party cadres, casting doubts about the intentions of the newer mobilisation campaigns. Most of our respondents talked at length about corruption in cadres. For instance, Zhang, a former magazine editor, said: "No one in my office was active in any official campaigns because they felt that the campaign messages were empty words.... The editor-in-chief of the magazine, a Party member, took bribes all the time". Another respondent, Li, complained: "The government tells the ordinary people to be upright models. However, most of the cadres take bribes and misuse public funds. How can the government expect people to listen? We are not fools?"

Overall, as grassroots cadres are increasingly rewarded for economic entrepreneurship than for political discipline, as corruption among the cadres undermines the image of the Party, and as the demands of provincial and county governance take priority over Beijing's instructions, the cadre system, which previously engineered the mass mobilisation process, has lost its teeth (White, 1990).

Increased Mobility of the Chinese People

Beginning in 1959, the Chinese government forbade people to move from a smaller town or countryside to a larger town or city due to the concern

of urban population growth (Yang, 1994). Migration was curtailed by an elaborate "household registration" system under which each individual had to be registered in the local public security bureau. This registration system was backed up by a streetwise quota of monthly grain ration distributions, which was only issued to the registered street. With the realisation of a market economy, monthly food rations were abandoned in the early 1990s. The household registration system also laxed and is largely unenforced. So the Chinese people today are no longer bound to one work unit, one commune, or one location. The people can now move from one work unit to another, and from countryside to the cities. In recent years, millions of migrant peasants have joined the "floating population", seeking better work opportunities in cities. Most city governments have established qualified personnel exchange centers to encourage the mobility of educated and skillful people. Such a movement complicates the government's efforts to enforce mass mobilisation activities. As the geographic mobility of the target population increases, the Party can no longer rely on community surveillance and collective commitment to ensure behavioural enactment.

Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that mass mobilisation campaigns during Mao's era were directed by the Chinese Communist Party to alter the social structure, value systems, and the ideological base of its people. Through integrated mass media channels, a pervasive cadre system, group and interpersonal sessions, and other social organisations, the communication system in China in the Maoist era extolled the ideals of the proletariat. Although coercion was an important element in people's compliance, skillful use of communication mobilised several hundreds of millions of people. However, with Deng Xiaoping's reform era in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mass mobilisation campaigns have been less effective. Loosened political control, expansion and deregulation of the mass media, decentralisation of the cadre system, and the increased mobility of the population rendered recent mobilisation campaigns as being less effective.

The greatest impact of mass mobilisation campaigns in China has been on altering the traditional Chinese cultural and value system (Chu and Ju, 1993). Relentless media-led attacks on old traditional values have brought fundamental changes to a culture that was relatively stable and remarkably resilient over thousands of years. Social relations between the Chinese people have become superficial, submission to authority has weakened, and the Confucian way of the "golden mean" and the value of discretion for self-preservation are, for the most part, largely forgotten (Rao, Singhal, Ren, and Zhang, 1999). The decline of ancestor worship and Buddhism in China seem to be especially notable, given that cultural-religious components remain strong in other bastions of Chinese populations like Taiwan and Hong Kong. During the Maoist era, old Chinese belief systems were destroyed without building

something new in their place. That is, after the Yugong removed the mountains, a big hole has been left in the ground, which remains largely unfilled.

The Chinese experience with mass mobilisation campaigns presents several practical and ethical lessons for other developing countries. Mao Zedong used to say that a blank paper is ideal to draw a new and beautiful picture. With missionary zeal, he wiped the old state clean to establish a new, and misguided, vision. Public disillusionment with such radical social alteration began during the Cultural Revolution. Cultural changes through interventionist measures are perhaps best brought about by realistic evolution, not dramatic revolution. Communication campaign designers should be highly sensitive to the local cultural elements not just to accomplish an efficient campaign, but also to respect the sanctity of people's core values.

While mass mobilisation campaigns during the Maoist era led to several undesirable impacts on Chinese culture, they do present some useful lessons for campaign planners. Small group-based communication can play an important role in audiences' attitude and behaviour changes, especially through the practice of collective commitment and peer surveillance. If members in a community, through participatory methods, can take decisions on the collective well-being of the entire community, behaviour enactment and reinforcement can be exercised through peer pressure and support. Such a balance of peer pressure and support occurs in a humane way among the members of the Grameen (Rural) Bank in Bangladesh, where poor people, organised in groups, utilise micro-loans to improve the quality of their lives (Papa, Auwal, and Singhal, 1995). Also, campaign topics such as environmental protection, family planning, drug prevention programmes, AIDS prevention, and others — which have a community-based self-interest — can be suitably and humanly implemented in this manner (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). However, group commitment and surveillance would probably be more effective in cultures where group cohesion is valued over individual choice.

Integrated mass and interpersonal communication activities, as implemented in China, can help realise campaign objectives. Consistency of messages on TV, radio, print, and interpersonal sources enhance information processing and facilitate the desired change on the part of audience members. However, ethical issues are central to campaign planners. Should the people at whom the campaigns are being directed also be presented with opposing information and opinions? Should the decisions about the campaign messages be made only by a group of elites? Or should the ordinary people have an opportunity to provide inputs in determining their course?

A pervasive, well-trained communicator network can help facilitate the correct understanding of the behavioural practice at the grassroots level. But not without its limitations. While the Chinese cadre system (or a similar hierarchical system) represented an effective means for information distribution and behaviour reinforcement, it was bureaucratic

and formalised. In spite of the advocated "mass line" strategy, in practice, it was a top-down, one-way channel of communication rather than a horizontal, two-way communication channel. During the Great Leap Forward campaign (1958 to 1960), exaggeration about inflated agricultural and industrial production became a common practice among cadres to please higher authorities, silencing the voices from the masses. The top-down, one-way communication system during the Maoist era was "efficient" and maybe even "effective", but not humane. As our 80-year old interviewee Shen put it so wisely: "You cannot make a buffalo drink by forcing his head into the stream!"

Endnotes

1. Derived from Confucian philosophy which emphasises the notion of taking the middle road and never sticking one's neck out. Such discretion is considered essential for self-preservation.
2. This comprised a selected group including CCP members and non-Party members, who are trained to implement policies and to report the local situation to higher authorities. Although most cadres hold official positions in the Party or in the government, not all are necessarily officials (for example, college students automatically serve as government cadres). All cadres are provided subsidies by the government.
3. Our 1999 random sample survey showed that some 98 percent of all households had adopted a television set.
4. At the end of Mao's reign in 1976, the private sector in China contributed zero percent to China's gross domestic product (GDP); in 2000, the private sector contributed a whopping 60 percent of China's GDP.

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