The Chinese *Danwei* as a Mobilizing Structure:

A Research Design for the Cultural Revolution in the Cities

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The Researchers of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (CR) have most vigorously studied the issue of what constituted the social bases of the factional movement. While the past literature provides us many insights about the composition of CR factionalism, it leaves other important questions largely unanswered. Above all, to the extent that the uniqueness of the CR lies not only in its factionalism but also in its enormity of mass activism, we need to look at the mechanisms by which the masses mobilized for CR activism. In other words, in addition to asking, "who were those people mobilized for the factional groups?" We need to ask, "how was it possible for those Chinese urbanites under the Maoist authoritarian regime to mobilize so extensively and rapidly?"

The issue is even more problematic because those who participated the rebel movement were usually characterized as deprived of any resources. Many students who later joined radical Red Guard groups came from families with "middle and bad" labels. They had been either excluded from or assigned secondary roles in the elite Youth League (CYL) and other forms of political activism. Workers' politics was even more dominated by the political networks of Party patrons and its activist clients. In Chinese factories, the Party networks monopolized most of the resources, such as career mobility, material and other kinds of rewards. The Party bosses cultivated the clientelist ties with activist agents by selectively assigned them various rewards, and used them to control and mobilize the rank and file (Walder 1986). We have to ask, therefore, what resources

were available for those deprived groups to mobilize for CR activism.

In this study, I offer a hypothetical solution to this question by arguing that the participants of CR movement used a particular form of work organization under the Maoist state—the *danwei*—as a vehicle of mobilization. During the Mao period, the *danwei* organization functioned not only as the Party-state's effective controlling device but also as a "welfare community" through its role as a redistributive center of various goods and services. Some features of the *danwei* closely resemble those of "intentional community" (Hechter 1987; Kanter 1972)—residential concentration, the closed and multifunctional nature, the density of internal activities and limits on privacy, and so on. Others can be characterized as the manifestations of state-imposed structure. The Party-sponsored clientelist network (Walder 1986) and the organization isomorphism that cut across various sectors—factories, administrative organs, schools, hospitals, and so forth—provided the Party-state a powerful means of top-town mobilization. This study tries to show an ironic process of the Cultural Revolution. Namely, I argue, while the combination of state-imposed structure and community-like social relations gave the Maoist state a powerful controlling device, it also gave rebels a mobilizing structure for insurgency. Once insurgents appropriated the structure, the authoritarian state was unexpectedly vulnerable to insurgency and unable to control the movement without calling in the Army.

This study aims to contribute to a larger field of

the contentious politics study. The Cultural Revolution represents one of the most important, yet least understood, mass movements in the 20th century history. While the China scholarship has made vigorous efforts to understand the social and ideological bases of the movement mobilization, it has made little contribution to the field of the contentious politics study. One searches in vain in major works of contentious politics scholars for any mention of the CR (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). On the other hand, reflecting on the past concentration of the research domain on western societies, contentious politics scholars have recently voiced the need for the expansion of scope to non-western and non-democratic countries (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1997). The time is ripe for the integration of the Cultural Revolution study with the contentious politics study. The application of the concept, mobilizing structures, from the contentious politics study to a social system under an monopolizing authoritarian state such as Mao's China can contribute to the expansion of scope of the contentious study.

The Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution erupted in May 1966 when Mao Zedong began a purge of Communist Party officials, with a campaign that relied heavily upon the mobilization of mass support. In the following few months, without clear directions from Mao, Party leaders such as Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping undertook the campaign with the conventional means of political campaign by dispatching work groups (*gongzuo zu*) to schools and by targeting those who had been already victimized during the previous campaigns. With the establishment of the Central Cultural Revolution Small Group (CRSG), the power base of the so-called "Gang of Four" (Jiang Qing, Chen Boda, Zhang Chunqiao, and Yao Wenyuan), in late May, those Maoist leaders tried to interfere with the activities of work groups by instigating local agents at schools. Mao put an end to the

impasse by scolding work groups for repressing "spontaneous" student movements, and in late July ordered them to withdraw from schools.

In August Mao suddenly lifted police controls over student movements and stirred up Red Guards to "seize power." Red Guards appeared in cities, shouting the slogan and smashing "four-old" things. During this early Red Guard phase of the CR, student Red Guards, composed of students with "good" or "red" class labels, attacked "intellectual" teachers and "rightist" low-level officials. Students with "bad or mediocre" labels were excluded from those elite Red Guard organizations. Despite the loudness of the early Red Guards phase, it took place within the boundary of institutionalized patterns of mobilization campaign. It was directed by central leaders, using the networks of Party loyalists. Moreover, those targeted by student Red Guards were "rightists" and "capitalists" who had been criticized in earlier campaigns.

The monopolization of Red Guard organizations by students with good class labels ended in October with a circular from the Party center allowing students of any class background to participate Red Guard activities. With now previously excluded students forming their own Red Guard organizations, student movements quickly turned into factional struggles between "radical" and "conservative" groups. In the mean time, urban workers also began to form their own rebel organizations, greatly expanding the scale of CR mass movement. The instigation and manipulation by central and local Party leaders exacerbated the factional conflict with the CRSG trying to instigate the radical rebel groups and local cadres under attack trying to shore up the support of the party loyalists. There were increasing numbers of local bloodshed with the pattern of violence shifted from individual victimization to the armed battle between Red Guards.

The "January Power Seizure" shifted the unstable balance between the elite's control and

the masses' spontaneity decisively in favor of the latter. Encouraged by central leaders to seize power from the local power structures, the Chinese masses were now freed from the control of the local elite. The local elite groups found themselves suddenly the objects of attack by the masses. The power seizure drew the masses suddenly into the political process without the benefit of previous experience. The mass politics inevitably resulted in chaos and anarchy. With the power holders shrewdly exploiting the chaotic situation to protect their own interests, the factional struggle among the masses intensified further.

In the face of a complete breakdown of order and production, Mao decided to throw the People's Liberation Army (PLA) into the factional struggle, ordering it to "provide leadership for the power seizure." This new policy only exacerbated the factional struggle. The Army, the cadres, and the conservative mass organizations formed an alliance against the radicals and the Cultural Revolution Small Group and pushed the movement in the opposite direction from the "January Power Seizure," creating the conservative "February Adverse Current."

In March, the radical forces hit back, and by the end of the month the radical-conservative confrontation reached a stalemate. With no clear policy from the central leadership, the radical and conservative mass organizations intensified their armed struggle. In July 1967, local mass violence culminated in the open revolt of the Wuhan regional military force, which sided with the conservatives.

In September, the Army was given greater authority to intervene in clashes and to curb militants. Large numbers of troops streamed into cities, and soldiers patrolled the streets. The local military control commission issued a series of orders for the collection of weapons, and for the return of students to their own schools, assuring amnesty to those cadres who had been falsely accused. Sporadic factional conflicts continued

with the elite groups—by the time largely represented by CRSG and the Army—still fighting for influence over the outcome of the Cultural Revolution. However, the phase of the mass movement came to the end, and was taken over by that of marshal law. During the period of the "reign of terror," which lasted until 1971, even more people were killed because of the military repression.

Past Studies

Debate over the Composition of the Mass Groups

The Researchers of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (CR) have most vigorously focused on the issue of what constituted the social bases of the factional movement. Some argued for the importance of status groups created by the official policy of class labeling (Lee 1978; Rosen 1982). Others focused on the divisions between economic classes such as permanent workers vs. temporary workers, workers of state sectors vs. those of less privileged collective sectors, and so on. Still others emphasized the importance of the cleavage produced by the clientelist network of party bosses and loyal activists (Walder 1986, 1996). More recently, a broad consensus has emerged from the debate. These contradicting factors respectively represent different "types" (Perry and Li 1997) or "phases" (Walder 1994) of the CR movement. The status groups account for the student Red Guard movements; the class interests best explain the brief phase of spouting of social interests; and the party networks best account for the more institutionalized and "conservative" phases of worker's movements.

Mechanisms of the Movement Expansion[1]

Owing to the past studies, we now know much about what social groups participated in the factional struggle for what reasons. What is still less clear, however, is how and by what means those groups and individuals mobilized so rapidly and extensively. Among the few attempts to explain the mechanism of the movement

expansion and escalation, two studies—organizational pathology and state structure—merit examining in some detail.

The first of such attempt has been made by Walder (1994), which can be called the account of "organizational pathology." He argues that there were two mechanisms of escalation at work during the CR: the escalating process of factional violence (the fall of 1966–early 1968) and that of organized terror (mid-1968–1970). The first process was characterized by spiraling factional violence driven "by the heavy costs of failing to seize power once the struggle had crossed a certain threshold (1994: 412)." And the second was a process, in which "insecure local authorities in a shattered hierarchy overcomplied with calls to 'cleanse the class ranks,' that is to say, purge and eliminate the class enemies, in a way that resulted in escalating episodes of torture and mass murder." In both cases, the processes of escalation were attributable to the organizational pathologies characteristic of the party organization and of its incentive structure. Designed to account for the escalating patterns of violence, however, this approach does not address the issue of movement diffusion directly.

The other approach advocated by Zhou Xueguang (1993) can be labeled as the theory of state structure. Zhou argues that the formation and outbreak of collective action were rooted in the particular "institutional structure of the state-society relationship (54)." "The very institutional structure of state socialism that supposedly prevents organized interests facilitates collective action based on unorganized interests (58)." This apparently paradoxical argument is based on the following assumption: "the institutional structure of state socialism reduces the barriers to collective action by producing 'large numbers' of individuals with similar behavioral patterns and demands that cut across the boundaries of organizations and social groups." It "also provides a direct link between the workplace and the state and influences the direction of the local demands."

While this argument is theoretically interesting, we need to test the hypothesis empirically.

Mobilizing Structure of the *Danwei*

"Mobilizing structures" are generally defined by social movement scholars as "those collective vehicles, both formal and informal, through which people come together and engage in collective action (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 1997)." They not only include formal social movement organizations (SMO) but also the range of more informal "micromobilization contexts" that are not aimed primarily at movement mobilization, but where mobilization may be generated: these include family units, friendship networks, voluntary networks, work units, and elements of the state structure itself (McAdam 1988). For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that the definition makes a basic distinction between the formal SMO and more informal mobilization contexts, suggesting the possibility that such structures as work units and elements of state structure can inadvertently serve as a vehicle of insurgency. I intend to extend this insight by applying it to the case of the work organization under the Maoist authoritarian regime.

In general, the *danwei*, or work organization, is a set of organizational principles developed by the Chinese Communist Party to control and mobilize the Chinese populace under the circumstance of scarcity and need for rapid modernization. More concretely, during the Mao period, the *danwei* not only provided the Party-state an effective controlling device with its institutions of monitoring and political network, but also functioned as the "redistributive center" through its provision of various goods and services (Walder 1986). Structural features of the *danwei* as a mobilizing structure can be summarized as follows: residential concentration, the closed and multifunctional nature, density of activities and limits on privacy, the divisive human relations caused by the political network,[2] and

organizational isomorphism.

Unity of Workplace and Residence

In his study of the Paris Commune of 1971, Gould (1993) argued the neighborhood organization, rather than craft groups or "class consciousness," provided a framework for the mobilization for insurgency. Zhao (1998) similarly pointed out the essential importance of the "ecology" of the 1989 Beijing student movement (BSM). He argued that the concentration of universities in Beijing in one district, their structural similarity, and dormitory life all contributed to the rise of the BSM. We can find other similar examples in many geographical areas, from the Polish workers during the Gdansk and Gdynia strike in 1970, the student activism of the May 4th movement in China in 1919, and to the university campuses in the United States during the 1960s.

During the Mao period, Chinese cities were often described as a patchwork of *danwei* organizations, which were then called a "village" within a city. A typical *danwei* had its residential quarters within the land surrounded by brick walls (Davis et al. 1995). Many urban residents did not have to commute to workplace, and some workers of large state factories could even spend a day without leaving the compound. The combination of workplace and residence facilitated the mass mobilization through mainly three mechanisms. First, it provided stronger and more extensive social networks outside the Party network. Second, the structure of the work organization greatly assisted the information transformation. Third, it provided a sanction to possible free riders. As Gould's study of the Paris Commune suggests, it is highly plausible that "neighborhood pressures" to join the movement were at least as great as, if not greater than, those of the political network and status-based groups.

Closed and Multifunctional Organization

Several researchers have noted the multifunctional nature of the *danwei* organization (Henderson and Cohen 1985; Walder 1986; Blecher and White 1979). Many work organizations, such as state factories, hospitals, schools, and so on, had not only living quarters but also clinics, day-care centers, schools, stores, and others. Many urban residents were able to satisfy daily needs without going out of the compound. In addition, the work organization was also the provider of health insurance, retirement pension, and other non-wage benefits. One important consequence of this multifunctionality was the widespread dependence of workers on the work organization (Walder 1986). The dependence of workers was greatly enhanced by the absence of alternative sources for needs satisfaction under the redistributive economy. According to a rationalist account, solidarity can be achieved by the combined effects of dependence and control (Hechter 1987). Given the high control capacity of the *danwei* organization (Walder 1986, chapter 3), then, we can assume that the work organization provided a high level of group solidarity among workers.[3] Thus, the dependency bred by the closed and multifunctional nature of the *danwei* organization gave rise to solidarity among workers, and, in turn, contributed to the mobilization of them for CR mass movement.

Frequency of Activities and the Limits on Privacy

The residents of the *danwei* usually participated in a number of activities such as study sessions, small group political meetings, mass meetings, public services, and recreational activities. Urban workers often spent a few hours after work for small group meetings. The frequency of meetings depended on the political climate of the time, ranging from twice or three times a week to every workday. Once political campaigns were launched, they spend hours reading newspaper editorials or other "study materials" to learn the official policies and the experiences of "model *danwei*." During campaigns, large-scale mass meetings or

public criticism meetings were also held in meeting grounds or halls. It is not farfetched to assume, therefore, that the close contact of workers not only facilitated the transmission of information and ideas. But those sites of mass meetings and other group activities also provided possible centers or arenas of mass mobilization.

Another possible mechanism related to the density of intra-*danwei* activities was that the lack of individual autonomy within the *danwei* might have contributed to *danwei* mobilization. In the extreme situation of the lack of individual autonomy, individuals could hardly develop independent thinking because hours of political study sessions and other activities left little private and leisure time. Even if one had managed to develop some ideas, one could have hardly found any space to share these heterodox ideas with others. The system of mutual surveillance and reporting as well as political dossiers (*dang'an*) also contributed to the limits on privacy. Thus, the close contacts, easy communication, public meeting spaces, and lack of individual autonomy all contributed to the processes of mass mobilization.

Organizational Isomorphism

By organizational isomorphism, I mean the state-imposed similarity in structural features of the *danwei* organization that cut across various sectors and the boundaries of organizations.[4] It includes all of the above-mentioned structural factors as well as the similar patterns of individual daily life shaped by these physical environments. The assumption here is that the isomorphism of the *danwei* organization facilitated mobilization by reducing inter-organizational behavioral differences to similar behavioral patterns across the boundaries of organizations. This argument is in line with the theory of "large numbers" phenomenon offered by Zhou (1993). He points out that the structural similarities of the *danwei* reduces the barriers to collective action by producing "large numbers" of individuals with

similar behavioral patterns and demands that cut across the boundaries of organizations and social groups. Zhou's insight provides us a clue to understand broad scale movements beyond *danwei* boundaries. That is, despite its closed and "cellular" nature of the organization (Heilmann 1993–94), the isomorphic nature of the *danwei* produces similar individual interests and behavioral patterns across their boundaries. By reducing the barriers to collective action, those "large numbers" of individuals provide the basis for social mobilization on a broad scale.

Therefore, the organization features of the *danwei* are characterized by residential concentration, the closed and multifunctional organization, the density of activities and the limits on privacy, and organizational isomorphism. Those organizational features contributed to the processes of CR mass mobilization through the mechanisms of easy communication, social networks, dependency, public meeting places, lack of individual autonomy, and similarly minded individuals. We now turn to the operationalization of these arguments.

Hypotheses and Research Design

Hypotheses

It is possible to derive several test hypotheses from the above argument. First, I expect that the combination of workplace and residence in the *danwei* facilitated the diffusion of CR movement:

H1: The timing of movement mobilization during the Cultural Revolution was earlier where a work organization combined workplace with residential quarters than where it did not combine them.

Second, I assume that the multifunctional nature of the *danwei* also facilitated the development of CR movement by creasing the dependency of individuals on the work organization:

H2: The timing of movement mobilization during the CR was earlier in a work organization with more functions than in that with fewer

functions.

Third, I posit that the frequency of non-work activities within a work organization not only provided better communication, public meeting space, and broader networks outside workplace, but also contributed to the deprivation of individual leisure time. These factors are assumed to have contributed to the rapid diffusion of CR movement:

H3: The timing of movement mobilization during the CR was earlier in a work organization with more frequent non-work activities than in that with fewer activities.

Fourth, it is argued that structural similarities of the *danwei* reduce the barriers to collective action by producing "large numbers" of individuals with similar behavioral patterns and demands that cut across the boundaries of organizations and social groups. By reducing the barriers to collective action, those "large numbers" of individuals provide the basis for social mobilization on a large scale:

H4: The more structural similarities work organizations shared with one another, the earlier they saw cross-organizational diffusion of CR movement.

Location

As implied in the above, this study requires a testing of hypotheses at two distinct levels of analysis: *within* work organizations and *across* work organizations. With regard to the first three hypotheses, this study focuses on workers' movement in Guangzhou (Canton), a southern largest city of China. The city was the most popular site for CR researches during the 1970s and early 1980s because most materials and emigrants arriving in Hong Kong at that time came from Guangdong and its provincial capital—Guangzhou (Lee 1978; Rosen 1982; Chan 1985). The focus of research shifted to Shanghai in the late 1980s (White 1989; Perry and Li 1997), and since then no major work has been produced on CR movement in Guangzhou.

Moreover, earlier works on Guangzhou movements was mostly focused on students rather than workers. Thus, there is a substantial reason for us to conduct researches on Guangzhou workers' movement during the CR. Only when testing hypothesis 4, I shift the level of analysis higher to city-level comparison.

Categorization of the Danwei

The samples are drawn from all the industrial work organizations (*danwei*) in the city of Guangzhou. They are categorized into eight types according to the availability of (1) residential quarters, (2) multiple functions, and (3) frequent internal activities. (Depending on the availability of the data on (3), they may be reduced to 4 types.) These vary from the *danwei* with full functions—those which had residential quarters, multi-functions, and frequent activities, to the *danwei* with partial functions—those which had only one or two of the functions, and to the *danwei* with no such function. The data on (1) and (2) are drawn from statistical yearbooks.

The diffusion of the movement is measured by the timing of the movement's first occurrence or non-occurrence. This is in turn indicated by the first appearance of rebel organizations in work organizations (or by the first attack on authority figures). The data are drawn from local newspapers and Red Guard publications.

Testing Organizational Isomorphism

On hypothesis 4, I shift the level of analysis and look at the city-level variation of the proportion of the populations living in the full-function *danwei*. The units of analysis are all the provincial capital cities (N=23) and province cities (N=3, i.e., Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai) at the time of the Cultural Revolution, which gives the total number of 26 cases. I exclude 5 autonomous regions—Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Xizang (Tibet)—from the samples in order to assure the homogeneity among the units. This is because these autonomous

regions are heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, languages, the level of urbanization, geographical settings, and so on.

Structural similarities of *danwei* organizations are indicated by the physical or ecological features (Zhao 1998) of work organizations. These include all the internal features of the *danwei*—the unity of workplace and residence, the closed and multifunctional nature, and the frequency of internal activities. There were considerable variations among Chinese cities in the predominance of the *danwei* organization in city landscape. In general, industrial cities in the northeastern region—such as Shenyang and Harbin—are know as dominated by large state-owned industrial *danwei* while many commercial cities of the south—such as Guangzhou and Shanghai—are less dominated by the *danwei*. I expect that the larger the proportion of population belonging to isomorphic *danwei* organizations in a city was, the earlier the city saw the first instance of the movement than other cities. The data on the proportion of city population belonging to full-function *danwei* are taken from statistical yearbooks.

The diffusion of the movement across work organizations is measured by the timing of the establishment of cross-*danwei* coalitions. This is indicated by the first appearance of citywide coalitions of rebel organizations in cities. I rely on local newspapers as a data source.

Controls

There are several conditioning and confounding factors that need to be controlled. First, the number of employee is controlled for the scale of organizations. Second, the proportion of party members within a work organization is controlled for a possible escalating factor of mobilization as well as a counterforce to the revolt. Third, a work organization's hierarchical position in the bureaucratic system—ministry-level, provincial level, city level, prefecture level, and so on—has to be controlled for political as well as

socioeconomic resources. In general, the higher the administrative level of a work organization, the more closely linked to the central authority and, thus, the more likely to have been influenced by the elite struggle. Moreover, the higher the administrative level, the more likely that a work organization had living quarters and other facilities because they were assigned more economic resources.

Fourth, as for the diffusion of movement across the *danwei*—i.e., city-level movement diffusion, the size of populations is controlled for the scale of cities. And finally, vertical ties among work organizations within the same industrial sector are controlled for preexisting inter-organizational ties.

Conclusion

This paper set out by pointing out a gap in the literature on the Cultural Revolution. It pointed out that the past studies of the CR have mostly concentrated on the composition of the factional groups, and have not paid enough attention to the extensiveness and rapid diffusion of the movement. To fill the gap, I proposed an explanatory argument that hypothesized the central role of the Maoist work organization—the *danwei*—in the rapid expansion of the mass mobilization. The structural features of the work organization include: residential concentration, the closed and multifunctional nature, the frequency of intra-organizational activities and limits on privacy, and organizational isomorphism. They contributed to the processes of CR mass mobilization through the mechanisms of easy communication, social networks, dependency, public meeting places, lack of individual autonomy, and similarly minded individuals. I derived four test hypotheses from the explanatory arguments and also touched upon possible ways to conduct the research.

In conclusion, I believe that the empirical implications of this study are generalizable to other cases. Several features of meso-level organizations—residential concentration, the

closed and multifunctional nature, the frequency of internal activities, and organizational isomorphism—are all expected, under certain conditions, to contribute to the rapid expansion of popular movement. One of the most important conditions is that we expect such an "ecology-centered mobilization" to take place under a centralizing authoritarian regime (Zhao 1998). It typically occurs in places where intermediate associations are underdeveloped and associations beyond state controls are illegal. In such cases, the networks and communication based on physical environment and the patterns of daily life become the only means that a movement mobilization can count on. In short, the structural features of daily life become a more important factor for movement mobilization where strong authoritarian regimes suppress volunteer associations.

Notes

1) Here I only treat the studies on the mass-level movements of the Cultural Revolution, and therefore exclude those studies mostly concerned with elite conflict and ideological issues. This is because this study is mostly concerned with the meso-level mechanism of the CR movement. I still think that this elitist account of the CR is important to understand the *political opportunities* of the CR movement. I will treat this in my future research.

2) Yang Su of our department is currently working on this issue. Therefore, I do not treat this aspect of the *danwei* structure here.

3) Walder assumes, however, that the vertical network of Party loyalists made the horizontal solidarity of workers impossible to develop.

4) The term, isomorphism, was used by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) to demonstrate the phenomenon that organizations in the same environment will become structurally similar as they respond to similar environmental pressures. Although there is a difference in thfat DiMaggio and Powell try to explain the process of adaptation of organizations to the environment but the organizational features of the *danwei* was largely imposed on by the Party-state, the concept is useful for explaining social movements in general.

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