

The Academy of Political Science

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POLITICAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

Volume 125 · Number 2 · Summer 2010

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Political Science Quarterly

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Book Reviews

Rise of the Red Engineers: The Cultural Revolution and the Origins of China's New Class by Joel Andreas. Palo Alto, CA, Stanford University Press, 2009. 368 pp. Cloth, \$75.00; paper, \$27.95.

Joel Andreas has written a very fine analysis of the emergence of China's current ruling group, which to a remarkable extent consists of engineers. Eight out of nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee fall into this category. Andreas traces the convoluted, protracted, and conflictual process that resulted in this outcome. He compares the Chinese to the Soviet case, showing that there, too, Soviet leaders also came to be composed largely of engineers, as exemplified, for instance, by the ruling group of the Leonid Brezhnev period. But in the Soviet case, the process, while also difficult, did not give rise to similar degrees of conflict.

The issue behind the rise of the engineers arose from the dual goals pursued by Communist regimes. One goal was ideological, namely, to attain a classless, egalitarian society. The other was developmental: Communists largely came to power in backward societies, so that it fell to the rulers to modernize and especially to industrialize the countries over which they presided. As Richard Lowenthal observed many years ago, these goals were in conflict, since inevitably, industrialization required highly trained specialists who necessarily were sharply differentiated from less well educated ordinary citizens. In the Soviet Union, ideological policies were pursued at the expense of specialists during "War Communism" (1918–20) and again from 1928 to 1931. But Josef Stalin soon recognized that such policies were counterproductive and switched course to an elitist educational system designed to cultivate scientific and technological talent, with a heavy focus on engineers.

Andreas uses Tsinghua (Qinghua) University, China's most-prestigious scientific and technological institution, as a case that exemplified the conflicts over the admission of students. The conflict revolved around the possession of "political" and "cultural" credentials. Worker-peasant origin and outstanding political performance were the desirable political credentials. Cultural credentials, that is, an outstanding academic record, were either transmitted by well-educated upper-class parents, the old "exploiting" classes, an advantage which the regime intended to phase out, or were acquired in the course

of the educational experience. The ideal was to train “red experts” who possessed both cultural and political capital.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) was the culmination of 17 years of effort to train “red experts.” In the first years after 1949, efforts to recruit the children of workers and peasants were not very successful. As of 1956, only 20 percent of student enrollment came from the two laboring classes. Instead, children of the small, well-educated pre-revolutionary elite disproportionately succeeded in the academically demanding entrance examinations. They overcame increasingly stringent discrimination by learning to accumulate an outstanding political record. At the same time, the children of the Communist Party’s ruling officials—themselves usually of lower-class background—could attend high-quality preparatory middle schools, enabling them also to pass the entrance examinations and thus become candidates for elite positions. In both cases, the prospect that parental elite status could be transmitted to the children became an issue of serious concern for ideological fundamentalists, especially Mao Zedong.

An early experiment with radical educational reform launched during the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) sought to expand worker-peasant educational opportunities and to combine education with labor, thereby combating the formation of elitist attitudes. These experiments collapsed, together with the Leap. Some changes in enrollment patterns in favor of students of worker-peasant origin before the Cultural Revolution did not satisfy the Chairman, who believed that China had to forestall what he saw as a new Soviet bourgeois stratum that had come to rule over the masses, thereby leading to a form of capitalist restoration. By launching the Cultural Revolution, Mao intended to eradicate the educational system’s propensity to cultivate elites and to train “revolutionary successors” who would become cultured laborers.

The goal of the Cultural Revolution was to revolutionize education and thoroughly reverse the social hierarchy. To this end, Mao mobilized high school and college students to rebel against the established Party authorities as well as against the old upper classes, including the professoriat, which still largely came from upper-class backgrounds. Schools were closed, and sanctioned violence was unleashed on the hapless targets of renewed class struggle. For the students, this provided unprecedented opportunities to prove their revolutionary credentials, which they did, often in horrendous ways. But the students quickly divided into factions that fought one another, often to the point of armed combat.

The sources of factionalism were complex. Previous scholarship concluded that the students’ interest provided the motivating force for joining this or that faction. Thus, students of upper-class descent became “radicals” who opposed the Party establishment, which had discriminated against them, while students from red families became “conservatives,” since they had an interest in soft-pedaling the Mao-decreed attacks on their “capitalist roader” parents. But factional cleavages often did not reflect these underlying interests. This was

largely due to situation-specific factors. As the Cultural Revolution got underway, students had to calculate where they stood in relation to rapidly shifting signals from above as to whom they should attack and whom they should support, which served to blur the clarity of interest-based collective action. In any event, by the summer of 1968, a disappointed Mao ended the student movement and sent most of the students to the countryside for re-education.

Even as order was restored, the revolution of the educational system continued. One of the major contributions of Andreas's book is that it sheds light on the sustained effort to create a new system of higher education that would end the status of universities as the "hereditary domain" of the old and new bourgeoisie (p. 168). Under the auspices of a "Worker-Propaganda Team" the length of study was compressed, pure theory was sharply downgraded, and all study had to be combined with labor. Instead of entrance examinations, a major role was given to work units that recommended applicants, many of whom had not completed middle school. These "worker-peasant-soldier" students saw to it that faculty adapted to these conditions. Tsinghua became something of a vocational school, although even while Mao was still alive, some steps were taken to improve quality.

As China's reform era got underway, a fundamental restoration of the status quo ante took place, including the old system of requiring dual political and academic credentials for admission. Ironically, Andreas argues, Mao's attacks on both the old and the new elites fostered unity between them. With the ending of the discriminatory system of class labeling, the two credentialing systems converged. "Red experts" came into their own. A subset of them advanced in the political hierarchy and quickly came to play powerful roles in the political system.

This richly empirical and theoretically informed study leaves one question open: how did Chinese engineers adapt so rapidly to China's "socialist market economy?" Engineers tended to be more comfortable with planning rather than market forces. In the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev had great difficulty in converting the ruling elite to acting in accord with the market, but in China, this evidently was far less of a problem. This is a question that remains to be studied.

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The Discretionary President: The Promise and Peril of Executive Power by Benjamin Kleinerman. Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2009. 322 pp. \$34.95.

This study seeks to provide the U.S. president with sufficient discretionary authority in times of crisis without jeopardizing constitutional government, especially the system of checks and balances. Benjamin Kleinerman explicitly