



Leadership Theories and Defense Reform in the People's Republic of China

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Abstract: The People's Republic of China (PRC) is currently a hybrid social system that ideologically has retained the core values of the Marxist doctrine, which, unlike its predecessors, can adapt and innovate in response to changing circumstances. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and public administration underwent a series of deep reforms that enabled them to become a facilitator rather than a hindrance to development. The meritocratic leader selection system known as "selection and election," consistent with the Confucian tradition and adopting some western leadership principles, played a significant role.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is also considering the application of Western leadership principles not typically associated with the military. However, no evidence exists that the PLA systematically seeks to apply these concepts. The PLA is likely to complete defense reform and enhance the combat capabilities of its strategic and new types of forces, establishing a high level of strategic deterrence and complex systems for conducting joint combined operations. Towards that end, PLA applies Western non-military leadership principles and a mission-oriented leadership model, considering Chinese specificity.

Based on indirect Chinese, Russian, American, and Hungarian sources, the article presents contemporary Chinese socialism, analyzes the impact of political, social, economic, and defense reforms and the significance of leadership on China's development, describes Western and Chinese leadership theories, and outlines China's development prospects.

On the future of the PRC, the author states that, unlike other communist parties that gained power with foreign help, the CCP is indigenous and has national roots. Therefore, it is unlikely to collapse due to mass discontent. More likely, the Party will continue to transform the country and itself in the coming years and continue its rule. It is conceivable, however, that this transformation will eventually lead to a top-down revolution that will gradually break down the foundations of socialism.

Keywords: socialism, reform, development, leadership theories, mission-oriented leadership, strategic deterrence, army, intelligence, combined operation, China.

Reform of Socialism in the People's Republic of China

China's Conception of Socialism

Chinese-style socialism is based on Marxist ideology but recognizes the prominent role of continuous technological development and innovation. Combining market approaches and a socialist model of state administration, the system prioritizes market processes in allocating resources, limiting the state's role in setting the main strategic guidelines, the appropriate design of the regulatory system, and the correction of market imperfections. In the case of China, we are currently witnessing a hybrid system that, ideologically, has retained the core values of Marxist doctrine but which, unlike its predecessors, can adapt and innovate in response to changing circumstances.

Deng Xiaoping developed the theory of Chinese socialism reform. Deng (1904-1997) was a dominant figure in the Chinese Communist Party from 1978 until his death. In carrying out reforms, he made the adoption of capitalist methods and opening up to capitalist states subject to specific conditions: CCP must stick to the socialist path of development, the dictatorship of the proletariat must be maintained, the leading role of the CCP must be preserved, and CCP must remain faithful to Marxism-Leninism and the teachings of Mao Zedong.

The idea of the three representations, formulated in 2000 by Secretary-General, Jiang Zemin, became a new component of the reform theory. This idea means that the Chinese Communist Party represents the interests of advanced productive forces, advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the Chinese people.

By the coming of the millennium, it had become clear that the private sector was driving China's growth. However, the party elite and propaganda remained ideologically hostile to capitalist forces at home and abroad. Jiang Zemin resolved the contradiction by adopting the idea of a new evolution of communism in 2002, supplementing the theory of reform, which also allowed capitalists to join the Party. An idea was needed to frame the Party's unbroken and hegemonic leadership. However, this should not paralyze modernization and would not reverse the reform process. In other words, it would drive reforms further.

Meanwhile, the idea of the three representations has been expanded with a scientific development approach, which according to the CCP's view, includes the aspirations of sustainable development, social welfare, and a harmoniously developing socialist society. Former Secretary-General Hu Jintao developed this theory.¹

¹ Editorial, "History of the Chinese Communist Party," *Liberty, the weekly newspaper of the Hungarian Workers Party XVI (XXIII)*, no. 26 (3 July 2021), https://hetila.punk.hu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/2021_26_szam.pdf. – in Hungarian.

By taking the ever-changing reform theory as a starting point, President and General Secretary Xi Jinping formulated the “Two Centenary Goals.” The first declared goal is to achieve a “moderately successful society in all respects,” which Xi hoped to accomplish in 2021 during the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. The second goal is to achieve a successful, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious socialist country,² which he timed to coincide with the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Market mechanisms and private property have gained much ground in China since the late 1970s, unlike in any other socialist country. However, both the market and private ownership have their limits: state ownership has been maintained in key sectors (the banking sector being the most important) and state redistribution, guided by political logic, regularly overrides the logic of the market.³

The Impact of Administrative Reforms on Modernizing Management

After the death of Mao Zedong in the late 1970s, the Chinese public administration underwent a series of deeper reforms that enabled it to become a facilitator rather than a hindrance to development. The main elements of these reforms were accountability and the promotion of competition. Since the 1980s, the evaluation of local party functionaries and bureaucrats has been linked to achieving economic goals. Moreover, their political fate and salaries would be maintained only if the goals were achieved. The internal evaluation system led to accountability, and the system of numerical targets and financial incentives led to competition and creative solutions. This system made the bureaucracy interested in promoting progress and required the administration to engage with the public and businesses and experiment relatively freely with reform.

One of the best ways to get ahead is still through the Party and the bureaucracy. There is already a lot of competition for positions at the lowest levels, and only the best can get into the Party's top ranks and the bureaucracy. For instance, the Chinese administrative entrance exams are notoriously difficult.

At the lowest municipal level (within limits), the institution of elections has been introduced: the leadership of the lowest local government bodies (controlled by the state party) is elected by direct ballot. The members of organs of the other levels of power are delegated by the “people's assemblies” of the level below – the provincial people's assembly by the county people's assemblies, the national people's assembly (highest legislature body) by the provincial people's

² Balla Soma, “The Next Possible Ruler of the World: Xi Jinping's China,” *Qubit*, March 29, 2019, <https://qubit.hu/2019/03/29/a-vilag-kovetkezo-lehetseges-ura-hszi-csinping-kinaja>. – in Hungarian.

³ Iván Szelényi, “What Kind of System Was Communism?” *Economy and Society*, December 2016, <https://ujegyenloseg.hu/milyen-rendszer-volt-a-kommunizmus/>. – in Hungarian.

assemblies. Partly for this reason, proponents of the Chinese political system often claim that meritocracy extends to the top leadership. Only those who have climbed the donkey's ladder can be members of the central organs of power.⁴

Local leaders communicate with people and listen to them. Middle managers, selected from among local leaders, carry out their work based on top-down guidance and experience and are responsible for maintaining economic development and political stability. The best middle managers with decades of political and administrative experience will be members of top management.

The competent leader makes important decisions, and power is exercised by those who have already demonstrated their experience in leadership. Proponents say that this system is much more stable and effective than democracy, which they claim has been captured by populists and large-scale industrial lobby groups and has consistently resulted in crises.

Western and Chinese Leadership Models in the Non-military Sectors

Western Leadership Model

In the recent past, Western leadership theories concentrated on the following elements: profit, vision, human relations, and strategic-level planning. At the same time, workers were considered an impersonal factor of production. Leadership theories emphasized achieving goals and maintaining control. However, recent approaches already see the importance of respecting employees, valuing their work, and developing their careers.

Chinese Leadership Model

China has created a special system of meritocracy known as "selection and election." Under this system, leaders are selected at the end of a complex process based on performance and employee support. This process includes so-called background checks, public opinion polls, internal performance and personality assessments, and the actual selection of leaders. This system is consistent with the Confucian tradition of meritocracy.

Confucianism is a specific tradition of ethical and leadership thinking. It is essentially the supremacy of ethics and virtue over anything else. Ethical or virtuous behavior is a characteristic of employees, leaders, senior managers, and high-ranking officials alike. This ancient philosophy is alive in Chinese leadership theory and attaches great importance to employees' personal development and ethical conduct. In China, managers are expected to place ethical considerations above the pursuit of profit. Other important elements of Chinese leadership theory are: encouraging employees, leading by example, equality, simple living, harmony with nature, and others.

⁴ Editorial, "What Makes the Illiberal Model State Work?" *Index* May 17, 2019, https://index.hu/kulfold/2019/05/17/kina_demokracia_meritokracia_hsz_i_csin-ping-politikai_rendszer_hatekonyabb/.

The Chinese implicit theory on leadership differentiates four traits:

1. Personal Morality (it refers to the principles and rules individuals live by and believe to be morally right and sound)
2. Goal Efficiency (it targets to achieve more output for each unit of input, and it has many variations, including goals for productivity, time management, economic efficiency, and resource efficiency)
3. Interpersonal Competence (which is about being good at recognizing and interpreting your own emotions and thoughts that takes both confidence and humility)
4. Versatility (the ability to adapt or be adapted to many different functions or activities).

As King and Wei point out, "The Chinese workplaces had evolved concepts of leadership by integrating methods from Western management approaches, through education abroad and being exposed to Western organizations in China. This does not necessarily mean that the fundamental values underlying Chinese leadership principles have changed." Yet, the Chinese leaders are adopting more *scientific* management approaches (for example, focusing on efficiency, elimination of waste, standardization, and process automation).⁵

A Comparison of the Western and Chinese Non-military Leadership Models

The only common element of leadership between the two cultures is the pursuit of economic efficiency. However, there is a difference in this impact on the relationship between managers and employees. The Chinese approach emphasizes the importance of the individual contribution of employees to the achievement of economic objectives, while Western management still sees employees as impersonal inputs to the production of economic benefits. Western leadership theories are changing and increasingly emphasize the human and ethical factors of leadership. This approach resembles the incorporation of traditional Chinese values such as incorruptibility, shame, and morality. The growing global emphasis on human rights is also contributing to the spread of this approach. At the same time, convergence does not mean that the two cultures already have the same leadership principles. However, Western and Chinese environments accept a wider range of leadership skills and principles as effective.

King and Wei further state that

The convergence of leadership principles between Western and Chinese cultures will ultimately improve the effectiveness and efficiency of leaders and businesses across both cultures. Chinese businesses will benefit from

⁵ Peter King and Zhang Wei, "Chinese and Western Leadership Models: A Literature Review," *Journal of Management Research* (Macrothink Institute) 6, no. 2 (2014), <https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/jmr/article/view/4927>.

an increased focus on efficiency and innovation, while Western businesses will benefit from improved labor relations and organizational commitment.⁶

Chinese leaders appear to be adopting Western leadership principles they deem useful but continue to place great emphasis on traditional Chinese values. Western culture can be better prepared to build closer ties with China if we understand and appreciate these values. When a Westerner leads a team of Chinese employees (or vice versa), knowing the similarities and differences in the leadership principles of the two cultures, the leader can develop a desirable, effective leadership style.

The Impact of Civilian Leadership Theories on the Development of Military Leadership

The PLA discusses the value of intangible leadership qualities and methods that are not typically associated with the military. Examples include charismatic leadership, institutional leadership, leadership from behind, flexible leadership, and cross-cultural leadership. However, there is no evidence that the PLA is systematically seeking to implement these concepts across the armed forces.⁷

Some noteworthy non-military leadership models that the Chinese military leadership believes can influence modern military leadership are briefly outlined below.

Charismatic Leadership

There are two proven leadership styles that military leaders can adapt to keep the military working: Transactional and Transformational leadership styles. The third one is the Charismatic leadership style, though it is believed to be part of the Transformational style.

Transactional leadership is a style whereby the commanders use rewards and punishments to make the soldiers (military personnel) comply with the orders. Charismatic leadership is a style whereby the commanders inspire and motivate soldiers using their talents. In return, the soldiers offer an extraordinary trust, eventually leading to voluntary compliance with commanders' defined mission without considering a reward or fearing a punishment. Transformational leadership, which is an extension of the Charismatic leadership style, is a style whereby the commanders inspire, motivate, influence, and stimulate the soldiers to an extremely high level to the extent of building extraordinary trust and belief between the two sides towards the common goals.⁸

⁶ King and Wei, "Chinese and Western Leadership Models."

⁷ Roderick Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders," *The Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs (JIPA)* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2020): 135-145, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Aug/31/2002488091/-1/-1/1/LEE.PDF>.

⁸ Hamad B. Hamad, "Transformational Leadership Theory: Why Military Leaders Are More Charismatic and Transformational?" *International Journal on Leadership* 3, no. 1 (April 2015): 1-8, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2921153>.

Institutional Leadership

The institutional leaders play a leading role in reforming the institution, shaping its vision, and facilitating the structural changes needed to implement reforms on a large scale. The US Army assigns about half of its military executives to the direct leadership of institutional activities, confirming the importance of the institutional Army to the Army as a whole. The Army assigns only a quarter of its military executives to lead what is presumably its core activity – the Army operating force itself.

The institutional Army generates different products. It starts by creating the operating force itself, defining its structure and doctrine, and choosing the weapon systems and materiel. An additional function is defining the skills needed to use weapons and technology to execute its doctrine, procuring or creating the weapon systems and skills to operate them, sustaining these systems and skills, and continually refreshing these outputs as the evolution of threats, budget, and technology environment warrant changes. To create this output, the institutional Army essentially exists before the operating force and always anticipates what it will look like in the future.⁹

Regarding the training of institutional military leaders, the Institutional Army must change from strict reliance on task-based, input-focused ways to incorporating skills-based, outcome-focused ways to develop agile and adaptive leaders to face the challenges of the current and future environments. Developing agile and adaptive leaders with the cognitive, interpersonal, and cultural skills to be adaptive in complex tactical and strategic environments and who are critical thinkers is instrumental to the Army's successful conduct of full spectrum operations in the 21st Century.¹⁰

Leading from Behind

Leading from the front means demonstrating your leadership skills directly on the front line. Many commanders believe they can only demand their troops do what they can do themselves. This approach strengthens relationships with subordinates and builds respect and trust. However, it is not always possible to lead from the front in large organizations. Thus, in this case, leadership from behind is used. Leading from behind requires good judgment, strong delegation skills, and a hands-on approach. The aim is to ensure that the subordinate military unit can continue its combat activities. In addition, the ability to lead from behind also means knowing when to support those fighting at the front without feeling

⁹ Frank Camm, Cynthia R. Cook, Ralph Masi, and Anny Wong, "The Institutional Army and Its Place in the U.S. Army," in *What the Army Needs to Know to Align Its Operational and Institutional Activities* (RAND Corporation, 2021), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG530.html>.

¹⁰ Scott King, "Changing the 'Ways' of the Institutional Army's Leader Development Strategy" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2011): <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA547379.pdf>.

a sense of failure. Leading from the front or behind depends on the circumstances, the individual, the military unit, and the type of military organization.¹¹

Effective leadership and command of military forces require knowing what is better, keeping up-to-date with the combat operations in your area of responsibility which is away from the line of contact with the enemy, or personally leading the fight in a section of the line of contact in the area of responsibility. This dilemma has accompanied the history of warfare. Once he had briefed his trusted lieutenants, Hannibal usually joined his Celtic contingent to ensure discipline in its ranks, dressed in a common soldier's armor so as not to be marked by the Romans. Yet, he was recognizable enough to his own Celts. Julius Caesar preferred to run his battles from the rear; however, he was quick to draw his sword and lead from the front in moments of crisis. Genghiz Khan had worked out a chain of command among his hordes and preferred to stay in the rear to survey the sprawling battlefield and delegate the details to trusted subordinates.¹²

Flexible Leadership

Flexible leadership is a theory that emphasizes the need to influence key determinants of financial performance for a company: efficiency, innovative adaptation, and human capital. So why are the elements of flexible leadership theory important for the military? The best explanation is the concept of fighting power, where efficiency, innovative adaptation, and human capital are crucial.

Fighting power expresses how successfully a military force operates on the battlefield once it has engaged with the enemy. Fighting power stands for the importance of learning and adaptation and the need to harmonize effectiveness (the quality of being able to achieve a certain desired result) with efficiency (the capacity to produce a certain desired result with a minimum expenditure of resources). Being effective and efficient at the same time roughly means doing the right things right, or at least doing the right things better or faster than the enemy. This way, we can successfully combine science and the art of war. Taking effectiveness and efficiency into account also helps us better address those human attributes that eventually can turn technological weakness into an exploitable advantage in war.¹³

¹¹ Editorial, "Lead from the Front, or Lead from Behind?" *Pure Blue Ocean*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.pureblueocean.com/my-product/lead-from-the-front-or-lead-from-behind/>.

¹² Jon Guttman, "Did Generals Really Lead from the Front?" *HistoryNet*, October 2, 2021, <https://www.historynet.com/did-generals-really-lead-from-the-front.htm>.

¹³ Zoltán Jobbagy, "The Efficiency Aspect of Military Effectiveness," *Militaire Spectator* 178, no. 10 (National University of Public Service of Hungary, January 2009), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/216155927_The_Efficiency_Aspect_of_Military_Effectiveness.

Cross-cultural Leadership

“Cross-cultural leadership is the way to understand leaders who work in the newly globalized market. Cross-cultural leadership involves the ability to influence and motivate people’s attitudes and behaviors in the global community to reach a common organizational goal.”¹⁴

Military operations also require military leaders to develop and maintain relationships with individuals and communities whose cultural backgrounds differ from their own. The army seeks to ensure this through language and country awareness training. This training develops the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and build relationships with the population of a particular area. However, complex operations require a broader range of skills that army leaders in any cultural environment can successfully apply. To achieve this capability, cultural and psychological training will be required in addition to linguistic and community or country awareness training.

Current Situation in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army

In the past few years, the People’s Republic of China has made a huge leap in the country’s rearmament. A robust military infrastructure has been built virtually from scratch using the latest technology. Richard Bitzinger, a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) in Singapore, identifies three key reasons for China’s dramatic breakthrough in defense building. First, Beijing introduced a new model of defense industry management, making it more “market-based.” Several positions have been downsized, production chains consolidated, and many conglomerates were broken up into smaller companies forced to compete with each other for government orders and export contracts. Secondly, Beijing has in recent years emphasized deepening military-civilian integration, actively exploiting developments in the military-industrial sector and encouraging military factories to commercialize their respective products. Thirdly, the biggest effect was multiple increases in the military budget. Chinese enterprises have been able to attract the best university graduates, invest in research and development, and test new types of equipment.¹⁵

In military development, the focus is on innovation, improving scientific and technological capabilities, and actively using the latest scientific and technological advances in defense reform. By 2035, the PLA should “strengthen the combat capabilities of strategic and new types of forces, establish a high level of strategic

¹⁴ Editorial, “Cross-Cultural Leadership,” *TechnoFunc*, 2020, www.technofunc.com/index.php/leadership-skills-2/leadership-styles/item/cross-cultural-leadership.

¹⁵ Mikhail Korostikov, Lubov Krasheninnikova, and Vasilii Lemutov, “The Whole Chinese Rath – What the Army Is and Who Should Be Worried of It?” *Kommersant*, July 5, 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4012699>.

deterrence and complex systems to conduct combined operations and joint warfare.”¹⁶

The current phase of military technology development relies on three key building blocks: unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence, and the use of “big data.” In these areas, China already possesses the know-how to deploy against the “most likely adversary,” the United States.¹⁷

Views on Contemporary Conflicts

The PLA often uses the term “informatization.” It is a term that characterizes the development of a modern military that must be able to operate in a cyber environment. In addition, it appears quite frequently in the founding documents of the Chinese leadership. To a certain extent, it is similar to the concept of network-centric warfare adopted by the US military, according to which the military must use advanced information technology and communication systems to achieve operational superiority over the enemy.

In 2015, China’s leaders revised guidelines on the types of wars that PLA units should be capable of waging. The revised document states that China’s Armed Forces should be prepared to wage “local information wars and to achieve unconditional victories in them.” Special emphasis has been placed on the guidelines on naval operations. In addition, China’s army strategy documents stress the increasing importance of offensive air operations, long-range mobile wars, and space and cyber warfare. It follows from all this that China plans to wage future wars mainly beyond its borders and engage in naval conflicts.¹⁸

Main Directions of the Reform of the Armed Forces of China

In the course of the ongoing reforms, the Chinese Armed Forces are to undergo significant changes. It will no longer be based in seven military regions, as it was previously, but will be organized into five theaters of military activities with five joint commands. Beijing has determined this structure by the strategic importance of geographic regions along China’s borders where the PLA has to be ready to combat to ensure national security.¹⁹

The reform, which began in 2016, primarily affected the PLA’s command and control system. Instead of four headquarters—General Staff HQ, Logistics Directorate General HQ, Political Directorate General HQ, and Weapons Directorate HQ—fifteen compact departments were established, each of which focuses on a

¹⁶ Sergey Nesterov, “Innovative Development – The Way of Military Construction,” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, March 17, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/innovatsionnoe-razvitie-put-voennogo-stroitelstva/>.

¹⁷ Korostikov, Krashennnikova, and Lemutov, “The Whole Chinese Rath.”

¹⁸ Vladimir Ivanov, “China’s Military Might Subjected to Comprehensive Analysis – US Military Intelligence Worries about the Rising Ambitions of China,” *Independent Military Review*, January 25, 2019, https://nvo.ng.ru/realty/2019-01-25/1_1031_china.html.

¹⁹ Ivanov, “China’s Military Might Subjected to Comprehensive Analysis.”

different area and reports to the Central Military Commission (CMC). The reform has also affected the structure of China's armed forces. China's PLA has incorporated a new service, the Strategic Support Troops. There is little information about its objectives and tasks. It has been announced that the Strategic Support Troops will engage in intelligence, information warfare, cyber attacks, and electronic countermeasures.²⁰

"The Chinese Combat Hackers are an integral part of the PLA's Strategic Support Force (namely, the Network Management Systems Command). The best-known hacking units of the PLA: Cyber intelligence unit 61398 with a focus on North America; Unit 61486 (Putter Panda), the PLA's famous cyber-intelligence unit. Units 61786 and 61565 tasked with technical intelligence activities against the former Soviet Union."²¹

The plan for reforming the command and control system of the Chinese Armed Forces establishes two clear lines of command and control of the troops under the auspices of the Central Military Commission. The commanders of the Armed Forces' Services are given command and control responsibilities of their troops, and the headquarters of the joint forces in the theaters of military operations are authorized to conduct operations in their areas of responsibility, which had not been clearly defined until that time. One of the main differences between the new control system of the PRC Armed Forces from the previous one is the absence of the need to create special commands in wartime. Such a command and control structure of the armed forces theoretically allows China to launch operations very quickly.

Chinese leaders continue to prioritize upgrading the C4ISR system, which includes systems for command, control, communications, computing, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. This approach to the development of these systems is a response to the trends in the transformation of the forms and methods of waging modern wars, which assigns main importance to the decision-making processes, as well as the exchange and processing of information. The PLA leaders search for ways to develop the technological capabilities of the troops and their organizational structure to manage joint operations on near and distant battlefields using the most advanced weapons systems.

Reforms to technologically improve C4ISR systems are critical to reducing decision-making time and improving decision-making efficiency by ensuring reliable communications with fixed and mobile command posts. The PRC Armed Forces are adopting the most modern automated command and control systems (ACCS) in the form of Integrated Command Platform (ICP), which are in service

²⁰ Sergey Polunin, "China's Armed Forces: History, Structure, Armament," *Military Arms*, October 24, 2018, <https://militaryarms.ru/armii-mira/vooruzhennye-sily-kitaya/>.

²¹ Korostikov, Krashenninnikova, and Lemutov, "The Whole Chinese Rath."

with smaller units of the Armed Forces echelons. Using the ICP allows for establishing reliable communication between the command posts of armed forces' services, which is necessary for conducting joint operations.²²

The People's Liberation Army of China has practically restored its role in the country's political life and a positive image that was somewhat tarnished after the 1979 Tiananmen events. Today it is one of the most important institutions designed not only to ensure China's external security but also as an instrument of power on which it relies to maintain internal political stability. Moreover, the significance of both of its functions increases from year to year.²³

Chinese Ideas on Modern Military Leadership

The Situation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Concerning the Good Military Leader and Military Leadership

The preparation of future commanders and other military leaders is planned by using special methods to appoint desirable officer candidates and by training them in a rigorous program of professional military education focused on military issues and technical knowledge, as well as new skills development. The PLA can expect its efforts to pay off between 2035 and 2050.

Three complicating factors have a significant impact on PLA leadership and the training of a new generation of officers:

1. PLA military leaders operate within the collective leadership mechanism of the Chinese Communist Party. This makes it difficult to find direct analogies with other leadership concepts.
2. In the last ten years, senior officers have often been promoted not based on merit. Therefore, it can be assumed that not all senior military leaders have the competencies required for military leadership in the 21st Century.
3. PLA career paths to date emphasize the depth of knowledge rather than breadth of knowledge. (Breadth of knowledge covers the full range of subject matter knowledge. Depth of learning refers to the extent to which each subject area is studied.)

Party, Collective, and Dual Leadership. The real leadership of the PLA comes entirely from the CCP and its first secretary. Consequently, the PLA operates within the broader ideology of the CCP, which sees unified leadership and central authority as key elements of its philosophy. In a sense, the PLA can be seen as the militant wing of a centralized ideology. Within this centralized leadership mechanism, the PLA exercises a form of collective leadership known as the military-political dual leadership system. In this system, the unit commander and the

²² Ivanov, "China's Military Might Subjected to Comprehensive Analysis."

²³ Konstantin Siroyezhkin, "The Military in the Top Leadership of the CCP," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 30, 2013, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/05/30/ru-pub-51827>.

unit political officer serve as equal partners. Their joint responsibility is to issue orders, direct the lower levels and supervise the day-to-day work of the unit. The political officer and the unit commander are jointly responsible for the leadership of their unit's party committee and usually serve as secretary and deputy secretary of the party committee, respectively. The unit's Party committee, of which the unit's political officer and the unit commander are members, and several other unit officers, has the power in the unit's command and control mechanism. This embodies the overall leadership of the CCP over the PLA, as these committees are the official decision-making bodies of all PLA units. Decisions within a unit Party committee are made through democratic centralism, where each committee member may voice opinions and vote on a decision, but once the committee makes a decision, it is the responsibility of all committee members to support that policy. In the event of a time-sensitive combat situation, the unit commander is permitted to make a unilateral decision. However, the unit Party committee still shares collective responsibility for that individual decision.

This system is in contrast to the 1980s practice in the former socialist countries, where the political officer could not interfere with the commander's explicit military decisions, and the commander or the political officer could not be the secretary or deputy secretary of the local party organization. Therefore, in my judgment, the current dual military and political leadership system in the Chinese People's Army requires further research.

Corruption in the Military and Its Impact on Leadership. The arrests of the vice-chair of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2014 and two CMC members in 2017 on corruption charges are a much bigger problem within the PLA than many experts believe. President Xi's anti-corruption campaign has involved hundreds of PLA generals and other senior officers, many of whom were responsible for staff appointments and promotions. Since the CMC must approve the promotion of all senior officers, it is assumed that most of the generals promoted between 2002 and at least 2012 paid for their promotion. Although a full price list is not available, according to state media and unofficial press reports, promotion to lieutenant general costs about USD 1.4 million, and a promotion to major general costs about USD 700 000. Lower-ranking officers also had to pay for their promotions so that future generals could finance their promotions.²⁴

The result was a system that promoted officers to the rank of general on the payment of a fixed amount of money, rather than based on knowledge, expertise, and competence. However, some officers of truly great ability still managed to obtain the rank of general without paying.

Lacking Breadth of Experience. PLA officers during their career could not get service experience in different branches of the armed forces. They served almost exclusively in the same branch until they reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel. Before 2016, the PLA did not have multi-service organizations, and

²⁴ Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders."

thus officers did not have the opportunity to gain experience in planning, conducting, or leading joint operations. They could get inter-service assignments, where an officer from one service would serve in another, but that happened rarely. “This lack in career diversity results in exceptional depth in knowledge but little in the way of breadth. While this is advantageous in the early part of a career, it becomes a major handicap later in the same career.”²⁵

Qualities of a Good Military Leader in the Chinese People’s Army

The PLA regularly talks about shortcomings, weaknesses, and deficiencies within the force, many of which are related to people rather than technical systems. The most frequently discussed shortcomings are the inability to analyze the situation and understand the intentions of higher levels of command, to decide on a course of action, deploy forces purposefully and effectively, and deal with unforeseen situations.

That leads to weaknesses in adapting to circumstances, ability to command and coordinate, operate weapon systems, direct operations, and organize effective training. Overall, there are deficiencies in leaders’ ability to fight modern wars and command modern combat at all levels.

The PLA discusses the desirable qualities that leaders should possess:

1. *Political loyalty*: the PLA considers politics to be an integral part of its identity and tradition. PLA commanders must always put ideological and political development first in the performance of their official duties. This means believing in communism, serving the people, and stressing the Party’s absolute leadership on all issues.
2. *Strategic awareness*: military leaders should fully understand where and how their actions fit into the overall operational strategy.
3. *Special skills*: commanders must have the skills to determine the interplay of different factors.
4. *Sufficient foresight*: commanders should have sufficient foresight to understand how an operational situation will evolve and how actions will follow from each other.
5. *The ability to conduct independent operations*: commanders should have some ability to conduct operations without direct superior command based on their understanding of the situation.
6. The ability to understand the meaning of *informationist* force: the PLA moves towards becoming an *informationist* force where force effectiveness is determined by:
 - the extent to which the force is networked,
 - the extent to which it has access to information,
 - how and to what extent it can process information.

²⁵ Lee, “Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders.”

7. *Skilled in military affairs*: PLA commanders must have the necessary skills to lead combat operations. (Due to the corruption experienced in the top command of the armed forces in the last 10-15 years, the PLA is essentially forced to resume the development of these necessary military skills among senior commanders. Skills and knowledge that are seen as prerequisites for advancement among senior officers in NATO countries—understanding joint operations, integrating the art of war with new technical capabilities, and gaining information superiority—often need to be developed and taught now to senior PLA leaders.²⁶)
8. *Adaptability*: commanders must be able to react to new circumstances, develop innovative ideas, and apply new methods. Specifically, leaders are expected to learn new methods and military developments from other countries, incorporate future technologies that have not yet been introduced into everyday practice, and be more creative. There is also a strong emphasis on finding reasonably independent-minded officers willing to undertake independent research and initiatives.
9. *Appropriate military culture*: PLA leaders must follow the set of intellectual requirements, achievements, and norms that the PLA collectively considers canonical. The PLA does not want leaders who serve only for the paycheck. Instead, it needs leaders passionate about military affairs and the PLA's heritage. That means hiring officers who have an active interest in the art of war, combat leadership, the latest military achievements, international and national military literature, and the PLA's past achievements.²⁷

Many of these desirable leadership requirements are new in PLA, as is the systematic application of mechanisms to promote such leadership qualities. While the PLA is relatively opaque regarding ongoing efforts to develop the armed forces, leadership development within the PLA is more transparent and can be divided into two processes. First, the PLA selects the officer candidates it considers optimal. Then it trains them according to fairly strict requirements.

The PLA currently uses the Myers-Briggs personality type indicator to filter certain personality types. The Myers-Briggs theory considers four basic dimensions to be important in information processing and decision-making behavior and classifies people into the following pairs: Introvert (I) – Extrovert (E), Sensing (S) – Intuitive (N), Thinking (T) – Feeling (F), Judging (J) – Perceiving (P).

In the introvert-extrovert dimension, one can be defined as a solitary or sociable personality. As far as the sensing and intuitive type are concerned, the sensing personality focuses on the concrete, perceptible phenomena of the world, while the intuitive focus on the connections within phenomena. In the thinking-feeling personality pairing, the feeling type accounts for their feelings,

²⁶ Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders."

²⁷ Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders."

while the thinking relies on logical reasoning. In the case of the judging-perceiving type, the judging person likes things to be categorized and makes decisions quickly, while the perceiving person rejects clarity, takes all aspects into account when making a decision, but moves slowly towards making a decision.

Candidates of the INFP (introverted, intuitive, feeling, and perceiving) type will be selected immediately, while those assessed as ENFP (extroverted, intuitive, feeling, perceiving), INTJ (introverted, intuitive, thinking, judging), or ISTP (introverted, sensing, thinking, perceiving) require additional screening. The objective of this personality filtering is that the PLA tries to filter out certain undesirable personalities. The INFP is the desired type.

It seems that the main purpose of the PLA's professional military education (PME) system is to develop the skills needed to lead combat activities at different levels and of different types. There is no indication that the PLA PME system aims to develop new habits of mind, critical thinking, or intellectual integrity.

PLA's PME requirements focus on training officers to plan, conduct and lead combat operations at the tactical and then operational levels. PME requirements can be met by attending any military academic institution. There are also some opportunities for officers to attend higher-quality civilian institutions. Senior officers (major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel) attend a series of multi-month courses at military academies covering single-service and then combined services tactics. Officers that will be assigned to larger headquarters will attend special courses on staff work.

The conditions of the training courses leading to an academic degree and the required reading reflect the desire to develop combat leadership skills. Most academic degrees are military and focus on current issues in military science, strategy, tactics, and operations. The required readings deal exclusively with military strategy, operations, and tactics.

The PLA is making a determined effort to accelerate the development of the desired qualities in the current generation of military leaders. The expectation is that by removing corrupt officers, rigorously testing, and modernizing the military education system, the current generation of military leaders will be able to provide a solid foundation for training and educating the next generation of commanders. However, a complete generational change in the PLA leadership is likely to be needed for a tangible, substantial improvement in the quality of senior military leaders. Knowing the general career path of PLA officers, we can estimate how long this may take.

In terms of senior leadership generation change, the starting point for the PLA is roughly 2017. When the PLA's anti-corruption efforts achieved their desired result, the PLA changed its command and control structure to enable the organization to conduct joint operations and modernized its PME system to shape a new generation of military talent. As a result, the new officers entering the PLA are more likely to get promoted on merit rather than money, have broader career experience, and undergo much more rigorous academic training. Based on the usual career paths for PLA officers, the new generation of officers

would reach their first higher command positions around 2035 and their highest command positions around 2050.

Otherwise, 2035 and 2050 are the broader benchmarks for the overall modernization of the PLA. According to the PRC's 2019 Defense White Paper, the PLA is expected to complete the modernization of national defense and the army by 2035 and transform its armed forces into a world-class force by the mid-21st Century.²⁸

Conclusions

Characteristics of the New Generation of War

The First Generation War was characterized by an orderly battlefield, creating a culture of order in state armies. Second-generation war relied on centrally directed artillery fire, carefully coordinated with infantry, cavalry, and air force to destroy the enemy. Third-generation warfare or maneuver warfare, developed by the German army during the Second World War, relied less on firepower and more on maneuver speed and tempo. In fourth-generation warfare, there are unlikely to be definable battlefields or fronts. In addition, the civil-military distinction may disappear. The fourth-generation war will occur in a complex arena of low-intensity conflict, using tactics/techniques of previous generations of war, across the whole spectrum of political, social, economic, and military systems (networks), with national, international, and non-categorizable actors, or a mix of actors.

The Military Leader of the 21st Century

The 21st-century environment is characterized by rapid organizational change. Leaders need to become versatile, flexible, adaptable, and innovative to remain effective in the new millennium. The hierarchical leadership patterns of the past are not suited to dealing with global complexity, rapid change, interdependence, and multiple challenges. In the information age, future leaders will act as facilitators, coaches, and teachers. Collaborative leadership seems to be the best solution in the current situation. Collective action is based on a shared vision, ownership, mutual values, and respect.

The military leader of the 21st Century is capable of managing uncomfortable situations and large amounts of information. Moreover, he is technically skilled, able to find creative solutions to complex challenges, and able to connect with the locals of the theater of military operations. While the military leadership remains formally hierarchical in terms of responsibility and accountability, in practice, it becomes more collective. As information is necessary to conduct ever more complex military operations successfully, the strategic environment requires a collaborative senior leader who makes decisions jointly and quickly, with

²⁸ Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders."

partial involvement of subordinates, and provides real-time, concrete, direct input. Commanders and staff must trust subordinates and decentralize their military structure accordingly. Information technology is crucial to leadership. However, it can only help if leaders are willing to use it. Leaders must consider the limitations of information technology and the dangers of over-reliance on computers. The lack of understanding leads to technophobia, in which natural resistance to change stifles creativity and innovation.

Today's Dominant Military Leadership Concept Is Mission-oriented Leadership

It seems that in the future, decentralized mission-oriented leadership will be the leadership philosophy in the military. On the other hand, command-oriented leadership would only be given space in exceptional and justified cases. The essence of mission-oriented military leadership is that only a framework goal is set for subordinates in the tasking process, while the path to that goal is not designated. In areas better known to well-prepared subordinates, the supervisor leaves the decision to them.

This delegation of decision-making power favors the subordinates. It develops their autonomy, motivation, and initiative and increases their chances of survival in difficult combat situations. The autonomous decisions of subordinates are crucial for the speed of military operations. Time is one of the three factors (force, space, time) that fundamentally determine the success of military operations in a war situation. In the wars of the future, the territorial scope of military activities will increase significantly as military technology develops, while the time to react to enemy action will be greatly reduced. The time factor will become even more important because of the sharp, rapid, and unpredictable changes in situations, the limited forces available, and the maneuvering military in large operational areas.

A much-discussed feature of mission-oriented leadership is that it accepts, in exceptional situations, the failure to comply with a given order to achieve a goal, to achieve the goal in another way because of a changed situation, or to modify the goal based on its assessment of the changed situation. These features are completely alien to the command-oriented approach to leadership.

The spirit of mission orientation should be reflected in the training and education of soldiers and the relationship between the commander and his subordinates. The main conditions for mission-oriented leadership could be summarized as follows:

- A highly trained command staff based on uniform principles and rules
- Subordinates who are confident in themselves, capable of thinking, deciding and acting independently
- Mutual trust between commander and subordinate based on mutual respect and effective performance
- Well-functioning internal communication, open and honest human relations between commanders and subordinates

- Unambiguous intent of commanders.²⁹

PLA Is Considering the Development and Introduction of Mission-oriented Leadership

Despite shortcomings, weaknesses, deficiencies, and complicating factors, the PLA is considering developing and introducing mission-oriented leadership. Good military leaders in PLA should have sufficient foresight to understand how an operational situation will evolve and how actions will follow one another. Moreover, they should be able to conduct operations without direct superior command based on their understanding of the situation. They need to align with the unique collective Party-based leadership where the Party Committee of the unit (the political officer, the unit commander, and other unit officers are members) has power in any PLA unit's command and control mechanism. Finally, the PLA is interested in incorporating Western leadership methods not typically associated with the military, such as charismatic leadership, institutional leadership, leadership from behind, and flexible and cross-cultural leadership, in the armed forces' reform.

Closing Remarks

With continued economic development, the People's Republic of China has made significant steps in arming the country over the past few years. A vast military infrastructure has been built by using the latest technology. The PLA is successfully strengthening the combat capabilities of its strategic and new types of forces as planned, establishing a high level of strategic deterrence and complex systems for conducting joint and combined operations. In the process, it applies principles of mission-oriented military leadership and Western non-military leadership principles, taking into account Chinese characteristics.

The People's Liberation Army has restored its role in the political life of the country and its tarnished image after the Tiananmen Square events of 1979. Today, it is one of the most important institutions not only to guarantee China's external security but also as an instrument of power on which the country's leadership relies to maintain internal political stability.

As for the future of China, socio-economic reforms will certainly continue. China's development is likely to be a two-way street. In other words, the middle class and prosperity would slowly emerge in the big cities and on the coast, while the rural Chinese would remain relatively poor for some time.

There is no chance of changing the social system in China. The ideals and practices of liberal democracy are alien to Chinese culture. There is no example of democratic governance in Chinese history, and the Chinese cultural tradition does not show any interest in protecting individuals through control of state

²⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Péter Lippai, "The Possibilities and Limitations of Mission-Oriented Leadership," *Journal of the Joint Forces Command*, http://bocskaikonyvtar.hu/images/emedi/LippaiP_kuldetesoriantalt_vez.pdf.

power. Most Chinese support CCP and believe that the Party has demanded less and given them more with the reforms in recent decades.

Unlike the other communist parties that gained power with foreign help, the Chinese Communist Party is indigenous and has national roots in China. Therefore, it is unlikely to collapse due to mass discontent as it happened with the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. More likely, the Party will continue transforming the country and itself in the coming years to continue its rule. However, it is conceivable that this transformation will eventually lead to a top-down revolution that will gradually break down the foundations of socialism. At least, that is the hope of most experts.

Yet, I am preoccupied with other questions and doubts, e.g., can socialism be reformed or can continuous scientific-technical and economic development be ensured within the framework of socialism?

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