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Operational implications of his personality and attitudes toward authority.

THE CHINESE AS AGENT

Robert M. Leviness

The assessment of an agent's character and personality, essential for handling him successfully and evaluating his production, is of special significance with respect to Chinese agents because of certain distinctive Chinese traits. The great majority of the Chinese exhibit the same general personality pattern, and it is one that makes using them as agents difficult. They belong to a type that underneath the surface is withdrawn and self-contained, that is not sensitive to diffuse or subtle outside stimuli, and that psychologically insulates itself against the outer world. By nature and by tradition the Chinese rely on a structured, institutionalized society to which they give their loyalty as long as it protects and sustains them in their outward life and leaves their inner independence unimpaired. An understanding of these characteristics that make up the general type will help a case officer find the best ways to handle them when they manifest themselves in an individual.

During the past ten years a considerable effort has been made to accumulate data on the Chinese psychological make-up. Samples have been taken from a variety of sources—graduate students in Hong Kong, other refugees from mainland China, defectors from the Communists, Chinese Nationalist soldiers and aviators, overseas Chinese in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, agents from the mainland, dock coolies from Hong Kong, Hong Kong white collar workers, and American Chinese from California, New York, and Hawaii. The sample remains less than systematic; it is heavy with people who for one reason or another could not adapt to mainland Chinese life. Nevertheless, the primary characteristics of those from the different groups, as revealed under intensive psychological assessment, show a uniformity of pattern that is possibly quite representative of the general Chinese population. This pattern is consistent with and clarifies the old stereotype of the "inscrutable" Chinese imbued with qualities of patience, politeness, clannishness, fatalism, stoicism, cruelty, xeno-

phobia, deviousness, frugality, and industriousness. The ultimate effect on it of lifelong Communist conditioning cannot now be gauged.

The Chinese Pattern

A characteristic common to all was found to be a kind of psychological isolation. This is not externally evident, and it seems paradoxical applied to the superficially gregarious Chinese. But underneath, they showed themselves to be of a type to whom psychological security and independence is of fundamental importance and who earn this by following the discipline and rituals prescribed by their protectors—whatever authority they are subject to—with great conformity in order to avoid prying attention. A very unusual percentage, almost 75%, had test patterns associated with a schizoid personality structure, that manifested by people who routinize their social behavior in order to free themselves for highly private and personalized mental activity. As long as there is strong external authority to guide and direct such people, they can be efficient and productive; but once that authority is destroyed or removed, they become splintered and chaotic.

These kinds of people exist in every culture. What is significant is their extraordinary prevalence in the Chinese sample. An original tendency toward this type may have been amplified by the crowded and unsettled milieu of prewar and wartime China, not conducive to much social intimacy or sensitivity. Genuinely outgoing, socializing people were met with disillusionment, distress, and distraction; and the easiest way to escape was by inward retreat. It is, of course, impossible to determine whether the environment made them take that course or whether those who inherently tended to take it survived.

In general, then, the Chinese have the underlying tendency to withdraw into their own thoughts. They can engage actively in the bustle of the workaday world without really putting themselves into it. They feel no need to share their inner experiences or overcome their self-centeredness. This internalizing tendency explains their apparent patience in the face of privation. It is a consequence of detachment from their surroundings and preoccupation with their thoughts; they are at bottom independent of their environment as long as conditions for survival exist. Thus they are not bothered by living in a grubby neighborhood, and they are hardened to the suffering of others. They exhibit a marked lack of urgency, participating superficially in life's hustle for the sake of inner solitude and tranquillity.

The Chinese ideal is not a world of social interaction and personal relationships but one so organized and ordered that little initiative is needed to meet the requirements of social living. The more structured the external behavior, the freer their inner activity. The ritualizing of external life in order to avoid real commitment is manifest in their emphasis on rote learning as opposed to comprehension and in a stylization of behavior in social situations. The famed Chinese politeness does not come from consideration for others; it is a ceremoniousness which, like other formalizing, serves to maintain appearances while at the same time warding off involving relationships. Another manifestation is extreme conventionality with avoidance and dislike of individual self-expression. A corollary is a literal-mindedness and an emphasis on recorded precedent which stifle innovation and imagination.

Status, Duty, and the Family

These psychological characteristics are reinforced by the Chinese tradition of formal structured life. In the old society that grew out of life in the villages, everyone had a certain station; he was always the superior of some people and the inferior of others. The old were superior to the young, males to females, fathers to sons, etc. Though one's station in life might change with time, no one was exempt from classification in the social hierarchy.

Status was not merely ceremonial; it carried with it obligations. It was the duty of inferiors to defer to the wishes of superiors both inside and outside the family. Inferiors were obligated to work for their superiors, to seek and accept guidance from them, to pay taxes, perhaps to perform military service. Superiors for their part had the obligation to protect their inferiors and insure their livelihood, to give advice and decide conflicting interests, and to support community interests. The relationship was thus one of mutual obligation for mutual benefit, and no one had the right to act individually.

Mutual obligations began at home in the family. Each member had to receive family approval for any undertaking. No one could take it upon himself to go into a business without family consultation and consent. He could not even travel to a distant place without family discussion and approval. Though many of the old restrictions on individual decision began to be loosened even before the Communists achieved power (most notably on individual selection of a mate), a strong sense of family solidarity still persists today.

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Chinese Agent

Family members will not, as a case in point, lightly implicate each other in risky ventures such as espionage. Recently an otherwise cooperative agent concealed for seven months information about a disaffected brother who worked in an electronics plant in Peking. In other cases, some agents have felt compelled to report their agent roles to family members.

Family relationships and obligations are thus sometimes inimical to agent operations, but they can also be helpful, say when a member living abroad agrees to cooperate in the defection of one inside China who is able to travel abroad. Unfortunately, the Chinese Communists are also aware of this possibility and seldom send people with relatives abroad to staff their foreign missions.¹

On the debit side, again, mutual obligations sometimes lead to nepotism in operations. An agent may be under considerable pressure to place relatives on the payroll, especially if he has an enabling overt position, as, say, in a publishing enterprise we support. Even if our vigilance should prevent his hiring them, he may yield to their demands for financial assistance and so have to pad his accounts or otherwise misuse our funds. Awareness of this hazard will be useful in policing operations.

Authority

Outside the family, the ultimate superior is the regime, which must live up to what is expected of it as a protective authority in the same way a father must. A most striking example of these expectations was found in examining the cases of 21 defectors from Communist China on whom the data was sufficient to determine motivation. Almost all of these defectors felt that the regime had let them down or was about to.

The long tradition of authoritarian government in China, together with their kind of family life, has accustomed the Chinese to rely on those above them not only for protection and means of livelihood but to tell them what to do. That the modern Chinese who may consciously disavow the old attitudes probably continues unconsciously to act on them was illustrated in a recent defector who had lived under Communism since he was nine years old. Commenting on his adjustment to life in America, the defector said he had found it most difficult to make decisions about what he wanted to do. He wished others

¹ See "Chinese Defections Overseas," by Henry Flocks, in *Studies* IX 4, p. 19 ff.

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would have told him what they wanted him to do rather than ask him about his own preferences.

No doubt the Communists have found this acceptance of authority useful for many of their purposes, but the stifling effect it exercises on creativity, imagination, improvisation, and innovation has surely hampered them as well. For us an inference should be that in directing an agent unaccustomed to exercising initiative and inclined toward literal-mindedness, we should be explicitly detailed, leaving nothing to his poor imagination. In general the Chinese are the kind of people who need "How To" manuals.

Many other consequences of significance to our operations stem from these attitudes toward authority. In seeking recruitments and defections, first of all, we are attempting to substitute ourselves as the target's protective authority. To succeed in this effort we must impress the target with our ability to perform the role and meet its obligations. Rather than pose as an unprepossessing student, businessman, or journalist, we should make it clear whenever possible that we represent the United States Government. Our manner, though gracious, should be slightly aloof. Yet we should avoid arrogance, for the Communists have sensitized the people to what one defector termed "feudal manners."

The Chinese defector does not expect, or want, to be treated as an equal. The egalitarian tendency in American society and the freedom it permits do not hold the attraction for him that one might suppose; one escapee from the mainland said these qualities of American society were positively frightening. He prefers a society more secure, less equal or free, and therefore less competitive. Though he may expect us to talk in terms of freedom, individual dignity, virtue, etc., he will really be listening for a clear statement of our expectations of him, risks he may have to take, and specifics of our ability to protect him. He will want to know what compensation he will receive, what training he may expect, where he may eventually be resettled, what his prospects for earning his living are, and other practical information. We should be prepared to give him this.

On the other hand, we should also think in terms of the obligations of the defector to us and capitalize on the Chinese disposition to fall in with the desires of constituted authority. If he respects the person directing him and clearly recognizes him as a representative of authority, he will do his best to meet our expectations of him, even to the point of going back, if feasible, and working for us in place.

Fatalism

Of some bearing on the Chinese acceptance of our authority may be his traditional "fatalism." In a recent letter from inside China to a relative abroad, a Chinese complained bitterly about his lot under the Communists, only to conclude that nothing he or anyone else could do would change his circumstances. "Communist rule is new," he said. "It has not yet run its course, so no matter how many people oppose it, it will not collapse."

In dynastic times the Chinese believed that a dynasty fell because Heaven had withdrawn the emperor's mandate. Crop failures, floods, droughts, pestilence, and banditry were not seen as causes contributing to the collapse but as signs of Heaven's displeasure. The rebellion that finally toppled the emperor succeeded only because it was in harmony with the forces of destiny. Clever men would always be alert for the right time to switch their support to a new dynasty.

We should be able to capitalize on this traditional concern with reading the trends of destiny in our efforts to promote defection among Chinese Communist officials abroad. In both the propaganda we direct against these officials and in agent contact, we should try when possible to illustrate that the tides of change are turning against the Communists. When we reach the point of open approach to a target, we might suggest that he break off his identification with the losing regime and live outside of China where he could improve his skills while waiting for the trend to turn. This concept might provide a satisfactory rationalization for an official who would otherwise consider defection an unpardonable departure from accepted rules of behavior.

Face and Fabrication

The imperatives of fulfilling his role in his structured society lead the Chinese to an extreme reluctance to admit failure in discharging an obligation. (The Communist institution of criticism and self-criticism, clashing head-on with this trait, can have prevailed only by virtue of Chinese submissiveness to requirements and conformism with group behavior.) His face-saving may reach the point, if he cannot plead that a changed situation invalidates the obligation, of trying to make it appear that he has discharged it when in fact he has not.

The bizarre sequel of such an attempted deception by a Chinese agent some years ago was the agent's blaming his case officer for his having fabricated several intelligence reports. "If he had not

constantly pressured me to produce," he said, "I would not have had to fabricate." It was of vast importance for him to avoid the shame of not having lived up to his role as an agent, and he felt no guilt at having used deception to this end. Though Chinese ethics teaches honesty and personal rectitude, the shame of failure may seem a greater threat to one's integrity.

This incident need not have happened. The case officer had failed to realize that in merely asking the agent to undertake a task he had accorded him a certain standing that the agent would seek to protect. It would endanger it to express doubt about being successful. If the case officer had fully discussed the proposition, explicitly considering the possibility of failure, the agent could have qualified his commitment; he would not have felt pushed out on a limb.

The case officer also probably missed important later clues. Before resorting to fabrication, the agent likely procrastinated in the hope that he would not be pressured further. Or perhaps he attempted to convince the case officer that unexpected difficulties (difficulties that did not reflect on his own abilities, of course) had arisen, only to have them brushed aside. When the warnings were ignored, he had no way out except to fabricate.

Levels of Reward

The Chinese agent should not be over-rewarded or often rewarded in advance. He will take bad pay and ill treatment when he has no alternative, but he becomes increasingly ritualistic and less productive as he feels more and more secure. He aims to progress to a status in which he no longer needs to earn security because he already has attained it. A single month's salary in advance may do no harm, but regular advance rewards will not necessarily instill a corresponding obligation. To get the most out of his agent, the case officer should use a sliding scale of rewards on which each point is set at the lowest level acceptable to the Chinese.

Case officer's and agent's understanding about compensation must be identical. The Chinese may expect certain benefits not explicitly agreed upon and feel wronged if he does not get them. He may regard, and prefer, a small salary as condition for increased benefits covering sickness and old age. He expects the case officer, as protective authority, to play the role of benefactor in time of need, and if the case officer refuses he cannot count on the Chinese to make any special effort for him.

The Chinese expects rewards for loyalty and seniority even though he is doing the same type of work as always and doing it less efficiently. This explains the large Chinese bureaucracy and the army's retention of large numbers of men in their fifties and sixties. The government feels responsible for providing for them. It cannot pension them economically or find them employment elsewhere. If it suddenly renegeed on this obligation, not only those affected but the Chinese public at large would react in anger. Explicit agreements on all these matters will help avoid later complaints and poor morale.

Recap

The Chinese personality pattern and the legacy of traditional Chinese society (between which there is presumably some causal relationship) combine to make the Chinese as a target—notably the Chinese official abroad—difficult to dislodge from his quid-pro-quo loyalties to regime and family. The principal wedge is a failure in the quid pro quo. These same factors require that, once recruited, he be handled with a tight-reined paternalism, with special regard to his immediate and permanent security, with a close eye to the limits of his capability, and with authoritative direction in detail. The case officer should of course not assume that any particular Chinese individual will fit this pattern precisely or at all—and continued conditioning under the Communist regime may modify it significantly—but it does embody the dominant observed tendencies and should be useful as a frame of reference against which to gauge the man at hand.