After Comradeship: Personal Relations in China Since the Cultural Revolution*

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The year 1985 marks the 20th anniversary of the publication in *The China Quarterly* of Ezra F. Vogel's classic article, "From friendship to comradeship: the change in personal relations in communist China."¹ The present article examines personal relations in China in the wake of the intervening two decades of Cultural Revolution (CR) and modernizing reforms. I will describe the major dimensions of personal relations in 1985 and offer a sociological explanation for them. My argument is that these relationships represent a re-emergence of certain traditional patterns as reshaped by both the CR and the current restructuring of state–society relations.

Vogel's Argument

In "From friendship to comradeship," Vogel argued that since 1949 the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had succeeded to a great extent in transforming the norms and behaviour of personal relations in China from being characterized by friendship to being characterized by comradeship. "Friendship" is a particularistic tie, where individuals do not treat all others equally, but rather have special friends in whom they can confide and to whom they can turn for help. They trust such people and enjoy bonds of personal commitment with them. By contrast, "Comradeship" is a universalistic morality in which all citizens are in important respects equal under the state, and gradations on the basis of status or degree of closeness cannot legitimately interfere with this equality.² Comradeship is characterized by helpfulness, civility and concern for others. "Helping" is more universalistic than the help one gives friends, and also translates in part into a willingness to criticize the shortcomings of others and so "help" them behave according to the norms of comradeship.

Vogel concluded that this transformation of values and behaviour had been achieved primarily through fear. The CCP raised the risks that private conversations and the sharing of information could be exposed and subject one to sanctions of varying severity. Feeling such confidences were not worth the risk, individuals withheld information, trust and commitment from others to protect both themselves and their friends. As the CCP penetrated and transformed society, risks became "almost

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omnipresent.” In addition, socialist transformation of the economy reduced the material basis for helping others and there was no private ethic to supplement the public one and thereby brace one’s commitment to friends. The Party’s objective in doing this was to remove threats to itself and to facilitate people of diverse backgrounds working together for the modernization or China. Through this process, the ethic, behaviour and goals of a small communist elite were extended to the population at large.3

From the vantage point of 1985, with our unprecedented access to Chinese society, and that nation’s own pervasive soul-searching about the past 35 years of socialist revolution, we could raise several questions about Vogel’s argument:

—Did the regime ever really penetrate society so deeply and transform personal relations, especially before the CR, or did it merely cause ritualized behaviour and little more than surface acquiescence to the comradeship ethic while friendship continued to thrive?4

—Were Party members themselves ever, or at least after Liberation, such paragons of the universalistic ethic of comradeship? The Hundred Flowers era stories of Liu Binyan and Wang Meng raise doubts.5

—Despite the placement of critical decisions in the hands of committees with revolving memberships, were their members above doing favours for their own and other’s clients?

—Were there sex-based differences?

—What is the demarcation line between “closer comrades” and friends?

Vogel’s objective was to describe and explain the ideal type (in both senses of the word) of relations in post-1949 China, and even if he erred in certain respects, his seminal essay tells us a great deal about the nature of real and ideal interpersonal relations on the eve of the CR. Little work has been done since then that attempts a comparable sweeping depiction of interpersonal relations at an aggregative society-wide level. Watson’s 1973 essay6 is now a period piece. Pusey’s and Meisner’s essays7 touch on the topic, but in the context of examining moral behaviour in China. Stover’s idiosyncratic book8 does not locate relations at any particular time (and

3. The Chinese term for comrade, tongzhi, means literally “common will,” implying that anyone called comrade shares in goals and values that supersede those of individuals.

4. Autobiographical accounts such as Robert Loh and Humphrey Evans, Escape From Red China (New York: Coward–McCann, 1962) and Tung Chi-ping and Humphrey Evans, The Thought Revolution (New York: Coward–McCann, 1966) stress the ritualization of public behaviour as a survival mechanism in the 1950s.


by so doing actually comes closer to the mark). Whyte and Parish\textsuperscript{9} offer the most sustained examination of relations in urban China. I am in basic agreement with them but take the data in a different direction.

Excellent research has appeared which examines personal relations at the micro level, in particular types of settings. These studies contrast the real with the ideal and implicitly suggest generalizations to society as a whole. The works of Blecher and White, Shirk and Walder are especially noteworthy.\textsuperscript{10}

My purpose in this article is, using Vogel as a starting point, to paint with broad strokes a picture of the dimensions of personal relations society-wide. I assume that no one individual could be characterized as solely exemplifying any one aspect and all of them cover degrees of purity. The type of behaviour and its intensity are responses to particular situational stimuli and individual personality, and we should expect a great deal of variance within and among individuals.

I will cite specific examples for purposes of illustration, but generally limit this article to setting out the categories and explaining them. Evidence comes from the official press,\textsuperscript{11} art and literature,\textsuperscript{12} and participant observation at two periods, 1979–80 and 1984.\textsuperscript{13}

**Dimensions of Personal Relations**

**Instrumentalism.** The pre-eminent characteristic of personal relations in China today is instrumentalism. The principle that underlies it is *guanxi*, which means connectedness or particularistic ties, but is best left untranslated.\textsuperscript{14} *Guanxi* is based on reciprocity, the traditional concept of *bao*,


11. The official P.R.C. press is an instrument used by the CCP. From 1976 and especially since the Party rectification campaign beginning in 1983, the reformist leaders utilized the media to expose their enemies and proffer their models, exaggerating both the nasty and the angelic. Recognizing this bias, the media are still a valuable source for understanding aspects of personal relations.


13. I was an exchange student at Fudan University in Shanghai from 1979–80 sponsored by the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the P.R.C., and also travelled extensively then and for two months in 1984. Interviewees and other Chinese I came into contact with must remain anonymous, although I have not altered details.

14. A recent study of *guanxi* is J. Bruce Jacobs, *Local Politics in a Rural Chinese Cultural Setting: A Field Study of Mazu Township, Taiwan* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1980). A forthcoming dissertation by Mayfair Yang for the anthropology department, University of California, Berkeley, also deals with the subject of *guanxi* in the P.R.C. in depth.
where one does favours for others as “social investments,” clearly expecting something in return.15 It is not a cold exchange, but is intertwined with renqing (human feelings, empathy) which raises it to a higher plane, and may also be based on a degree of ganqing (affect).16

The technique of establishing and manipulating guanxi is guanxixue,17 literally, the study or art of guanxi. People exist in a guanxiwang18 or network of guanxi. Those individuals or units with whom they maintain a supply and demand relationship are guanxihu, literally, guanxi households.19 Guanxi is a power relationship as one’s control over a valued good or access to it gives power over others, but a guanxiwang itself is composed of both vertical and horizontal connections, thereby differing from the standard patron-client relation, although the latter is an example of it. Establishing guanxi requires a great deal of posturing and dissembling to make initial contact. One must invite the target to a meal or present a gift (qingke songli) or deliver an intangible favour to demonstrate sincerity and efficacy and thereby suggest future benefits from having guanxi with him. One gets face (mianzi) or status from showing he can get things done and the amount of face is in direct proportion to the size of one’s guanxiwang.20 Conversations abound with bragging about the extent of one’s guanxiwang and the ends it can be mobilized to serve.

16. Fried does not discuss guanxi (kuan-hsi). He defies ganqing (kan-ch’ing) as “the quality of the relationship between the parties,” varying in warmth and intensity, for the most part expressing “a relationship between two individuals who are not in precisely the same social plane . . . Kan-ch’ing is the primary institutionalized technique by which class differences are reduced between non-related persons . . . (I) differs from the state of friendship which, in many cases, makes a tacit assumption of equality.” Morton H. Fried, Fabric of Chinese Society (New York: Praeger, 1953), p. 103. Jean C. Oi, in “Communism and clientelism: rural politics in China,” World Politics, XXXVII(2) (January 1985), pp. 238–66, distinguishes guanxi as “a somewhat casual and nonpermanent alliance. Ganqing comes closer to describing a clientelist type of relationship” (p. 252). I think ganqing refers more to the quality of a relationship, not the relationship itself. In China, I never heard the term ganqing used for the pervasive instrumental relationship I describe here.
18. See, for example, “Guanxiwang’xia de angzang jiaoyi” (“Dirty exchange in a guanxiwang”), Renmin ribao (People’s Daily) (hereafter, RMRB), 6 March 1984, p. 5. A case of a cadre who “broke through guanxiwang and made it through the relatives and friends pass” is illustrated in “Xianyidangwei shuji Lin Lairong binggong banshi ling ren jingpei” (“The impartial work of county Party secretary Lin Lairong earns respect”), RMRB, 12 December 1983, p. 1. “Networking” has positive connotations in western societies, but guanxi is seen by the Chinese as pathological. I am indebted to William Liu for pointing this out.
19. An analysis of how a legitimate co-ordinating shop became a guanxihu in Fushun is presented in RMRB, 18 July 1981, p. 3.
20. I was present at a purely social get-together when, on a first meeting, a man presented a written list of “requests” (in pseudo-classical Chinese) to a minor official in a very obsequious manner. He obviously had nothing at all to offer in return. A Party cadre also present told me afterwards that the petitioner had humiliated himself and lost face by his inept performance.
Guanxi is an informal, unofficial relationship utilized to get things done, from simple tasks to major life choices. Thus, for successful string-pulling (la guanxi) one's network ideally should contain everyone from store clerks who control scarce commodities, to cadres who have final say over such things as housing allotments, residence permits, job assignments and political evaluations needed for Youth League or Party membership. Not surprisingly, a major locus and target for instrumental relations is China's gargantuan bureaucracy, where it frequently assumes the form of outright corruption.

From official press accounts, it would appear that corruption in cadredom is positively rampant. Especially since the autumn of 1983, the media have been filled with detailed lurid accounts of cadre malfeasance and a general "unhealthy tendency" (buzheng zhi feng). Of course, such exposés are a weapon of the Deng Xiaoping reformers to discredit their opponents. Reliance on such accounts to estimate the pervasiveness of corruption would be risky. Nevertheless, its existence is certain and, significantly, as attested by interviews and conversations, the masses perceive the bureaucracy as riddled with corruption.

Cadre corruption ranges from the pervasive going through the back door (zou houmen) to accomplish a minor or major task; to demanding gifts and bribes; to abuse of office, such as converting public goods like an automobile to private use or to chauffeur one's wife and children.

**Notes:**

21. Oi (note 16, above) uses gao guanxi to mean using connections, but in my experience, this is a rather crude term, meaning to engage in an illicit relationship, often sexual.
23. The Chinese press has examples virtually daily. A nei bu compendium to be used in the attack against economic crimes is Jingji Fanzui Anli Pouxi (Dissection of Cases of Economic Crimes), No. 5 of the series Falü Guwen (Legal Adviser), published in Shanghai by Huadong Zhengfa Xueyuan (October 1982). The second stage of the Party rectification beginning in 1985 took corrupt cadres as a primary target. Buzheng zhi feng is also the title of a hilarious xiangsheng (comedian's dialogue) that was enormously popular in 1979. The protagonist, Wannengjiao (All-Purpose Glue), calls to mind Sgt. Bilko in his manipulation of a guanxiwang that seems to include everyone in Tianjin. My translation of it will appear in John Burns and Stanley Rosen (eds), Policy Conflicts in Contemporary China: A Documentary Survey, with Analysis (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1985).
24. A sampling: "Piping yixie danwei yong gongkuan qingke songli" ("Criticize some units using public funds to hold feasts and send gifts"), RMRB, 12 April 1984, p. 4 – for building his own house with state and collective monies and materials. "Heilongjiang Shengwei yansu chachu Hashida fenfangzi di cuowu" ("Heilongjiang provincial Party committee investigates and deals with errors in distributing housing at Harbin Teacher's University"), RMRB, 7 April 1984, p. 3 where cadres took over housing designated for intellectuals. "Jiuzheng yiquan mousi nongxu zuojiadibuzhengzhifeng" ("Correct the unhealthy tendency of abusing power for private gain and fraud"), RMRB, 22 March 1984, p. 4, where army officers in Beijing engaged in irregularities over a test.
around town, or gathering the best benefits such as housing for one’s own family; to actual commission of a crime, such as smuggling.26

In any society where goods – necessities and luxuries – are scarce, but especially in a socialist society where most goods are bureaucratically distributed, connections are vital for access to them. The reliance on instrumental personal relations based on guanxi to accomplish tasks in China also reveals a lack of respect for law, regulations, and for the concept of everyone being equally subject to universal standards of law and morality. As the people see it, guanxi is the basis for personal relations because it works; playing by the rules takes much longer – if it ever bears fruit – and is something only the very naïve or inept would resort to. Thus, the crime is not to use guanxi; the crime is to be caught. Whereas individuals brag about their own facility with guanxi, the masses absolutely revel in gossip about corruption among high cadres (gaoji ganbu) and their pampered offspring (gaogan zidi).27 Dramas such as What If I Were Real, and Power Vs. Law; comedians’ dialogues such as “The tyrant bids farewell to his mistress”; reportage such as Liu Binyan’s “People or monsters?”; poetry such as “General, you must not do this”; and fiction such as Diadong (Transfer) which expose the place of guanxi throughout society, especially the bureaucracy, are enormously popular, and not infrequently suppressed.28

Commoditization. With the enlivening of the economy, enlargement of the market, abundance of commodities and expansion in disposable income, Chinese are increasingly relating to each other directly through a cash nexus. The provision of goods and services is being freed from bureaucratic control and turned over to collective and individual enterprises responding to market signals. This is especially the case in the countryside, where the Agricultural Responsibility System has revived and reinforced the household as an economic unit and peasants are diversifying into multifold endeavours, all with eyes on money (xiang qian kan).29

26. An extremely serious case was Zhang Yingshou of Guangzhou who, in league with a Hong Kong businessman, defrauded the state of U.S.$ 2.97 million (RMRB, 8 April 1984, p. 1). Zhang was executed. Another case involved Zhao Guoxuan, deputy director of the Hebi Municipal Communist Youth League youth work department who was executed for rape and hooliganism. He tortured his wife and raped other women. He was the son of the city’s former deputy mayor and current vice-chairman of the Municipal People’s Congress and was protected by other cadres who owed their careers to his father (RMRB, 10 March 1984, p. 4).

27. The Hong Kong media publish such reports. For instance, see Lo Ping, “Beixing fangyu” (“Talking about my trip north”), in Zheng ming, No. 74 (December 1983), pp. 12–13 about Ye Jianying’s son’s involvement in smuggling gold from Hong Kong.

28. These appear in English in the works cited above in note 12, except for “People or monsters?” which is in Perry Link (ed.), People or Monsters? (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983); Power vs. Law which is in Chinese Literature, No. 6 (1980), pp. 31–91; and Diaodong which has not been translated but is in Qingming, No. 2 (1979), pp. 58–95.

29. A pun of the homonymous phrase where qian means “forward.” Detailed study of conditions in the countryside can be found in Thomas P. Bernstein, “Reforming China’s agriculture,” a paper prepared for the conference “To reform the Chinese political order,” 18–23 June 1984, Harwichport, Mass; and Anita Chan and Jonathan Unger, “Grey and black: the hidden economy of rural China,” Pacific Affairs, 55(3) (Fall 1982), pp. 452–71. Qi (above, note 16) presents an excellent analysis of conditions on the eve of reform, with
In addition to such direct cash exchanges, marriage is increasingly treated as a commoditized relationship. Perhaps as a tacit acknowledgement of this, the weekly journal Market inaugurated a “Spouse” column in 1981. The demands prospective brides make to their potential husbands have inflated along with the recent economic boom. Only a few years ago, it was “the three things that go around” (watch, bicycle, sewing machine) that were required. Then it became a certain number of “legs,” referring to pieces of furniture. Recently, in punnish fashion, the demands include quanji quanya, which does not mean a feast with a whole chicken and duck but all of the popular ji or machines (tape recorder, radio, television, refrigerator and washing machine) and things made of ya, duck down, such as bedclothes. Then there is hailukong which does not mean “navy, army, air force,” but rather haiwai guanxi (overseas connections), liushiyuan (a wage of at least 60 renminbi a month) and kong fangzi (an available living space).

In Quanzhou, Fujian, a pedicab driver trying to change his rmb. for waihuijuan (foreign exchange certificates which are worth at least 20 per cent more than rmb. and the only scrip accepted for imports) told me that he needed to amass 4,000 rmb. for his wedding. Top restaurants and even function halls in once off-limits hotels for foreigners are booked nightly with lavish wedding feasts, conspicuously demonstrating the value of the match.

In line with the theory of the unity of opposites, with the commoditization of marriage there is also an increase in divorces for economic reasons. According to Shehui (Sociology) magazine, the number of divorces nationwide doubled in 1981–82 over the previous period a year before, and in Shenyang, economic reasons accounted for 15 per cent of them, the second most common cause after rushing into marriage.

Another sign of the commoditization of relationships is the number of suits filed over the return of property confiscated during the CR and over
The proliferation of lawyers, law journals and legal advice columns in the press bears witness to an increase in disputes over money and property and a litigious approach to resolving them. The upsurge in crimes of property is also a form of commoditized relation. The restoration of a contract labour system has formalized the commoditized nature of relations between some individuals and their work units. The Agricultural Responsibility System (ARS) establishes contractual relationships between individuals, households or groups and the state. Under the work point system, family members were income-generating labour power; under the ARS, they have become fully commoditized.

As intellectuals are allowed to “moonlight,” they also enter into exchange relations beyond their research unit or university. Units have begun to pay a training fee (peixunfei) to universities or other units as part of the process of recruiting new blood.

Us and Them. Chinese are identified primarily by their work or study unit (danwei), which regulates a wide range of their daily activities, including contact with the larger society. Many danwei have their own residential quarters, day care, schools, hospitals and canteens. The largest ones are virtual company towns. Switching units – even transferring departments in a university – is extremely difficult, and even visiting a unit other than one’s own involves an elaborate procedure commencing with obtaining a chopped letter of introduction (jieshaoxin). The official structuring of society into all-encompassing danwei with attendant severe restrictions on occupational and geographical mobility thus limits the people with whom most Chinese will engage in more than superficial relations.

Nonetheless, beyond the danwei there is a resurgence throughout society of the importance of particularistic ties, distinguishing us from them (neiwai youbie, literally, “there is a difference between inner and outer”). These are based in the first instance on the family, but also on kinship, native region, schoolmates, faction, field army, etc. Such particularistic ties function as a valuable entrée for the establishment of guanxi to be used to other ends. In some areas, Party members have utilized that tie to form networks of “good ol’ boys” (laohaoren) to engage in corruption.

34. For example, see BR, No. 7 (13 February 1985), p. 23. In April 1985, the National People’s Congress standing committee considered a draft law protecting the inheritance of the means of production in addition to the means of subsistence. (“New law on business inheritance,” CD, 5 April 1985, p. 3.)

35. As of late November 1984, there were 860,000 workers with contracts to work in state and collectively owned enterprises (CD, 29 November 1984, p. 1). Most were urban school graduates or peasants (CD, 13 November 1984, p. 3).

36. The 13 March 1985 decision of the CCP Central Committee on the reform of the science and technology management system affirmed their right to moonlight and protected the ownership of intellectual property. See BR, No. 14 (8 April 1985), p. 20.


38. RMRB, 25 January 1984, p. 4 describes such a group formed by cadres of the water bureau system in Yuncheng, Shanxi.
The family remains the strongest primary relationship, especially in the countryside, where it is being strengthened as a production and consumption unit, so the sense of us against them is reinforced. I have been told that in some areas peasants are editing their lineage genealogies, a way of establishing boundaries and degrees of closeness of ties.

Another sign of the separation of us from them is the deplorable state of public morality and civic consciousness in China. The cut-throat competition for a seat on a bus, the anarchic manner of operating vehicles, the increase in the crime rate, and the notoriously indifferent-to-surdy service in stores are examples of how people relate to one another in impersonal or anonymous situations. The Chinese given a uniform and charged with keeping other Chinese out of places catering to foreigners or the local elite is an especially irritating practitioner of this manner of behaviour.39

Older Chinese may behave rudely, but they recognize it as wrong. They lament the decline in public civility – comradeship – that they claim existed in the 1950s, and that represented a major achievement of the new regime. Whether or not the 1950s were really such a halcyon era of civic consciousness is not as important as the fact that people today – even those who dislike the regime intensely – look back on them as such, especially contrasted to the present situation. At the other extreme, young Chinese are the worst perpetrators of public disorder and violent crime, but have little sense of right and wrong to plague their consciences.40 The demoralization caused by more than two decades of incessant campaigns, failure to achieve economic and social goals, wanton destruction of careers and individuals and the loss of original high ideals held out for the new society perhaps lead older Chinese to be more critical of social behaviour than is warranted. But this perception is itself very telling.

The effects of selfishness and poor moral training are even felt within the family. China’s much vaunted tradition of respect and care for the elderly has had to be formally enshrined in the 1980 Marriage Law, a sign that it needs shoring up.41 A film shown in 1984, Baiyangxia (Under the White Poplar), explored this theme through a young popular singer who is humiliated at having bumpkin peasant in-laws and mistreats them in order to drive them out of the house when her modern friends drop by. Not surprisingly, she receives quite a lesson in comradeship and care for the elderly by the end of the film.

Friendship. Friendship is still an important dimension of personal relations and Chinese greatly value the small circle of people they insist they can “talk about anything with” or “open their hearts to.” Fear that today’s confidences might provide fodder for criticism in future campaigns

39. An example of two such people getting a well-deserved come-uppance is related in “Rude pair launch service with smile,” CD, 3 April 1985, p. 3.
41. Xiao Song, “Protecting neglected old folk,” CD, 29 March 1984, p. 6 discusses this issue, taking off from the case of a mistreated elderly woman in Fengtai district, Beijing. A counter-example of grandsons fighting over who is lucky enough to care for grandma appeared in RMRB, 10 November 1984, p. 5.
still reinforces the caution with which Chinese approach most relationships. They contrast ties with their few close friends with social relations more generally which range from impersonality to avoidance, particularly of activists whom they fear might betray them to further their political ambitions.

But there is a popular perception that even friendship is tinged with instrumental considerations—“making friends out of self interest, disbanding when the benefit is exhausted” (yili xiangjiao, lijin jiaosan). Love is a subject of great moment, especially to young people, and even more so to those contemplating “making a friend,” that is, finding a spouse. Young people generally socialize with members of the same sex from school or work. There remains much social pressure against appearing in public with someone of the opposite sex, unless they are virtually engaged. So the process of “making a friend” usually goes on secretly until it can be subjected to public scrutiny. After reaching that stage, young couples are increasingly demonstrative in their display of affection, and premarital sex and pregnancy are more common. Extramarital affairs were behind one-fifth of divorces among couples under 35, according to a sample survey, another example of a more casual attitude towards sexual relations. Reaffirming the place of love in personal relations, the revived marriage law recognizes alienation of affection as grounds for divorce. Literary works deal more openly with the subject of love above and beyond the class love aggressively propounded in CR literature.

Comradeship. I do not wish to imply that comradeship is extinct in China. The neighbourliness, mutual aid and comradely concern that characterize comradeship among the masses at certain times and places is one of the distinct aspects of Chinese life. Walking city streets by day, one sees neighbours looking out for each other’s children and old folks; by night, they drop into each other’s homes to watch television, chat or compare infants. In rural areas, relations generally are even more informal as people have worked together, shared implements and gone into each other’s houses regularly.

There are examples of newly rich peasants who voluntarily contribute some of their wealth to society, funding schools, installing tap water, 

42. See Hershatter, “Making a friend,” note 30 above.
44. “Couples under 35 ‘more likely to divorce,’” CD, 8 April 1985, p. 1.
45. When I gave a friend a copy of Love Story in 1979 he exclaimed “We have no idea what love is or models of it.” A highly regarded 1984 film, Zai diantishang (On the Elevator) explores the nature of love. A Japanese soap opera Xueyi (Uncertain Blood), shown during the summer of 1984 and watched devotedly, moved audiences with its story of the love between a boy and a girl with leukaemia (of course, it is much more complicated than that). It even prompted a double suicide. (RMRB, 1 December 1984, p. 8.)
46. See Whyte and Parish, Urban Life, note 9, Chapter 11, especially pp. 336–40.
supporting the elderly and lending money to the needy.\textsuperscript{47} A 1984 film, *Shencai youdao (They Get Rich in Their Own Way)* depicts successful peasants assisting those less wealthy.

At the more rarified stratum of national models, the media are replete with encomia to the “new Lei Fens,” comrades to emulate in the 1980s. These include: Jiang Zhuying and Luo Jianfu, intellectuals who worked diligently despite terminal illness; Zhu Boru, the selfless soldier who assists old ladies in the railway station and brings criminals to his home to learn from his example; Zhang Haidi, the paraplegic who taught herself foreign languages and also helps others; and Zhang Hua, the army medical student who jumped into a nightsoil pit to rescue an old peasant who had fallen in and was himself overcome by the vapours.\textsuperscript{48}

**Explaining the Change in Personal Relations**

The dimensions of personal relations outlined above are quite different from those associated with the 1950s and early 1960s, and those touted under the “gang of four.” To explain the metamorphosis, it is necessary to examine the change in the material base and general moral and social contexts in which individuals interact and are socialized. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the CCP vigorously tried to transform individuals, their relations and the context of relations to create a new socialist man for the new socialist society. In the CR, using extreme, often violent means, the leftists pushed this transformative mission beyond previous limits. The CR viciously discredited many of the values and models of the first 17 years after Liberation, and left a deleterious economic, political and moral legacy for personal relations that is now in turn the target of rectification by the reformers. This combination and the resultant confusion have created the context and psychology for the types of relations described in the previous section.

**Effects of the Cultural Revolution.** The economic disarray caused by the CR brought about a shortage of necessary goods and services, to say nothing of consumer goods and luxury items. Under leftist influence, the leadership strove to eliminate all remnant bourgeois tendencies within individuals and to build a structure of strict surveillance and asceticism to ensure this. It attempted to extend bureaucratic control over production and allocation of goods and services and to restrict the collective and individual sectors. As a result, it became necessary to seek irregular channels to acquire a wide range of goods and services from food, clothing and bicycles to housing, medical care, residence permits and permission to


marry. So people of necessity relied on establishing guanxi with the cadres or others who could provide these things. This is of course a phenomenon endemic to all socialist societies, but I would contend that the extreme dislocations caused by the CR by removing most of the normal channels for provision of these things, exacerbated an already difficult situation.

Another aspect of the CR legacy on personal relations resulted from the effort to bring all aspects of life under CCP control (dang yao lingdao yiqie). More than at any other time since Liberation, the Party attempted to eliminate a private sphere and to dictate all decisions for individuals. CCP cadres, freed from even the nominal checks and balances provided by a separate state structure, had tremendous scope to act arbitrarily and without accountability. Despite ultra-leftist slogans about egalitarianism and cadres serving the masses, such a situation revived traditional deference and obsequiousness to authority. It also fuelled the necessity for citizens to cultivate good guanxi with these often uneducated former peasants who wielded such power over them, and it had another consequence as well. There was a constant tension as to what standards these despots would use to evaluate people, so those they controlled resorted to flattery and ritualized behaviour to at least appear to be abiding by the official Maoist precepts.

As one man explained to me, there was a distinct subtext to all interactions. An object of the proletarian dictatorship, he was especially sensitive to signals about what behaviour was expected of him – how to act (biaoxian) in any given situation. When he passed the leading cadre in his unit, the safest ploy was to recite the current slogan. “I knew I didn’t believe what I said,” the man informed me, “and the cadre knew I didn’t believe it either, and I knew he knew I didn’t believe it, but as long as I said it, it was sufficient to get me through the interaction.”

The CR reinforced hierarchy and a “new class” in China based on position in the Party and bureaucracy, the attendant access to perquisites and ability to pass on privileges to one’s children and relations in the absence of regularized procedures or career tracks. Arrogant and cocky about their power and position, some Party members insisted on being addressed by their official titles and people stopped calling one another “comrade.” In formal situations, the term is still used, such as “Comrade Gao’s speech was full of revolutionary fervour.” The term previously had been used to address strangers, clerks or people in menial jobs, but by the late 1970s at least, “comrade” had been replaced in these contexts by either the generic shifu (master, as in craftsman) or the more familiar lao (elder) and xiao (little): “Gao Shifu” to the clerk or gatekeeper; “Lao Gao” to a colleague or possibly someone of superior

50. Walder, “Organized dependence,” and Shirk, Competitive Comrades, note 10, discuss this in depth. Shirk proposes the term “virtuocracy” to describe systems which award “opportunities in part on the basis of political virtue” (p. 4). Walder stresses biaoxian, what might be called the presentation of self in everyday Chinese life.
rank; and "Xiao Gao" to the young apprentice. Close friends will address each other by their given name.

The CR also brought about an extreme breakdown in social order and law, as well as crippling the education system and the entire socialization process. With parents sent away, teachers under fire and schools in disarray, the normal primary agents of socialization were severely impaired. The general anarchy taught young people that "to rebel is justified," so they distrusted authority generally. The correct standards of behaviour and their exemplars from the early post-Liberation era were thoroughly criticized. But there was also a yawning gap between the officially propagated Maoist virtues and the lifestyle of their main proponents, a subject of much popular gossip, especially after the Lin Biao Affair almost completely discredited the leftist leaders. Taken together, these spawned a pervasive amorality, civil discourtesy and cynicism. Through practice, young people learned that guanxi was supreme law. To avoid being sent down to the countryside, many youths, or their parents, cultivated good guanxi with leaders at school or in the neighbourhood. After being sent down, youths established good guanxi with local leaders to facilitate being sent back as quickly as possible. The children of high cadres set the precedent for this, others followed suit. In countryside or city, as material reward was not tied to effort at one's official task, but did come through guanxi and Party membership, many people saw little need to obey rules and regulations or CCP exhortations.

Finally, the extreme and relentless politicization of all relationships, well beyond the campaigns of the 1950s, had two types of effect. On the one hand, deviants and targets of campaigns sought a "haven of friendship" to succour one another, strengthening the place of friendship. But on the other hand, with the winding down of turmoil and return to what passed for normalcy, colleagues and family members who had betrayed and physically assaulted one another found themselves back together in the same unit or household from which there was virtually no outward mobility possible. Tension and distrust in all relationships remained and, fearing a resurgence of politicized relationships in future campaigns, people became extremely cautious with one another, always holding back potentially damaging information (liu yudi). At the same time, they accumulated information on others as political capital to provide dividends in the next campaign. This was more intense and psychologically damaging than the fear Vogel discusses for the 1950s.

Current reforms. The multifaceted reforms begun since the late 1970s have, inter alia, attempted to redress the admitted wrongs of the CR, to eliminate the environment that engenders such unsavoury personal relations and to establish a new basis for interpersonal interaction. The CCP now proclaims that the fundamental task of socialism is to develop the productive forces. While continuing ideological education and

52. An excellent account of growing up in this environment is Liang Heng and Judith Shapiro, Son of the Revolution (New York: Knopf, 1983).
53. See Shirk, Competitive Comrades, note 10, especially Chapter 5.
54. This is well illustrated in "Kill the chickens to scare the monkeys," pp. 155–77, in B. Michael Frolic, Mao's People (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).
propagating ideal values, the battering-ram approach to personality transformation has been set aside.

Enlivening the economy, expanding the role of the market and of private entrepreneurship in city and countryside, raising wages and bonuses, stepping up the production of consumer goods and propagating a new consumerist ideology have provided the material and moral bases for the commoditization of relations, something the socialist transformation of the 1950s aimed to eradicate.

In industry, tying income to effort, reducing subsidies and smashing the iron rice bowl are making commoditized and instrumental relations necessary. Chinese society is becoming more atomized. The tight control of the unit and the small group and other institutions that enforced and monitored group conformity are being relaxed. It is now officially asserted that modernization requires a degree of individualization of consumption, life-style and thought. Decision-making is devolving from committees to individuals, creating more scope for personal responsibility. The legal system makes individuals more accountable for their actions without the excuses of class background or environment to fall back on. Economic growth also requires competition among individuals. All of these provide an ethical foundation and material substructure for this individualizing, privatizing trend.55

Perhaps the reversal of the once sacred process of collectivization of agriculture is the most dramatic change. While the rules of the ARS still prohibit sale of land to individuals, most other collective assets have been dispersed and peasants are purchasing trucks and light airplanes in addition to machinery and facilities for industrial enterprises. The ethos of a market system violates the most fundamental tenets of collective, comradely agriculture. Official encouragement of individual initiative in production and distribution propels this trend.56

The scaling down of the CCP's totalitarian aspirations, the continued scandals which only aggravate its still low prestige, the general alienation, especially among young people, and clumsy campaigns such as the drive against spiritual pollution, hamper the Party's attempts to institutionalize universalistic moral standards. Nor do they solve the problem of civil amorality. The CCP is still obviously in such disarray that people do not fear it so much anymore. The "omnipresent" fear which Vogel saw as key to transforming personal relations is perceptibly absent. The Party now seeks legitimacy by providing an improved material standard of living and eschews creating a new socialist man without such a foundation - more in line with Marx's teachings. The spiked boot is still around, to be sure, but as people have more control over their own lives and need not concern themselves with politics so much, they pay scant heed to Party calls for moral reform and adherence to law. Chinese are retreating back to their families for sustenance, tangible and emotional. They are withdrawing from public movements. The one-child family policy exacerbates this

55. For instance, see "The modern way of thinking," CD, 29 November 1984, p. 4; and "Educational reforms are aimed at stimulating creativity," CD, 24 November 1984, p. 4.
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Parents channel energy and emotion into bringing up one perfect child; in the meantime, many of the children are turning out to be selfish and spoiled monsters, a poor bet to exemplify comradeship in the next generation.

The emphasis on income tied to effort, productivity, efficiency and specialization is establishing new hierarchies, occupational and economic strata, as well as a division of labour that will reinforce instrumental relationships and result, in Durkheimian terms, in more organic solidarity in society.57

China's gender gap is widening as well. Women are no longer exhorted to do whatever men can. They are reminded that it is no shame to be a good housewife and mother. In the countryside, with men off working in cities, factories or in transport, women stay at home in the double bind of farmwork and housework, relating primarily to other women and less to the larger society.

What all of the above indicates is that China has re-established and is reinforcing the material basis and private ethic for relations based on instrumentalism, the cash nexus and particularistic commitment to family, friends and fellow Party members. The Chinese term for comrade, tongzhi, literally means "common will" or "ideal," but these trends indicate that the only common goal at present is individual wealth, everyone enjoying a "bit of prosperity" (xiao kang – a Confucian term), so there is little material foundation in existence or being established for an overarching, lofty common goal.

Trying to Re-establish the Base and Superstructure for Comradeship

This is not to say that CCP leaders are intent on doing this; far from it, they are displeased with the current state of personal relations and are engaged in a drive to remove the cause of what they see as unhealthy behaviour and to re-establish the basis of and standards for comradeship.

They firmly believe that increasing the production of necessities and consumer goods to end scarcity will obviate the need to engage in corruption and guanxi to get them.58 They are in effect legitimizing the underground or second economy which is endemic in Eastern Europe to help alleviate shortages, keep people busy in production, and, not incidentally, increase state revenues via taxes to redress persistent budget deficits. It will hardly remove commoditized relations but will bring them into the open, subject them to laws and make them easier to supervise. They also assert that attaining wealth through one's own efforts will make

57. Simple or segmental societies with a rudimentary division of labour are characterized by mechanical solidarity based on likeness and enforced by repressive law. As societies industrialize, roles are differentiated with a complex division of labour. They are characterized by organic and contractual solidarity. The place of the individual becomes greater and restitutive law dominates. See Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society (New York: Free Press, 1933), especially Chapter 6.

58. This is spelled out in the "Communique of the third plenum of the twelfth Central Committee." See BR, No. 44 (29 October 1984), pp. I-XVI.
bad people good. While "sheer asceticism" will not spark development, neither must "wanton self-interest" be allowed to run rampant, the China Youth News asserted. A middle path, balancing the quest for a more comfortable life with hard work to attain it, is the official programme.

Leaders hold that institutionalizing laws, regulations, procedures and accountability, plus decentralizing and diffusing power, replacing elderly uneducated peasant-origin cadres with youthful educated ones, and severely punishing offenders will also eliminate many of the structural and personal causes and opportunities for corruption and guanxi. Widely publicized trials and severe punishment of errant cadres and criminals demonstrate the commitment of the Party to cleaning up the system. Certainly it has lowered the crime rate and improved public order. In addition to raising the material standard of living, the CCP has in effect linked recovery of its pre-CR prestige with eliminating all unhealthy tendencies and re-establishing new forms of social relations in line with communist morality. An effective constitutional and legal structure, it asserts, will prevent the recurrence of CR-style campaigns and reduce the tensions in interpersonal relations.

In good Chinese fashion, the CCP uses education and exemplars of the new morality to get the message across. In addition to formal education in the tightened school system, the Party has published numerous hortatory works aimed primarily at the youth market, teaching the correct nature of love, friendship and comradeship. Love and friendship are no longer criticized as being detrimental to building socialism, but readers are instructed in the correct way to seek a mate and make friends. "Serve the people" is touted as the essence of comradeship, and mankind generally should be treated according to this principle, with the old warnings against being kind to class enemies toned down.

The eclectic officially-sponsored moral package is "spiritual civilization," characterized by such attributes as the 5 stresses, 4 beauties and 3 loves (wu jiang, simei, san reai). In the countryside, peasants build civility villages (wenmingcun) and every March has been designated as

59. Wang Bosen, "Shilun jingji gaige yu daode jinbu di guanxi" ("Tentative discussion of the relation between economic reforms and moral progress"), Wen Hui Bao, 23 July 1984, in Hsinhua Wenzhai, September 1984, pp. 21–24, refutes the claims that reforms will harm morality, arguing that the old morality must be eliminated in order to speed reforms. An example of a bad person who became good is the Uygur Tohuti, a bad egg in the CR, but, since becoming a 10,000 yuan household, a model peasant. (RMRB, 1 November 1984, p. 4.)


61. RMRB, 20 September 1984, p. 4 asserts China now has the lowest crime rate in the world.

62. A sampling: Liu Xinwu, et al., Rang women lai taolun aiqing (Let's Talk About Love) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1979); Lixiang, xuexi, aiqing (Ideals, Study, Love) (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1979); Chen Guanggan, Fu Shusong, Gingnian xiuyang zatan (Miscellaneous Talks on Youth Cultivation) (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1983).

63. Pang Shuqi, "Jiading ren jiu shi ren" ("Assuming people were just people"), Shehui, No. 3 (1983), pp. 39–42, describes the ideal form of personal relations.

64. These are: to stress decorum, manners, hygiene, discipline and morality; to beautify mind, language, behaviour and environment; to love the Party, motherland and socialism. The three were linked in 1983. See RMRB, 6 January 1983, p. 4, in FBIS, No. 008, 12 January 1983, pp. K4–5.
Civility and Courtesy Month (*Wenming Limao Yue*) to bring such ideals into practice from Zhongnanhai to the lowliest *hutong*.65

The Communist Youth League, along with the Women's Federation, has gone into the matchmaking business to remove the exchange component from marriage and to propagate a new ethic of simple wedding celebrations.

Extensive propaganda is given to selected "fine traditional values" (*chuantong meide*) such as respect for elders and teachers.66 The following authoritative catalogue of "new type social relations" is a good example of wishful thinking, a mirror for the real state of such relations.

New type social relations

in China find expression in solidarity, equality, friendship and mutual assistance in common struggle and common progress among all of China's nationalities, between the workers, peasants and intellectuals, the cadres and the masses, the army and the people, the army and the government, and among the people in general. Since the downfall of the Gang of Four in October 1976 and especially since the raising of the task of building a socialist spiritual civilization, the above-mentioned social relations have revived and developed step by step.67

*Conclusion: Tradition, Reform and Comradeship*

Twenty years ago, Vogel emphasized the success of the CCP in altering personal relations in China from friendship to comradeship, by working on individuals and their psychological and material environment. Fear and the socialization of production formed a key part in this.

Looking at the micro and macro levels in 1985, this article concluded that instrumentalism and commoditization had supplanted both friendship and comradeship as primary characteristics of personal relations. It located the causes of this situation in certain aspects of the CR and current development-orientated reforms.

The P.R.C. is a Leninist state established in 1949, but it grows out of millenia of continuous Chinese history. As members of society and as individuals, the mainland Chinese are caught in two historic streams. This fact, taken with the above conclusions, should stimulate further research along two lines which I can only suggest in this article. One line is: how these patterns of interaction are related to traditional Chinese behaviour; the other is how the P.R.C.'s experience differs from that of other Leninist societies.

In the process of delineating the dimensions of personal relations in contemporary China and considering illustrative material, I realized the

65. For a national model at achieving these lofty goals, Sanming city, Fujian, see *Jingshen wenming, dafang guangming* (*The Great Brightness of Spiritual Civilization*) (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 1983). Zuoyun county, Shanxi, has done a good job of building a civility village. "Zuoyun Xinfeng" ("New style in Zuoyun"), *RMRB*, 14 October 1984, p. 2.

66. Chen Guanggan and Fu Shusong, *Miscellaneous Talks*, note 51, in a chat called "Respect teachers and the elderly," pp. 66–71, stress fine traditional values and note that Mao Zedong himself emphasized respect for parents and elders and he loved his parents. Zhu De and Chen Yi are also cited as exemplary sons.

degree to which I seemed to be reiterating traits described in classic works such as Arthur Smith's *Chinese Characteristics.* These include: particularism; family and kin solidarity; reciprocity; lack of civic conscience; commoditization of marriage; hierarchies of age and sex; deference to authority; bureaucratic arrogance and corruption; ritualized interactions; and gentry philanthropy.

What is more, travelling among Chinese societies with diverse economic and political systems, such as the P.R.C., Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, the striking thing is not the difference but the similarity of personal interaction in spite of other variances. What we see then, in the P.R.C., is the strength of certain traditional patterns of behaviour despite a concerted assault on them dating back to the May 4th Movement.

In the capitalist Chinese societies, with the removal of the anti-commercial ideology and structure of traditional China, many of these patterns proved quite functional for rapid economic growth. Only as these societies have prospered materially and increased their intercourse with the west have some traditional patterns begun to evolve into something new.

Not allowing evolution to take its course, the founding fathers of the P.R.C. launched repeated attacks on feudalism, Confucianism, the four olds (ideology, thought, habits, customs), particularism and other traditional behaviours seen as harmful to socialist development. Yet, as shown above, many of them are very much alive. This can be traced to several causes. First, the Communist regime has yet to sustain one consistent set of values and exemplars to replace those handed down over the centuries. Second, it has not provided a material base to support the socialist values it touts. Third, the extreme and sustained breakdown in social order from the CR recreated the conditions that gave birth to many of China's fundamental behavioural norms back in the days of Confucius, and that have recurred frequently since. The old patterns, never eradicated, re-emerge strongly under such chaotic conditions and prove how functional they are for muddling through unless mobilized towards a particular goal. As long as nothing viable has appeared to supplant them, they will not go away.

At the micro level then, personal relations in China reveal the power of tradition. But do the current reforms at the macro level have any distinctive Chineseness, or are they part of an anticipated stage all Leninist systems pass through with predictable consequences for personal relations?

In an important and stimulating article, Kenneth Jowitt argued that in Leninist regimes

68. Arthur H. Smith, *Chinese Characteristics* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1970 (originally 1894)). In Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 221, the author writes: "A highly stylized society wherein the roles of individuals were thoroughly restricted by a body of simple yet ill-defined moral precepts, the empire was seriously hampered in its development, regardless of the noble intention behind these precepts."

one can identify at least three elite-designed core tasks and stages of development. The first is transformation of the old society; the second is consolidation of the revolutionary regime; the third and current task is inclusion: attempts by the party elite to expand the internal boundaries of the regime's political, productive, and decision-making systems, to integrate itself with the non-official (i.e., non-apparatchik) sectors of society rather than insulate itself from them.\textsuperscript{70}

In the Soviet Union and its neighbors, inclusion began in the 1960s. In China, it would seem to be underway now. But I would argue that the Chinese reforms and their social effects are significantly different. First, the CCP pursued transformative policies for society and individuals much longer and in more depth than in Eastern Europe, in many ways discrediting the whole process and its goals. Second, the CR erupted between the consolidation and inclusion phases, with the latter being undertaken under unparalleled conditions of disarray and loss of legitimacy. Third, although sharing elements such as a shift from a nepatrimonial to oligarchic leadership, political managers replacing political bureaucrats as the defining political actors, the rise of professionals as the Party's social base, manipulation over domination as the form of regime–society relationship, upgrading of legislative and representative organs, and emphasis on procedural norms\textsuperscript{71} – the Chinese seem to be going further in granting legitimacy to individualism and social autonomy. An important reason is the existence of successful modernizing East Asian societies which serve as China's referents. They present a challenge and threat to the CCP. Many Chinese have relatives in these and other places and their citizens now travel, invest and temporarily reside on Chinese soil, already penetrating the society to a degree beyond the East European experience.

What we see in China is a distinctive interaction between revived traditional behaviour at the interpersonal level and a crisis in the regime at the macro level. To a certain degree, it resembles the "Soviet neotraditionalism" referred to in another important essay by Professor Jowitt.\textsuperscript{72} But here again, I believe that, for the near and mid-term at least, in addition to the loss of organizational integrity by the CCP and emergence of political capitalism, the expanding scope for entrepreneurial activity by native Chinese and those from abroad will, if sustained, have more profound effects on the structure of society and on personal relations. None of these trends augurs well for comradeship.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid. p. 69.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid. pp. 75–82.