

## **China and the US: Comparing Leadership Selection**

**James Petras**

The US selection of leaders has virtually nothing to do with democratic processes and outcomes. It is useful to contrast this with the process in China. In most instances, China's selection of leaders is far more meritocratic, successful and performance-based. In both the US and China, the process lacks transparency.

### **US Economic, Political and Cultural Leadership**

The selection of US economic, political and cultural leaders is based on several undemocratic procedures.

1. Inheritance via family ties
2. Personal access to credit and financing
3. Political patronage
4. Lobby and elite sale and purchase of office and favors
5. Media links
6. Political repression and manipulation of electoral procedures
7. Incumbency and use of state resources
8. Ethno-religious nepotism

9. Internal party hierarchy
10. Closed party decisions (opacity)
11. Ability to keep secrets

Leaders, whether appointed, self-appointed and selected through money, media, elite networks, turn the electoral process into virtual afterthoughts in the US system. US economic leaders have increased the flow from productive profits and investments upward to the financial sector and/or outwardly overseas to tax havens.

US political leaders have increased military expenditures and wars, diverting public funds from domestic social services and welfare, diminishing domestic economic growth and markets for investment and trade.

US cultural leaders have been rewarded for defending, promoting and embellishing imperial conquests and denigrating independent nations and leaders. They have also been rewarded for promoting the most degrading and frivolous consumerism, undermining social and community cohesion.

The lack of transparency in the US selection process of leaders in major investment banks, political parties, legislative and executive offices and academia is growing at an alarming rate and with significant negative consequences: US leaders do not have to pass rigorous exams nor do they face interviews with peers with competence in their fields of work.

US business leaders are not judged by their economic and political performance. Responsibility for disastrous wars, corrupt bank bailouts, financial crises and skyrocketing health care costs do not disqualify a candidate for leadership positions.

Documented performance criteria are not the basis for selecting Congressional and Presidential leaders. The decisive factors influencing political selection are the capacity to promote elite interests, pursue imperial wars to gratify the ambitions and greed of civilian militarists and mask widespread corruption to grease the wheels of speculation.

### **China: Consultation, Meritocracy and Performance**

Chinese leaders are selected on the basis of multi-level consultation, meritocracy and performance in office.

China's recent Party Congress highlighted three areas of vital concern: reducing inequalities, addressing environmental degradation and health care.

In contrast, last year's US Congressional elections focused on its pledge to reduce corporate taxes for the super-rich despite the increasing social and economic inequality, removal of state and federal regulation protecting the population and environment from corporate polluters, and reducing public funding for access to competent health care,

undermining citizen well-being and exacerbating the rise in premature deaths and decreased life expectancy for the poor and working class.

The American political elite is full of ‘climate change’ deniers and promoters of the worst kinds of pollution.

The US Congress spent an enormous amount of time and energy pursuing partisan conspiracies while refusing to address the raging epidemic of prescription narcotic addiction, which has killed over 600,000 Americans in 15 years.

President Xi Jinping demanded that Chinese leaders direct their efforts to correct the ‘*unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever growing needs for a better life*’. President Xi emphasized the goal of ‘*greening the economy*’, mentioning it 15 times in his address to the Party Congress- compared to only once in the previous Party meeting (FT 11/1/17, p 11).

Chinese public and private investors have responded to health and environmental priorities set by President Xi – stock indexes spiraled in those sectors (FT 11/11/17, p. 11).

At the top level, leadership engages in consultations and debates among competing elites, discussing past and present outcomes in developing current and future policies.

At the middle levels, ultra-competitive public service examinations are determinant in the selection and appointment of Chinese officials.

At the top and middle levels of leadership job performance is one of the leading factors determining selection. The four decades of spectacular economic growth that has lifted 500

million Chinese people out of poverty is a reflection of the effective system for selection and promotion of leaders.

Maintaining peace and friendship with other countries for over forty years -- except for a brief border conflict with Vietnam in 1979-- has been a major factor influencing leadership selection. In contrast, despite multiple disastrous and brutal wars, Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama were re-elected to office in a two-party 'duopoly' system universally regarded as 'rigged'. The effect of these wars on the deterioration of US domestic economy is not reflected in the candidate selection or in the outcome of the presidential or congressional elections.

China has selected leaders who have demonstrated ability and seriousness in investigating and punishing over one million corrupt public officials and plutocrats. Anti-corruption crime-fighters have been promoted as 'clean and hardworking' leaders.

In contrast, the US Administration has repeatedly appointed Wall Street criminals to senior positions in Treasury, the Federal Reserve and the IMF with disastrous results for the citizenry, with no capacity for analyses or correction.

One of the most selective and prestigious Party mechanisms is found in the *Organization Department (OD) of the Chinese Communist Party* (FT 10/30/17, p. 9). The OD meets privately and reviews selections for leadership on the basis of a 'complex combination of nominations, written and oral exams and investigations, and a majority vote among ministers. Leaders, thus selected, assume collective responsibility – and they do not position themselves by '*leaking decisions*' (FT *ibid*).

## **Conclusion**

In both the US and China the selection of leaders *are not based on elections or consultations with the citizens*. However, there are vast differences in the process and procedures of leader selection resulting in vast differences in the outcomes.

China is largely a *meritocracy*, with vestiges of family nepotism, especially with reference to some business-state appointments.

*Performance* counts a lot, and most citizens credit the leadership of the Chinese Party for China's long-term, large-scale socio-economic success. In contrast, the vast majority of US citizens are cynical and dissatisfied with top economic appointments because of their documented past and present socio-economic failures. The citizens direct their greatest dismay at the top financial leaders (whom they view as corrupt oligarchs) for plunging our country into repeated crises, perpetual wars, growing inequalities and deep, widespread poverty. The loss of stable, well-paying jobs and the deterioration of community and family cohesion has outraged the citizens because these are in stark contrast with pervasive, deep-seated corruption in high places and almost total judicial impunity for high officials, politicians and oligarchs alike.

China's on-going prosecution of corrupt leaders has no counterpart in the US.

Business-politician bribes are legalized in the US when they are termed 'campaign financing' or 'consultant fees'. One has only to consider the half-million dollar lecture fees paid to the Clintons by grateful Wall Street financiers for their 30 minute recitations of platitudes and influence peddling.

In the field of foreign policy, China's leaders defend their national interest. US leaders shamelessly kowtow to Israeli lobbyists, promoting Tel Aviv's interests.

Chinese leaders marginalize critics in the name of harmony, stability, peace and growth.

US leaders marginalize, imprison and brutalize Afro-Americans, immigrants, environmentalists and anti-war activists, as well as Wall Street and government whistle blowers, in the name of free markets and nebulous liberal democratic 'values'.

China, with all of its drawbacks in terms of democratic procedures and rights, is moving toward a less corrupt, less bellicose and more accountable dynamic society with carefully vetted and developed leadership.

The US is moving toward a more corrupt, crime ridden and despotic ('police state') society with unaccountable leaders, warmongers and criminal at the helm.

The gap between promise and performance is widening in the US, while it narrows in China.

China's rigorous, meritocratic selection process has demonstrated greater capacity to respond to new challenges and majority needs than the dysfunctional and corrupt US electoral charade, which cannot even address the addiction crisis brought on by unregulated over-prescription of opiates, let alone respond to the environmental crises of climate change and mega-storms ravaging US communities.