

Making Communism Work: Sinicizing a Soviet Practice

Abstract

Among various governance practices adopted by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), few have proven more effective than the deployment of ad hoc task forces known as *work teams* (工作队/工作组). Yet, perhaps because work teams straddle the boundary between formal and informal institutions, they have received scant analytical attention from social scientists. Tracing the roots of Chinese work teams to Russian revolutionary precedents, Professor Perry argues that the CCP's adoption of this practice involved creative adaptation over a sustained period of revolutionary and post-revolutionary experimentation. Sinicized work teams were not only a key factor in securing the victory of the Chinese Communist revolution and conducting Maoist mass campaigns such as Land Reform, Collectivization, and the Four Cleans; they continue to play an important role in managing grassroots Chinese society even today. As a flexible means of spanning the center-periphery divide and combatting bureaucratic inertia, Chinese work teams, in stark contrast to their Soviet precursors, make a powerful contribution to the resilience of the Communist party-state.