

*De-ideologized Mass Line, Regime Responsiveness, and State-Society Relations**

Alexander Korolev

Abstract

Once the primary method of revolutionary leadership, the “mass line” has reemerged in today’s China as a method of public policy making. This study explores and theorizes the implications of mass-line tactics in policy making and state-society relations in contemporary China. At the theoretical level, it argues that the de-ideologized mass line in combination with traditional forms of nonmobilized participation can enhance government responsiveness to the broader public interest. The mass line can complement traditional forms of voluntary participation in that it can allow better representation of social groups who regularly fail to articulate their needs through the existing participation mechanisms and who therefore remain outside of the policy-making process. Empirically, the paper draws on existing Chinese studies, official document analysis, and unstructured interviews with Chinese academics to provide examples for the theoretical argument. This study analyzes the workings of the mass-line tactics in China during the New Healthcare Reform and the formation of the 12th Five-Year Plan. If implemented not as a propaganda tool but as a mechanism of interest articulation and aggregation, the mass line has the potential to offer China alternative routes of democratization.

Alexander Korolev is Research Fellow at the Centre on Asia and Globalization, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore; Senior Researcher, Centre on Political Research and Prognosis, Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Correspondence should be sent to: akorolev@nus.edu.sg.

* The author thanks Wang Shaoguang for sharing his ideas at the inception of this research, and Jing Yuejin, Wu Fengshi, and one anonymous reviewer for very helpful feedback on the earlier drafts of the article. The author also acknowledges useful questions and comments by Margaret Pearson, Gunter Schubert, and Yan Xiaojun. Any mistakes are of the author alone.