

Xi Jinping, Biden His Time

Through the Lens of Stratified Systems Science¹

(Discussion draft 3-9-23)

Mark Goodall

We live in quite a different world from my Vietnam war era R&R in the pleasant company of a tall Chinese woman of Mongolian descent (maybe Fang Fang's grandmother – trade-craft could run in the family - smile). During a romantic evening in a stern-sculled boat, I suggested our young Taiwanese gondolier take us to the mainland, “*fǎngōng dàlù qù* (反攻大陸去)!”² I was reminded that we were on a lake – never mind.

Today, the sentiment of *fǎngōng dàlù qù* is gone, replaced by a tenuous, scary, defensive posture. As tensions with China rise, we are becoming increasingly aware of concerns that many China watchers have been raising that a Taiwan confrontation, a key part of a Chinese Communist Party global strategy, is inevitable, and may unfold in a fairly short time frame.

For a better perspective, it is necessary to understand the capability gap between Chinese and U.S. leadership. The CCP is a meritocracy³ with standards for leadership in governance that are not required, and likely not understood, by American political parties. High capability and an excellent, grueling, long record of performance is required to attain higher levels of government in China.

Meanwhile, the U.S. is willing to accept presidents who may be several levels of leadership acumen below that of Xi Jinping, along with a cabinet of political patronage. This capability gap is the result of a party and electoral system that fails to bring highly capable candidates to voters, who are unaware of the key levels of capability above that of scientists and so-

¹ Note: I will not attempt to teach, or even comprehensively introduce, Stratified Systems Theory, the lens through which I make my observations, in this paper. It is recommended that the reader look at my short SST Teaser for an outline of the science. See: [It's Only Rocket Science – Stratified Systems Theory – Goodfirm](#)

² *Fǎngōng dàlù qù* 反攻大陸去, in song and slogan “Go and Reclaim the Mainland” was a Kuomintang rallying cry during the 1950's and 60's.

³ Bell, D. (2015) *The China Model*

called professionals, and who are unable to realistically take on the assessment of a global leader.

The science of Stratified Systems Theory (SST), used by many in national and global business, provides a methodology to measure human capability which has determined that the size of the role of CEO of a global business is stratum 7 with line worker at stratum 1. SST illustrates that the role of a good lawyer requires stratum 3 ability. While lawyers, doctors and scientists, usually stratum 3, are very bright, with cognitive ability in the 90th percentile, it is hardly the capability needed for a global leader where a higher level of abstraction in information processing capability is required. Movement in capability from 3 to 4 is movement from concrete to abstract, from serial to parallel information processing - a different mental processing and these differences change with each ascending level. Of course, there are people more capable than required by the job they hold, but in U.S. politics, there is no system of finding and lifting that capability - a notion that is not lost on the CCP.

The founders crafted our wonderful constitution in a pre-industrial age, when the role of president was much smaller, and without the benefit of the measurement tools that developed, over time, as 90% of the world's population became employed by management accountability hierarchies reflecting the multi-modal way in which human populations process information. They did not have the benefit of the 70 years of work and research with SST that scientifically illuminated the important capability differences in work roles, and the implications of discontinuous capability modes in all human endeavor.⁴ In those early days, a stratum 3 president may have been adequate.

The size of the role of a U.S. president changed dramatically during the world wars when, à la Shakespeare⁵, greatness was thrust upon the U.S. The country reluctantly recognized it had to step up with a global force, saddled with responsibility for world order and leadership. We may now be experiencing a naive reluctance, on a substantial part of the U.S. electorate, to maintain that status. Xi, while respecting the economic,

⁴ Jaques, E. and Cason, K. (1994) *Human Capability*

⁵ "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene 5.

military and geopolitical power of the U.S., can see its decline, and the failure to find and develop able leadership.

A well-run business would never place a person in such a large roll without the requisite experience, demonstrated ability, and stratum 7 information processing capability – and likely neither would the CCP. Recognition that a global leader must be highly capable, a capability not understood by most voters, limits democratic experimentation in China to local levels.⁶

It is one thing to imagine initiatives unfolding more than 20 years into the future and quite another to have the capability to manage the design and execution of such planning, while at the same time having the high level of abstract information processing capability needed to deal with the complex challenges that arise suddenly in a chaotic world.

A global leader should be capable of working with a long time span of discretion, and stratum 7 information processing cognitive capability is a must. The U.S. system of short-term, alternating, limited capability leadership, driven politically to replace or undermine initiatives of a predecessor, results, inevitably, in planning and execution unworthy of true global leadership. In terms of the science of SST, continued failure to fill a position with a person big enough for the role will eventually reduce the size of the role, and is certainly reducing the size of the office of U.S. president, leaving the U.S. vulnerable to more capable global leadership.

Xi is aware of this deficit in U.S. leadership capability which probably hit home for him with the election of Barak Obama, a candidate with little experience and limited relevant demonstrated capability – bright, but lawyer bright, scientist bright, PhD bright, not global leader bright. Xi watched as well-meaning American voters placed someone in the highest global leadership position who would not have been considered capable to manage a small county in China's system.⁷

Arguably China will soon peak, or has already peaked, in terms of its economic and geopolitical standing. It faces declining GDP, daunting demographics, shrinking resources, and geopolitical push-back. Xi's window of opportunity to take over global leadership may be closing.⁸

⁶ Bell, D. (2015) *The China Model*, p.60

⁷ Economy, E. (2018) *The Third Revolution*, p.33

⁸ Brands, H. and Beckley, M. (2022) *Danger Zone*

Reclaiming Taiwan is key in the CCP view of security and global posturing.⁹ It is likely Xi senses a need to make a move during the current era of weakness in the U.S. presidency. He will be watching the primaries closely and is Biden (smile) his time.

References

- Bell, D. (2015) *The China Model*
- Brands, H. and Beckley, M. (2022) *Danger Zone*
- Brown, K., (2016) *CEO China*
- Brown, W. and Jaques, E. (1965) *Glacier Project Papers*
- Cason, K. and Jaques, E. (2006) *Requisite Organization*
- Economy, E. (2018) *The Third Revolution*
- Goodall, M. (2022) *It's Only Rocket Science* (discussion paper)
- Jaques, E. (1976) *A General Theory of Bureaucracy*
- Jaques, E., and Gibson, R., and Isaac, D. (1978) *Levels of Abstraction in Logic and Human Action*
- Jaques, E., and Cason, K. (1994) *Human Capability*
- Jaques, E. (2002) *Social Power and the CEO*
- Jaques, E. (2002) *The Life and Behavior of Living Organisms – A General Theory*
- Klein, E. (2012) *The Amateur*
- Lee, N. (2017) *The Practice of Managerial Leadership*
- Macdonald, I., Burke, C., and Stewart, K. (2018) *Systems Leadership*
- Shepard, K., Gray, J., Hunt, J., and MacArthur, S; Editors (2007) *Organization Design, Levels of Work and Human Capability – Executive Guide*
- Schweizer, P. (2022) *Red Handed*

⁹ Brands, H. and Beckley, M. (2022) *Danger Zone*