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SOME PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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April 1964
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The political scientist who embarks on the study of contemporary China inevitably encounters a host of problems, perhaps unequalled in aggregate difficulty by those which any of his colleagues race. These occur at all stages of his work: the original training for research, selection of the topic, acquisition of data, and the ultimate analysis.

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This paper was prepared for delivery at the Conference on Research in the Government and Politics of Contemporary China sponsored by the Joint Committee on Contemporary China (Social Science Research Council-American Council of Learned Societies), Greyston Conference Center, Riverdale, New York, April 17-18, 1964.
There is nothing to be gained by pretending these problems do not exist or that they can be resolved suddenly if somehow we can discover the magic formula. The road to really significant knowledge, much less understanding, of the government and politics of modern China is lined with frustrating obstacles and demoralizing detours. The journey requires a hardy and dedicated traveller. The one who is ill-prepared or faint of heart will fall by the way. That is, he will either take the first opportune turn-off to regions more easily traversed or, lamentably, sink into the sedan-chair of mediocrity and passively allow the porters (e.g., inadequate research, half-baked analysis, and premature publication) to carry him where they will. Unhappily, there are few genuine short-cuts and even those which have proved worthwhile sometimes contain unexpected pitfalls. This is, after all, an underdeveloped area and the traveller must proceed at his own risk.

Fortunately, this is only part of the picture. The rewards of our work more than compensate for the difficulties. Ours is far from the "dismal science" of Ricardo, the arid investigation of Ranke, or the scientific search of Spencer. We study a nation and a political system of
unusual intrinsic interest, extraordinary power, and unsurpassed importance for the future course of history. Moreover, our opportunities for making a significant contribution to knowledge are steadily increasing. In recent years research efforts have been greatly assisted by large-scale acquisition of documentary sources, more frequent field work in areas adjacent to the Mainland, and a variety of measures initiated by the Joint Committee on Contemporary China to encourage and aid scholarly inquiry. Finally, the personal hardships and uncertainties assumed in committing oneself to professional specialization on China are becoming less -- thanks to financial support from private foundations and the federal government. Expanding employment opportunities have considerably brightened long-range career prospects.

Nevertheless, in comparison with other areas of political science the study of China remains neglected and underdeveloped. This is not a lament, but a statement of fact. In some ways a "retarded development"\(^1\) may be

\(^1\)This term, used nearly four years ago to describe the state of political studies on China, remains relevant today. See Howard Boorman, "The Study of Contemporary Chinese Politics: Some Remarks on Retarded Development," *World Politics*, XII:4 (July 1960).
preferable to a rapid expansion. However, political scientists live on the same planet with other mortals, roughly a quarter of whom are Chinese, dissatisfied with their lot and determined to play a larger role. This places a premium on knowledge as a basis for action as distinguished from knowledge for its own sake. Professional assessments of Chinese political processes, policies, power, and aspirations become essential as momentous decisions must be made -- or not made. Thus it is not uncommon today to hear the term "crisis" applied to the backward state of our political understanding of China. Perhaps we can gain some comfort, if not insight, by reference to the common Chinese expression for this concept. It is a compound composed of two characters -- wei, signifying "danger," and chi, signifying "opportunity." There are dangers in our enormous ignorance, and dangers that our necessarily hasty efforts to repair it may produce serious confusion as well as enlightenment. However, there are also significant opportunities for effective action.
General Problems of Research

Good political research on China demands an unusual breadth of learning and skills -- and judicious application of them. These requirements spring both from the nature of our discipline and the peculiarities of the area on which we focus. According to an eminent member of the guild, "Political Science is an integrating focus, but it draws its methodology and data from other disciplines."² Whatever the geographic focus, studies of political behavior, processes, institutions, ideologies, etc., require the possession of a wide range of analytical tools -- including history, psychology, economics, anthropology, law, and philosophy. On the other hand, unique features of the Chinese political scene often make it misleading, if not impossible, to rely on the familiar Western categories of

²Emmette S. Redford, "Reflections On A Discipline" (Presidential address to the American Political Science Association), The American Political Science Review, LV:4 (December 1961), 757.
analysis. Radically different notions of "authority," "leadership," "public opinion," "justice," "constitutionalism," "party," and "parliament" seem to defy the possibility of useful or economic comparison with similar concepts in the West -- if, indeed, we fully understand them in their Chinese setting.

Assuming the researcher possesses the necessary background and skills for political analysis, the level or degree of sophistication at which he can profitably work will still depend on the depth and distribution of available data. In the absence of adequate basic information on a given subject -- as conveyed through documents, interviews, and personal observations -- the probability of carrying out productive, or even accurate analyses, is remote. It is, of course, possible to spin new theory from limited experience and it is sometimes useful to hypothesize no matter how sparse the facts. Nevertheless, the fruitfulness of such labors cannot be divorced from the substructure of raw data. *Ex nihilo nihil fit.*

**An Approach to Research**

In my own view, under present circumstances the most formidable problem facing the political scientist who would study China is not the formulation of new topics
(more worthy ones suggest themselves than any of us will ever be able to explore) or the development of new methods (we are unable to put to good use a host of those already devised and tested in more advanced research areas).

Rather, it seems to me that the central problem immediately ahead is to broaden our understanding of Chinese political phenomena at the lower levels of abstraction -- i.e., to acquire knowledge of the basic facts of political experience and organize them according to fairly elementary and well-established theories. I would submit that at the present relatively primitive stage in our research on China there is more to be gained, in most cases, by analyses which look down the ladder of abstraction\(^3\) toward discrete, concrete objects of experience (e.g., the structure and functions of a particular institution, an event or episode in political history, a biographical profile) than up the ladder toward highly-generalized theory-building, cross-cultural comparisons and unverifiable or extravagant inferences from available historical or anthropological data.

\(^3\)For a simple and graphic illustration of the process of abstracting see S. I. Hayakawa, *Language in Action* (New York, 1949), 96.
I hope that I shall not be misunderstood. It certainly is not my intention to disparage the highly sophisticated analyses of political behavior, social dynamics, and cross-cultural relationships which have been successfully carried out in countries where an adequate body of basic knowledge is available. I would simply question whether the time is yet ripe for such studies with regard to China. Have we yet seen enough with the naked eye to make the best use of either the microscope or the telescope? To be sure, the pace of acquiring knowledge can often be quickened by mounting the ladder of abstraction to look down. But let us not deceive ourselves that the individual rungs are unessential to the ascent. We are not magicians performing an Indian Rope Trick. (In fact, it may never have actually been performed and the legend may have been Chinese rather than Indian in origin.)

The approach to research which I am suggesting is one which cuts across the old, parochial debate as to whose discipline is the most important and some of the more recent arguments between "traditionalists" and "behavioralists." I do not believe that the best representatives of the former school are satisfied with crude empiricism,
unguided by systematic organization and application\textsuperscript{4} --
as is sometimes charged. On the other side, if I correctly
understand such outstanding exponents of the behavioral
approach as Dahl and Truman, they have no interest in
speculative analysis which is not or cannot be put to
adequate empirical tests. Professor Truman has emphasized
the importance of historical knowledge "as an essential
supplement to contemporary observation of political
behavior" (where the latter is possible). Moreover, he
has recognized that although the student of political
behavior should work in quantitative terms where possible,
it may sometimes be necessary to perform his task in
qualitative terms.\textsuperscript{5}

The Problem of Formulating Topics

Although good political research on China is arduous
and demanding, the individual scholar exercises consider-
able control over the situation. Specific deficiencies
in available data or professional capabilities can be

\textsuperscript{4}See John K. Fairbank, "Introduction: Problems of
Method and of Content," in Chinese Thought and Institutions
(Chicago, 1957).

\textsuperscript{5}See David Truman, "The Implications of Political
Behavior Research," in Social Science Research Council
Items, 5:4 (December 1951).
offset, within limits, by prudent formulation of the research topic. As Professor Tang Tsou is wont to caution us in the field of foreign policy, it is always desirable to fit objectives to means. Stated in other terms, it is best to research the researchable. However, what constitutes a researchable topic perhaps requires further qualification.

To formulate topics which are researchable, in the "best" sense, I would suggest that the following questions be asked. Are sufficient data available -- or likely to become so with a definable and acceptable output of effort -- to support the projected study? Considering the availability of data and the adequacy of methodology, what is the most fruitful level of generalization at which to slant the inquiry? Given the capabilities of the researcher, can he reasonably expect to cope with the problems which are likely to arise under the projected topic? Or, alternatively, can he overcome any serious limitations (e.g., by additional training, outside help) or avoid problem areas (by redefining the topic) without impairing the usefulness of the project? Such questions would seem obvious enough but, unfortunately, they are not always asked. Or, if asked, the answer is sometimes
smothered either in a gross overestimation of the state of our knowledge about China or a naively optimistic faith in the potentialities of sophisticated methodology to dispense with the need for raw data.

The Problem of Preparation

In addition to carefully formulating his research topic, the political scientist studying China can lessen the inherent difficulties of his work by seeking to improve his professional capabilities and to broaden his experience. There are abundant opportunities in American universities to receive training in the very latest methods of political science and other disciplines. Training in language and area studies has also been highly developed in several academic centers. Nevertheless our schooling -- as well as research -- is considerably hampered by the fact that it must be conducted entirely from outside Mainland China. Modern linguistic techniques and fellowships for intensive and prolonged language instruction have been tremendously helpful and worthwhile. However, they cannot entirely substitute for the rich and varied experiences of direct, on-the-spot training in a Chinese-speaking environment.

Similarly, it is doubtful that we can hope to overcome the "cultural lag" by even the most single-minded
study of books on anthropology, history, etc. One of our
most highly esteemed China scholars has succinctly described
the problem:

The fact is that the American specialist on
Asia is seldom deeply versed in the experience
of Asian life. His knowledge comes from learn-
ing, not from living, and he often combines
information with imperception.... We live
removed from Asian realities, far from the
day-to-day content of feeling and the view of
the world in Asian minds.... Of course, we
do have information and occasionally some
contact with the changes going on in Asia,
but always sterilized by distance and non-
involvement, protected by our standard of
living and our citizenship, to say nothing of
the linguistic barriers.6

Total immersion in a Chinese or, at least, Asian society
(preferably Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Japan) for extended and
recurrent periods is essential. Such experiences are
necessary for the seasoned scholar as well as the neophyte;
we should regard them as part of the main dish, not, as is
often the case, merely as the dessert. It seems to me that
direct and repeated contact with the Chinese social and
cultural milieu is vital if we are to expect any profound
answers to the basic political questions posed by Professor
Lasswell nearly thirty years ago -- "Who Gets What, When,
How."

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6John K. Fairbank, "A Note of Ambiguity: Asian Studies
Fellowships for training and advanced research in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere on the periphery of Mainland China have gone far to meet this need. Unfortunately, these programs remain inadequate. This is particularly the case on the post-doctoral research level --- especially in the years before the scholar attains a senior professional status. In my view there needs to be a sizeable expansion of opportunities for serious field work. Please note that I am not referring to the standard six-week tour of the Orient --- a favorite of Government agencies, a few foundations, and American Express. These junkets may have some "area familiarization" value for the busy executive, but usually offer little beyond confusion and dysentery for the researcher. It has been my experience, working in two very different foreign contexts, that periods of a year and more in continuous residence are necessary for significant new research or interviewing. (However, I am willing to concede that age and wider experience may mellow this opinion.) Since 1955 some 200 U.S. scholars have studied in Russia for periods of one semester to two years (probably twice that many for shorter periods). 7

I wonder if one-sixth that number have studied Communist China from its accessible periphery.

While it is generally agreed that a language capability in Chinese (as well as other languages) is highly desirable, there seems to be a growing sentiment in some quarters for waiving this as an expected professional credential. It is, of course, possible to carry out perfectly respectable research entirely on the basis of translations. In fact, the China specialist today is inundated with a wave of extremely useful and usually accurate translated documents, newspapers, and periodicals. In this welter of information it is sometimes forgotten that not everything of importance gets translated. The odd journal or local newspaper which may really be essential to an individual research project may not be considered of sufficiently wide interest to merit translation by the U.S. Consulate-General in Hong Kong or the Joint Publications Research Service (J.P.R.S.). Unfortunately, this fact will probably not come to the attention of the non-Chinese-using scholar.

However, we are told, there is an easy solution to the language problem. Researchers who are competent in a particular academic discipline need only employ the
services of assistants who are proficient in the language. Moreover, according to a recent article in *Saturday Review*, this will perform a social good by employing many refugee Chinese who are unable to find work with the State Department (because of insufficient length of residence). It is admitted that: "Scholarly interpretations built on translation-by-proxy are...at the mercy of the translator's accuracy." However, "the theory is that shaky foundations will expose themselves when documentary footnotes are read and checked by the few who are able to both read and interpret the original sources." 8 I would certainly like to add my support to the proposal that we seek more useful employment for educated Chinese refugees; they can be of incalculable assistance in our political research on China. However, I would take strong exception to the implication that "the few" scholars who are able to use the language will have either the wide range of knowledge or the incentive to serve as an adequate check on the translators' accuracy. Given a generation or so, many of the errors might be corrected and omissions filled in, but as Lord Keynes wisely said, "In the long run we are all dead."

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It may be felt that in discussing the problem of preparation for research I have been excessively demanding and pessimistic. I would agree that developments in China and the world dictate a broadened and accelerated program of training competent research scholars. As one who has viewed this predicament from both the governmental and academic standpoints I am deeply concerned that strenuous efforts be made to augment the supply of China hands. Perhaps this will require some lowering of standards, further substitution of assembly-line techniques for individual hand-tooling. However, I would urge that we look on any dilution of professional standards as a necessary evil and a temporary phenomenon to be rectified when time allows. No matter how great the need, there are serious dangers in allowing concern for quantity to overshadow insistence on quality.

The Problem of Sources

Although Mainland China is closed to the American researcher, now and for the foreseeable future, large and significant sources of information -- both human and documentary -- remain accessible. Despite the Bamboo Curtain and the U.S. embargo there continues to be a sizeable flow of persons and publications across the Mainland borders.
The potentialities for refugee interviewing have scarcely been appreciated, much less actually tapped. There would seem to be every reason to explore the possibility of a major project similar to that on the U.S.S.R. which a group of Harvard social scientists carried out in Western Europe in the early 1950's. Commissioned by the U.S. Air Force, this project was based on systematic interviewing of refugees and involved five years of research, resulting in an over-all view of the Soviet social system. A study of this nature, benefitting by the lessons learned in the Harvard project, could be conducted in areas peripheral to Mainland China. If carefully planned and skillfully executed, it would have excellent prospects of providing valuable new social and political data. Besides furnishing the basis for further analyses, such a project would greatly enrich the professional experience and sharpen the perception of all participants. In view of Roger Hilsman's recent "open door" proposal, Senator Fulbright's attempt to demythologize the popular notion of Peking's permanent, "implacable hostility," and, in another mood, the persistent echoes of Joseph Alsop's

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Raymond Bauer, Alex Inkeles, and Clyde Kluckhohn, How the Soviet System Works (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1956).
"descending spiral" thesis, any contributions to our pitifully inadequate knowledge of Chinese political attitudes, social dynamics, internal tensions, etc., could be expected to have timely and practical uses.

Apart from interviewing refugees, there are also significant opportunities for useful field work among indigenous Chinese populations in Taiwan and other areas around the Mainland. Using advanced social science techniques, it would be possible in these accessible places to probe more deeply into the Chinese character, studying such topics as group behavior, forms of non-governmental political activity, etc. While these case studies would not allow sweeping inferences as to the situation on the Mainland, they could be helpful in a number of ways (e.g., suggesting hypotheses for analysis of Mainland data).

Since it is impossible to undertake field work in Mainland China or conduct on-the-spot interviews, the political scientist, in most cases, will seek the bulk of his research data in documentary sources. This necessarily restricts the range of topics open to him, and often the method or approach as well. Thus studies of public opinion in Communist China cannot rely on polling techniques, and psychological analyses of the regime's leaders, if attempted,
must do without planned interviews (except for a possible defector). As in the more advanced field of Russian studies, this will probably continue to result in greater emphasis on research which employs the more traditional techniques of the historian, economist, literary critic, and classical political scientist rather than studies in the disciplines in which field work is essential, such as sociology and anthropology. We can benefit greatly from the refined techniques pioneered by students of the Soviet Union. Hopefully, the opportunities for transference of methods will be more fully and systematically explored in the near future. However, if I correctly assess the experience of Soviet studies, the refinements in method thus far achieved have not greatly lessened the original primary dependence on documents, as distinguished from other sources of information.

Even on the documentary level, the student of Chinese politics faces formidable problems. There are serious inadequacies of data on some of the most central topics, particularly in the areas of Party and military affairs. In this respect our position is substantially inferior to that of scholars in the Soviet field, one of whom complained recently:
...We do not know enough about Soviet politics. We do not know the alignments, the political forces and motivations which produce the great policy decisions and lead to the enormous and important shifts, reversals, initiatives of the regime. ... It is not that we seek any finality, any data on which certain prophecy can be based. No more can we in any other country; but in most other capitals we can at least meaningfully discuss the forces at work, the party and factional alignments, the personal affiliations. In fact most political comment about the rest of the world is in such terms. 10

The Chinese Communist Party has maintained an extraordinary degree of secrecy with regard to internal affairs, aided in no small measure by the remarkable continuity and cohesiveness of its leadership. However, it is imperative that we try to penetrate this veil. The imminent succession crisis will not wait, nor will the need to respond to Peking's mushrooming threat to world order.

Despite the inadequacy of published data on many facets of the Chinese political system, there are opportunities for significant research -- in America as well as overseas -- which we have scarcely begun to exploit. Vast, under-used collections of primary and secondary materials (in Chinese, Japanese, and Western languages) have been assembled at such academic centers as the Hoover

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Institution, Harvard, Columbia, and the Universities of California and Washington. As a result of the large and impressive research effort by the U.S. Government, literally tons of newspapers and documents have been acquired from Communist China, which have been made readily available to the private scholar through the Library of Congress, the J.P.R.S., and other channels. Other important sources of information include the publications of the Hong Kong Consulate-General, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), and the State Department's External Research Division.\footnote{See John M. H. Lindbeck, "Research Materials on Communist China: United States Government Sources," \textit{Journal of Asian Studies}, XVII:3 (May 1959).} Notable steps are being taken in this country also to improve bibliographical controls and provide basic reference tools.\footnote{A comprehensive guide to Chinese language sources in the social sciences and humanities, compiled by Peter Berton and Eugene Wu, is now nearing completion as is the monumental biographical dictionary of modern Chinese personalities, under the editorship of Howard Boorman. Other useful aids to research include the annual "Bibliography of Asian Studies" published by the Association for Asian Studies and special bibliographies such as the guide to J.P.R.S. reports on China edited by Richard Sorich.} Much more work remains to be done in these areas, however, if the available documents are to achieve their maximum utility.
Some of the richest collections of data on contemporary China outside the Mainland are located in Taiwan. These include: (1) the Bureau of Investigation Library at Ch'ing-t'an, (2) the Kuomintang Archives near Taichung, (3) the Institute of Modern History of the Academia Sinica at Nan-kang, (4) the National Defense College Library at Yangmingshan, and (5) the personal archive of Vice-President Ch'en Ch'eng at Pei-t'ou. To consider these in reverse order, six filing cases (of, perhaps, thirty in all) of the Ch'en Ch'eng documents are now available on microfilm at the Hoover Library, opening up whole new vistas on the history of the Chinese Communist Movement. The National Defense College Library includes a special Communist collection made up largely of current Mainland publications and collected reprints. Three research institutes connected with the College enhance its resource value. The Academia Sinica's holdings are especially strong in Chinese diplomatic history, but materials dating after 1927 are not open for research.\(^\text{13}\) The Kuomintang Archives, to the

\(^{13}\)Hopefully, in time, this blanket restriction will be relaxed or replaced by a system of periodic review and downgrading, similar to that which the U.S. State Department applies to its archives. See Professor Kuo Ting-yee's note, "Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica," in Journal of Asian Studies, XIX:4 (August 1960).
extent thus far opened to American scholars, have shown unusual strength in holdings of newspaper files, but their location some thirty miles from Taichung presents formidable logistical problems to the scholar.

The Bureau of Investigation Library deserves a special word. Its more than 100,000 catalogued volumes include books, periodicals, newspapers, reports and documents, primarily of Communist origin. These have been collected over a period of nearly forty years and comprise probably the richest single repository of historical and current data available outside the Mainland. With these resources it is possible to contemplate political studies approaching the detail and depth of Fainsod's Smolensk Under Soviet Rule. The Bureau's facilities include a newspaper clipping room in which news clippings are arranged daily according to a system of over 1000 topics.

In addition to the sources described above there are other significant opportunities for research in Taiwan. Personal libraries and files of various Party and Governmental leaders have hardly been tapped. In addition to documentary sources there is a great potential for interviewing. Allen Whiting's valuable work on Sheng Shih-ts'ai
and Sinkiang is an example of what can come of this.\footnote{14} The undocumented testimony of a single ex-Communist (e.g., Chang Kuo-t'ao) should be viewed with extreme caution -- although, lamentably, it sometimes is not. However, if several such persons could be interviewed at length, their stories checked against each other and against relevant documents, the result could be of immense value. In fact, such work is now being successfully carried out under the Columbia University Oral History Project. I believe there would be great merit in exploring further possibilities for interviewing former CCP members and competent non-Communist observers in both Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Hong Kong, of course, has long been recognized as a research base of outstanding potentialities for the student of contemporary Chinese politics and society. Its advantages include: convenient access to outlets for Mainland publications, contact with seasoned observers (diplomats, journalists, businessmen of all nationalities) and travellers from the interior, and geographic proximity to the Mainland which permits the analyst to acquire, almost by osmosis, a vital, but intangible, "feel" for the situation.

Unfortunately, the colony still does not provide an adequate research library for students of the contemporary scene. I would whole-heartedly endorse the proposal made by Howard Boorman some years ago that "a compact academic-sponsored research center" be established in Hong Kong to provide necessary facilities for private scholars working on China. ¹⁵

Important research opportunities also await the student of Chinese politics in other places around the periphery of the Mainland, most notably Japan. Japanese research, official and unofficial, on developments in China has long been among the best. Several important documentary collections are available to the scholar, including both recent and historical material. ¹⁶ Their value has recently been demonstrated in the work of Chalmers Johnson. ¹⁷ As yet the opportunities for China research in South and Southeast Asia appear to be limited, although studies of Overseas Chinese communities and of

¹⁵ Howard Boorman, *World Politics* (July 1960), 598.
Peking's relations with various countries can be profitably undertaken. Looking toward the future, perhaps we should not dismiss the interesting possibility of research on contemporary China in the U.S.S.R.

Concluding Thoughts

As we have seen, the political scientist who undertakes to study China faces a number of difficult problems. Even so, there remain abundant opportunities in this field to engage in satisfying, intellectually fascinating, and important work. Despite the myriad difficulties which hinder even our best efforts, it is possible to probe effectively the mysteries of Chinese politics. With proper attention to professional training, reasonable care in formulating truly researchable topics, prudent regard for the accessibility of data, and realism and honesty in proportion to methodological sophistication, there is every reason to hope that political research on China will flourish, contributing insights which are both penetrating and useful.