

# Social Science and the Methodology of Contemporary China Studies: A Critical Evaluation\*

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The field of China studies has entered a critical stage of self-evaluation, self-criticism, and soul searching. Never before have there been so many books, journal articles, and conference papers that deal with the problems of reliability and validity of scholarly work and press reports.<sup>1</sup> A prevailing disillusionment over the performance of the Communist regime in China has led to rising dissatisfaction over the inability of China specialists to provide reliable and timely analysis of the situation. The first serious challenge to the analytical skill of China scholars occurred during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. This unprecedented movement came as a major shock to those who had long argued for the gradual evolution of Communist China into a more normal political system willing and able to interact with the West on a more cooperative and rational basis. Nevertheless, the cruelty and irrationality demonstrated by both the leaders and the followers of the Cultural Revolution did not deter the more “sympathetic” Western observers from rationalizing such bizarre behavior as a purifying and rejuvenating process for the increasingly bureaucratized Communist political system. Even the almost total absence of any legal remedy for the prosecuted during the Cultural Revolution was defended as a kind of “revolutionary justice” in a society dedicated to the eradication of “class enemies.”

The setbacks of the Four Modernizations plan, however, presented a quite different set of problems for the pro-Peking scholars. Because the Chinese Communists used the old-fashioned Western criteria of “modernization” that are not so much different from the “self-strengthening” movement of the late Ch’ing Period, success or failure of this movement must be measured by rather concrete materialistic indicators. No longer can the continuation of rampant poverty and poor sanitary conditions, or the lack of administrative efficiency be defended by the mere need for

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\* In Yu-Ming Shaw (ed.), *Power and Policy in the PRC* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985), pp. 321-339..

<sup>1</sup> For examples, see Ramon H. Myers and Thomas A. Metzger, “Sinological Shadows: The State of Modern China Studies in the United States,” *Washington Quarterly* (Spring 1980), pp. 87-114; Chalmers Johnson, “What’s Wrong with Chinese Political Studies?” paper presented to the Eleventh Sino-American Conference on Mainland China, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China, 7-13 June 1982; and Harry Harding, “From China, with Disdain: New Trends in the Study of China,” also a paper presented to the Eleventh Sino-American Conference on Mainland China.

revolutionary spirit. With the gradual opening up of China to Western visitors in recent years, the “discovery” of the actual living conditions of the Chinese people led two U.S. reporters to write books that have gained considerable attention from both academics on China and the general public in many countries.<sup>2</sup>

Why have so many China scholars, particularly those in the United States, failed not only in predicting developments in Communist China but also in perceiving the reality of Chinese society under Communist rule? Does this failure reflect an innocent lack of intellectual sensitivity to detect the real conditions, or is it due to the normative and willful orientation of the China scholars themselves? Should China studies remain an area study devoted to detailed description and analysis of specific problems in a well-defined geographical region or historical period, or should these endeavors go beyond this and become part of the social sciences related to the larger question of understanding human behavior at the global level? Should China studies be limited to the examination of Chinese society under Communist rule or include all societies in which the Chinese people predominate and the Chinese culture prevails? What types of approaches and research methods have been used by scholars in the China field and how successful have these approaches and methods been with regard to their particular subject matter? What are the requirements a competent China scholar should fulfill in order to do a good job in the field? Finally, what are some potentially rewarding areas of research in which future studies should be conducted?

Obviously it is impossible for any single scholar to address himself to all the above-mentioned questions. This paper is not intended to cover all the problems raised in those questions or even to conduct an exhaustive review of literature in the China field. Instead, the main thrust of this paper is to present a critical review of the methodological problems facing contemporary China scholars from a social science perspective. In the course of the discussion, the nature and scope of China studies, the intellectual connection between China studies and social science, the contribution of various approaches and research methods to the analysis of the Chinese society under Communist rule, and the intellectual tools that China scholars should possess in order to do a competent job in the field will be examined one after another. Finally, in the closing section some recommendations will be presented on both directions and methods of investigation, along with suggestions for further cooperation among China scholars in the Republic of China, Japan, the United States, and European and other countries.

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<sup>2</sup> See Fox Butterfield, *China, Alive in the Bitter Sea* (New York: Times Books, 1982) and Richard Bernstein, *From the Center of the Earth* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982). See also Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (New York: Viking, 1977); Edward Luttwak, “Seeing China Plain,” *Commentary* (December 1976), pp. 27-33; and Susan Shirk, “Human Rights: What About China?” *Foreign Policy* 29 (Winter, 1977-1978), pp. 109-127.

## **China Studies: What Has Gone Wrong?**

If we accept the criticism that China studies have fallen short of their goal in accurately analyzing and predicting events in Communist China, then a failure to determine the nature and scope of the field has been one of the major contributing factors. We may differentiate three major types of research interests in the China field: the sinological tradition, problem and policy analysis, and disciplinary studies. There has been a rough chronological sequence of development, with the sinological approach predominating in the pre-1950 period, problem and policy analysis during the 1950s and early 1960s, and the disciplinary approach in the post-1960s period.<sup>3</sup>

The sinological school does not need much clarification. Generally speaking, it refers to scholars influenced by China studies in Europe that focus on the historical, cultural, and linguistic aspects of Chinese society. Their interest lies in discovering the unique features of the various facets of traditional China. Not much effort has been made in producing or testing general hypotheses concerning the subject matter. Problem and policy analysis is a type of research that treats Communist China as an issue in the foreign policy of a specific nation. Scholars of this group use a combination of research methods, ranging from sheer speculative reporting to documentary analysis to some limited employment of social science methods.

Disciplinary studies refers to the mode of investigation that relies on the theories and methods of a particular discipline or a combination of several disciplines within the social sciences. Researchers in these studies differ from sinologists in terms of their more professed interest in discovering the regularities rather than the uniqueness of certain things about events in Chinese society. The discipline-oriented scholars also differ from scholars of problem analysis in the sense that the former's concerns go beyond the immediate utility of the research results, whereas the latter are primarily interested in producing data for problem-solving and policy analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Since the disciplinary or social science-oriented scholars basically are not preoccupied with the immediate utility of the knowledge produced by their research,

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion on the changing orientation of China studies, see Yung Wei, "The Behavioral Sciences and China Studies: Some Thoughts on Theories, Methods, and Data Sources," paper presented to the Second Sino-American Conference on Mainland China, San Francisco, California, 14-16 June 1972, later included in Yung Wei, *Science, Elite, and Modernization* (Taipei: Hsueh-Sheng Shu Chu, 1980), pp. 37-55; Eugene Wu, "Studies on Mainland China in the United States," in *Collected Documents of the Conference on Mainland China* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1971), pp. 29-46; and Kenneth Scott Latourette, "Far Eastern Studies in the United States: Retrospect and Prospect," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 15 (1955), pp. 3-11.

<sup>4</sup> For a review of the different approaches to China studies and the role of social science, see Chalmers Johnson, "The Role of Social Sciences in China Scholarship," *World Politics* 17 (January 1965), pp. 256-271; Yung Wei, "The Chinese Communist Political System: An Introduction," in *Communist China: A System-Functional Reader*, ed. Yung Wei (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1971), pp. 1-13; and Richard W. Wilson, "China Studies in Crisis," *World Politics* 33 (January 1971), pp. 296-317.

accuracy in predicting specific events or developments in the Chinese setting is a desirable and indispensable quality of their research. They are more interested in discovering the probabilistic relationships among different variables concerning a broad range of problems or phenomena. To these scholars, the building of heuristic, interpretive, and organizing models and theories is more important than becoming a successful fortune-teller in the China field.

Having made the above distinctions, one can turn to the prevailing complaint on the “failures” of China studies. Essentially, there could be two major types of problems afflicting China scholars. The first is that of orientation, the second that of inadequate research procedures. The first is a matter of preconception; the second, methodology. One may divide scholars affected by the first type of failure into two subgroups: those whose bias and prejudices derive from their social background and the milieu in which they find themselves, and the others whose problems lie in a deliberate manipulation of data to suit their ideological or personal purposes. Given the complexity and intensity of the China issues, there is no shortage of individual scholars in the China field who have basically already made up their minds. For these scholars, sophisticated research procedures are simply a better packaging process for the delivery of goods already selected.

The development of the China field in the United States was so closely related to the emergence of the Communist regime in China that policy debates within the U.S. government tended to carry over into academic research. The witchhunt procedures in the investigation for Communist-sympathizers within the U.S. government and its advisory personnel during the McCarthy era in the 1950s caused a backlash among an extremely influential group of China scholars and their students who to this day have remained dedicated to the rectification of the wrongdoings of McCarthyism. It was only natural for these scholars to feel positively toward Peking and less positively or even negatively toward the Republic of China on Taiwan. For many of these scholars who have become very successful in their profession but still feel “persecuted,” their writing and research have become instruments for fighting back. With this group of China scholars in the United States, all the sophisticated reasoning processes and complicated methodology are merely instruments with which they try to influence policymakers and “educate” the general public.

A large part of the “failure” to produce a reliable account of conditions in Communist China can be traced back to preconceived biases among certain China specialists in almost all countries. Two cases must be differentiated. When a scholar deliberately distorts reality, it is a failure in academic integrity. When, however, one unconsciously or innocently analyzes the problems in the China field with a particular

tilt, it is then a matter of *Wissenssoziologie*, or sociology of knowledge.<sup>5</sup> That a scholar's mental process is influenced by his social position, cultural background, and belief system is not unique to China scholars. It ought to be pointed out, however, that because the post-1949 development of the China field has been so much related to an unhappy chapter of U.S. domestic and foreign policy in the era of McCarthyism, a "group think" phenomenon has appeared to develop in analysis in the China field—a phenomenon that still has an impact on scholarship in China studies.

### **Social Science and China Studies: The Need for Mutual Fertilization**

Having recognized the problems of orientation and preconception, we may now turn to the more basic problem of China studies, i.e., that of research methodology. But first a fundamental question must be asked: why should we study China? Do we study China only because its mainland is now occupied by a gigantic Communist regime that is a major concern for foreign policymakers of many nations? Do we study China because of the "unique" cultural heritage of the Chinese people? Still more fundamentally, what is the meaning of "China"? Does it mean only Communist China or both Communist China and Taiwan? Or does it refer to a more abstract concept of the "Chinese communities" in various parts of the world? Trying to answer these questions will make us aware of the different perspectives through which one can observe "China" phenomena.

In my opinion, the key to success in China studies lies in the adoption of a broader definition of the term "China" and the application of a more rigorous social science methodology. China studies should not be limited to the analysis of the structure, processes, and behavior of the Chinese Communist system, nor should it be focused only on the examination of the Chinese society under Communist rule. Instead, we should broaden the scope and elevate the level of analytic focus from that of area studies to that of a study of the Chinese people under different social and political systems.<sup>6</sup> Examination should be made of the responses and readjustment of the Chinese people not only to different political regimes but to social, cultural, and economic changes at different stages. By adopting this approach, we shall be able to move from a preoccupation with "issues" or "problems" to an orientation focusing on

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<sup>5</sup> Marx, Scheler, Mannheim, Durkheim, and Sorokin all have addressed the problem of interaction between the mental process of a scholar and his social as well as cultural milieu. For a thorough discussion, see Robert K. Merton, *The Sociology of Science, Theoretical and Empirical Investigation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 7-40.

<sup>6</sup> For the need to broaden the scope of China studies, see Maurice Freedman, "Why China?" presidential address to the American Anthropological Association, 1969.

“phenomena” or “social facts”<sup>7</sup>—a move that, in my opinion, will bring China studies into the mainstream of social science research.

Whether China studies should be area studies or a part of the interdisciplinary studies of the social sciences has been a topic of persistent debate among academicians. Lucian W. Pye, Robert C. Tucker, and Alex Inkeles all have argued strongly that it is the contemporary social science approach rather than area studies that has provided most of the promising conceptual tools for the study of Communist societies.<sup>8</sup> Only by adopting a social science approach can we move from an “idiographic” description of area studies to a “nomothetic” analysis in comparative research.<sup>9</sup> The larger proportion of social scientists is basically nomothetic, whereas the larger proportion of area specialists is idiographic.<sup>10</sup> This differentiation between the two groups, however, is not an absolute one. Many area specialists also try to generalize in their own geographic areas. Likewise, social scientists develop substantive knowledge of a specific geographic region for which they possess more comprehensive sources and more detailed data.

The need for mutual fertilization between the social sciences and China studies is evident in several important aspects. From the perspective of China studies, given the complex and ever-changing nature of the various Chinese societies such as Communist China, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, it is no longer possible to rely upon a simple historical, cultural, or descriptive political analysis to unravel the meaning of various events and developments. More than ten years ago, this author pointed out the potential contribution that the social sciences, particularly the behaviorally oriented social sciences, could make to the studies of problems in the Chinese settings. Suggestions were made on the employment of social science theories and models such as structural-functional theory, system theory, decision-making theory, social mobilization, developmental theories, elite theories, and political communication to the examination of problems in China studies. Recommendations were also made on the utilization of the research tools of the social and behavioral sciences to investigate various problems in the China field. It was argued that research techniques such as survey methods, content analysis, statistical analysis and inference, information retrieval, computer analysis, and simulation all

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<sup>7</sup> See Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Methods*, trans. Sarah A. Solovey and John H. Mueller, ed. George E. G. Catlin (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 1-13.

<sup>8</sup> See Lucian W. Pye, “Comparative Politics and Communist Studies,” paper delivered at Conference on Communist Studies, American Political Science Association, New York, September 1966); Robert C. Tucker, “On the Comparative Study of Communism,” *World Politics* 19 (January 1967), pp. 242-257; and Alex Inkeles, “Models in the Analysis of Soviet Society,” *Survey* 60 (July 1966), pp. 3-17.

<sup>9</sup> Frederio J. Fieron, Jr., ed., *Communist Studies and the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1969), pp. 1-33.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

could be used to tackle the problems in China studies, although some modifications might be necessary to overcome the limitation on data collection and the generally lower quality of the data sources.<sup>11</sup>

Encouragement of a merging of China studies and social science research also can be defended by the need for extending the social sciences as a branch of human knowledge that hitherto has relied heavily on theoretical tools developed in the West and on data sources collected primarily in Western society. As G. William Skinner pointed out, “those disciplines which, like sociology, economics, and political science, developed not only in the Western world but as studies of Western institutions—those disciplines remain essentially rooted in particular societies, economics, and politics found in the Western world and its outputs.”<sup>12</sup> Skinner lamented in a 1964 article that none of the empirical studies completed in the period between 1958 and 1963 dealt with a non-Western community.<sup>13</sup> If the social and behavioral scientists have any intention at all to make their particular field of human knowledge a universal science based upon global human experience, then it is absolutely necessary to include the Chinese societies in the arenas of rigorous empirical research.

On a more practical level and in more concrete terms, one of the major reasons for our interest in Communist China lies in the fact that it occupies the Chinese mainland, which is the seat of a society having a continuous social and political structure for more than 4,000 years. Thus, to study China in this context represents an effort to keep track of social and political developments in one of the oldest continuous civilizations of the world.

A second such reason for studying China is to be found in the enormous dimension of this political system in terms of the size of its territory and of the population under its domination. Indeed, it rules one-fourth of the people on earth and is the biggest country in Asia, with a central location in the eastern part of that continent.

A third reason for an interest in Communist China among social and political scientists is that it is the largest Communist nation in the world, not excepting the Soviet Union. The success or failure of this Communist regime will have a decisive impact on the Communist movements in various parts of the world. The recent Sino-Soviet split with all its consequent effects on Communist parties and governments throughout the world has further intensified concern for the role played by Communist China in the unity or division of the Communist camp.

A final reason that has motivated social and political scientists to study

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<sup>11</sup> Yung Wei, “The Behavioral Sciences and China Studies,” pp. 48-54.

<sup>12</sup> See G. William Skinner, “What the Study of China Can Do for Social Science,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (August 1964), pp. 518-529.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 518.

Communist China is that this Communist regime stands not only for a totalitarian political system of tremendous dimension but also for a distinct model of sociopolitical development that differs from both the Western democratic model and the Soviet Communist model. An understanding of this regime would shed much light on the nature of totalitarian rule and the process of sociopolitical development of the emerging nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

### **Social Sciences and China Studies:**

#### **A Preliminary Review of Approaches and Research Results**

If one is not satisfied with the current state of affairs in China studies or the accuracy of reporting on China, the sources of the shortcomings are not so likely to be found in the quantity or quality of research—as in the orientation and preconceptions of individual scholars or groups of scholars. As for the research itself, for the past three decades Chinese studies unquestionably has been one of the most active and productive fields of scholarly pursuit. This was particularly true in the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1958 and 1970, more than US \$25 million were given by various private foundations to support research in the China field. For example, the Ford Foundation poured large amounts of funding into various China and Asian programs in the United States and other countries in order to recruit competent scholars, improve language training, expand course offerings, compile indexes and bibliographies, and establish research centers in various Chinese settings. These efforts by private foundations, coupled with equally well-financed efforts by the U.S. government, have led to the mushrooming of academic programs on China and a phenomenal increase in the number of specialists in China studies. For instance, during the decade 1960-1969, some 1,700 students in U.S. colleges received B.A. degrees in China studies; at the university level, some 1,000 received M.A. degrees and 412 the Ph.D. degree.<sup>14</sup>

The vitality and dynamism of China studies during that period was also manifested in the voluminous publications and the increasing attention given to the investigation of problems of contemporary China. The Social Science Research Council (SSRC), for instance, pumped a considerable amount of funds into research on carefully chosen topics submitted by young scholars and doctoral candidates. Almost invariably the methods employed in research projects supported by the SSRC were far more social science-oriented than oriented toward area studies or sinological inquiries. The fruits produced by social science-oriented research on China have been

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<sup>14</sup> Leonard D. Gordon, with Frank J. Shulman, ed., *Doctoral Dissertations on China: A Bibliography of Studies in Western Languages, 1945-1970* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972).



documented by a great number of bibliographical studies that stand as monuments celebrating the achievements in this field.<sup>15</sup>

In such a short paper it is impossible to thoroughly review the contributions made by various scholars in the China field. It is possible, however, to identify some fields that, in my opinion, have made progress toward more rigorous social science-oriented research in the China field. Tables 18.1 and 18.2 represent a rudimentary and impressionistic examination of the relationship between social sciences and China studies. Although the device is extremely crude and may be highly subjective, it does show that political science, sociology, and psychology have had the highest associations with different fields within China studies. Data in Table 18.1 also demonstrate that among the subfields of China studies, “political culture and socialization” and “population and social relations” are the two more oriented to an interdisciplinary approach. These findings are quite close to the observations made by Maurice Freedman in 1969.<sup>16</sup>

Table 18.2 shows that quantitative research techniques are used in the study of “political culture and socialization,” “population and social relations,” “elite recruitment,” and “economic development” more frequently than in “political participation” and “external relations.” The data also show that simple statistical analysis, contingency analysis, and computer data processing are already being used rather widely in certain fields of China studies.

Judging by the information summarized in the two tables, political culture and socialization is without question one of the most sophisticated fields in China studies, so far as both an interdisciplinary approach and research methods are concerned. The number of books and articles published on the subject testify to the vigor and resourcefulness of this research.<sup>17</sup> Two impetuses behind these efforts are the

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<sup>15</sup> For instance, see William Skinner, ed., *Modern Chinese Society: An Analytical Bibliography* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Freedman, “Why China?” pp. 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Notable examples include: Lucian W. Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics: A Psycho-cultural Study of the Authority Crisis in Political Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968); Richard W. Wilson, *Learning to Be Chinese: The Political Socialization of Children in Taiwan* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1970); R. W. Wilson, *The Moral State, A Study of the Political Socialization of Chinese and American Children* (New York: Free Press, 1974); R. W. Wilson, “The Learning of Political Symbols in Chinese Culture,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 3 (July-October 1968), pp. 246-254; Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of Brainwashing in China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963); R. J. Lifton, *Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Cultural Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); Richard H. Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Sheldon Appleton, “The Political Socialization of College Students on Taiwan,” *Asian Survey* 10 (October 1970), pp. 910-923; S. Appleton, “Regime Support Among Taiwan High School Students,” *Asian Survey* 13 (August 1973), pp. 750-760; and Charles Price Ridley, Paul H. B. Godwin, and Dennis J. Doolin, *The Making of a Model Citizen in Communist China* (Stanford, Calif.: The Hoover Institute Press, 1971). For a critical review of studies on China political culture, see Yung Wei, “A Methodological Critique of Current Studies on China Political Culture,” *Journal*

emergence of a “behavioral” approach to China studies and the development of political science subfields in “political culture” and “political socialization.” The development of an empirically or behaviorally oriented school of China studies is closely related to the emergence of a “behavioral” approach in political science. To put it in grossly simplified terms, the behaviorally oriented political scientists have forged ahead by advocating an empirical political science based upon quantitative analysis with an interdisciplinary emphasis; that is, they increasingly use the theories and methods of other behavioral and social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and economics in the analysis of political phenomena. In brief, they have called for a cross-fertilization of theories and methods between political science and other social sciences.

Given this background, it is no wonder that the majority of scholars who are pushing for an empirical-behavioral approach in China studies are political scientists. From the writings of Lucian W. Pye, Chalmers Johnson, Richard W. Wilson, and Yung Wei, several basic positions of empirically oriented China scholarship can be derived. First, it is maintained that in conducting research in the China field, scholars must try to adopt or develop certain analytical frameworks to use as a guide for data collection and hypothesis testing. Second, any propositions or statements that are not supported by empirical data should be regarded as untested hypotheses, not as conclusions. Third, in order to have a broader theoretical as well as methodological approach, scholars should adopt an interdisciplinary orientation, borrowing for application those theories (especially middle-range theories<sup>18</sup>) and methodologies that are available in political science, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics. Finally, efforts should be made to refine the hypothesis-testing process by collecting and developing quantitative data rather than relying on qualitative descriptions.<sup>19</sup>

It should not be a surprise that in searching for a focus of interdisciplinary, quantitative research, China specialists turned to one of the most explored subfields in empirical political science, i.e., the study of political culture and political socialization. According to Lucian W. Pye, “political culture is the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system.”<sup>20</sup> Generally speaking, four basic approaches to the study of Chinese political culture can be identified: the psychohistorical approach, the psychocultural approach, the

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*of Politics* 38 (February 1976), pp. 114-140.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion on the “theories of the middle range” see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1957), pp. 5-10.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, “China Studies in Crisis,” and Yung Wei, “Behavioral Sciences and China Studies.”

<sup>20</sup> Lucian W. Pye, “Political Culture,” in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), vol. 12, pp. 218-225.

sociopsychological approach, and the communication approach. Scholars applying a psychohistorical approach try to combine psychoanalytical methods with historical analysis. In Robert Jay Lifton's words, this approach is "a combination of psychoanalytic sensitivity and historical imagination."<sup>21</sup> Lifton's interest in the Chinese culture derived from his study of "brainwashing" techniques of the Chinese Communists. During 1954 and 1955, he interviewed forty "victims" of the "brainwashing" process; among them, twenty-five were Westerners and fifteen were Chinese.<sup>22</sup> Being a psychiatrist, Lifton used primarily the method of clinical interview, emphasizing techniques of "free association." Through these interviews, he discovered that the basic techniques used by the Chinese Communists in "brain-washing" included coercion, exhortation, therapy, and realization. By depriving an individual of opportunities to satisfy basic physical needs and comfort, by isolating him from the outside world, by exposing him to a specially arranged environment, and by creating intense mental stress, the Chinese Communists were able to produce confession, self-criticism, and open repentance from individuals who ordinarily would not have been perceived as capable of such self-deprecating responses.

Another leading effort to understand Chinese political culture has been made through the psychocultural approach. In the words of Lucian W. Pye, psychocultural analysis is simply "a psychologically oriented study of political culture." The actual content of this type of study, however, goes far beyond this description. It involves not only the examination of the personality structure of members of a society and of a political system, but also the relationships among personal identity, political authority, nation-building, and political modernization. Pye first tried this method on Burma and then developed, along with other political scientists such as Sidney Verba, Myron Weiner, and Robert E. Ward, a general framework for studying political culture and political development. In regard to the study of Chinese political culture, Pye's major contribution is his thesis on the problem of "authority crisis" in the modernization of Chinese society.<sup>23</sup>

Although Pye advanced the thesis of an "authority crisis" in Chinese political culture, he did not proceed to collect empirical data to test his hypothesis. This job was left for his student, Richard H. Solomon.<sup>24</sup> Central to Solomon's theme of Chinese political culture is the relationship between child-rearing practices and the development of a model Chinese political personality and political culture. Solomon

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, "On Psychohistory," *Partisan Review* (Spring 1970), pp. 11-32.

<sup>22</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform and Psychology of Totalism*.

<sup>23</sup> For the idea of "authority crisis," see Pye, *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*; see also Pye, *China, An Introduction* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), pp. 349-351.

<sup>24</sup> Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture*, p. xvii.

“discovered” that the golden age of the life experience of the Chinese people is their preteen childhood. During this period, the parents assume a very permissive and protective attitude toward the child, especially in regard to satisfying the child’s desire for food, hence the development of an “oral character” among the Chinese. Yet once the child reaches his teens, this tolerant attitude on the part of his parents is suddenly changed into strict discipline, threat of isolation, severe physical punishment, endless indoctrination with the orthodox Confucianist teaching on filial piety, and subjection to shaming techniques.<sup>25</sup>

A third approach is the sociopsychological approach, by which I mean the analysis of Chinese political culture by examining the process of how the values, norms, and attitudes have been transmitted from one generation to another through social learning, i.e., the process of political socialization. Among the scholars who have studied political socialization in the Chinese setting are Richard W. Wilson, Sheldon Appleton, Song-hsi Yüan, and Yung Wei.<sup>26</sup>

During the school year 1965/1966, Richard W. Wilson collected data on political socialization by observing and interviewing children in three elementary schools in the Taipei area on the island of Taiwan. He used four procedures to collect his data: (1) actual classroom and school observation; (2) questionnaire-based interviews with children (using open-ended questions, a pictorial political symbol questionnaire, and projective questionnaires based on pictures of authority situations); (3) face-to-face interviews with children, educational authorities, and parents; and (4) intensive examination of educational materials, primarily textbooks.<sup>27</sup>

One of Wilson’s major conclusions is that the emphasis on the importance of “face,” involving the “shaming” techniques used by both parents and teachers, has a lasting effect on a child’s political behavior. By denying love and shaming the child publicly, the parents and teachers of Taiwan are able to generate a deeply internalized identification with the group as well as with the leader of the group. Wilson found an intense, uncritical loyalty toward the authority figure, yet there were also feelings of insecurity, doubt, fear, inner rage, hostility, and cynicism. These hidden hostilities could usually be released against sanctioned outside groups, which in the case of Taiwanese children are the Chinese Communists.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to the psychohistorical, psychocultural, and sociopsychological approaches, another approach applied to the study of political culture is

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-46.

<sup>26</sup> See note 17 for the works of Wilson and Appleton in the area. As for the study done by Song-hsi Yüan and Yung Wei, see Yüan, “Children and Politics [in Taiwan],” *Annals of the Chinese Association of Political Science* 1 (September 1971), pp. 67-113, and Yung Wei, “The Political Socialization of College Students in Taiwan” (unpublished research report).

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, *Learning to Be Chinese*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 99-120.

communications research. In this regard, studies conducted by Frederick T. C. Yu, Richard H. Solomon, Alan P. L. Liu, and Arnold B. Urken<sup>29</sup> have uncovered some important findings on the interplay of political ideology, the mass media, and elite-mass relations in Communist China. Although it may be questioned whether studies of this kind are really relevant to the study of Chinese political culture, it should be recognized that, given the emphasis by Mao Tse-tung on the importance of “mass line” and the extent of the efforts made by the Chinese Communists in this respect, political communication is definitely an important link between political culture on the one hand and the behavior of the mainland Chinese people on the other.

Besides the four approaches already discussed, one may add still another, i.e., the ideological approach to Chinese political culture. By “ideological approach” I refer to studies of the relationships among Chinese culture traits, Communist ideology, and the political practices of the Chinese Communists. Studies done by Franz Schumann, Chalmers Johnson, Benjamin I. Schwartz, James Chieh Hsiung, and John Bryan Starr<sup>30</sup> have definitely shed much light on our understanding of the behavior of the Chinese Communists in relation to Marxism-Leninism and the thought of Mao Tse-tung. As in communications research, one may question the utility of examining the political culture of China from an ideological point of view. But unless the Chinese background of the Communist leaders can be completely dissociated from their application of Communist ideology to the solution of concrete problems in China, one cannot examine the interaction between culture and ideology in the Chinese setting.

Other than political culture and socialization, another very fruitful field of research in China is elite studies. Studies of political elites have been closely related to the investigation of revolutionary movements. In the China field, a great many studies have been made of the important political leaders of Communist China. The number of such studies increased in the years after the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Various models have been developed to describe and analyze

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<sup>29</sup> See Frederick T. C. Yu, “Communication and Politics in Communist China,” in *Communications and Political Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 259-297; Richard H. Solomon, “Communication Patterns and the Chinese Revolution,” *China Quarterly* 32 (October-December 1967), pp. 101-110; Alan P. L. Liu, *Communication and National Integration in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); and Arnold P. Urken, “The Logic of Maoist Political Communication,” paper presented at the 1973 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Jung Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana, 4-8 September 1973.

<sup>30</sup> See Franz Schumann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Ideology and Politics in Contemporary China* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1973); Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958); James Chieh Hsiung, *Ideology and Practice, the Evolution of Chinese Communism* (New York: Praeger, 1970); and John Bryan Starr, *Ideology and Culture, An Introduction to the Dialectic of Contemporary Chinese Politics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

relationships among Chinese Communist leaders.<sup>31</sup> For example, the “Red versus expert” model attempts to picture the struggle between the Maoists and the non-Maoists in the Cultural Revolution as a conflict between those who stressed revolutionary experience and ideological purity and those who stressed practical and technical knowledge for solving concrete problems. A second model—the “palace coup”—treats the conflicts of the Cultural Revolution as an internal power struggle, focusing on political intrigues among a handful of the more powerful members of the elite and observing the spread of these intrigues to the lower echelons of the political and bureaucratic structures and the general populace in China.

A third model may be called the “regional versus central government” model. Here, conflicts between elite groups are viewed as a continuous process of readjustment of relationships between the political elite whose power base is in or near the capital and the elite whose power rests in the provinces. Scholars applying this model have pointed out that even before the Cultural Revolution, regionalism was a subject of frequent attacks by Mao and other Communist leaders. The purge of Kao Kang and Jao Shu-shih is a good case in point.

A fourth model rests on group conflict theory, viewing the Cultural Revolution as a struggle for domination among the party, the bureaucracy, and the military elites, each claiming to be the true disciples of Mao Tse-tung. The emergence of Lin Piao as vice-chairman of the party has been interpreted as a victory for the military elite in the struggle. We may call this model the “military-party-bureaucratic struggle” model.<sup>32</sup>

A fifth model was developed by Jürgen Domes, who tries to analyze intraparty conflicts in Communist China by examining the decision-making process. He discovers two distinct types of groups in the intraparty conflicts. The first is the opinion groups that exist in the short and middle term, having been initially formed on the basis of conflict between individuals within clearly defined limits. The second is factions that exist on a longer-term basis—the groups who are struggling for

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<sup>31</sup> For notable examples, see Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *Elites in the People's Republic of China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973); James R. Townsend, “Intra-Party Conflicts in China: Disintegration in an Established One-Party System,” in *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*, ed. Samuel P. Huntington and Clement H. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 1970); John M. Lindbeck, ed., *China: Management of a Revolutionary Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971); and Ying-mao Kau, “The Urban Bureaucratic Elite in Communist China: A Case Study of Wuhan, 1949-1965,” in *Chinese Communist Politics in Action*, ed. A. Doak Barnett (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969).

<sup>32</sup> See Lucian W. Pye, *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1981); A. Doak Barnett, *Cadres, Bureaucracy, and Power in Communist China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967); Michel Oksenberg, “The Political Group, Political Participation and Communication,” in *The Cultural Revolution: 1967 in Review*, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, no. 2 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Center for Chinese Studies, 1968); and John W. Lewis, “Leader, Commissar, and Bureaucrat: The Chinese Political System in the Last Days of the Revolution,” in *China in Crisis*, ed. Ping-ti Ho and Tang Tsou (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), vol. 1, book 2, 449-481.

alternative programs and demanding exclusive access to leadership. By carefully examining the process of leadership formation at different stages in the development of Chinese Communist politics, Domes concludes that the course of domestic politics Does not substantiate the assumption that the key to an understanding of political change in Communist China is through concepts and actions of a single charismatic leader.<sup>33</sup>

Another fertile field of social science research in the China field is to be found in the study of local communities. Skinner, Vogel, Ahn, Parish, and Whyte have done major works in this field.<sup>34</sup> By carefully examining fragmented official documents and statistics, interviewing emigrants, and occasionally visiting rural China under Communist rule, scholars of rural sociology have been able to put out an amazing quantity of serious work on the living conditions in local communities in China. Of these studies, the work by Parish and Whyte deserves special attention both in its findings and methodology. Parish and Whyte discovered that it is incorrect to interpret the willingness of the peasants to change in the 1960s and 1970s primarily in terms of outdated class labels. Instead they found that only when and where the rural social structure is supportive of particular changes is ideological persuasion likely to be effective. Parish and Whyte also discovered that the modernization perspective, in its broader conception of indirect structural sources of change, is superior to the Chinese Marxist perspective. The methodological notes made by Parish and Whyte in regard to the handling of refugee interviewing are informative as well as reflective. By pointing out the bias and selectivity of the interviewing process, they have demonstrated the painful limitation confronted by scholars doing research on closed or semiclosed systems. Yet despite all the restrictions put on them, scholars of rural and urban sociology have emerged as a group receiving one of the most abundant harvests in the China field.

From the foregoing review on political culture, elite studies, and rural sociology, one should be able to get a general idea of the types and extent of application of social science theories and methods to China studies. The list could be extended to other

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<sup>33</sup> Jürgen Domes, *China After the Cultural Revolution, Politics Between Two Party Congresses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> G. William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China" (in three parts). *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (November 1964, February and May 1965), pp. 3-43, 195-228, 363-399; Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1948-1968* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Byung-joon Ahn, "The Political Economy of the People's Commune in China: Changes and Continuities," *Journal of Asian Studies* 34 (May 1975), pp. 631-658; William C. Parish and Martin King Whyte, *Villages and Family in Contemporary China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Martin King Whyte, "Inequality and Stratification in China," *China Quarterly* 64 (December 1975), pp. 684-711. For a review of sociological research on Communist China, see Andrew G. Walder, "Chinese Communist Society: The State of the Field," paper delivered to the Eleventh Sino-American Conference on Mainland China, 7-13 June 1982.

fields in China studies, for instance, study of the economy of Communist China, an enterprise almost monopolized by Western scholars, especially ones from the United States. Although their assessment of the Communist Chinese economy is somewhat tilted to the more optimistic side, it is far more accurate than the official figures of the U.S. government.<sup>35</sup>

Deductive modeling is another promising field that has witnessed creative contributions by younger scholars. Using game theory and coalition theory, models of elite behavior with a rather high explanatory power can be built.<sup>36</sup> If the Chinese Communists continue to increase the supply of more reliable official data on various aspects of the society on the Chinese mainland,<sup>37</sup> more can be done in the areas of deductive modeling as well as inductive testing of hypotheses.

### **Conclusions and Suggestions**

From the foregoing review of the methodology of contemporary China studies, one may draw several conclusions. First, there has been a clear tendency among China specialists to move from the historical-cultural approach to more empirically oriented studies, and from pure area studies to social science-oriented research. Second, extensive efforts have been made to generate testable hypotheses by building both deductive models and inductive research designs. Third, a gradual merging of the theories and methods of various branches of the social sciences has occurred in China studies, making mutual fertilization a reality, not just a slogan. Reports on the results of serious social science-oriented research have started to appear with increasing frequency in various disciplinary journals, thus enriching and broadening the content of specific subfields within the social sciences.

Through the process of reviewing the literature for this paper, one thing has become very clear. The orientation and “group thinking” of certain China scholars, more than the lack of methodological sophistication, has prevented the emergence of a true picture of Communist China. Whether the cause is innocent or is due to the deliberate manipulation of data in the reporting process (either from pressure by a subculture of a scholarly community or a perceived need to follow the “official line,” both in the West and in Communist China) I leave to my colleagues.

In the future, the key to more dynamic China studies is more interdisciplinary

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<sup>35</sup> Kang Chao, “The China-Watchers Tested,” *China Quarterly* 84 (March 1980), pp.97-104.

<sup>36</sup> For example, see William Pany-Yu Ting, “Conditional Behavior Among the Chinese Military Elite: A Nonrecursive, Simultaneous Equations, and Multiplicative Causal Model,” *American Political Science Review* 73 (1979), pp. 428-493.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion on this, see W. Klatt, “Chinese Statistics Updated,” *China Quarterly* 84 (December 1980), pp. 737-748.



approaches using the theories and methodology of the social sciences. We may compare the Chinese Communist political system with other political systems along several mutually complementary spectra over time and space. For instance, we may place Communist China on the familiar traditional-transitional-modern spectrum and see how it differs from other political systems in terms of the relationship between the social and economic conditions of a society and its political style and development. Comparison along this line will help us gain much insight into the appeal of the Chinese version of communism for countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

We may also compare Communist China with other nations of the world along the line of a competitive-semicolonic-authoritarian model. Using this classification of political systems, we may compare the Chinese Communist political system with other political systems in terms of the degree of “openness” and “competitiveness” in processes affecting interest articulation, interest aggregation, elite recruitment, rule making, and other functions. However, a word of warning must be expressed: we must be careful not to let our ideological preferences lead us to quick, subjective conclusions as to the nature of the Chinese Communist political system and thus lose sight of the real purpose of the comparison.

A third type of comparison can be made between Communist China and other Communist nations, against an orthodox-revisionist spectrum. By doing this, we may see how differences in commitment to the original Marxist-Leninist dogma have affected the behavior of the Communist nations. We may also see how the historical, geographical, and cultural elements of a society can lead to different interpretations and application of the Communist political model to fit local conditions.

Finally, we may, and should, compare the Chinese Communist political system with other Chinese social and political systems in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. What we need is detached and dispassionate comparison based upon empirical data and with some kind of theoretical framework. Given the common cultural and historical roots of the four Chinese systems, each could serve as a control group for the others. In such studies we may examine the effect of different social and political systems on the lives of Chinese people living in different geographical areas.

Han Yü, an outstanding scholar of the T'ang dynasty, once said “Wen ch'üing erh hou kung” (Scholarship gets better when one becomes poorer). The problems of China studies in the recent past may have been derived from the abundance of funding, the high relevance to policymaking, and easy access to media exposure. Consequently, one of the most important ingredients of fine scholarship, i.e., the self-imposed solitude and detachment from worldly motive, was diluted and in some cases lost. From this perspective a limited academic recession may do us some good. When funds for research become limited, the fever for quick fame lowered, and the limelight

dimmed to a reading level, we shall all become more reflective and better able to move China studies onto a higher plane.

Table 18.1 Social Science and China Studies: The Degree of Mutual Fertilization (Rating: 3>2>1)

Social Science Discipline	Subfield in China Studies						Total
	Population and Social Relations	Political Culture and Socialization	Political Participation	Elite Recruitment	Economic Development	External Relations	
Sociology	3	3	1	1	1		9
Political science	1	3	3	3	1	1	12
Psychology	1	3	1	1	1	1	8
Anthropology	1	1	1		3	2	2
Economics	1						7
Total	7	10	6	5	6	4	38

Table 18.2 Research Methods in China Studies: The Extent of Utilization (Rating: 3&gt;2&gt;1)

Research Method	Subfield in China Studies						Total
	Population and Social Relations	Political Culture and Socialization	Political Participation	Elite Recruitment	Economic Development	External Relations	
Simple statistical analysis	3	2	2	3	3	1	14
Contingency and correlational analysis	2	2	1	3	2		10
Computer data processing	2	2		2	3		9
Content analysis	1	2					3
Survey research	1	2		1			4
Total	9	10	3	9	8	1	40