

本文章已註冊DOI數位物件識別碼

► Approaches to the Study of Chinese Politics

doi:10.7033/ISE.199609_32(9).0001

Issues & Studies, 32(9), 1996

問題與研究（英文版），32(9), 1996

作者/Author：Lowell Dittmer

頁數/Page：1-18

出版日期/Publication Date：1996/09

引用本篇文獻時，請提供DOI資訊，並透過DOI永久網址取得最正確的書目資訊。

To cite this Article, please include the DOI name in your reference data.

請使用本篇文獻DOI永久網址進行連結:

To link to this Article:

[http://dx.doi.org/10.7033/ISE.199609_32\(9\).0001](http://dx.doi.org/10.7033/ISE.199609_32(9).0001)



DOI Enhanced

DOI是數位物件識別碼（Digital Object Identifier, DOI）的簡稱，是這篇文章在網路上的唯一識別碼，用於永久連結及引用該篇文章。

若想得知更多DOI使用資訊，

請參考 <http://doi.airiti.com>

For more information,

Please see: <http://doi.airiti.com>

請往下捲動至下一頁，開始閱讀本篇文獻

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE



Approaches to the Study of Chinese Politics*

Lowell Dittmer

Department of Political Science
University of California at Berkeley

The development of China studies reflects not only the cumulative progress of "normal" science and the adventitious availability of particular source materials, but the changing core concerns or leitmotifs of a political system that has undergone several paradigm shifts. During the reform era, there has been a shift from the Maoist emphasis on charismatic leadership and revolutionary momentum to a concern with economic growth and system building. Thus it becomes possible for us to group (domestic) China studies into three subfields: political economy, political sociology, and political structure. Common to all three of them is a shift from top-down, "strong state" assumptions to the construction of complex systems at the middle and lower levels.

Keywords: political structure; political economy; political sociology; approaches; China studies

* * *

The methodological outlook for the study of politics on the Chinese mainland has been considerably less stable than that in the analysis of American or West European politics, which have established (if not always written) constitutional structures; it is perhaps less stable even than the study of other less developed countries (LDCs) which, although lacking stable institutional frameworks, have remained relatively persistent in their fragmentation. Chinese politics, in contrast, has changed so dramatically over time that the theoretical approaches applicable to one period become completely irrelevant to the next. The reason for these changes in intellectual fashion is partly

*Revised version of a paper delivered at the 25th Sino-American Conference on Contemporary China, Taipei, June 10-11, 1996. I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the research assistance of Mr. Jin-baek Choi.

attributable to shifts in paradigms popular in the field at large, no doubt, but it lies primarily with the PRC regime itself—not because the PRC is so adept at steering gullible Western China-watchers around by the nose, as some critiques would have it, although there is perhaps a tendency among some scholars to fall into line with whatever values and tenets the regime happens to be espousing at the time (and an equally strong tendency among other scholars, lest we forget, to assail those same values and tenets). Aside from research biases and intellectual vogues, there is the simple fact that as the objects of analysis change, new techniques are needed to analyze them. Thus in the 1950s, the CCP's concern was indeed with resocializing the newly "liberated" population (particularly the intellectuals who control secondary communications), with monopolizing control of the economy, and institutionalizing a stable political hierarchy—and scholarly interests accordingly focused on "thought reform" and pervasive socioeconomic control through institutional hierarchies ("totalitarianism"). When this still fragile political infrastructure came under assault and buckled during the Cultural Revolution, attention naturally shifted to informal politics, political culture, and collective action. The previous totalitarian paradigm was abandoned not so much because it had been logically refuted or shown to have some besetting flaw as because it simply no longer applied to the emergent Chinese political reality: claims to organizational monocracy and ideological unanimity were belied by rampant factionalism, "struggle," and "contradictions."

Thus the methodological landscape of China studies is littered with models abandoned due to functional obsolescence, and the lack of a dominant paradigm or even an abiding constellation of "schools of thought" mirrors the turbulent course of actual Chinese politics. There is, however, some prospect that the situation is gradually improving. Although there is no clear consensus on whether the June 4 protests and subsequent crackdown mark a watershed or merely a temporary caesura, the well-known Deng Xiaoping "freeze" on political reform in the context of economic transformation has at least had the advantage of giving political scientists a more stable empirical base to work with—surely there has been less political change during the past seventeen years of reform than during the previous twenty-seven years of "continuing the revolution." Thus the purpose of this essay is to review the state of the art or science of PRC political studies during the reform era. To be sure, it is a preliminary schema designed to initiate discussion rather than a definitive survey, and I

apologize in advance and solicit correction for any inadvertent mischaracterizations. Nor will I include the field of foreign policy and international relations, which involves extraparametric variables. As a working categorical framework I shall divide the field into three subfields: political economy, political sociology, and political structure.

Political Economy

The shift from elite studies to political economy has been one of the major shifts in focus since the advent of reform. Again, this reflects the regime's new prioritization of the "four modernizations" (1977-80) and the "policy of reform and opening up" (1980-96), which in turn ensured that more data would be made available about economic reform than about other areas. What is political economy? It is obviously a hybrid term, referring to the dynamic interplay between politics (the state, empirically) and economics (the market). Thus the study of political economy can be roughly divided into two areas: those chiefly concerned with the market, and those chiefly concerned with the economic role of the state.

Most of the studies chiefly concerned with the market are of course conducted by economists, and as such beyond the purview of political scientists. There is some legitimate concern with how the market is politically conceptualized in China, resulting in the periodization of shifts between the "birdcage theory" of the early 1980s to the Socialist Commodity Economy (1987) and hence to the Socialist Market Economy (1992). Finally, although the market has received unprecedented ideological legitimization during the "primary stage of socialism," it is not yet by any means a "pure" market but one under much tighter political control than in capitalist systems, thus the politics of market manipulation (as in the demarcation of regional markets via fees and quasi-tariffs), the balance between market and plan, are still worth analysis. The World Bank's 1992 report, based on a mission that went to China in May-June 1991 to review the reforms of the 1980s and to assess developmental policies for the 1990s, is just one of the many studies to investigate the changing relationship between market and plan. The mission reported that many of the economic problems of the 1980s were the result of incomplete reforms and the devolution of decisionmaking power to provinces, local authorities, and even to enterprises and individuals, but that the problems created by reform created pressure for further reform.

It also viewed the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1991-95) as having made an important shift from mechanical targeting to emphasizing the macroeconomic framework.¹

What is the economic role of the state? There are at least three different ways to define this, and some of the literature that calls itself political economy uses all three definitions, while some uses only one or two. The first definition defines political economy in terms of political impact on the economy. That is, one turns to those institutions who have under their jurisdiction an important economic sector and investigates how they manage that sector. We might call this the “output model.” The institutional or structural approach to the study of economic outputs thus focuses on the institutions responsible for making economic policy. The pioneers in this approach have been David M. Lampton, Kenneth Lieberthal, and Michel Oksenberg, in a series of careful and well-researched books: Lampton, ed., *Policy Implementation in Post-Mao China* (California, 1987); Lieberthal and Oksenberg’s *Policy Making in China* (Princeton, 1988), which focused on the energy sector; and Lieberthal and Lampton’s *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (California, 1991). An important recent contribution to this genre joins a political scientist with an economist for a truly political economic analysis of China’s financial sector.²

The second variant of political economy deals with the politics of how economic policy is made; i.e., economics is “reduced” to politics. We might call this the “withinput model.” The underlying

¹The World Bank, *China: Reform and the Role of the Plan in the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1992). Other useful studies in this genre include William A. Byrd, *The Market Mechanism and Economic Reforms in China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); Andrew Watson, ed., *Economic Reform and Social Change in China* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Hsueh Tien-tung et al., *Studies on Economic Reforms and Development in the People’s Republic of China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1993); Keun Lee, *Chinese Firms and the State in Transition: Property Rights and Agency Problems in the Reform Era* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); Thomas P. Lyons and Victor Nee, eds., *The Economic Transformation of South China: Reform and Development in the Post-Mao Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994); Ding Lu, *Entrepreneurship in Suppressed Markets: Private Sector Experience in China* (New York: Garland, 1994); Samuel P. S. Ho, *Rural China in Transformation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Susan Young, *Private Business and Economic Reform in China* (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1995); and Derong Chen, *Chinese Firms Between Hierarchy and Market: The Contract Management Responsibility System in China* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

²Cf. Paul Bowles and Gordon White, *The Political Economy of China’s Financial Reforms* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993).

assumption in this literature is that institutions do what they are assigned to do and that the cadres who work in them thus reflect the interests of those institutions (“where one stands is where one sits”), but there are both hard and soft adherents of the bureaucratic politics approach. Perhaps the leading exponent of the former is Susan Shirk, who sees economic reform as the outcome of a political fight for political goals (thus “political logic”).³ Her faith in the premises of bureaucratic politics is reflected inter alia in her adoption of principal-agent theory to characterize the relationship between the CCP and the state bureaucracy. In order to overcome their opponents at the Center, Deng Xiaoping and his associates built a coalition of support from provincial cadres, who had an interest in the decentralization through which reform was then implemented. The result is that reform policies emerged as “particularistic contracts” providing mutual benefits for local leaders and their central allies, with the “second best” result of extensive (rather than intensive) growth; yet the Center found it very difficult (as “conservatives” discovered after Tiananmen) to recover either power or revenue after devolution, freezing reform in midcourse. Although he deals with the Maoist period rather than reform, David Bachman also adopts a bureaucratic politics approach, reinterpreting the Great Leap Forward as the outcome of interaction among three bureaucratic coalitions: financial, planning and heavy industry, and the Party. Dorothy Solinger, like Shirk and Bachman, emphasizes the importance of the state in economic reform, but her variant of bureaucratic politics traces bureaucratic interests not to specific bureaus but to broader umbrella categories devised by the analyst: in her work on commercial development she proposes a triad consisting of reformers, adjusters, and conservatives, and later she shifts (for reasons unclear to me) to different triad of planners, bureaucrats, and marketeers.⁴ Among advocates of a looser variant of bureaucratic politics are David M. Lampton, who finds overlapping jurisdictions, informal alliances,

³Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); see also Shirk, *How China Opened Its Door: The Political Success of the PRC's Foreign Trade and Investment Reform* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1994), which focuses on the interaction of bureau interests, primarily as seen in relations between the CCP and the State Council, based on “reciprocal accountability.”

⁴Dorothy Solinger, *China's Transition from Socialism: Statist Legacies and Market Reforms, 1980-1990* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).

and functional drift. In Gordon White's *Riding the Tiger*,⁵ which traces the reform program to the failure of the "Maoist developmental state" (chapter 1) and the subsequent ill-starred effort to revive the official ideology and rectify the Party, elite considerations in policy decisions are assumed to transcend their own bureaucratic interests and take account of broader questions of national strategy and the overall viability of the system. Rejecting "Pekingology," he sees policy as the outcome of interactions among three levels: the leadership echelon (macropolitics), pertinent institutions (mesopolitics), and social groups (micropolitics).

The third approach focuses on the economic inputs to the state, how entrepreneurs (usually bureaucratic entrepreneurs, though there have been some studies of the still tiny private sector) get what they want from the state. We might call this the "input model." Some micropolitical analyses do use such a model. Thus Ole Bruun's in-depth study of the private sector in a district of Chengdu, Sichuan, based on five extended field trips over a five-year period, examines how private entrepreneurs interact with local officials and develop "connections."⁶ In one of the few post-Mao studies to take "class" seriously, we see in George T. Yu's anthology how the power of China's emerging new middle class—intellectuals, technocrats, entrepreneurs—has resulted in demands for rationalization of economic activities and legal protection from the state.⁷ The input model is, however, clearly the least developed of the three, reflecting the implicit consensus that China remains a "top down" polity.

In general the study of political economy has made impressive contributions. By focusing on that facet of politics given top priority by PRC authorities, scholars pursuing this approach have gravitated to the area where the action is, and inasmuch as the economic reforms have been very successful, reflecting glory on their authors, the authorities have not been too secretive about access to data. Scholars have found it possible to do illuminating field research

⁵Gordon White, *Riding the Tiger: The Politics of Economic Reform in Post-Mao China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁶Ole Bruun, *Business and Bureaucracy in a Chinese City: An Ethnography of Private Business Households in Contemporary China* (Berkeley: University of California Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993).

⁷George T. Yu, ed., *China in Transition: Communism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1992).

and conduct interview with Chinese officials, including decisionmakers themselves. There are also limitations to the approach, of course. First, it is self-limiting by definition to the “economic” sphere, defined either in terms of inputs or outputs: political economy qua bureaucratic politics cannot explain Tiananmen, for example. Second, the field remains a paradigm and a set of illustrative case studies (tax for profits, eating in separate kitchens, contract management responsibility system, etc.)⁸ without a coherent theory linking together the input, output, and withinput dimensions—Marx’s conception of political economy may have been wrong, but he did have a theory.

Political Sociology

If political economy has to do with the interaction between state and market, political sociology, in its most abstract formulation, applies to “state-society” relations. Indeed, this is the title of two books, one of which is, however, disappointing in that most of the chapters are still influenced by the Cultural Revolution model, the other of which tends to focus on the issue from the perspective of leadership.⁹ Solinger’s *China’s Transition from Socialism*, though political economic in much of its subject matter, is also based on the state-society paradigm: the “guiding theme is the *statism* behind the reform effort” (p. 3); i.e., reform is merely a means to such statist ends as a balanced budget and economic modernization. Whereas Victor Nee finds the state-society relationship to be increasingly distinct (and desirably so), one of Solinger’s central findings is that patterns of personal association developed under the command economy linger on under reform so that “there is no clear or necessary opposition or dividing line between plan and market.” For Solinger, reform has blurred and softened, rather than sharpened, the distinction between state and society—thus she even undertakes a historical comparison to suggest that the close relations now developing between the contemporary Chinese state and new entrepreneurial elites are remarkably reminiscent of the relationship that once obtained between

⁸Chen, *Chinese Firms Between Hierarchy and Market*.

⁹Victor Nee and David Mazingo, eds., *State and Society in Contemporary China* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Arthur Lewis Rosenbaum, ed., *State and Society in China: The Consequences of Reform* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).

merchants and officials in the late imperial and republican eras. In contrast, Barrett McCormick argues that one of the most distinctive characteristics of the "Leninist state" is its autonomy from society: by monopolizing control of the economy, media, and personnel systems, the state has completely denied social autonomy, except through informal patron-client networks.¹⁰ Although the structure of his analysis is a bit odd, jumping from theoretical discussions to random case studies, McCormick proceeds to show that the impact of reform on alleviating this situation has been very modest: movement toward a more rational legal system has been thwarted by ubiquitous patrimonial networks, electoral law has proceeded in fits and starts, etc. Yet however irrational and discretionary, as Daniel Kelliher has noted, this network of patrimonial ties has strengthened the cumulative power of society vis-à-vis the state.¹¹

To get at a more concrete understanding of the state-society relationship, one group of studies has sought to focus on the margin between the two spheres, specifically on the informal politics that often spans them. The work of Andrew Nathan, Tang Tsou, and Lucian W. Pye looks at factional networks as a form of state-society bridge, as do the studies of Vivienne Shue, Andrew Walder, and Jean C. Oi.

Vivienne Shue examines the interactive process whereby the Chinese state and (rural) society have gradually reshaped each other.¹² She describes a historical process in which Maoist rural policies since the 1950s had the paradoxical effect of strengthening preexisting tendencies in rural life, resulting in a "honeycomb" pattern of rural

¹⁰Barrett McCormick, *Political Reform in Post-Mao China: Democracy and Bureaucracy in a Leninist State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹¹Daniel Kelliher, in *Peasant Power in China: The Era of Rural Reform, 1979-1989* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), notes that "one way of assessing the expected distribution of power between Chinese peasants and the Party-state apparatus is by analyzing the relative strength of state and society. . . . Under criteria devised by theorists in this tradition, China would be classified as having a strong state and weak society—the worst possible combination for the growth of peasant power." Yet, contrary to expectation, Kelliher finds that peasants played a key role in reform initiatives. The reason, he suggests, is that by placing great numbers of people in very similar, prescribed circumstances, state socialism unwittingly creates the possibility of mass action by disorganized, atomized individuals. Ironically, then, according to Kelliher, the very structure of state socialism gives rise to an influential society whose power derives not from organization but from its homogeneity vis-à-vis the state.

¹²Vivienne Shue, *The Reach of the State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988); see also Shue, *Peasant China in Transition: The Dynamics of Development Toward Socialism, 1949-1956* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

organization.¹³ Rural cadres operating in this environment, particularly after the apparent betrayal of local interests by the state during the Great Leap, came to identify with their local units and see their roles as protecting their communities from state demands. The pattern of state-society relations thus became one of rural localism in which local cadres bargained with higher authorities over which tasks they would accept and often distorted or ignored commands coming down from above. Thus the Maoist state suffered from a loss of power to implement its intended policies. Shue argues that the current marketizing reforms must be seen not as a voluntary surrender of central power, but as an effort to break down this local power through co-optation of issues and thereby expand the power of the state.

In contrast, Jean Oi argues that peasants today suffer from continuing dependence on local cadres, who have found new ways to pursue their own interests at the expense of the peasants. To Oi, the Chinese village is the place where the state meets society; politics does not take place among peasants, but between peasants and the state. Her point is that at the village level, a communist system is in effect a collection of patron-client relationships. During the Maoist period, peasants sought to manipulate these clientelist relationships with cadres in order to hold onto grain. The chapters on the reform period range more widely over such issues as the allocation of productive resources, inputs, and jobs. Throughout, the emphasis is on the power of local cadres over the peasants below them, mediating the commands of the state above them. Of particularly compelling significance is the argument that reform has transformed but not shrunk the power of local cadres and the state. Local cadres have parcelled out the best opportunities and resources to themselves and to their clients, harassed peasant entrepreneurs, and continued to curry favor with their superiors by making false reports.

The counterpart to Oi's studies in the urban context is Andrew Walder's well-known analysis of industrial workers.¹⁴ Walder shows that workers' interests are not uniform but depend greatly on their

¹³See Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), chap. 3, for an earlier analysis of this "honeycomb" structure.

¹⁴Andrew Walder, *Communist Neo-Traditionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

location within the industrial sector. In this case, the factory floor is where the state meets society. He shows how state-imposed structures of surveillance, control, and reward shape workers' strategies for pursuing their interests. Again, patron-client relationships prevent workers from organizing to pursue their interests, and encourage workers, in formal organizational settings, to pursue defensive strategies rather than to articulate aggregate interests. The result is the development of informal clientelist networks in which individual workers pursue their particularistic interests in an unorganized fashion. Even after the reform, he argues, the basic structures of worker dependence have not changed.

There are many important issues in this genre still awaiting further research and testing. First, there is the question of how informal networking between state and society affects the balance of power: Kelliher, Shue, and others argue that informal networks have successfully usurped state initiative, while Oi and Walder argue that organized dependency still permits the state to co-opt and manipulate local power. Second, there is still some ambiguity as to the nature of the bond: whereas Shue, Nathan, and others refer to it as a traditional holdover, based either on kinship, primordial ties, or preestablished patron-client relations, Oi and Walder consider the bond specific to communist organizational forms, and usually used to augment rather than subvert the power of the state.

Notwithstanding its important contributions, the state-society paradigm has its drawbacks.¹⁵ The conceptualization of a monolithic state vis-à-vis an undifferentiated society obscures some of the most intriguing aspects of the reform experience. How useful is a focus on the state-society relationship, for example, when informal networks are able to cross-cut and undermine the division? Thus there has been some attempt to break down the state-society relationship. Books edited by Victor Falkenheim and David Goodman borrow the notion of group theory from Eastern Europe (and ultimately, from Bentley, Truman, and others) to try to show how each group relates to the state.¹⁶ Thus the Goodman anthology includes chapters on

¹⁵Elizabeth J. Perry, "Trends in the Study of Chinese Politics: State-Society Relations," *The China Quarterly*, no. 139 (September 1994): 704-13.

¹⁶Victor C. Falkenheim, ed., *Citizens and Groups in Contemporary China* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1987); David S. G. Goodman, *Groups and Politics in the People's Republic of China* (Cardiff, U.K.: University College Cardiff Press, 1984).

“economists” (by Barbara Krug) at the highest echelons, David Goodman on provincial Party secretaries as an interest group, Gerald Segal on the military, Gordon White on middle and primary school teachers as a potential interest group, John Burns on peasant interest articulation, Tony Saich on the role of trade unions, and James Cotton on intellectuals. This is a pioneering effort, but most chapters are just descriptions of the formal characteristics of the various groups; interest articulation by the groups is assumed but seldom demonstrated empirically. As Andrew Watson demonstrates in a more recent anthology, the new interest groups also stand on shifting ground, as the reforms on which they were based have not been consolidated by appropriate institutional changes and laws.¹⁷ This leads to unintended consequences that tend to distort the reform effort.

Stimulated by the social changes wrought by reform, as demonstrated most dramatically in the April-May 1989 protest activities at Tiananmen, a whole new genre of political sociological literature has arisen on the topics of “civil society” and the “public sphere.” The former concept seems to have originated with Rousseau and Hegel and refers to voluntary, autonomous nonkinship groups based on lateral ties of interest (as in markets, strongly emphasized by Hegel) or common memories. The “public sphere,” a concept introduced more recently by Habermas, refers to the public forum as extended by modern mass communications media and the notion that government should be based on consensus reached by reasoned discourse within civil society. The import of the two terms stems from the assumption that civil society is a prerequisite of a public sphere and the latter is in turn a necessary prerequisite of modern democracy. This was of course the ultimate goal of the protest movement, and the virtually simultaneous collapse of the people’s republics in Eastern Europe, frequently attributed to the unnoticed previous accretion of civil society there, made that seem to be an intelligible goal. Some (but not all) political sociologists have also detected the “shoots of an incipient ‘civil society’” in China, either historically or of more recent vintage, resulting in a “great debate” in this literature.¹⁸ In contrast,

¹⁷Andrew Watson, *Economic Reform and Social Change in China* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁸White, *Riding the Tiger*.

Solinger and McCormick hold that the blurred division between state and society makes true civil society impossible, the implication being that marketization will not lead to democratization. Watson judiciously argues that the implications of economic reform are mixed: some problems arise from the continuing application of inappropriate political control, while others stem from the loss of control.

The problem with civil society as a research agenda is that it tended to be a one-issue paradigm, focusing on whether social groups were truly autonomous from the state; if not, the concept was deemed useless. Thus the civil society vogue has been surprisingly ephemeral.

Political Structure

The study of political structure has been in something of a slump in the reform era, corresponding to the halfhearted CCP interest in political reform. Whereas in the early 1980s the discussions of the reform leadership (Liao Gaisheng, even Deng Xiaoping) suggested an interest in quite ambitious structural changes, these aspirations seem to have been sidetracked. Yet there are subtle but significant differences from the Maoist era. As a way of facilitating the elimination of Hua Guofeng, the "chairmanship system" (one Party chair and a ranked hierarchy of vice-chairs) was eliminated, and with it there has been some moderation (but not elimination) of the power of the Supreme Leader, as Parris Chang has noted. This has resulted in what Lieberthal calls "fragmented authoritarianism," in which central leaders must "bargain" with subordinate units in order to have their policies implemented.¹⁹ There seems to be general consensus about this change, but there are differences about how the post-Mao leadership is patterned. According to Lieberthal, Shirk, Bachman, and Oksenberg, the process is increasingly incremental and institutional rather than personal and arbitrary, pitting large, impersonal institutions against one another. According to Joseph Fewsmith, Andrew Nathan, Tang Tsou, Frederick Teiwes, and others, divisions within the leadership are still personal and informal rather than as defined by the formal division of functions, and the periods of quiet incremental change belie the sudden, sharp fights for total victory

¹⁹Cf. Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 169.

that still occur recurrently over succession and other high-stakes issues.²⁰

Authority “leakage” has afflicted not only the central leadership, but the relationship between the Center and regional and local governments. Although Shirk first called attention to Deng’s tendency to “play to the provinces,” she dismisses this as a problem, due to the central Party apparatus’ retained powers of appointment and resource allocation: after all, China is a unitary rather than a federal system, and what the Center gives, either through reformist devolution or via the “one country, two systems” formula for Hong Kong and Taiwan, the Center can always take away. Shirk’s position is supported by David Goodman’s comparative study of two neighboring but vastly different provinces—rich and powerful Sichuan in contrast to poor and backward Guizhou.²¹ Goodman rejects the three main arguments for enhanced provincial power. First, in response to the argument that traditions of provincial autonomy became increasingly relevant after the early 1950s, he notes that the traditions of separateness of the two provinces were quite different, with only Sichuan having a sense of provincial identity, which, however, took the form of separatist impulses only when central authority was weak. Moreover, in the post-1949 period, when strong central authority had been restored, provincial leaders consistently emphasized Sichuan’s duty to contribute its resources to overall national development. The second argument, that flexibility in the policy process came to serve local interests disproportionately, is countered by the observation that where provincial variations from central policy occurred, there is little to suggest this was due to provincial power and much evidence that it reflected central encouragement—either a coordinated leadership initiative or a factional splinter group. Third, the view that decentralization in 1957-58 arose from demands for increasing provincial autonomy is countered by evidence that not only did the leaders of the two provinces not campaign for decentralization, but in fact became more dependent on central resources during the Great Leap.

²⁰Cf. Joseph Fewsmith, *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1994).

²¹David S. G. Goodman, *Center and Province in the People’s Republic of China: Sichuan and Guizhou, 1955-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); see also Goodman, ed., *China’s Regional Development* (London: Routledge, 1989).

Yet others evince more concern about the prospect of secession, “warlordism,” or some other form of permanent power devolution, accounting for a mounting accumulation of studies. They usually point not to major structural changes but to devolutionary shifts of managerial responsibility, the allocation of equalization funds, the central-local division of tax revenues, and other policies. Thus all contributors to the Jia Hao and Lin Zhimin anthology²² concur on the general trend of regionalization, as translated into increasing discretionary funds and policy discretion; although central checks remain intact, regional authorities have become more outspoken and skilled in defending local interests. The general assumption is that those (rich) provinces that are net contributors to central government revenues have greater autonomy than those that are net recipients of subsidies.²³ The increased local financial and economic powers are reinforced by new local powers in personnel appointment (e.g., after 1991 the central appointment powers are only “one down” instead of “two down”) and even in enacting local (mostly provincial) laws.

The problem in the center-region “debate,” as in the debate over fragmentation vs. struggle for final victory at the top, is in finding a meaningful criterion for verifying either position, given the informal and flexible nature of such decisions. As long as the Center retains the power to do so, it may decide in favor of one (relatively decentralized) arrangement today and for another (relatively centralized) arrangement tomorrow. True, there is a momentum in such shifts, and decentralization is a trend that has been under way since the Great Leap, making it politically expensive to reverse. Yet the Party secretary of Guangdong was finally transferred, though Ye Xuanping is reported to have had veto power over his replacement, and the highly arbitrary early arrangement for differential tax revenue splits [*fenshuizhi*] between the Center and various provinces was renegotiated at the Third Plenum of the CCP’s Fourteenth Central Committee in late 1993. Some exiled reformers led by Yan Jiaqi have recommended the formal establishment of a federal system, using the “one country, two systems” formula as a pilot for the rest of the

²²E.g., cf. Jia Hao and Lin Zhimin, eds., *Changing Central-Local Relations in China: Reform and State Capacity* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994).

²³Cf. Goodman, *China’s Regional Development*; also David S. G. Goodman and Gerald Segal, eds., *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade, and Regionalism* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

country, but Beijing has shown no interest in such a structural adjustment, making it likely that China will remain the only large fully central system in the world, although a certain amount of (formal) particularism will continue to characterize central-local relations.

Conclusions

This survey of the study of Chinese politics in the reform era has many yawning gaps, partly because (as noted above) the study of any subject matter reflects which objects are made accessible to analysis, partly due to my own inadvertent omissions. Let me first mention some of the areas that have been most conspicuously missing scholarly attention, before discussing the problems afflicting the field as a whole.

Political culture, consisting of the political use of symbols and rituals to guide mass populations (even in the possible absence, say, of formal legal regulation), a definition that subsumes ideology as a more tightly organized subconstruct, has historically been central to the study of Chinese civilization, and has continued to be very important since Liberation—but not since the death of Mao. Lucian Pye has continued to make very stimulating contributions, but he has toiled almost alone in this vineyard.²⁴ In part this may again reflect developments in Chinese politics: after being force-fed a surfeit of culture during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people seemed to welcome a vacation from symbolic obsessions and a chance to reconnect with material reality. This is not entirely true, as the intellectuals remained interested in culture, and indeed for a period in the late 1980s there was a quite lively debate about the impact of traditional culture (the “search for roots” and “cultural fever” [*wenhua re*]) and the relative merits of “complete Westernization,” but the elite became nervous and such debates were quashed. As for

²⁴See Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1988); and *Chinese Negotiating Style: Commercial Approaches and Cultural Principles* (New York: Quorum Books, 1992). Some of the best work in this field is now done by nonpolitical scientists; e.g., cf. Perry Link, Richard Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz, eds., *Unofficial China: Popular Culture and Thought in the People's Republic of China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989); Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); and Zhengyuan Fu, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

ideology, after reinterpreting “Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought” to be more compatible with reform policies at the Sixth Plenum of the CCP’s Eleventh Central Committee in June 1981, the elite had every intention of continuing to propagate it, but only in a stultified, dogmatic form that bore no perceptible relevance to practical problems and incited little popular enthusiasm. In the early 1980s, the apparent extinction of socialist culture and ideology aroused fairly widespread disquiet, particularly among the youth, but since Tiananmen there seems to have been neither very much activity in this area nor any sign of regretting its absence.

I would argue, however, that the framework of meaning in which political activity is conducted will always be worth investigating, although it has become considerably more difficult to do so. China still has a culture, of course, but it is no longer as explicit and monolithic as in the days when there was a general line (*zhidao luxian*) that was trumpeted in the “two newspapers and one magazine” and then uniformly echoed by all the nation’s media. In place of the “one voice hall” we now have a cacophony of voices (albeit not marching in the streets), and the phenomenon is more difficult to conceptualize. One puzzle worth investigating is the impact of the apparent demise of the official ideology, which might be compared to the process of secularization in Western culture. This should be particularly interesting for two groups: the cadres and the intellectuals, both of whom have a vested interest in maintaining an ideological system of some sort. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is an organization still tightly enough knit to have a coherent ideology, and China’s “strategic culture” has been fruitfully investigated.²⁵ Another interesting phenomenon is the rise of a self-selected commercial culture amid China’s small but growing entrepreneurial class. As China develops and the economic division of labor and differentiation of incomes and lifestyles proceeds, it will become increasingly difficult to make valid overarching cultural generalizations and more necessary to specify subcultures.

A second surprising omission is the study of political mobilization and mass participation, once deemed a hallmark of post-Liberation China. As in the case of ideology and culture, part of the problem

²⁵Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

may be the exhaustion of the subject population. Although the decision of the Third Plenum to discontinue mass mobilization has not been upheld with complete consistency, centrally sponsored campaigns have certainly been fewer and less intense than during the Maoist era, mainly because mobilization tends to interfere with reform. Yet mobilization of a more voluntary type, here termed “participation,” has clearly continued. Attempts at analysis have followed three tracks. First, there have been relatively conventional electoral analyses, such as those conducted by Brantly Womack in the early 1980s, but not repeated since the subsequent modification of voting laws to curtail the element of spontaneity that had upset incumbent cadres in the initial polls.²⁶ Second, taking off from Falkenheim’s early analysis of participation more inclusively conceived, John Burns has made a relatively comprehensive analysis of peasant participation.²⁷ Also under the rubric of “extracurricular” participation is the raft of studies of the Tiananmen movement. Unfortunately, most of these have been memorial or documentary or otherwise descriptive; only Elizabeth Perry and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, independently echoed by Chung-fang Yang, have attempted a more ambitious conceptualization based on notions of self-dramatization—not yet a theory, but an intriguing metaphor.²⁸ Third, there has been some analysis of legislative participation, particularly Kevin O’Brien’s fine study of the National People’s Congress (NPC).²⁹ Since Tiananmen, all such investigations seem to have come to an end, as if all forms of mass political activity had been permanently extinguished. Scholarly researchers, unlike journalistic reporters, must in my view have the patience to continue to study topics of this importance through the lean years as well as the fat.

²⁶Brantly Womack, “The 1980 County-Level Elections in China,” *Asian Survey* 22, no. 3 (March 1982): 261-77.

²⁷Victor C. Falkenheim, “Political Participation in China,” *Problems of Communism* 27, no. 3 (May-June 1978): 18-33; John Burns, *Political Participation in Rural China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

²⁸Elizabeth Perry and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, eds., *Popular Protest and Political Culture in Modern China* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).

²⁹Kevin O’Brien, *Reform Without Liberalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990). The main variable in the study is legislative development, as indicated in three areas: liberalization, rationalization, and inclusion. He finds that the position of the NPC has moved toward greater rationalization and inclusion, combined with continuing rejection of liberalization—the reforms of the 1980s did little to increase political competition or to institutionalize responsiveness.

Aside from the neglect of such areas that are politically quiescent for the moment but surely of lasting political significance, one criticism I would like to make of contemporary Chinese political studies (without exempting myself) is the lack of theory. Again, this dearth can be to a considerable extent blamed on our subject matter: as the CCP moves from stone to stone while crossing the river, for anyone to hazard a guess about where reform is going seems highly risky, so we call it “half-reformed” without any predictions of what the other half will look like. Of course, such a complaint is overstated, and in any case no one can predict the future, particularly not in China studies. But I would like to encourage more attempts to posit the interrelationships between variables in diverse subfields, more attempts to move beyond the description of headline-making events to the social dynamic behind them, more attempts at synthesis. Franz Schurmann’s *Ideology and Organization* is now completely out of date, but surprisingly it does not seem to have yet been surpassed as a dynamic synthesis of the field.