The Spirit of Chinese Politics

NEW EDITION

Lucian W. Pye

The Spirit of Chinese Politics

NEW EDITION

Lucian W. Pye

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

Copyright © 1968, 1992 by the President and
Fellows of Harvard College
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication
Data*

Pye, Lucian W., 1921–
The spirit of Chinese politics/Lucian W.
Pye.—New ed.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-674-83240-X
1. China—Politics and government—1912–
1949. 2. China—Politics and government—
1949– 3. Political culture—China.
4. Authority.
I. Title
JQ1508.P94 1992 91-34892
306.2'0951—dc20 CIP

The Spirit of Chinese Politics

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

In the first half of 1964, when I was doing research in Hong Kong, China was relatively tranquil on the surface. It had emerged from the follies of the Great Leap Forward and had not yet plunged into the greater madness of the Cultural Revolution. Yet I became convinced that beneath the calm there were great tensions which might soon boil over. The Western consensus was, as usual, optimistic about China's prospects: China's leaders were rational, prudent people who learned from experience and were above all not given to rashness. So they could be counted upon to lead China in steady progress. In seeking to resolve what I saw as a set of profound and troublesome contradictions between surface appearances and masked realities, I arrived at an interpretation of Chinese political culture which became this book. During that time I also made public my dissent from the existing consensus, which I called the "prudence model" of Chinese Communism, in an article published in *Foreign Affairs* in April 1966, a few months before the Cultural Revolution exploded into public view. *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* was published when the world was just beginning to try to make sense of the massive disruptions of the Red Guards, and when there was still much skepticism about reports of widespread violence throughout China.

The Spirit of Chinese Politics was allowed to go out of print

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook

during the honeymoon phase of China's new opening to the West. But new interest in the book, especially among Chinese intellectuals, surfaced when Deng's "reforms" began to run into difficulties a year or so before the Beijing Spring of 1989 and the subsequent Tiananmen Massacre. As they wondered about the fate of China's modernization efforts and contemplated the character of their enduring culture, these intellectuals began talking about a "crisis of confidence." They saw *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* as less nihilistic than such Chinese interpretations as the six-part television series *River Elegy* or Bo Yang's *The Ugly Chinaman.* I have been told that there are several pirated translations circulating in both China and Taiwan.

In this new edition I have not altered or updated the first nine chapters. I have, however, replaced a chapter that is now considerably dated, a case study of the commune movement, with comparable but more up-to-date material from my *Dynamics of Chinese Politics* (1981). The basic tension between consensus and factions in the operation of Chinese politics illustrates the "spirit" in action. The final chapter, originally published in the Fall 1990 issue of *Foreign Affairs,* discusses the great gap that persists between the world of the political leadership and the activities of society in post-Tiananmen China. Reflecting prevailing usage both now and earlier, I have used *pinyin* in these last two chapters while leaving Wade-Giles spelling in the original text.

In the late 1960s many scholars became convinced that not just Chairman Mao but Fidel Castro and a variety of African leaders had changed the deep culture of their societies through sheer political will. The myth of Mao Zedong's revolutionary transformation of the character of the Chinese people contributed to a premature dismissal of political culture studies. With the opening of China in the post-Mao era, when it became clear that Chinese culture had indeed persisted despite decades of relentless attacks by the Communist Party, it also became clear that the study of political culture was still relevant.

In fact political culture continues for many reasons to be singularly important in shaping Chinese politics. There, more than in most countries, politics revolves around clashes of ideas and sentiments that have to be played out in the context of exaggerated notions of authority, on the one hand, and straitjacket controls on dissent, on the other. Conformity and rebellion have indeed been the lifeblood of modern Chinese politics. The centrality of hierarchy, the elaborate concerns involved in managing superior-subordinate relations, and a pervasive use of moralistic rhetoric have combined to produce in China a form of Confucianist Leninism that seems destined to outlive the model of Leninism in its homeland. But there is also the gap between formality and reality, which has produced the great Chinese political art form of feigned compliance. The center proclaims grand policies, the localities nod their assent but then test the limits by going their own ways—and the center, hesitating to expose its impotence, looks the other way. The tradition of rule by men instead of by law has also promoted an extraordinary mystique of leadership. Mao the Superman Chairman has been succeeded by Deng Xiaoping, the Paramount Leader who holds no office, is responsible to no institutions, but who dictates the fate of more than one billion Chinese. Consequently the future of Chinese politics, like its past, is destined to be one of continuous struggle over leadership succession.

The special importance of political culture for understanding China also lies in the ways in which China is unique at both the collective and the individual levels. As a collectivity, China is not just a normal nation-state; it is a civilization trying to squeeze itself into the format of a modern state. At the individual level, no society makes more of the importance of molding children into people who will honor correctness in both thinking and conduct.

Central to my interpretation of Chinese political culture are the problems arising from a deep crisis of authority in Chinese civilization, a crisis complicated by the frustrations created

by the imperative of conformity; a combination that has produced a profound fear of disorder. Fueling these tendencies are Chinese socialization practices that severely repress expressions of aggression. The result is a pronounced idealization of harmony alongside a reality of diffuse, suppressed anger. (Some readers, apparently not comfortable with psychology, have said that *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* is tainted with Freudian insights, which I suppose can be taken as a compliment, however it was intended.) In recent years even before Tiananmen it has become more legitimate to point to the role of violence in Chinese culture—as for example in works such as *Violence in China* (1990), edited by Jonathan N. Lipman and Stevan Harrell, and *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (1990), by Mark Edward Lewis. My interpretation dwells less on violence per se, although the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Massacre are a part of the story; instead my focus is more on orientations toward power and authority that have operated to impede China's modernization.

As China now moves into another succession crisis comparable to the end of the Mao era, and the problems of power relationships are likely to become critical once again, it seems appropriate to republish *The Spirit of Chinese Politics*. With the Deng era coming to a close China is caught in its Brezhnev phase: On the surface there is the order and tranquillity of political stagnation, while throughout society profound social and economic changes are taking place that will in time fundamentally alter the character of Chinese society. In the meantime the essential features of the political culture will operate to provide elbow room between the realms of conformity at the top and of spontaneity beneath the surface. Given the Chinese practice of feigned compliance, contradictions will be more readily contained than they would be in more rationalistic cultures, where logical inconsistency is less tolerated and becomes the grounds for adversarial tensions and conflicts. As at the close of the Mao era, the end of Deng's rule will

intensify the inevitable factional struggles of succession. Elements of the public, especially the intellectuals and the emerging entrepreneurs, will become skilled in learning the limits of their respective freedoms, the boundaries of which will be drawn, first, by the pressures of conformity and, second, by the realities of state-sanctioned fear. In short, change is taking place, but certain continuities will endure.

Needless to say, we now have considerably more knowledge about the operations of Chinese politics than was available when I wrote either *The Spirit* or *The Dynamics*. Indeed, from the perspective of hindsight it seems incredible that on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, when China had barely recovered from the Great Leap Forward, which had produced the greatest famine in its history, the standard line of the China-watching community was that Chinese politics was operating according to the norms of prudent rationality, unencumbered by cultural predispositions or other marks of human frailty. (But then, on the eve of Tiananmen there was also near-universal belief that Deng Xiaoping and his legions of reform-minded cadres had found the formula for the intelligent solution of China's problems.) The context in which the succession struggles for leadership after Deng will be played out is of course different from that of the last days of Mao's rule. The haunting memories of both the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen will no doubt inhibit violence but not passions of anger. Yet the very fact that the Chinese, after going through the trauma of Mao's succession, failed to establish any institutions and processes for orderly leadership succession suggests that the basic cultural predispositions remain remarkably the same. Awe of the magic of personal leadership rather than reverence for the majesty of law still governs Chinese feelings about power and authority. Deng's hapless selection of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang is a close enough parallel to Mao's equally ill-starred choices of Lin Biao and Hua Guofeng to suggest that *The Spirit of Chinese Politics* may still be relevant in efforts to understand the mysteries of Chinese political be-

havior. The very process of identifying where changes might be called for should prove enlightening.

I am grateful to *Foreign Affairs* and to the Rand Corporation for granting permission to reprint the material under their copyrights. I am indebted to Ann Hawthorne for exceptionally careful and thoughtful editing. I also thank Pamela Clements for her help in typing much of the manuscript.

Cambridge, Massachusetts
September 1991

The Spirit of Chinese Politics

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook

CONTENTS

Preface to the New Edition *vii*

1 The Authority Crisis in Modernization 1

2 The Comforts of Hierarchy and Ideology 12

3 Politics without Modern Men 36

4 The Millstone of Greatness 50

5 The Discovery of Hate 67

6 Authority, Self-Discipline, and Order 85

7 Broken Fathers and the Bitter Search for New Authorities 107

8 Willpower and Morality: The Dynamics of Action 125

9 Organizational Behavior and the Martial Spirit 164

10 The Dynamics of Chinese Politics 197

11 Erratic State, Frustrated Society 233

Index 257

CHAPTER ONE

THE AUTHORITY CRISIS IN MODERNIZATION

China is not only Communist;it is a developing country. Strangely this second dimension of China has been more appreciated in the popular press and in official policies than in scholarly research. Academically there has been little inclination to apply to the analysis of Communist China the concepts and theories that have given such vitality to the study of political and economic development in the rest of the Afro-Asian world. Among scholars the division has been sharp between those working on Communist China and those working on political and economic development. Each group has gone its separate way, and there has been remarkably little intellectual exchange. The China specialists have seemingly taken on some of the pride of their country of study and have been anxious to stress its world-shaking importance, often, possibly quite unintentionally, giving the impression that the rest of the underdeveloped countries are insignificant in comparison. This has helped to spread the impression that China's problems and those of the other transitional societies have little in common. The students of development, on the other hand, have steadfastly ignored Communist China and have generally displayed a strong distaste for any serious analysis of communism. For these people Communist China smacks too much of the Cold War, a reality they accept at

times when justifying the importance of development but which they prefer to live without. Although the search for theories of political, social, and economic development has sought to avoid excessive partisanship, the implicit bias of most scholars in the field has been toward democratic development; hence there has been a feeling that the blatantly Communist example of China can properly be ignored.

Possibly an even more significant element in this curious scholarly omission is the fact that China was a transitional society long before the world fully appreciated the inherent difficulties of modernization. If we were now to review the twentieth-century experiences of the Chinese in the light of what we currently know about the difficulties of achieving advancement in the Afro-Asian world we should have to revise many, if not most, of the conventional judgments and evaluations of Chinese performance. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's the Chinese received low marks and a bad press from scholars, diplomats, and journalists because everyone measured their efforts to modernize against the standards of the European world and not against those that are currently being applied to transitional societies in the former colonial areas. During these early decades of the century when China was seeking to break out of the traditional institutional molds there was little general understanding of the extraordinary complexity of economic and political development. At that time China stood largely alone in the world as an independently developing society; the rest of the still traditional and pre-nation-state societies were held together and given administrative order largely through colonial rule. Thus, in the decades when China was passing through the first phases of modernization, the world was not nearly as tolerant as it is now of the violence, confusion, and ineffectualness characteristic of developing societies.

During this period China was compared only with Japan, a country we now realize had unique potentialities for development. Certainly no other developing country in today's world

has the likelihood of matching the Japanese record in modernization. The common Confucian-Buddhist tradition and the historic Japanese borrowing of Chinese culture, however, tended only to confuse the issue by suggesting that the Japanese experience should be relevant for judging Chinese potentialities.

The feeble afterglow of the 1911 Revolution, the period of the pathetic Phantom Republic in Peking, Sun Yat-sen's impotent efforts at economic planning, the sordid interplay of warlords, the students' explosive but ineffectual nationalism, the venal corruption of bureaucrats and office holders, the Nationalist government's shallow propagandist pretensions of progress — all seemed to suggest that something was wrong with the Chinese, that they lacked the ability to build a polity and to run a country. Since the forces of frustration and conflict inherent in the developmental process were being contained throughout the rest of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East by the intervention of European power, no one could envisage standards appropriate for measuring Chinese performance.

Now that the world has seen innumerable "phantom republics" in the ex-colonial world, the period of the early twenties in Peking seems less preposterous. The common phenomenon of military rule in postindependence societies makes the emergence of the Chinese military and the rule by warlords less disgraceful and more sociologically understandable.[1] Indeed, considering the intellectual vitality and the exciting traffic in ideas of the warlord period, military rule in China was seemingly less handicapping to development than it has been in most contemporary cases.

If we use the measures of progress currently applied in the Afro-Asian world, we see that significant advances in Chinese development occurred in the 1930's and 1940's. During this

[1] For a general discussion of the military and the problems of political development see John Johnson, ed., *The Role of the Military in the Underdeveloped Areas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1961).

period, increasing numbers of Chinese were trained in modern skills, and elite cadres were developed in a variety of fields and were eager and able to perform the functions necessary in a modern secular society. The war against Japan, which has generally been thought to show up Chinese weaknesses, was in fact a remarkable performance for a transitional society. It is questionable today whether any developing country could, with almost no outside assistance, mobilize so large a proportion of its human and material resources for so long a period of time. The Americans who knew wartime China were largely disappointed and frustrated because they expected too much of their ally. Today we are wiser and expect less of a transitional society.

The reason for attempting to analyze contemporary China in the light of our knowledge about political development in other countries is less to achieve justice in historical evaluations and more to discover what may be unique and what may be universal in China's experiences with modernization. Although we cannot as yet say how successful the Chinese will be in time, we can certainly begin to isolate the ordinary and the peculiar in their pattern of development. It is at this point that a comparative perspective is critical.

The Chinese themselves would insist that because of the historic greatness of their civilization their experiences with modernization must be significantly different from those of other traditional societies with less impressive histories. In their minds China represents the agonies of a great civilization in turmoil and not just a traditional culture adapting to modern ways.

The key problem that has plagued a hundred years of efforts to respond to the challenge of a dynamic outside world has been the inability of the Chinese to reconcile the manifest accomplishments of their traditional civilization with the requirement that their society would have to be radically made over. According to the straightforward logic that greatness should sire greatness the Chinese felt they had the right

to expect that their philosophically sophisticated traditional civilization, with its partially urbanized way of life, should give them unquestionable advantages in accommodating to the demands of the modern world. Yet these manifest advantages may also have been subtle and intractable liabilities for truly effective development. In clinging to both the legitimacy and the virtues of a past civilization the Chinese have necessarily inhibited their commitments to change and to modernization.

It is rarely appropriate to take seriously the historical pretensions of a people, but there are grounds for recognizing that the Chinese experience in modernization has differed in certain critical respects from the typical pattern of transitional societies. It is equally proper to discount the earlier Chinese protestations that they were unique in their suffering from the Western impact and the current Communist claim of having a unique "Chinese model" for all developing societies. Yet there are deeper analytical reasons for believing that the Chinese experience has been significantly different.

It will be the theme of this book that the critical difference between the Chinese and most of the other developing countries begins with the fact that the Chinese have been generally spared the crises of identity common to most other transitional systems. The basic problem in development for the Chinese has been that of achieving within their social and political life new forms of authority which can both satisfy their need to reassert a historic self-confidence and also provide the basis for reordering their society in modern terms.

We shall have to reserve for later discussion the complex implications for national development of the Chinese sense of historical greatness; at this point we need only note that in the modern era the Chinese have had little doubt about their identities as Chinese, and the more they have been exposed to the outside world the more self-consciously Chinese they have become. Indeed, their psychological sense of cultural and social identity has in many respects blurred the extent of

试读结束：需要全本请在线购买： www.ertongbook