

中國

SUZANNE
OGDEN

CHINA'S
UNRESOLVED
ISSUES

POLITICS,
DEVELOPMENT,
AND CULTURE

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**Politics, Development,
and Culture**

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Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

Ogden, Suzanne.
China's unresolved issues : politics, development, and culture /
Suzanne Ogden.
p. cm.
Bibliography.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-13-132739-9
1. China--Politics and government--1949- 2. China--Economic
policy--1949- 3. China--Social policy. 4. Socialism--China.
I. Title.
DS777.75.O35 1988
220.951--dc19

88-5864
CIP

Editorial/production supervision and
interior design: *Mary A. Araneo*
Cover design: *Ben Santora*
Manufacturing buyer: *Peter Havens*



© 1989 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.
A Division of Simon & Schuster
Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

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Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-132739-9

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*
Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*
Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*
Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*
Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*
Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*
Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

PREFACE

This book addresses China's key unresolved issues, those issues that plague the Chinese system now as they have since the Communist takeover in 1949. In so doing, the book offers both a conceptual and thematic perspective on China's accomplishments and failures. With this perspective, readers will be able to sort out what are at best quite complicated pictures of rapid and repeated turnarounds in China's policies, objectives, and leadership. The overarching theme presented herein—that it is the interaction of three variables, political, developmental, and cultural, which created the conditions for problems being resolved or left unresolved—will serve to pull together the complex and diverse elements of Chinese politics.

The book is, therefore, a thematic and issue-oriented study. Although the major policies adopted after 1949 to address China's problems will be examined, the text does not pretend to explain every change in China's objectives, policy, ideology, leadership, and institutions. These are important matters for specialists, but they are confusing for those being introduced to Chinese politics. The book begins by offering a theoretical framework for understanding Chinese politics after 1949. This is followed by an overview of China's history and culture and a summary of the major policies followed by the Chinese Communists after 1949. The book then examines seven major unresolved issues in the People's Republic of China:

the leadership and bureaucracy, socialist democracy, socialist legality and control, class struggle, economic development, education and political culture, and finally, the meaning of socialism in China today. This approach will, I believe, offer readers a solid basis for understanding the nature of the Chinese political system and how it has functioned since 1949.

CHINESE SYSTEM OF SPELLING USED FOR THIS TEXT

This text will use the Chinese phonetic alphabet (*pinyin*) system of spelling for Chinese names, terms, and places. The only exceptions are the established and internationally accepted spellings of the Kuomintang, Chiang Kai-shek, and Sun Yat-sen. For Chinese names, the surname is the first name given: Mao is the surname of Mao Zedong.

The only letters that are pronounced in a significantly different manner from what an English speaker would expect are: "C," which has a "ts" sound as in *its*; "Q," which has a "ch" sound as in *China*; "X," which has an 'sh' sound as in *shop*; "Zh," which has a "j" sound as in *jar*. "Z" by itself has an ordinary "z" sound as in *zero*. "Q" is not necessarily followed by "u". In some cases, alternative spellings using the Wade-Giles system, the system commonly used before the adoption of *pinyin*, have been put in brackets beside the new *pinyin* system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues who read part or all of my book in manuscript form, and who provided invaluable comments and criticisms of my work: Gordon Bennett, Timothy Cheek, Donald Clarke, James Feinerman, B. Michael Frolic, Robert Hunt, Donald Klein, Barrett McCormick, John Moon, Andrew Nathan, Louis Putterman, Lucian Pye, Stanley Rosen, Vivienne Shue, Ralph Thaxton, Robin D. S. Yates, and David Zweig; to Philip Kuhn and Roderick MacFarquhar, the former and present directors, respectively, of the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, who have provided me with an office at the Center and access to Harvard's libraries; to my colleagues at the Fairbank Center for endless inspiration during lunchtime conversations and in weekly colloquia; to my colleagues in the Department of Political Science at Northeastern University; to the Chinese scholars and graduate students for their insights about Chinese culture and politics; to Kau Yingmao, for the training that made such a work as this possible; to Karen Horton, the political science editor at Prentice Hall who unstintingly supported my project; to Ann Holmes and the

editors at Prentice Hall who helped this book come to fruition; to Henry and Lydia who were mystified but patient with my endless excitement about China; and to my friends and students for asking the kinds of questions that stimulated me to write this book. I alone, of course, bear responsibility for the errors and shortcomings of this study.

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Chapter One

A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CHINESE POLITICS SINCE 1949

Though of less value than communist moral standards, traditional moral values can be used as a moral foundation. Unlike material production, moral codes can transcend history. Furthermore, communist moral values cannot be developed independent of tradition; their development should grow out of the traditions of the country. Only when the traditional moral values are distilled and sublimated, can true communist ethics be established.¹

Communist rule in China has been marked by stunning successes and resounding failures. But underlying these successes and failures have been unresolved issues, issues that have seemingly eluded solutions and have continued to absorb the energy and attention of both the Chinese leadership and the people since 1949. Without an understanding of these unresolved issues, the present problems of the People's Republic of China will remain unfathomable, and the future prospects of this great country will remain obscure.

DEFINING THE ISSUES

In the period immediately following the Communist victory in 1949, the new leaders of China did much to change basic structures and values. Attitudes changed with these structural reforms, and new policies evolved. One could safely hypothesize that the initial series of policies implemented after 1949 were successful in large part because they were relevant to China's needs of that time and because they could become firmly rooted in the structures and values that the Chinese Communists were simul-

taneously cultivating. As time went on, however, policies either became increasingly ineffectual or they created new problems. Sometimes the solutions were worse than the problems.

Western Versus Chinese Communist Definitions

The problem of defining China's major unresolved issues pits Western values and perspectives against Chinese and socialist values. Many of the values American Sinologists have used to assess China's achievements and failures reflect either their own society's dilemmas or the nature of the U.S. bilateral relationship with the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the moment. These assessments, and reassessments, of the nature of Chinese achievements and problems are, therefore, colored by America's own internal politics, the excitement and disappointment about its relationships with the Chinese, and the emotional and intellectual perceptions of the "way-things-ought-to-be" at home and abroad.²

More broadly, Western scholars have frequently been accused of "intellectual imperialism" in their use of Western values and standards for judging and analyzing issues that are both Chinese and communist. Which values are used is a subjective determination in any event and profoundly affects the conclusions reached. Subjective perceptions emanating (perhaps unconsciously) from a discrete set of values and standards necessarily affect any analysis. The real question is, do students of China really understand the Chinese situation better when Western liberal democratic values, concepts, and models with which they are familiar form the analytical framework?³ Or does their use simply distort understanding, since different values, ideals, concepts, and objectives motivate the Chinese Communists? How far can one push the argument that Chinese and communist values are not as concerned with Western concepts of individual liberty, human rights, and democracy, and that these are not, therefore, fair or accurate standards by which to judge the situation in the PRC? Could one argue further that they are not even "issues," either for the leadership or the masses? Could it at least be argued that the introduction of a market economy and economic freedoms into China has had many consequences they would not have had in a non-Chinese or a noncommunist state?

The alternative to adopting Western evaluative standards—and the one scholars sympathetic to the goals of the Chinese Communist revolution and those pleased with the U.S. relationship with the PRC most frequently appropriate—is to accept the Chinese leadership's definition of the situation. According to this viewpoint, what really matters are Chinese and communist values, ideals, models, and objectives and whether or not they have been realized. Even if one rejects Chinese values and goals as not worthy, or not worth the sacrifices involved, the ability of the Chinese to attain them is still relevant.

If we accept the findings of modern psychology, which indicate that matters treated as problems often become problems, then we must certainly treat the Chinese leadership's definition of problems seriously. The Chinese leaders have utilized all the media, in addition to a unified leadership structure, to ensure that the entire country has received the same message about what the issues are. Subsequent policies are usually addressed to rectifying whatever the leadership has said those problems are. In China more than in most countries, then, saying it makes it so—or at least policies respond *as if* it is so. If the leadership states that “bourgeois attitudes” are an issue that must be dealt with, policies will be formulated to eradicate these attitudes, the bulk of the people will start searching for bourgeois attitudes in others, conceal their own, and generally become concerned, if not distressed, over the issue of being “bourgeois.” If they are told the issue is “right-wing deviation,” the collective angst of the Chinese people will similarly become focused on this issue. This seemingly happens regardless of whether most Chinese people accept the regime's definition of the situation or not.

The value of an exegesis of Chinese statements that define the issues is greatly enhanced by the additional use of “rational” (although not necessarily Western) criteria for defining the issues. An example would be the determination of whether China's present problems take the form of recycled old problems or evolve forward because solutions have created new and more advanced stages of problems that are themselves the result of an improved situation. Of course, going back to old values or institutions may be the best means to move forward.⁴ This is, in fact, one of the few possibilities for a system with rigidly orthodox pretensions: Such a system does not permit going out and beyond it for alternatives. So it must resurrect and amend the limited number of alternatives that *are* permitted. Yet, going back to old methods and ideas may simply indicate the leadership lacks imagination: It can not see beyond its ideological and cultural boundaries.

China's unresolved problems must, therefore, be viewed in the context of what has already been achieved. The Chinese government has, in fact, made considerable progress in addressing many of its major issues, particularly when compared to most developing countries. Thus, the question is one of defining and measuring “progress” and “success.”

First, have the Chinese, according to their own criteria, achieved successes? For example, “development” according to communist values is frequently at variance with a Western liberal conceptualization of it. Western liberals, unlike the Chinese Communists, have not seen the destruction of the capitalist class as an element of development. The Chinese Communists defined “development” as the movement to ever-higher forms of economic structures, from primitive communism, to slavery, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and then to communism. And in the past, they tended to equate

bigger units of production with better, more efficient units of production. The problem is that even these standards of development and achievement are not consistent over time. This makes it unwise to adopt them as the criteria for our own judgments.

Second, accepting Chinese statements about their achievements in resolving their problems is risky because China's leaders insist on an upbeat presentation, even when unprecedented disasters strike. Only later, when the regime is intent on reversing a particular policy, do the leaders inform the people that it was an unmitigated disaster,⁵ and a newly formulated policy, which represents the current embodiment of "truth," is to be followed without questioning. As Lu Xun [Lu Hsun], China's preeminent critic of the 1930s and 1940s, so aptly put it, the Chinese take the statement as the fact, as if stating that something is true really makes it true, and itself creates a new reality.⁶

Thus, several problems arise in accepting Chinese Communist evaluative standards. First, some policies do not lead to "development" at all, according to what Western liberals believe are unbiased, objective standards. Second, it is difficult to accept some of the values explicit in certain Chinese assessments of success, to wit: "The world is in great disorder and this is a good thing." Third, China's leaders seem uncertain of what they really want. This makes it virtually impossible for them to create consistent standards for evaluating the success of their policies. In any event, when it comes time to assess what went wrong with a policy, the leaders have usually resorted to blaming cadres at one level or another for improper implementation, rather than blaming the policy itself.

Because the Chinese tell us little about why some of their most important problems have not been successfully addressed, we must dig out all the relevant data to make our own assessments. Inferences thus have come to constitute a large part of the diet of students of China: If what the Chinese termed *successful* policies are subsequently undone, we may infer that they produced unacceptable results. To illustrate, the rapid succession of rural economic policies after 1949 brought the Chinese full circle from individual landholdings through ever-higher levels of collectivization and back to individual landholdings some thirty years later. Yet at each step, China's leaders announced that their latest policy confirmed the Communist Party's wisdom and embodied an unquestionable "truth."

Thus, the methodological problem posed by the need to discover what elements China's successful policies encapsulate requires students of Chinese politics to use additional evaluative criteria. In each issue area addressed in this study, the criteria for assessing whether the Chinese succeeded in achieving their goal and why will be stated. The value clusters that surround three key variables—traditional, developmental, and political—and that interact to provide the conditions and catalysts for policy change will also be considered: *China's achievements must be judged by criteria*