

*In Memoriam***Lucian Pye, 1921–2008**

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Lucian Pye, long-time political science professor at MIT, past president of the American Political Science Association, passed away aged 86 on 5 September 2008. He was known particularly for his perceptive analysis of Chinese political culture and his central role in building institutions for the study of China.

Lucian Pye was born in Shanxi where his father Watts O. Pye was a Congregational missionary. Watts, a Minnesota farm boy born in 1878, studied at Carleton College and in 1907, immediately after graduating from Oberlin Theological Seminary, went to Fenzhou mission, Shanxi province. Only seven years earlier, all but two of the missionaries then at the mission had been killed by the Boxers. Watts was unable initially to relate to the local people because he arrived without language training, but he nevertheless became very successful in helping the mission raise money, gain converts and expand the number of churches. He became a leader among missionaries in China, raising money for a hospital and for nearby roads and helping found the Oberlin-Shanxi programme. He saw his role as an educator, setting up bible training as a vehicle for gaining converts. However, as he observed the low quality of leadership in some of the churches established by the mission, he began to focus on identifying promising young men and supporting them to get better training in seminaries. He died in 1926 aged 48 when Lucian was only five,<sup>1</sup> but Lucian remained in Shanxi with his mother Gertrude Chaney Pye who had joined the Fenzhou mission before her marriage. After some years in Oberlin, Ohio schools, Lucian returned to China with his mother, attending high school at the North American School in Beijing.

As an undergraduate at Carleton College, Lucian met Mary Toombs Waddill. They married in 1945 and became life-long partners. She is listed as a co-author of the book *Asian Power and Politics: Cultural Dimensions of Authority*, but she played a key role as editor, typist and sounding board for all his works, as Lucian gratefully acknowledged at the beginning of each book. Combining dedication and intellectual vitality with Southern graciousness and generosity, Mary was Lucian's inseparable companion.

Lucian's best childhood friend, Chuck Cross, and two of his closest later friends, Doak Barnett and John Lindbeck, all shared the same background, as children of missionaries in China who served as US marines in China during the

1 John Schrecker, "Watts O. Pye, missionary to China, 1907–1926," Harvard University East Asian Research Center, *Papers on China*, No. 13 (1960), pp. 32–59.

Second World War. Chuck Cross became a State Department official, serving as ambassador to Singapore, Consul General in Hong Kong, and head of the American office in Taiwan after the United States switched formal diplomatic relations from Taiwan to mainland China. They did not share their parents' commitment to religion, but they shared their idealism and belief in service. They had a secular calling, not to convert the heathen but to educate those who knew little about China. The same was true of many other children of missionaries in Asia such as Edwin O. Reischauer, Jack Service and C. Martin Wilbur, who were classmates at Oberlin College when Lucian was finishing Oberlin elementary school, supported by the Congregational Church with which they were all connected.

Despite the different roles these seven people later played, none of them saw a contradiction between patriotism to the United States and a commitment to helping Asian peoples. During the Second World War they worked for the American government trying to help the Chinese people. Unlike many scholars who reached maturity at the time of the Vietnam War and who believed that to realize their ideals they must oppose the US government, Lucian and his peers believed in the government and the role it could play in improving the world. Jack Service, like Chuck Cross, joined the US State Department. After the Second World War, Lucian, Doak and later John Lindbeck chose academic rather than government careers but they were happy to co-operate with the government. Lucian never doubted his choice of the academic career. Just as officials in Washington DC were helping build institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to make the world a better place, so the sons of China missionaries were building scholarly institutions to improve the understanding of Asia and make the US government and international institutions function more effectively.

Among this trio of academic friends (Lucian, Doak Barnett and John Lindbeck) who in the 1960s and 1970s brain-stormed with each other about how to build new institutions for Chinese studies, Lucian was the most intellectual. While Doak, who bridged being a professor and a reporter, had a marvellous capacity to observe Chinese developments and explain them simply, Lucian sought for deeper answers. Doak's reportage on his travels in China in the late 1940s provides an extraordinary window into what was happening. After working at the Ford Foundation where he helped finance studies of China and at Columbia University, Doak found his niche in Washington DC at Brookings and SAIS where he wrote books on China for the American public. Doak became, in effect, the institutional memory on relations with China, providing continuity for understanding US–China relations for American and foreign diplomats in Washington who were rotated from one slot to another.

John Lindbeck, after leaving the US government in the late 1950s, found his niche in academic administration. In the late 1950s he accepted an invitation from John Fairbank, the dean of the global promoters of China studies, to

launch contemporary Chinese studies at Harvard. There he helped get grants for contemporary studies, set up research programmes and recruited talent. After serving as the deputy director of the East Asian Research Center at Harvard, Lindbeck was invited to Columbia University where, as director of the East Asian institute, he began to lay the foundations for contemporary China studies when sadly he died suddenly of a heart attack.

Pye was not only the most intellectual of the three but the most deeply curious. He was always wrestling with some intellectual puzzle, trying to understand why political leaders behaved as they did and why Chinese politics worked as it did. He was open to ideas from psychology, political science, sociology and anthropology. Lucian used Chinese as a child and learned to read as a marine, but later his ability to read atrophied and he had difficulty finding time to keep up his spoken Chinese. To Lucian, ideas were fun. He never outgrew the boyish pleasure of getting some new insight, showing his disdain for pomposity or pointing out ironies, explaining why something was different from the way it seemed.

After returning from the war, as a graduate student at Yale University from 1947 to 1952 Lucian had the good fortune to be part of a creative new generation of comparative political scientists. Before the war, political science had been dominated by the study of political structures, leaders, legislatures and executive branches, and how they worked. After the war, Talcott Parsons and other social scientists began looking not only at the structures but the functions. Instead of just examining how laws were made, they asked broader questions about how societies established rules, informal as well as formal. This led to a fresh look at comparative politics where Gabriel Almond, one of Lucian's teachers, played a key role, not only at Yale but through conferences and papers at universities around the world. As the Cold War took shape, another teacher of Lucian's, Nathan Leites, was asking questions about the underlying assumptions of communists. Lucian thrived on the intellectual dynamism of these two and other colleagues.

Lucian was bright enough to take in the burgeoning insights from social science without being stuck on the literal formulations or the subtle distinctions between different theories. He always came back to what was happening on the ground. Deeply rooted in Chinese politics, Lucian was always aware that some of the formulations of his more parochial American colleagues did not fit China. He enjoyed hearing the theories but then wanted to know how they would help him understand: "what is really going on?" "what are they really thinking?" "what is driving them?" and "how do cultures differ?"

The original puzzle that intrigued Lucian was the strategies of Yan Xishan, the local Shanxi warlord. Given the overall chaos in China, Yan Xishan had used very strategic methods to hold together a governing coalition. At Yale Lucian wrote his thesis on warlords. With little change, the thesis was published as *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China* (Praeger, 1971). The book was primarily a political history, with only a

hint of the boldness in examining underlying cultural and psychological attitudes that imbued his later works. It traced the history of the warlords north of the Yangtze from 1920 to 1928 and put them in the context of the times. Lucian made good use of the diaries of another modernizing warlord, Feng Yuxiang. He pointed out that the basics of power in the 1920s stemmed from military power, but that the competing warlords lacked the capacity to set up a national regime. The warlords competed not only on the military battlefield but also on the ethical battlefield where each tried to show that he possessed superior moral virtue, the traditional underpinning of legitimate rule. Lacking an established rule of law, the warlords relied for power on the personal loyalty of key subordinates. Strong warlords had officers who remained loyal even when their salary payments fell behind.

When many of the Yale comparative political scientists went en masse to Princeton, Lucian went with them. After a brief stint there and at Washington University, St Louis, he went in 1956 to the Center for International Studies at MIT. There he joined a fledgling political science department just as the former engineering school was expanding to include a full-blown social science faculty.

Like his father, Lucian was a dedicated institution-builder. He enjoyed working with colleagues. Even before he went to MIT, Lucian had played a central role in the work that Almond and Coleman did in setting up a series of conferences and volumes on political modernization. At MIT Lucian played a central role in building the political science department that he later chaired. When William Marvel, representing several foundations, was trying to decide where to fund a new China research centre, Lucian suggested that instead of choosing between Harvard and University of Washington in Seattle (the two largest modern China centres of the day), a centre should be built in Hong Kong to serve China scholars from around the world. Marvel followed Lucian's advice and in 1963 established the Universities Service Centre that played such a crucial role in the development of contemporary Chinese studies. Nearly three decades later, as foundation funding for the Centre was drying up, Lucian played a key role in transferring it to the Chinese University of Hong Kong where it continued to thrive.

In the mid-1960s Lucian, Doak Barnett, John Lindbeck and others founded the National Committee on US–China Relations to promote informed discussion on China, American interests in China and US–Chinese relations. It was founded just in time to play a key role in launching ping-pong diplomacy and has played an important role in promoting US–China exchanges ever since. Lucian held a variety of leadership positions, including acting chairman in 1981. He also played a critical part in the Council on Foreign Relations where he later became editor of books on Asia, providing brief introductions to those concerning Asian policy. Lucian was not only an enthusiastic supporter for building institutions but also a conceptual thinker about how to make an institution work. His colleagues called on him both because he was fun to work

with and because they knew he was absolutely dedicated to building good institutions and did not seek personal credit or position.<sup>2</sup>

In the early 1950s Lucian spent a year doing interviews in Malaya, trying to understand what it was that made Asians turn to communism (*Guerilla Communism in Malaya*, 1956), and in 1958–59 he went to Burma to do a study that examined the psychological impediments to nation-building (*Politics, Personality, and National Building*, 1971). By this time, having taken part in a faculty seminar with Erik Erickson at MIT, Lucian had begun to focus on the psychological issues that were to play a central role in his later studies. The Burma book helped spawn the new sub-field of “political culture” of which Lucian was one of the founding fathers.

Lucian spent the spring and summer of 1964 at the University Service Centre in Hong Kong that he had helped to establish. There he returned to the study of Chinese politics, but with his new perspective as a comparativist thinking about psychological aspects of culture. He noted that China, with such a long history, had been spared the identity problem of many developing nations. The crux of China’s problem, he believed, was to reconcile the accomplishments of its traditional civilization with the radical changes needed to modernize. China suffered from a crisis of authority: the lack of a coherent decisive system to resolve issues such as differences of interest between the national and regional governments. Government officials at the top operated in relatively self-contained circles, with little input from local areas or citizens. Recruitment into officialdom screened out the more Westernized and modernized Chinese. The sense of greatness of their nation was frustrated by a century of failures, leading to a powerful sense of humiliation. Filial piety, which is the basis of political socialization, teaches obligations of the subordinate to the superior but not obligations of the superior to the subordinate. The subordinates, trying to preserve an area of freedom while displaying proper respect, often resorted to feigned compliance (*The Spirit of Chinese Politics*, 1968).

Lucian continued to refine his psychological analyses of China in several other works (*China: An Introduction*, 1972; *Mao Tse-tung: The Man in the Leader*, 1976; *The Dynamics of Chinese Politics*, 1981; *Chinese Negotiating Style*, 1982). *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China’s Political Cultures* (1988) illustrates the kinds of questions he raised and the insights he achieved as he looked at concrete political developments. In discussing the Cultural Revolution, for example, he asks why so many intelligent people were taken in by it. Why were so few people engaged in critical introspection? How was it that long-term friends and associates, classmates and office workers were so quickly brought to the state of attacking each other in life and death struggles? Why was there such rage? What are the psychological problems of post-traumatic stress and the loss of

2 In 1988, when Lucian was elected president of the American Political Science Association, his colleague Don Blackmer presented a detailed introduction to Lucian and his work. Donald L. M. Blackmer, “The contributions of President Lucian W. Pye,” *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1988), pp. 882–91.

meaningful goals? Why is it considered disloyal to try to analyse the nature of patriotism? What will be the impact of those who become more sceptical? In examining materials he was able to see on the Cultural Revolution, Lucian suggests Mao was driven to extremes because he could no longer count on feigned compliance. Frustration from the failure to realize the bold goals that communist leaders earlier announced must have been a source of much of the anger. He notes that because the nation lacked clear rules about succession, many people feared that their own network might be replaced and cast aside. As Tom Gold said, the Cultural Revolution strengthened the need for *guanxi* and the willingness to sacrifice comradeship. Yet considering how badly they were devastated by the Cultural Revolution, it was astonishing how quickly the Party and the ministries re-established their hierarchy and achieved order. Lucian notes the Chinese political practice of seeing the past in the worst possible light so as to make the present look good. Now that the Cultural Revolution is over, there must be people who once supported it but who no longer express their views publicly. He concludes that without the horrendous events of the Cultural Revolution it is inconceivable that post-Mao China could have deviated as much as it did from any known concept of communism.

In the large political science department at MIT, Lucian supervised far more theses than any other faculty member. Like other professors, he gave lectures, but his hallmark as a teacher was his role in and out of class as a gadfly calling attention to all the interesting issues and involving students as intellectual companions seeking answers. If one used a family metaphor to explain his relations with students, Pye was more like the friendly interested uncle than the stern disciplinarian father. He was generous in acknowledging the contribution of students and colleagues to his thinking, in letting them use insights that originally were his, and in supporting those who challenged his own thinking.

In *Asian Power and Politics: The Cultural Dimensions of Authority* (1985) in collaboration with Mary, Lucian presents psychological interpretations of ten different Asian countries. The book could not have been written had Lucian not worked so closely with graduate students who were studying these various countries. Lucian's ability to articulate interesting insights about each of these ten countries is a testimony to his intellectual involvement in the issues with which the students were wrestling, and to his generosity in acknowledging the contributions of his students and colleagues.

Among his many outstanding students were Dick Solomon, Susan Shirk and Dick Samuels, all of whom joined his search to understand the underlying sources of political behaviour. Solomon, in his first book that grew out of his thesis under Lucian, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture*, explored the fear of chaos and how Chinese leaders try to avoid or manage it. Susan Shirk, in her first book *Competitive Comrades*, explicitly challenged Lucian's stress on psychological factors, emphasizing instead the importance of institutions and career incentives in shaping social relationships. Dick Samuels, in *Machiavelli's Children*, explored the leadership strategies of Japanese and

Italian political leaders. As Lucian's students and friends, it is not surprising that all played an active role in working with the US government and in building institutions. Solomon, as a staff assistant, helped Henry Kissinger understand Mao in preparation for Kissinger's five meetings with Mao. Later he helped build social science studies at Rand and conflict resolution studies at the US Institute of Peace, which he served as president. Susan Shirk not only did a term in the State Department where she helped make Asia policy, but also played a central role in building the Asian programmes at the University of California, San Diego, and in bringing together officials from the United States and Asian countries, including North Korea, in informal dialogue. Samuels succeeded Lucian as head of the political science department and the Center for International Studies at MIT. He also chaired CULCON and the US–Japan Friendship Commission and set up a large programme for MIT engineers to learn about, and intern in, Japan and China.

Some historians find many of Lucian's sweeping psychological characterizations more than a little fanciful. Political scientists who want to make their discipline into a real science by having testable theory and methods say quietly to each other that Lucian's psychological interpretations were not a real contribution to the discipline. Despite their criticism, Lucian was invariably interested in what they had to say. He showed that he deeply believed what he wrote in the preface to *The Mandarin and the Cadre*: "Our need for knowledge is far too great to allow us the extravagance of slighting the advantages of multiple forms of analysis." Colleagues who had a different vision of scholarship not only reciprocated his cheerful friendliness but, when caught off guard, would acknowledge that his questions were stimulating and his interpretations sometimes fascinating.

In his last years, Lucian suffered from Parkinson's disease, and shortly before his death he suffered a broken back from a fall. Until a year before he died, he and Mary lived in their home in Belmont, enjoying Mary's beautiful flower garden and many lovely Asian artifacts. They then moved to a retirement apartment not far away, where their children Lyndy, Chris and Virginia were of great help. Until Lucian broke his back, his mind was clear. His curiosity and his readiness to challenge accepted wisdom never waned. Until the very end, he remained remarkably upbeat and fun to talk with.