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Traumatized Political Cultures: The After Effects of Totalitarianism in China and Russia

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Developments in both China and Russia are a challenge to political science, and more particularly to theories of political culture. Both countries are engaged in profound processes of transition involving the abandonment of totalitarianism and the adoption of market-based economies. It is, however, far from clear what form their political systems will eventually take. They are currently following strikingly different paths. Are the differences a reflection of their distinctive cultures? Or, are the differences more structural, a manifestation of their respective stages of economic and social development? Or, are they merely the consequences of the idiosyncratic choices and policy decisions of the two leaderships?

No doubt a full answer to the question of where China and Russia are headed would require the examination of all these questions and some others as well. For our purposes here the focus will be limited to critical concerns about the stresses the political cultures have gone through. Our attention will be primarily directed to the Chinese case, with references to Russia serving mainly to gain the benefits of a comparative perspective. Keeping in mind Russian developments is of value because Russia has gone further down the road of abandoning Communism and hence its experiences may foreshadow what is in store for China.

Our emphasis will be on political culture because developments in this realm will, in a fundamental fashion, determine the emerging norms of legitimacy and the content of the new national identities. Political scientists have a special obligation to explore these developments since they will provide the foundations for the future constitutional orders of the two countries. Since the fall of Communism in Russia and the introduction of the reforms in China, political scientists have largely concentrated on analyzing on-going policy decisions, and especially the economic problems of the two countries. Consequently they have conspicuously ignored what should be one of the discipline's most fundamental concerns: the all-important question of the norms of legitimacy which frame the constitutional order and give government its authority to rule. The norms and values, the ideals and principles

which give governments legitimacy are a manifestation of their political cultures. These are matters that should command the attention of political scientists as much as, if not more than, say, the fate of the failed state owned enterprises (SOEs) in China or the activities of Russia's robber barons.

This is a big challenge for political culture theory, but in recent years there has been a revival of interest in political culture precisely because it has turned out to be a valuable approach for finding answers to the truly big questions in comparative politics and international relations theory. These include such questions as: Why are some countries rich and others poor? Why have some been more successful in becoming stable democracies? In the post-Cold War world, where will the most likely lines of international conflict be drawn? These are the questions addressed in important new books, all of which find their answers in the realm of culture. Thus, David Landes's (1998) *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* concludes that 'culture is the key' for explaining why some countries have become rich and others remain poor; Thomas Sowell's (1998) *Conquest and Culture* sees culture as the critical factor in explaining Western civilization's dominant role in world history; Robert Putnam's (1993) *Making Democracy Work* traces the relative successes and failures at democracy of the different regional governments of Italy to their cultural traditions; and Samuel P. Huntington's (1996) *Clash of Civilizations* holds that cultural factors will determine the fault lines of international conflicts after the collapse of Communism.[1]

The challenge of discerning the future bases of legitimacy in China and Russia is, however, greater than the problems confronted in these recent studies because in the cases of Russia and China it is precisely the political cultures that are in the process of uncertain change. The authors of all of the above studies could treat culture as a fixed independent variable, operating with the almost magical powers of enduring 'History'. In the case of Putnam's study of Italian regional differences, twentieth-century practices were, it seems, determined by thirteenth-century practices. With contemporary China and Russia we are dealing with systems that are in the midst of profound transitions, and it is therefore not possible to treat their traditional political cultures as being still fully intact.

The big challenge in determining the essence of the changes and the degrees of continuity is to identify what aspects of the cultures were the most severely damaged during their experiences with totalitarianism. The decades of Communism brought not just change from their traditional cultures but, as we shall argue, traumatic shock to their respective national psyches.

[1] There are other reasons for the revival of political culture studies, but probably one of the most important was the discovery that narrowly quantitative analyses, common to sociology, fail to do justice to the complexity of ideas and values, the strategies and tactics, the blend of reason and passion that are the essence of politics, and which can best be grasped by the culture approach.

In analyzing the post-totalitarian circumstances it is also appropriate to focus on the prospects for democracy because in the post-Cold War world the attainment of pluralistic democracy and a market economy have become the widely accepted standard for national development. The goal of democracy is the appropriate yardstick for measuring national progress because at present there is no other generally recognized alternatives to democracy such as there were in the 1930s and 1940s when fascism and Communism had their appeals. If either China or Russia fail at democracy they may produce an alternative, but it would emerge out of a failed effort at democracy.

Since we will be guided by concerns about the prospects for democracy we will employ two of the most important concepts in political culture theory: the concepts of civic culture[2] – that is, the values basic to stable democracy, and civil society[3] – that is the development of autonomous associations that can represent the interests of society. The question of how the Chinese and Russian political cultures, so severely damaged by their totalitarian experience, now measure up with respect to these two concepts will tell a great deal about the directions in which they are headed.

Enduring Individual Identities but Weak Collective Identities

It is significant that in China and Russia today cultural continuity is to be found mainly at the level of individual behavior, and not at the collective level of the community and the nation. The processes of liberalization in both cases exposed the astonishing fact that the decades of indoctrination to create 'New Men' had not changed the individual Chinese or Russian nearly as much as might have been expected. When Deng Xiaoping's reforms gave the Chinese people a chance to be more themselves they quickly manifested behavior patterns consistent with pre-Communist Chinese culture. All of Mao Zedong's efforts to change Chinese national character have had little lasting effect. Similarly Stalin's massive effort to make 'New Soviet Men' failed fundamentally to change Russians as individuals.

But the story of their collective identities, which give substance to their national psyches, is quite different. In both China and Russia the break with their experiments with totalitarianism has not brought an automatic revival of their traditional political cultures. In both countries it is still hard to discern what is taking shape in the formulation of new senses of collective identity, but it is clear that there will be no reversion to their respective earlier national identities. The only significant continuity is that both countries seem to be back at the point of their pre-Communist ambivalence about modernization: the Russians torn between Westernizers and Slavophiles, the Chinese between traditionalists and advocates of Western ways. The old issues are there, but the terms of the debate will have to be

[2] The classic statement of civic culture is Almonmd and Verba, (1963).
[3] Important statements of civil society include Putnam (1995) and Gellner (1994).

significantly different given the new circumstances and their failed experiences with totalitarianism. For over a century both Chinese and Russians have had deep ambivalence about fitting into the modern world. They wanted the benefits of modernity but they did not want to simply copy the West. They still have not found a way to resolve that dilemma.

This contrast between the level of the individual and that of the collectivity is troublesome because it strikes at what has always been a vulnerable area in political culture theory. This is the micro–macro problem, which is the problem of the connection between individual psychology and group psychology. Central to this problem is the question of how valid is it to apply knowledge about individual psychology to group behavior. It is one of the paradoxes of political psychology that we have a great deal more solid knowledge about individual psychology than about group or collective behavior. Given the richness of our knowledge about the individual, it is tempting to jump from the individual to the collectivity, but a national political culture is not just the sum of the attitudes, values, and habits of all the individuals involved. A collectivity, such as a nation, has to have its distinctive norms, that is its shared values, myths, and ideals which together constitute the community's distinctive spirit or psyche.

The experiences with totalitarianism, and the shocks that accompanied its ending, profoundly affected the lives of individual Chinese and Russians, but the damage has been far more severe with respect to precisely those sentiments and attitudes that are fundamental for the effectiveness of collective behavior. In both countries there has been a dramatic breakdown in the norms essential for any form of civil society. It is no exaggeration to say that a moral vacuum exists in both countries. Moreover, the level of trust critical for constructive impersonal relationships, which was never particularly high in either Russia or China, has now largely evaporated. Lives have become more private as people turn inward to look after their individual interests, focusing on family ties and personal friendships. The level of social capital is shockingly low and hence there is little potential for creating effective civil societies. The erosion of collective values has undermined the foundations of legitimacy of the governments and consequently corruption abounds.

The situation has been described by some as a breakdown in morals and ethics, while others speak of a crisis of faith. These are true descriptions, but in seeking to be more precise, our interpretation is that both political cultures have been traumatized.[4] That is, there has been profound damage to the norms and beliefs that give structure and content to the national political culture. Individually Russians and Chinese have been psychologically scarred, but the damage to the collective

[4] The relief that has come from the ending of the Cold War has seemingly opened the way for Western Europeans to revive memories of their traumatic experiences during World War II. There have thus been numerous books on the theme of national political trauma and distorted memories. See Deak, Gross and Judt (eds.), (2000); Lagrou, (2000); Wood, (2000).

norms has been much more severe. These are the norms that govern society–state relations and that make effective collective action possible. More particularly, the damage has been the greatest in destroying the basis for trust in social relations, so cynicism now reigns. This situation has profound consequences for the task of arriving at appropriate new national identities.

In both China and Russia, even before the shock of the collapse of Communism, the people had experienced tremendous suffering and psychological devastation caused by the very institutions which should have been nurturing and protecting them, their political systems. No society could possibly have gone through the hell of Chinese and Russian totalitarianism without having their social system profoundly disturbed and disoriented. In China the very process of recruiting leaders involved induction into a world in which fear was a dominant emotion. Cadres were always vulnerable to charges of 'incorrectness', and purges could sweep the system, indiscriminately destroying both good people and bad. The Russian elite had its years of terror. The Chinese cadres were in a constant state of anxiety over whom to trust and how to deal with their fears. Over 34,000 cadres met their deaths, including Politburo members Liu Shaoqi, Tao Zhu, Peng Dehuai, and He Long Teiwes and Sun (1996). In both countries those who set the tone had the deepest fears and the least trust. Understandably people who have gone through such experiences will be quick to grasp at the opportunities for corruption offered by even a small degree of liberalization.

For Russians there has been in addition to the horrendous losses of two world wars, revolution and civil war, the terror of the Stalin years. It has been argued that the West exaggerated the intensity of Soviet totalitarianism because many Russians were able to privatize there lives even during Stalin's rule and have a life devoid of politics.[5] The very practice of escaping into their private lives and trying to blank out all thought about public affairs is, however, evidence of the very trauma we have been describing.

China from the beginning of the twentieth century has been plagued with constant turmoil and wars, both civil and international. With the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, China lost the chance for a smooth transition to democracy by making a gradual transition by way of a constitutional monarchy, such as Japan and the ruling houses of Europe were able to do. Instead China was instantly declared to be a republic, but of course it lacked all the cultural norms and institutional arrangements essential for such a form of government, and hence it disintegrated into the War Lord era. In 1927 the Nationalist briefly united the country, but in less than five years Japan took over Manchuria, and in five more years the Sino-Japanese war put the country into turmoil. During that war China was divided between Occupied and Free China, a division that was more complete than that of France

[5] This position is advanced in Cohen (1985). This benign view of the Soviet era has been challenged by Malia (1999).

between Vichy and Free France. When peace came, China did not have enough time to heal its divisions before it was again torn apart by the struggle between the Nationalists and the Communists. The years of Communist rule devastated whole categories of Chinese society. First with land reform, the rural establishment was exterminated; then with the Hundred Flowers and the Anti-Rightist campaigns the intellectuals were left in a state of shock, too timid thereafter to assert their traditional role. Then came the Great Leap and the worst famine in human history, and finally the horrors of the Cultural Revolution. Mao's policies resulted in more deaths than the combined numbers of deaths caused by Stalin and Hitler (Short, 2000). The cumulating effect has been an end of faith in Marxism–Leninism–Mao Zedong Thought, but the power structure of the Communist Party still stands as a monument to greed, abuse, and corruption. Stripped of any faith in the ludicrous ideology they had been mouthing for decades, the people can only see the Party as an institution of crass power, intent only in looking after its own, while repressing any opposition.

Thus the critical bonds of the respective cultures which gave structure to social relations have eroded, and the values essential for a well-functioning social order are very weak. The guiding principles for coherent and disciplined social behavior have been subverted. As a result there are weak foundations for a civil society. In such a situation people feel it essential to look after their own interests and to act opportunistically. The result is rampant corruption, 'crony capitalism', and all manner of fraud and cheating.

The trauma is particularly acute with respect to the feelings about authority, leadership, and government in general. The Chinese have had to live through a period in which they were given exaggerated notions about the potency of leadership, but they were shockingly disillusioned as they learned how awful leaders can be, what troubles authority can cause, and how frightening government can be. Not surprising, politics and government are seen in a negative light, an evil force to be avoided.

The shock is particularly devastating because both societies before they went down the road of totalitarianism were not far removed from their traditional states in which social relations were highly structured, firmly disciplined, and ruled by custom. The disruptions that go with modernization have thus been exaggerated by the trauma of their experiences with totalitarianism. The domain of public morality is a wasteland.

National Trauma and the Evaporation of Trust

In China the leadership seems to believe that it can simply wait out the crisis and hope that as living conditions improve people will come to accept as legitimate a somewhat moderated and liberalized form of Communist Party rule. By suppressing all forms of spontaneous popular politics at the national level, and opening a small crack for local village elections, they hope that in time the system will gain new

life. Paradoxically, the still repressive Chinese political system has in a perverse way operated to give individuals some degree of guidance as to what they should do to get rewards and avoid punishment. The rigidity of the political system has thus provided what amounts to the functional equivalent of social norms for helping people manage their lives. This short-term advantage, however, is likely to be negated in the longer run by the fact that the repressive power of the political system also prevents the Chinese people from working out for themselves any new norms which would reflect their best interests, and which they could internalize as the basis for a smooth functioning post-Communist society.

Thus, while in the short run it may seem that China has been able to avoid the troubles that engulfed Russia after the collapse of the Soviet system, in the longer run China may not be able to escape the same fate, if they fail to develop a new set of social norms which individuals can internalize as a part of their new national identity. China at the end of the twentieth century remained an empire awaiting the fate of all other empires, including the Soviet empire.

We should note here that the norms basic to a collectivity constitute, on the one hand, the structural framework for the society, and, on the other hand, they provide the individual with guidelines for effective social relations beyond the realm of private relationships. Thus the structures of social systems have a dual character as they provide both the objective framework that is the outcome of routinized social actions, and also the medium that individuals employ to advance their goals in society.[6] The breakdown of the norms that we have been speaking of for China thus produces double confusion: confusion over the rules that make up the social system as a whole, and confusion for the individual over how to be socially effective.

This confusion over norms complicates the task of establishing new norms of legitimacy for the state. Moreover, compared to most countries the Chinese have a particularly serious problem in establishing the normative foundations for state legitimacy. This is because in modern times they have not had a shared religion that could serve as the basis for their national identity. Other countries generally have a common religion, or compatible religions, which can either directly provide the transcendental values for defining legitimacy, or give structure for a parallel secular set of transcendental values. Thus, as a part of the American national identity, such secular legitimizing values as freedom, justice, equality easily take on a sacred dimension. The Chinese since the erosion of Confucianism as a binding force have had no common shared transcendental framework of values which could be tapped for legitimizing the state. The effort to give Marxism–Leninism such a legitimizing force helped only to weaken Confucianism even further and to leave the country void of either a sacred or a secular framework of values.

The Russians have no such problem, given the speedy revival of the Orthodox church. Instead, the Russians, as always in their history, have little tendency for half

[6] On the dual structure–agency problem see Giddens (1979).

measures; and thus they totally abandoned Communism and expected to achieve democracy and capitalism instantly.[7] Now the hope is that by working through the challenge of confusion and disorder the people will in time sort out their interests, establish new social norms, and thereby form a workable pluralistic democracy. In the meantime it is hoped that somehow a system of rule by law can be established to check corruption and regulate the opportunistic industrial vultures. Their traumatized political culture makes it hard for them to achieve effective public order, as seen in the confusion of going from elections with only one party to a December, 1999, election with 26 parties. Indeed, the Russians deserve much credit for successfully carrying out somewhat fair elections which have usefully sorted out power among the contenders in the new political elite. What the elections so far have failed to do is to give greater content to the ideals that the Russians want as the basis for their new national identity. Unable to resolve their traumatized political culture, much of the Russian public have unfortunately became cynical about liberal democracy, not willing to give it enough time to become institutionalized, but blaming it for all of Russia's current problems.

The symptoms of trauma run very deep in both countries, and wishful thinking of either the Chinese or Russian variety will not bring satisfactory solutions. Both populations are acutely aware of how they have been grossly mistreated by the normal workings of their political system. Governments and ruling parties which pretended to be warm and friendly turned out to be ruthless and destructive. As the peoples fail to work out their troubles from the past there has been a marked tendency for self pity. In China in the early years of the reforms there was an outpouring of stories about the sufferings the authors had endured during the Cultural Revolution. Bookstores were filled with what was called the 'wounded' literature, largely accounts of personal tragedies, especially during the Cultural Revolution. The authorities did not censor such works because at the time they were trying to blame China's problems on the 'Gang of Four' even at the risk of tainting the image of the just deceased Chairman Mao. The public telling of horror stories seemingly worked as a catharsis for both author and reader.

This stage was followed by the outburst of what Geremie Barme has called MaoCraze[8] (his translation of the Chinese expression *Maore* or 'Mao hot'). This was a popular culture craze that was fueled by a blend of contradictory motives and impulses, including nostalgia for the more orderly and disciplined Mao era, exuberance over the pleasures of being able to challenge icons, and disgust with the rampant corruption and commercialism of contemporary China. The cult of Mao was also a way for people to implicitly criticize the current leadership: by saying that under Mao there was no corruption is a way of saying that the current leaders are

[7] Yet in some areas the Russians have been timid about change, as for example, in not granting the right to own land.

[8] In Barme (1996). The examples of MaoCraze that follow are from this book.

corrupt. Yet paradoxically, MaoCraze was also sustained by the possibilities it offered for making money. The cult of personality surrounding the living Mao set the stage for the craze, for when Mao died the country was awash in Mao things: 4.2 billion copies of the Little Red Book, enough of Mao's various books for every man, woman, and child to have 15 copies, and several billion badges and pins. (Warehouses filled with such sacred stuff had to be guarded by PLA soldiers until the Politburo worked up enough courage to have the Central Committee order the materials pulped.)

The craze revealed that in China's state of disillusionment there was little that separated the reverential and the ridiculous, the awesome and the absurd, the earnest and the laughable, and that it was easy to mix them playfully. Chinese students were soon captivated by the delightful nonsense of a wacko Helmsman who had once awed an obviously slow-witted older generation with such wonderfully silly Thoughts as, 'The lowly uneducated are the most intelligent; the intellectual elite are quite ignorant.' The comic exploiting of Mao was easiest for writers of popular literature because Mao Speech makes lampooning both irresistible and a snap. The inappropriate expropriating of Mao's words reached a high in incongruity when the Beijing prostitutes took as their jolly slogan, 'We service the masses wholeheartedly.'

Along with MaoCraze Chinese students went through a series of other fads, first the 'Sartre craze', then the 'fad of Freud', then the 'vogue of Nietzsche'. All of these movements were manifestations of a desperate search for something to believe in. The Chinese, and especially the youth, have been seeking to find a new basis for collective actions and an appropriate new national identity which would give the state a new basis for legitimacy. There was for a time before Tiananmen some attempts to create what were essentially new ideologies. These included a movement to establish a humanistic Marxism based on the writings of the Young Marx. Another attempt was the popularization of the theory of neo-authoritarianism as advocated by Singaporean leaders which holds that the modernization of Asian societies is best done by authoritarian rule.[9] The search for something to believe in continues to this day. It surfaced in the Tiananmen democracy demonstrations, and again with the widespread popularity of the Falun Gong movement that has so frightened the Chinese rulers. Clearly there is a void in the Chinese collective psyche.

What makes the search a response to true trauma is that the Chinese are not just aware that their political system mistreated them and caused them great suffering, but at a deeper and more psychologically repressed level, they are still in denial of the fact that they themselves individually once supported and enthusiastically participated in the very actions which caused such grievous suffering. Hence they are not themselves without blame for their troubles. They were able in the

[9] For an excellent study of the efforts of Chinese intellectuals to find a new basis for Chinese identity, see Min Lin (1999).

'wounded' literature to speak out about their misfortunes, but, as yet, with a few notable exceptions, they have not been able to articulate the crimes that they committed against innocent others as they sought to be more Red than those they attacked as 'capitalist roaders' and faint-hearted revolutionaries.[10]

This problem of repressed self-blame is peculiarly acute for the Chinese because their culture is famously strong in socializing its members to a high degree of need for achievement.[11] The experience of growing up Chinese, especially under the unrelenting demands of Maoism, produced people with a compulsive need to excel. The resulting character formation has, understandably, profound problems with confronting suppressed self blame. This deep repression of guilt does however surface in the form of a reinforcement of the Chinese propensity to adopt a martyr complex. Feeling discount and ill at ease with themselves their knee-jerk tendency is to claim that they have been mistreated.

The solution to this psychological problem demands that they must go further than just denounce the bad leaders of the past. They need to find a new basis for their identity, new standards for their achievement goals, and absolution from their guilt and martyr complexes.

At the level of ethnic identity the Chinese have no problems about knowing who they are. However, when it comes to national identity there are serious difficulties because the Chinese no longer believe in the official doctrine of Marxism–Leninism–Mao Thought and there are no alternatives. The continued repression by the Party prevents the people from engaging in a dialogue which might give them a new set of ideals, values, and principles that would help define them as a unique national culture. For more than half a century their government, led by the Communist Party, has used its considerable propaganda powers to denounce, as an ultimate evil, China's Confucian traditions. Today in the wake of the Reforms they feel that others are not giving them the respect that should be their due, especially in the light of their remarkable economic successes. When asked, however, what others should respect China for, and what does China stand for internationally, they find it hard to answer. The slogan, 'To Get Rich Is Glorious' is hardly an appropriate one for the heirs of one of the world's greatest civilizations.

As a result of these difficulties with their sense of national identity the Chinese now have a shallow, thin-skinned, xenophobic form of nationalism, a 'we against them' view of the world. They are quick to take offense, and they suspect hostile designs behind the actions of the other states. The depth of their feelings of being mistreated are such that they are easily transposed to the international scene where they quickly feel that other states are mistreating China. The Chinese propensity for self-pity is such that the leadership does not feel silly when it denounces the actions

[10] An Important exception is Ba Jin who blamed himself for doing Mao's bidding; see, Goldman (1994).

[11] On the concept of need achievement, McClelland (1961).

of other states as 'Hurting the feelings of 1.2 billion Chinese people'. The state encourages this type of nationalism by dwelling on China's 'century of humiliation'. Consequently, the Chinese, who were less dominated by colonial rule than most Asian countries, now wail the most over having been mistreated by Western imperialism. Complaining about mistreatment by foreign powers diverts attention from the fact that most of China's sufferings has come from the actions of their own governments. The public however easily goes along with the official view because they do feel that they have been mistreated. Evidence of how widespread such insecurities are was revealed in the popular reactions to the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. It is a mentality that provides fertile ground for conspiracy theories. Indeed, given profound uncertainties caused by the trauma of totalitarianism and Communism, there is a hunger for the certainties that conspiracy theories provide. Such theories explain everything and provide an explicit reason for why things happen as they have.

Finally, the combination of this form of shallow, xenophobic nationalism and the weak basis of legitimacy makes the Chinese, and also the Russian, rulers inordinately passionate about state sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs. At a time when the forces of globalization are making borders ever more porous, their problems of legitimacy and identity cause the Chinese and Russian leaders to seem quaint but shrill as they complain about interference in their 'domestic affairs'. It was not surprising that China was the only conspicuous defender of Russia over its Chechnya operations, arguing that it was an internal matter and the business of no one else.

Blocked Memories and Stunted Imaginations

Again, the solution to these problems of a xenophobic nationalism and weak legitimacy calls for the establishment of a new sense of national identity that will be consistent with both Chinese traditions and the current international standards of state behavior. The molding of such a new identity requires that the Chinese reflect on their history and bring into consciousness those elements of their past that they can feel most proud of, and for which they want others to respect them. The process will call for the creation of a new set of constructive and unifying national myths.

It might seem that this should not be such a difficult task because the Chinese have a rich history of dramatic events that should be able to provide all the necessary symbols, slogans, and imagery to give content to such new national myths.[12] Yet, in spite of the fact that nearly every year the Chinese calendar is filled with anniversaries of modern political events which historians can point to as being worthy of collective respect, the Chinese people themselves seem to have no collective memories of those events. Their traumatized political culture has left them with a shocking lack of vivid

[12] The analysis that follows is based on Pye (1996a, 1996b).

shared memories.[13] The year 1999 dramatized the extent to which China is a society with anniversaries but not memories. It was the 100th anniversary of the first reform movement, but there is no collective memory of that initial attempt to modernize China: it was the 80th anniversary of the May Fourth Movement, but there is no popular basis for recollecting those once exciting times; it was the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the PRC, but that only reminded people of their ambivalence about Mao's rule; it was the 20th anniversary of Democracy Wall but no Chinese can speak loudly of that; and it was the 10th anniversary of Tiananmen and, needless to say, the regime wants to quash any memories of that event.

Thus, what is striking is not that the Chinese have so many anniversaries, but rather that they have so many blocked or repressed memories. The nature of modern Chinese politics has been such that it has been impossible for the Chinese people to collectively share their memories and weld them together to form enduring and inspiring myths for succeeding generations. The absence of a collective memory for a nation is as serious a liability as the repression of memory is for the individual. Clinical psychology tells us traumatic experiences can block the memory, and that repression of memory decisively inhibits the imagination, and this in turn stifles creativity. Individuals who have blanked out memories because of traumatic experiences will also lose their powers of imagination and creativity. The result is a kind of rootlessness of the personality.

What is true for the individual is also true for a national culture. The richness of modern Chinese history has not generated a creative process of bringing together the emotions and the imagery of collective memories to produce an inspired sense of national identity. The numerous repressions of collective memories have left China with an ill-formed nationalism. Without freedom for the imagination to be truly creative, the Chinese are left with a shallow, xenophobic, 'we-against-them' nationalism. Hackneyed calls to 'carrying on the revolution' have lost all meaning. Dwelling on humiliation has not produced collective pride. State-sponsored attempts at national myth making never really work, as the efforts of innumerable Third World countries prove. The uplifting visions of true national myths can only come out of the collective imaginations of a whole people who are able to build on their freely shared memories. Instead, politically, China today is, in Matthew Arnold's imagery, a blocked society suspended between a world which is dead and a world which is powerless to be born.

The Chinese are not the only people in Asia with problems of blocked memories and inadequate myths of national identity. The Japanese, for example, also have a problem of repressed collective memories so that they have difficulties with their

[13] The Chinese folk culture's calendar is filled with festivals and special days, but in a strange way Chinese political leaders have not tapped into the symbolism and appeals of this popular culture for national political purposes, as democratic politicians elsewhere would certainly have done. The Chinese thus have collective memories tied to their folk culture but not to their political culture.

symbols of nationalism. They are confused and ambivalent about their national flag and anthem. However, the Chinese problems are far and away more severe, for theirs are rooted in their traumatized political culture.

No Easy Solutions

The task of the political scientist is to identify the sources of national political problems and often to suggest possible solutions. It is not to predict what will happen, for prudent political scientists operate under the rule that 'Prophecy is voluntary folly', and hence is to be avoided.

The current scenes in Russia and China make it clear that in their different ways the two countries are still encumbered by their traumatized political cultures. In Russia the process of open politics and elections has provided a means for working through a part of the problem. Yet to date the norms for a stable civic culture and civil society have yet to be formed. The behavior of the leading political figures remains erratic, and relationships are not stable or enduring. Opportunism rules, not loyalties. There is a lack of national vision, but the direction in which salvation lies is discernible. The national urge is toward becoming a pluralistic democracy, but a decade of troubles has tarnished the concept of liberal democracy for many Russians. However, the political elite is overwhelmingly committed to achieving free market democracy. Therefore the Russian problem is over the means to achieve their national goal and not over the goal itself.

The situation in China is, as we have indicated, harder to judge because there has been little progress on political reforms. Hence there is no basis for determining what the Chinese reactions will be if, and when, the system is opened up for a popular effort at defining a new Chinese national identity, and new foundations for state legitimacy. The main obstacle to progress, as throughout modern Chinese history, has been the operations of the government and the behavior of those with power. It is an extremely significant fact that as individuals the Chinese are able to perform at the highest standards of the modern world whenever they are not hobbled by the destructive influences of the practices of power and authority typical of their culture. The problems arise directly from the burdens that Chinese power practices impose on the people. If it were not for the perverse nature of the Chinese political realm, the Chinese would be among the world's most productive and creative peoples

Yet, the prospects for democracy are not particularly favorable because in addition there are difficulties stemming from the character of Chinese norms of civility, which are important because they provide the bases of both a civic culture and civil society. In particular such norms are especially weak with respect to impersonal relationships, the very relationships most essential for democratic behavior. Traditional Chinese culture had elaborate rules for face-to-face relations but not for more impersonal ones, especially those among strangers.[14] It is

[14] The more distant and impersonal the stranger the more legitimate it is to cheat him. As

significant that of the five basic relationships which Confucius said constituted the foundations of human society, three deal with family relations, another with neighbor-to-neighbor, and the fifth was ruler-to-subject, none governed the huge realm of impersonal relations with non-acquaintances. It is of course precisely such relations that are the foundations of any civil society. Almost as a way of trying to make up for such a vast void, the Chinese have perfected the practice of declaring any new acquaintance to be instantly an 'old friend', *lao pengyou*.

The Chinese are, however, masters at building social networks which can be exploited for political or commercial purposes. The Chinese system of *guanxi*, or connections, consists of highly particularistic relationships in which people who, for example, come from the same town, country, or even province, or who were classmates or went to the same school, or who served in the same organization are expected to be mutually supportive.[15] It does not matter how close they may have been or even whether they particularly liked each other, they are still expected to respond to appeals for help.[16]

It might seem that *guanxi* could provide the social capital necessary for a civil society. Individually the networks bring together some people, but they also encourage distrust of all outsiders. The Chinese today, moreover, feel that there is something improper and old-fashioned about their dependence upon *guanxi*, and hence they treat is as necessary but shameful feature of their culture. Modern Chinese generally insist that for China to modernize it will have to get rid of *guanxi*. They generally fail to appreciate that norms of reciprocity are essential in all societies. The problem has been that the Chinese have never tried to distinguish 'good' and 'bad' forms of *guanxi* in order to designate some as honorable and worth retaining and others as shameful which should be abandoned. It is the latter category that has been the basis of the pervasive corruption in contemporary China.

The spirit of *guanxi* is such that, while associations may be formed among intimates, their focus is usually on seeking favors from those in power and not in becoming citizen groups making demands on the government. Thus, the institutions and associations that are now taking form in what might appear to be a civil society tend to avoid overt political action and instead they seek special treatment from the authorities. Traditionally well-established associations in China, such as merchant guilds and clan associations, never sought to apply pressure on the government in support of their interests, but rather they operated as protective associations seeking special favors from officials in the application of the law, often giving in return a

Geremie Barme (1996) notes, in current Chinese popular culture the operating principle is, 'To screw foreigners is patriotic.'

[15] For discussions of the concept, see Yang, (1994).

[16] *Guanxi* does not call for a precise calibrating of quids pro quo in that the better off party can be expected to repeatedly help out the less fortunate one who need only express deference and respect. Nor is *guanxi* based on strong, personally felt sentiments of indebtedness and obligation, as for example is the case with the Japanese concepts of *on* and *giri*.

'slight consideration', or what in the West would be considered an inappropriate bribe. For the Chinese it was considered morally inappropriate for citizens to presume to want to change the laws in their favor. The tradition still holds as in the case of those who have prospered in Hong Kong have generally not been middle-class champions of democracy, as might be expected in classical political theory. Instead they are mainly docile apologists for the PRC, who, not wanting to stir the political waters, quietly seek special favors from the Beijing authorities.

What this means is that even though the associational bases for pluralistic politics may be evolving in China, it is not necessarily certain that emerging groups and institutions will openly perform as agents of competing political interests. The practice of deferring to authority will be hard to break.[17] At the same time we can expect the Chinese to continue to engage in their great traditional political game which I have called 'feigned compliance', in which the central authorities proclaim grand policies and issue authoritative decrees while the local powers extol the greatness of the central authorities, not openly challenging the orders, but then quietly doing what makes sense locally. The center hesitates to enforce its orders for fear of exposing its impotence. This pattern of feigned compliance has worked over the centuries to hold China together as an enduring entity while allowing local and regional differences to be accommodated. It has operated throughout the Communist period and it still operates today.

What is most troubling is that the after effects of totalitarianism in China will make the Chinese more disinclined than they traditionally were to become politically assertive in challenging their rulers. The two groups that historically went counter to this general cultural pattern were the students and workers. After the horrors of Tiananmen the students have chosen to modernize their own thinking but not to assert themselves politically. Worker unrest has increased but it is geographically limited because the closing of failed state-owned enterprises has been uneven throughout the country. Thus, the process of healing the traumatized political culture has advanced only very, very slowly.

Viewed in these general terms about the nature of Chinese social traditions, the prospects for democratic development may not seem bright. Indeed, some version of a fascistic-nationalism may seem more likely. However, the decisive factor could easily be that of individual leadership: China could have new leaders, their Gorbachev and their Yeltsin, flawed leaders as they were, or closer to home their

[17] The Confucian cultural tradition is not enough of an obstacle to block democracy, as the cases of Taiwan and South Korea prove. In both of those cases there were, however, important external and domestic factors which helped to make a difference which unfortunately do not exist for China. In Taiwan there were strong pressures from the United States to live up to the ideal of being 'Free China' and domestically there was the sharp divide between mainlanders and Taiwanese which could only be bridged by allowing popular political participation and hence democracy. The process of bringing into the ruling Kuomintang Taiwanese also had the effect of driving out the more autocratically inclined mainlanders. For an excellent study of the process of democratization in Taiwan, see Chao and Myers (1998).

Chiang Ching-kuo. Transitions to democracy depend upon far more than just socio-economic developments, for they are profoundly political processes, and the movement of politics always depends upon the actions of individuals. Farsighted leaders can overcome traditional cultural obstacles. If China in time has such visionary leaders it could open their society to the creative process of forming a dynamic, modern Chinese national identity. That sense of identity would have to capture much that was great in China's historic civilization, but also much that is of the essence of a modern pluralistic democracy. There is considerable evidence that the Chinese people long for such an escape from their current traumatized political culture. the after effects of totalitarianism in China and Russia

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