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COMMUNICATION IN CHINA:
PERSPECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

by

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March 1978
ABSTRACT

Dr. Barnett raises significant research questions about the new communication system that has emerged in China since 1949, and points out several research areas to be given priority in the future.

Dr. Chu looks at the changes in the language of Communist China, a language with its "roots in folksy peasant dialogues, but with a particular ring of its own." He looks at the impact of this language on Chinese cognitive processes.

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THE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM IN CHINA:
SOME GENERALIZATIONS, HYPOTHESES, AND QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

by

A. DOAK BARNETT
The revolution in communications in China since 1949 has played a major role in the broader processes of political, economic, and cultural change that have altered profoundly the nature of Chinese society in the past quarter-century. Valuable research has already been done on aspects of China’s new system of communication. But there is clearly a need for more.

On the basis of what is now known, what are some of the basic characteristics of this new communication system that need further examination? What are some of the major questions about it that now need to be investigated? Can one formulate hypotheses about the system, its operation, and its effects—in practice as well as in theory—that point to areas for research that should be given priority in the period ahead?

One of the most striking characteristics of the communication system in China today is its pervasiveness, penetration, and intensity, with minimum technology. In relation to its size, China still has only limited communications technology. It is true that the Communists have done a good deal to develop modern media. If one compares the situation of today with that of 25 years ago (to say nothing of that in traditional China), the technology of communication has advanced considerably. Yet if one compares China with societies that are more highly developed, technologically and scientifically, such as Japan, it is clear that the Chinese are still operating with minimum technological facilities for communication. For example, even though the Chinese press has developed substantially, its distribution is still relatively small for the size of its population. The written word obviously has a crucial importance in China today, but its direct impact is greatest on elite groups and those in the bureaucratic structure of power. Television is in its infancy. Of the modern means of mass communication, radio—including the wired rediffusion system that has spread widely throughout the country—probably now has the greatest mass impact. But even in radio communication, if one compares China and Japan, there is no doubt that China’s technological capabilities are still limited.

In examining communication media in China, one must look, therefore, at things other than the modern media. A notable characteristic of the present communication system in China is that it incorporates almost every conceivable means of communication, including many traditional ones, such as story telling, old-style "comic books," and popular drama. Nevertheless, even taking these into account,
the Chinese system appears to be far more pervasive, penetrating, and intense than one would expect simply from an analysis of the media. Why?

One answer is that there is an intimate and crucial link between communication and organization in contemporary China. The Chinese Communists see communication as a means to create new political and social organizations, and they see all political and social organizations as important channels of communication. This makes the system fundamentally different from that in any modern pluralistic society, such as in the United States or Japan, where there is a great outpouring of communications, through many channels, that reach millions of individuals. But no disciplined, organizational structure exists to reinforce them, nor is one desired. In China, a direct link exists between organization and communication. Great stress is placed on face-to-face, oral communication, through organizations. In analyzing how communications are diffused throughout China, it is misleading, therefore, to look simply at what is transmitted via the identifiable media. Even more important are the messages communicated down through the regime's major organizational hierarchies, then out from these hierarchies through organizational channels, and ultimately to the mass of the population.

The following key elements exist in the organizational apparatus in this dual system of communication and organization: at the top, the disciplined Party, state, and military hierarchies are of key importance, as are the organizations for mass campaigns; finally, and perhaps most important, at the bottom levels, Chinese society is organized in a unique way into hsiao-tzu (small groups) of many sorts, including hsueh-hsi hsiao-tzu (study groups). The organization of the entire population into small overlapping groups is distinctive. Through these groups, intense social pressures of many sorts are exerted on virtually all individuals in Chinese society.

The dividing lines between organization and communication or, more broadly, between state and society are blurred; it is often hard, in fact, to define that line in China. Some scholars argue that this has always been true in Chinese society, at least to some extent; that traditionally the state and society were much more intimately linked than in pluralistic Western societies. Perhaps, but this is even more true now. Since 1949, the state and the society in China have at times seemed to be virtually merged (although in periods when central control has been weakened, as during the Cultural Revolution, it has been evident that the merger is by no means complete).

What are the characteristics of the small groups that play such important roles in the political, social, and communication systems in China today? To start with, normally they are directly linked to higher authorities, which makes them very different from most citizens groups in pluralistic societies. There is almost always a politically-directed hierarchy to which a group is connected. Someone within the group is usually in close touch with the hierarchy, or at least with some group within the leadership sector. Instructions, information, and the definition of acceptable values come from above; they are sent down to these groups by higher authorities. The prime functions of local groups are to mobilize peer pressure and, through propaganda, indoctrination, and "criticism and self-criticism," to achieve acceptance, compliance, commitment, and action--based on the impulses coming
from above. At times, the local groups also express their own interests, but this is not their primary function (in fact, it is generally not viewed as a legitimate function).

The intensity with which the system affects different types of people in China clearly varies. The pressure to submit and conform is greatest with respect to deviants—for example those in reform-through-labor institutions. However, the pressure is also great both on all those who work within the bureaucratic hierarchies of the regime and on intellectuals and students. "Ordinary people," this is, rank and file workers and peasants, feel the effects of this system, but with less intensity. There are also obvious differences between urban and rural areas; people in cities are clearly more affected than peasants in the countryside. How great the differences are is a question that deserves further research.

The communication system in China today is a highly centralized and national system that communicates with speed, as well as intensity, throughout most of the country. This is very different from what existed in the past. Traditional China had an effective, but slow, system of communication. Over the decades, and even centuries, the diffusion of cultural values and social practices through this system was impressive. But it was the result of a very gradual filtering-down process. Education was of key importance, and various kinds of social pressures reinforced particular values. But not only was the process extremely slow; there was also a great deal of regional variation and localism. Today, once the impulses are sent by the center, they are transmitted very rapidly throughout the entire country.

In order to understand China's present national communication system, it is necessary to analyze the interrelationships of several elements, some public, some not. The regime has an elaborate internal structure of bureaucratic communication (which we have learned something about in recent years from documents that have filtered out of China) that obviously is a key element in the system. Its messages are highly differentiated; they are contained in many types of directives, with different levels of authoritativeness and with different degrees of classification. However, since most of these messages are classified, we know much less about them than we would like. Ordinary Chinese do not know much about them either.

What we do have is easy access to the open system of public mass communication. Several interesting studies have been made of the mass media in China, and there is beginning to be a significant literature dealing with them. But much can still be done to increase our understanding of the media. Finally, a better understanding is needed of the social dynamics of how small groups operate in China, that is, how social pressure is exerted through them. There have been a few interesting studies of such groups, but much more needs to be done.

In China—in contrast with countries such as Japan or the United States—the content of communications emanating from the center, and disseminated through the Party-controlled system, tends to be highly focused, not diffuse. At any particular time, the top leadership usually focuses attention on a few priority objectives, and the communication system concentrates on trying to deal with these. This too makes the system very different from those in pluralistic societies.
The communication system in China today is highly purposeful. Its function is not primarily to inform; rather, it is to stimulate action, to mobilize people, to change values and beliefs, and to change behavior. The Chinese Communists see an intimate link between beliefs and behavior.

By concentrating on a few objectives, Chinese leaders can achieve visible results. But such concentration also has obvious liabilities. The leaders often neglect certain problems while concentrating on priority tasks; the costs of this deserve careful analysis.

Above all, the communication system in China today puts an extraordinary emphasis on normative goals, on values. The leadership stresses what the Chinese call "thought reform," ssu hsiang kai tsao. Because their goal is to create a new "culture," they spend a great deal of time on basic ideological education. This is true in most small groups as well as in the mass media. Great effort is spent on communicating, through repetition, fundamental ideology--simplified, with values usually defined in black and white terms--good and bad. The distinctive scale of values of the late Chairman Mao Tse-tung put enormous stress on the need for ideological transformation, often giving it higher priority than increased production or structural social change, although these are obviously linked. His assumption was that if the mass of people could be induced to accept a new culture, a new set of values, this would automatically set a new framework for thinking and behavior. It would set boundaries on what people could think and do, and make "right thinking" and compliance close to being automatic. The assumption has been that if the people know what the new ground rules of the society are, they will know what patterns of behavior are required and will conform to them.

In China today, the language, per se, is an enormously important transmitter of values. Every revolution introduces a new language, and the Chinese revolution is no exception. The Communists' new terminology carries tremendous freight, introducing new norms and political and social ideas. Language is a tool for change, and the regime's new slogans, symbols, and models, have powerful effects. The use of historical analogy and allusion, as well as of "esoteric communication" (using ideological "code words") requires that members of the society (and outside observers) learn entirely new ways of communicating.

One of the basic functions of the communication system in China today is to control, limit, and restrict information, as well as to diffuse new ideas and values. In certain respects, of course, the system is very effective in transmitting information that the regime wants to spread. One example is the dissemination of simple agricultural information through the regime's extension system, which may well be more effective in China than in any other developing society. The other side of the coin, however, is that the information diffused in China is extremely restricted. The average Chinese today has little knowledge of many aspects of his or her own society, and even less about the rest of the world. These people must spend a great amount of time and effort trying to learn what in another type of society would be in public domain. This raises important questions that deserve further analysis:
What information is disseminated, and what is not, in China? What is the level of knowledge, or lack of knowledge, about key questions among different groups of Chinese?

Finally, it is important to recognize that the present Chinese system is based on a complex mix of persuasion and coercion. Many observers, including myself, have stressed the importance of political persuasion in China. The Chinese put an enormous stress on "voluntarism." Yet much of the persuasion in China is clearly "coercive persuasion." Coercion—sometimes subtle, sometimes not, usually in the background, but at times in the foreground—is essential for the system to work as it does. In the early days of the regime (especially during land reform and the campaign against counter-revolutionaries), there were periods of open violence that demonstrated to everyone the capacity of the regime to deal harshly with its opponents, or deviants, and people did not forget this. Today, everyone is aware of the sanctions that are built into the system to discourage and punish non-conformists. These include extreme penal sanctions, reform-through-labor, and less severe surveillance.

Let me conclude with a few broad judgments, questions, and hypotheses about the strengths and weaknesses of the communication system in China today. Most observers are impressed, rightly, by many of its strengths. Personally, however, I believe that it is most clearly effective in achieving control, compliance, conformity, and submission. How effective it is in achieving basic value change, in bringing about "conversions," and in eliciting real "commitment" is harder to judge. This is not meant to imply that there have not been important changes in values; there obviously have been, although the amount of change doubtless varies, depending on the groups one considers, at what time. For the nation as a whole, however, the changes may be less far-reaching than is sometimes assumed.

It is a reasonable hypothesis, in my opinion, that there is a considerable amount of dissimulation and role playing by large numbers of people in China. Many probably simply do what they feel they must do to get along under the system. Doubtless, many differences exist between public postures and private beliefs. There is unquestionably a great deal of ritualism in political behavior. Clearly, many old values persist, sometimes in new form. But more research is needed if we are to have a better basis for judging both the extent to which the Chinese today accept new values, or old ones, or some complicated mix, and the extent to which their loyalties focus on old social institutions or on the new political groups. At present, we really do not know.

It would also be illuminating to have more research on how much "cognitive dissonance" may exist in China today; that is, how much are people disturbed by the roles they have to play in relation to the realities they see. Perhaps it is easier in Chinese culture than in some others to cope with the differences between the private views that people hold and the public roles that they must play. In any case, more research should be done on this.

Further research is needed on the evolution of the mobilization system in China. This system has been impressively effective in many respects, but there is
some evidence that its effectiveness has declined, in part because of a tendency toward routinization. Is this in fact the trend? This too deserves systematic investigation.

Much more research needs to be done on the ways in which traditional forms of communication persist, sub rosa, outside of the official system, transmitting values different from those officially propagated in the Party-controlled system. How and to what extent are information and values, differing from those contained in the official media, disseminated informally through friends, families, factions, cliques, local groups, and the rumor network? There is evidence that a great deal of communication of this sort persists in China, totally outside the official system. But more study is needed on how much there is, on how important it is, and on the extent to which it transmits values that seriously compete with those propagated in the Party's system.

Further research is also needed on other questions concerning possible limitations and costs inherent in China's present communication system, which may counterbalance some of its more obvious advantages. How much does the deliberate restriction of the information disseminated create problems for the regime, retard the development of an efficient economy and social system, and work against real integration of the society? There is little question that it does create problems, but how serious are they? What costs, in terms of utilization of talent, does the system involve? One can argue that in many respects it effectively mobilizes new talent; to a notable degree, it stresses the potentialities of ordinary people and encourages local initiative, creativity, and problem solving, thereby fostering local innovation and change. It is probably equally true, however, that the system, by demanding conformity and perpetuating learning by rote, wastes much talent. It clearly has inhibited the creativity of many of the country's ablest intellectuals. How should one weigh these pluses and minuses?

Still another question deserves careful examination. Although, in theory, the "mass line" demands effective two-way communication, both up and down the regime's hierarchies, in practice does it operate this way? Considerable evidence exists that, although communication downward is usually very effective, there are many inhibitions that make communication upward less effective. The channels for communication upward do exist, but the deep sense of hierarchy and awe of authority held by the Chinese appear to create major obstacles to having effective communication upward to the leadership. It also appears that there is generally relatively little effective lateral communication in Chinese society today. Communication channels focus on the center, and the center seems to discourage lateral communication among different groups and regions. If all this is true, these are obviously flaws in the system. Thus, how serious are they?

Further research also needs to be done on the role of communication in China today as it affects conflict resolution. There is considerable evidence that in some respects the system inhibits social conflicts; it clearly provides controlled outlets for aggressive impulses. However, it is also clear that in some respects the system fosters tensions and conflicts. By stressing contradictions among different groups and classes, the leadership under Mao tried to maintain a state of
constant dynamic tension in society. Without doubt, there are many overt, as well as latent, tensions in the society. Periodically, they have come to the fore, either when the leadership has deliberately highlighted them or when the system has temporarily broken down.

The system appeared to operate most effectively during the regime's first few years. Because China's leadership was unified at that time, the regime's propaganda and mass mobilization campaigns generally reflected a consensus at the center, were articulated in a planned way, and were systematically implemented throughout the country, down to the bottom levels of society. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, the consensus began to break down. The leadership was doubtless genuinely shocked by the evidence of latent dissidence and tension in Chinese society during the Hundred Flowers period. In the early 1960s, during the post-Great Leap depression, the entire political control system loosened and the intensity and effectiveness of communication from the center temporarily declined, in part because of the adverse impact of economic conditions on the entire political and social system. Then, during the Cultural Revolution, when Mao and his closest followers deliberately attacked the bureaucracies, the system temporarily broke down. As a result, communications from the center no longer originated from a single authoritative source; they emanated from many competitive factional groups. At the end of the Cultural Revolution, steps were taken to restore a centralized system, but in the ongoing struggle among Chinese leaders, conflict was more notable than consensus up until the death of Mao. Without a united leadership to set clear goals and define values, competing groups argued fiercely over priorities and policies. Different bureaucratic and interest groups in the top elite actually debated against one another in the media. A crucial question now is whether, with Mao gone and the radicals purged, China's leadership will be able to restore a more unified system, as they are obviously trying to do.

Many of the observations and judgments made here are tentative hypotheses. All of them are debatable. They all raise questions that deserve further research. More, and better, research needs to be done both on the system in its ideal form and on its strengths and weaknesses in practice.

Much can be done by expanding the kinds of research already completed on the communication system in China, applying old approaches to new questions. However, a need for new approaches also exists. In particular, there needs to be a wider use of two techniques. One is sophisticated content analysis of media output. Much of the research done to date on Chinese media has focused on how the communication system is organized. There should now be more extensive and more sophisticated content analysis to determine the values and information communicated by the system.

Second, in order to understand how the system actually works in practice, a greater effort should be made to combine media research with interviewing. One cannot know how the Chinese system really works, and what effects it has, simply by reading the press or listening to the radio. There needs to be deeper analysis of the actual impact of the system through intensive interviewing of people who have lived under it. Unfortunately, there are not likely—at least in the near future—to be many opportunities for effective interviewing in China itself. However, more
systematic efforts can be made to interview both refugees from China and visitors of many kinds who have gone to China—especially overseas Chinese who have returned home, many of whom have had a kind of experience quite different from that of most other visitors.

A great many of the most interesting and important questions that now need to be explored require research that combines in depth interviewing with sophisticated content analysis. Research of this kind is needed to provide greater understanding not just of the surface appearance of China's new communication system but also of its strengths and weaknesses in operation. And it is this kind of understanding of the system that is required to improve our knowledge of the broad political, economic, social, and cultural changes that have occurred, and are still occurring, in the world's most revolutionary and most populous nation.
REVOLUTIONARY LANGUAGE AND
CHINESE COGNITIVE PROCESSES

by

GODWIN C. CHU

The writer wishes to acknowledge the critical reading and comments by A. Doak Barnett and Joan Rubin, Visiting Researcher at the East-West Culture Learning Institute.
China under Communism has been undergoing rather drastic changes. Beginning with the land reform and the state control of business and industry in the 1950s, the Chinese social and economic structures have been radically altered. Attempts at ideological reform, as a means to change the traditional Chinese values, were started in the same period and are still going on today. Beyond the structural transformation and ideological indoctrination, another trend of a change can be sensed, one that has a more subtle and less readily perceptible nature. Whether intentionally or not, the Party leadership over the years has been taking steps that may some day change the way the Chinese perceive their surroundings and, in essence, change the Chinese cognitive processes. A major mechanism for initiating the cognitive change is the popularization of a new, revolutionary language as a means of communication.

The idea that language is closely related to perception has been discussed by anthropologists in the West, notably by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. It is doubtful, however, that these theoretical discussions were known to the Chinese Communist leaders. Nevertheless, since the early days of the Communist movement, the Party leaders have sought to transmit their messages in a language that has its roots in folksy peasant dialogues, but with a particular ring of its own. This is something that other Chinese revolutionary leaders, like Dr. Sun Yat-sen and his followers, did not do.

The purpose of this section of this publication is to illustrate the possible impact of the new language on the Chinese cognitive processes, in terms of both continuity with the past and change in the future. It is my hypothesis that the new language both reflects some of the cultural heritage that has been retained, whether consciously or unconsciously, and at the same time, functions as an agent for cognitive change. In discussing this hypothesis, I shall examine similarities as well as contrasts between the old and the new. It must be emphasized, however, that these ideas are highly tentative. They are presented here merely to suggest a topic for research on communication in China.

COGNITIVE PROCESSES

First, the general concepts of cognitive processes will be briefly discussed. The American sociologist William I. Thomas once proposed what has come to be
known as the Thomas theorem: "If men define situations as real, they are real in
their consequences."2

The implication is: Human beings do not simply live in a world of reality. Rather, we live in a world of perceived reality that may or may not have full cor-
respondence to reality itself. How individuals behave depends in a large measure
on how they have learned to perceive the world around them.

Stated in a different perspective, we live in a world that in part consists of
a physical environment including natural resources, man-made artifacts, and tech-
logy. But our world also consists of a social-cultural environment: the individ-
uals around us, with their customs, conventions, beliefs and values, and the social
relations among them. Human life is essentially a continuous process of inter-
actions with both our physical environment and social-cultural environment. The
point emphasized here is that this interaction is mediated through our cognitive
processes, depending, as it were, on what we perceive or do not perceive.

By cognitive processes, we are referring to at least three aspects of per-
ceiving.3 First, there is the fundamental recognition of our environment, the cog-
nizance of some of its elements that are considered relevant or significant to our
life. Both the physical and social-cultural environments are important to our sur-
vival and thus need to be dealt with. But the degrees of attention we pay to the
various elements in our environment vary from one society to another. We have
the familiar example of the Eskimo's recognition of different kinds of snow, which
is far more extensive than the differentiations generally noted by other people.4
In a similar way, the Chinese recognize different aspects of their social environ-
ment in terms of kinship relations while the Americans, for instance, generally do
not.

Second, whatever we recognize in our environment needs to be classified
into categories in order to provide a basis of perceptual clarity. Again, people of
different cultural backgrounds follow different patterns. The Chinese, for instance,
classify social relations in simulated kinship terms even when no kinship ties exist.
Thus friends and acquaintances outside the actual kinship network are placed in the
categories of "brothers" or "uncles" depending on age differentiations. A different
trend is found among the Americans, who seem to perceive relatives and friends
with almost no marked distinction. By the process of classifying and categorizing,
we carve our perceptual world into comfortable niches. This process makes it
relatively easy for us to recognize and cope with the different aspects of our life.

Finally, we tend to evaluate the individuals and objects that we have per-
ceived and categorized and then structure them into a sort of hierarchical order.
We assign greater importance to some elements than to others, that is, certain
people and things are closer to our hearts, so to speak. Parallel to the hierarchi-
cal order is a relational order, in the sense that the objects and categories are
not perceived in isolation, but as related parts of a perceptual whole.

In short, we assume that the elements in our physical and social-cultural
environments are perceived, classified, organized, and evaluated in a manner that is somewhat unique to a particular cultural group.

CHINESE COGNITIVE PROCESSES: OLD AND NEW

We shall discuss the Chinese cognitive processes—both their old forms and the new trend the Party is promoting—under three topics: (1) framework of perceiving, (2) nature of classification, and (3) basis of evaluation.

1. Framework of Perceiving.

One noticeable aspect in the traditional Chinese framework of perceiving was a high degree of absolutism. The Chinese tended to see things in an absolute as opposed to relative framework. Things were often seen as all or none, in black and white terms, rather than in different shades of gray. This lack of relativity in perception can be illustrated with traditional sayings from the Chinese language. The following examples emphasized the absolute merit of scholarship:

- "All ten thousand professions are low; only scholarly pursuit is lofty and high."
- "Of the high ranking officials in the imperial court, all are scholars of learning."

This tendency seems to have been inherited and even perpetuated under the Communist rule. In China today everything is to be seen in the perspective of the absolute truth of Marxism and Maoism, in a version consistent with the current ideology. Three of the recent campaigns—against Lin Piao and Confucius, against Teng Hsiao-ping, and most recently, against the Gang of Four—are examples. In each campaign, the criticisms have been presented on the same ground of absolute sins even though the targets of condemnation have varied in political ideology.

Another dimension in the framework of perceiving, one in which the old and the new are wide apart, is the degree in which the world around us is seen as potentially changeable. This is a passive versus dynamic dimension. Most cultural groups recognize change as an intrinsic aspect of life. The Chinese in the past certainly recognized the prominence of change, as indicated by the Book of Changes. However, the Chinese seemed to perceive change as something to be adjusted to passively, not as something that they could control with an active effort on their part. To the traditional Chinese, changes were seen as inevitable and unalterable. This passive inevitability is aptly illustrated by the traditional saying: "When the going is rough, adjust compliantly." The same passive view of the world was reflected in the way the Chinese accepted political disorder with an air of resignation. The Chinese believed, as illustrated by another saying, that "after peace, (there will be) chaos." In other words, peace and suffering will come in cycles, and one should simply accept them.

The static view of the universe was reflected in many traditional terms in the
Chinese language, which seemed to cover up action with a coat of ambiguity. These are a few examples (the English translations are approximates):

進行 Proceed
詢問 Enquire
從長計議 Take a long view (meaning disagree)
處理 Deal with
詫病 Note weakness (meaning criticize)
協助 Provide aid

This static view is one aspect that is now being changed. Partly through the new revolutionary language, and partly through the many campaigns for production, the universe is presented to the Chinese as controllable and conquerable. The parable of "The Old Man Who Removed a Mountain," which for centuries was relegated to a status of obscurity, is now being given national prominence and had the personal endorsement of the late Chairman Mao Tse-tung. The Chinese did have a saying that "manpower can overcome the will of heaven," but few seemed to have taken it seriously in the past. Now the whole country has set out to conquer the universe, to do the impossible.

The vastly different tone of the new language can be illustrated by the revolutionary counterparts of the six obscure phrases from the traditional past (cited above):

大搞 Vigorously stir up (instead of proceed)
摸底 Feeling the bottom (instead of enquire)
狠批 Ruthlessly criticize (instead of take a long view)
狠抓 Resolutely grasp (instead of deal with)
鬥臭鬥毆 Struggle till it stinks, till it collapses (instead of note weakness)
大力支援 Support mightily (instead of provide aid)

2. Nature of Classification.

Of the many possible ways of classifying the elements in our perceptual world, the distinction between physical and social-cultural environments will be discussed. This distinction has been clearly recognized by the Chinese. Confucius, for instance,
spoke of ke-wu (distinction of things) and hsiu-shen (cultivation of the whole person). The question is: To what extent does one orientation (for example, the social-cultural) dominate the way the Chinese perceive their world?

In my opinion, the Chinese in the past were oriented primarily toward the social-cultural aspect as a basis of classifying their perceptual elements. The Chinese traditionally tended to see their world as a social world, populated by people having an intricate network of relations, rather than as a world full of material objects to be manipulated. This is indicated by the fact that while the Chinese developed one of the world's most elaborate systems of human relations, for centuries they largely neglected the development of technology and science. It would seem that the adequate utilization of resources was not given full attention by the Chinese.

Indeed, the social orientation was so pronounced that the Chinese tended to create a personal relation between themselves and their material possessions. For instance, there was the popular legend of a scholar who had such a love for the flowering plum trees that he regarded them as his wives. Bamboo acquired such a status of refined dignity among the Chinese that it was said to represent the attributes of a true friend. Inanimate objects were often given names, not in memory of someone who made a large donation (a custom unheard of in olden-day China), but to signify the personal relation between the object and its owner, usually with a moral undertone. For instance, a hut, a pavilion, or even a roadside stone would be appropriately named in a personal manner.

The tendency to personify material objects was reflected in the Chinese religion. Trees, rivers, oceans, mountains, the family residence, the kitchen, the heaven, and the earth—these were personified and deified. A remote but personal relation, exemplified in worship and offerings, was presumed to exist between an individual and the personified deities. In fact, many of the deities were at one time living persons who somehow became symbolized as gods having jurisdiction over some aspect of the physical environment, thus giving it a social orientation.

These tendencies of attributing personal relations to inanimate objects and materials have been condemned by the Communist Party authorities in China. Now far more attention is being directed to the material aspect of life for the sake of development. Even against this background of perceptual change, we can discern a thread of cultural continuity, expressed in a different form of social orientation. From all the pronouncements by the Party leaders, it appears clear that the efforts to seek material development are to be understood not only in physical terms, but also in the perspective of social significance, in terms of their contribution to the establishment of a new social order. The campaign to praise Iron Man Wang Ching-hsi, a deceased oilman at Taching, provides an example. Wang has been glorified as a hero who defied impossible odds in his efforts to develop the Taching Oilfield. His achievements, however, are presented not in terms of physical quantity of production, but in terms of his dedication to the revolution and personal loyalty to Chairman Mao.


How are the objects and individuals in our perceptual world evaluated? Are
they evaluated according to some rigid principles, perhaps on moral grounds, or more flexibly according to empirical evidence? This is a question of flexibility versus rigidity. The Chinese in the past seemed to be bound by a highly rigid evaluative scheme with a moral character. One indication of this tendency is found in the numerous sayings embodied in the Chinese language. For almost every occasion in the life of the Chinese, there was a corresponding saying that told him or her how to view the situation and what the right way was to handle it. For instance, when misfortune would strike, a person should not be depressed, because there was the popular saying that "when old man Sai lost his horse, the loss later brought him luck in return." For centuries, the Chinese peasants accepted their social status compliantly, a reflection of this saying: "If you are blessed, others will serve you; if you are not blessed, you serve others." Another example was when people were in disagreement, do not argue because "harmony is precious." Of all the offenses to an individual's ancestors, the worst was not to have a male child. This was sufficient grounds for a man to dismiss his wife. Extramarital sex could lead to murder because the Chinese character for that term begins with a knife. Many of the sayings contained some element of folk wisdom, but they also tended to limit an individual's perception (and subsequent behavior) to such an extent that empirical reality to the contrary was often ignored.

A similarly high degree of perceptual rigidity appears to be promoted in China today. In place of the old traditional sayings, the Chinese are now urged to follow the quotations of Mao. Every day for years, the People's Daily featured a quotation from him on its front page. Mao's quotations are still prominently placed in this newspaper, although not on a daily basis now. The point is clear. The basis of evaluation, both for personal efforts and state affairs, is whether it does or does not conform to Mao's instructions—according to their current ideological interpretations.

The basis of evaluation has another perspective, namely, the point of reference from which evaluations are made. When speaking of evaluation, we necessarily make a judgment about the desirability, whether it is good or bad, moral, or immoral. The question is: from whose point of view, the individual or the group? The Chinese, in the past as well as the present, have not had a strong orientation toward the individual. Rather, the evaluative aspect of the Chinese cognitive processes has by and large been oriented toward the group. The difference between the past and the present lies in the nature of the group: the kinship groups in the past and the collectives at present. In the past, the Chinese viewed their world not as an arena in which to fight for individual achievement, but as an avenue for advancing the glories of their ancestors. This is illustrated by the traditional saying: "Work for the glories of ancestors and forefathers." This concept was so deeply imbedded in the Chinese mind that many parents named their sons (never daughters) either Kuang-chung (glories for the ancestors) or Yao-chu (splendors for the forefathers). Now the ancestors have faded away. Rather, the Chinese are encouraged to work for the glories of their groups, that is, the collectives. For instance, the young Chinese today are being urged "to think only of workers, peasants and soldiers, and love only their collectivity," not themselves or their families.
The Party authorities have used two major tactics in order to change the
cognitive processes of the Chinese people. One, which has been briefly discussed,
is language reform in order to change the mode of verbal communication. Many of
the archaic terms from classic Chinese have been abandoned. In their places, new
colloquial phrases with strong action-oriented connotations have been introduced.
If anyone wants to be convinced that the language spoken in China today is different
from what it was a quarter-century ago, all they need to do is to read the People's
_Daily_. Phrases such as "feel the bottom" (or find out what is going on) and "walk the
socialist road" were previously unheard of, but have now become part of the popular
Chinese vernacular. Since our cognitive processes function primarily within the
confines of language, changing the language is a fundamental way of changing our
cognitive processes.

The other major tactic is the well-known ritual self-criticism. In a self-
criticism session, a person is required to make a searching examination of his or
her errors not only in overt behavior but also in covert thinking. This self-
examination is then verbalized in public in the presence of the individual's own
group, either in a production team or in a factory shift. Whether or not coercion
has been applied prior to the self-criticism session, it is important to note that the
act of self-criticism is done in a manner that is intended to make the person believe
that he is doing it voluntarily. Let us assume that the person making a self-criticism
is not yet fully convinced by what he himself is saying in front of the group. Accord-
ing to the theory of cognitive dissonance, the individual is caught in between two
cognitions that are dissonant with one another: He knows that he holds one kind of
belief, and yet he is saying something to the contrary, with an air of deep conviction,
and seemingly on a voluntary basis.7

There are, among others, two ways of resolving the person's cognitive dis-
sonance. One way is for the individual to change his inner belief to be consistent with
his verbal confession, that is, to become genuinely converted. Another way is for
him to tell himself that he is merely playing a game for the purpose of survival. In
the latter case, the discrepancy between his own belief and his overt verbal perform-
ance, and whatever psychological discomfort this discrepancy may cause, is simply
a necessary part of the game. As long as he stays out of trouble by periodically put-
ting on his act, he will be rewarded and will continue to play this game. From an
article in the _People's Daily_, it seems that the number of people who take the second
course of action is large enough to deserve official attention:

When a campaign comes, there are people who would prepare themselves
in every conceivable way. They pretend to be progressive and sincere,
as if they were really engaged in a relentless struggle against all wrong-
doings. At a mass meeting for self-criticism, they would cry, moan,
and confess all their mistakes. After the campaign is over, when the
"storm has calmed down," they are back to their old selves. Their
self-criticisms are tossed aside, and they will do whatever they want
to do.8
Because the tactics of self-criticism might be more effective in achieving overt conformity than covert conversion, the function of language reform seems to assume considerable significance. The effects of the new language are more subtle and gradual, and for these reasons it might have some lasting impact in the long run. Because the people who speak the language are not necessarily conscious of the effects, they probably do not make an effort to resist. After they have engaged in the new mode of verbal communication long enough, the Chinese people will probably change some of their cognitive processes accordingly.

This point was brought home to me during a conversation I had recently with a former resident of mainland China. While this person was describing some of the hardships experienced by one of his relatives during the San Fan and Wu Fan campaigns, he did not use terms such as "sufferings" or "physical punishment." He referred to his relative's experience as "having received the impact of waves," a phrase that was not used during the past but that has become popularized in China today. It seems that because he was used to the new language, he began to see things in a different perspective. It may be noted that the conversation took place in private and that he used that term in a completely natural manner without any intention of minimizing the harshness of his relative's experience. To me, however, that phrase gave the impression of someone who had received some unavoidable, and yet justifiable, mild treatment.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF OLD AND NEW COGNITIVE PROCESSES

The social implications of the old Chinese cognitive processes can be seen in the perspective of the Thomas theorem referred to earlier: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

In terms of social change, this means that if a situation is perceived as unchangeable, then no change is likely to happen. The rigid, passive way the Chinese in the past perceived their world, in which a highly inflexible priority system determined the Chinese evaluation of their alternatives, seemed to be in part responsible for the lack of social change in Chinese history. The traditional cognitive processes appeared to be reinforced by an equally rigid Chinese social structure centered around the kinship system. It was as if because the Chinese social structure remained stable and undisturbed for centuries, the Chinese cognitive processes were able to function adequately despite their rigidity and inflexibility. In a sense, the rigid cognitive processes were a major factor contributing to the structural stability in the Chinese society because the Chinese did not see an active need for change.

This cognitive-structural equilibrium was disrupted during the Nineteenth Century when the guns of European imperialists forced China to open its doors. Even in the face of the necessity for change, however, the rigid Chinese cognitive processes stood in the way of social reforms and cultural adaptation, particularly when the reforms required a reorientation toward the use of material resources, which the Chinese found it difficult to accept. This may explain why the Chinese in the early years of the Twentieth Century resisted the impact of modernization and development.
The Chinese Communist leaders, in their effort to revolutionize the Chinese society, have not refrained from the use of coercion as a means of changing the Chinese cognitive processes as well as the Chinese social structure. However, the Party leaders seem to be not fully conscious that the new cognitive processes they want to establish may possibly have much in common with the old. Underneath the new emphasis on change and dynamism, a measure of rigidity and absolutism is couched in new ideological terms. It seems that the Party wants changes, but only the kind of changes acceptable to the Party's ideology.

In short, the Party wants the Chinese people today to perceive their world in a new but similarly rigid and inflexible manner, in largely absolute rather than relative terms, with an orientation centered on collective groups rather than kinship groups. The one major difference between the old and the new cognitive processes lies in the dynamic action-orientation of today. Within the Party-directed framework, the Chinese people today must see their world as one calling for continuous actions, not only for class struggle, but also for mobilizing the vast human energy of the Chinese masses for the tasks of development.

2. The original idea that led to what is now known as the Thomas theorem in sociology was first introduced in an almost casual manner by William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki in their discussion of the traditional attitudes of Polish peasants, in *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 68. The theorem was restated in its current version by Thomas in a 1938 conference on Polish peasants. See Herbert Blumer, *An Appraisal of Thomas and Znaniecki's "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America"* (New York: Social Science Research Council, Bulletin 44, 1939), p. 85.


5. *The Book of Changes*, or I Ching, was an ancient Chinese classic of unknown authors and antiquity. Believed to have existed as early as the Twelfth Century B.C., I Ching was one of the classics edited by Confucius. It was a collection of texts discussing the synchronistic concepts of change and equilibrium in the universe. See *I Ching (the Book of Changes)*, translated in 1882 by James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963).


9. San Fan, or Three Anti, was a movement launched by the Party in December 1951 against corruption, waste, and bureaucratic practices among Party cadres. Wu Fan, or Five Anti, was a similar movement in 1952 directed at businessmen and industrialists to stamp out practices such as bribery, tax evasion, pilfering public property, profiteering, and stealing economic information. For an analysis of these two movements, see Godwin C. Chu, Communication, Social Structural Change, and Capital Formation in People's Republic of China, East-West Communication Institute Paper No. 9 (Honolulu, Hawaii: East-West Center, June 1974).
All ten thousand professions are low; only scholarly pursuit is lofty and high.

Of the high ranking officials in the imperial court, all are scholars of learning.

When the going is rough, adjust compliantly.

After peace, (there will be) chaos.

The Old Man Who Removed a Mountain.

Manpower can overcome the will of heaven.

Plum tree wife.

Bamboo tree friend.
When old man Sai lost his horse, the loss later brought him luck in return.

If you are blessed, others serve you; if you are not blessed, you serve others.

Harmony is precious.

Of the three major offenses to one's ancestors, the worst is not to have a male heir.

Extramarital sex leads to murder.

Work for the glories of ancestors and forefathers.

Having received the impact of waves.

塞翁失馬 馬知非福
有福之人人服侍 無福之人服侍人
和為貴
不孝有三 無後為大
色字頭上一把刀
光宗耀祖
受到衝擊