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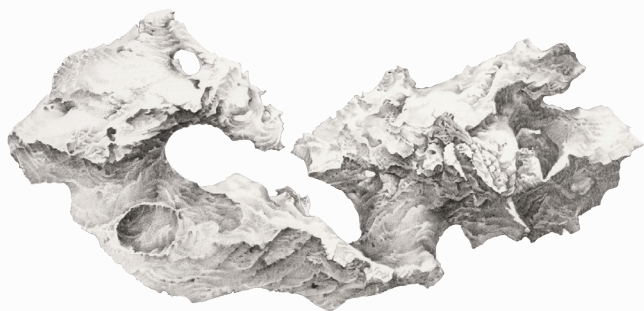
国际问题高等研究院
中国研究中心

STUDYING CHINA IN THE ABSENCE OF ACCESS: REDISCOVERING A LOST ART

**COMPILED FROM SAIS CHINA RESEARCH
CENTER LECTURES BY JOSEPH FEWSMITH,
THOMAS FINGAR, ALICE MILLER,
AND FREDERICK TEIWES**

EDITED BY ANDREW MERTHA

PREFACE BY ANNE THURSTON



**SAIS CHINA RESEARCH CENTER
PUBLICATION NUMBER 1**

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SAIS China Research Center
Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg Center
555 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20001

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The SAIS China Research Center's mandate is to strengthen our knowledge of contemporary China—not in spite, but because of—the challenges embedded in this complicated but vital relationship. Our aim is to reimagine and refashion current approaches to understanding China and offer an array of alternative approaches to inform China scholarship, the policy process, and general interest among non-specialists.

The SCRC's approach extends beyond disciplinary boundaries and dominant policy narratives. Our frame of reference is the Chinese state, a complex, globally connected country with multiple, often-competing elite interests, organizational missions, and vast regional differences. Understanding China requires exploring the significant contending power centers within dozens of functional bureaucracies and at tens of thousands of subnational administrative levels, and a Chinese Communist Party that is evolving in its relationship to the Chinese state and to Chinese society. Only with an approach in which we privilege institutional structures, incentives facing leaders throughout the system, and shared cultural-historical frameworks can we make sense of the economic and strategic concerns that dominate the policy world and the Academy.

As the successor of the China Studies Program at SAIS, the goal of the SCRC is to champion both rigorous scholarly research as well as active engagement with academics, students, policy practitioners, governments officials, and business and community leaders, drawing from the rich history of China Studies at SAIS.

Forward and Acknowledgments

The format of this publication is somewhat unorthodox. It draws on presentations by Joseph Fewsmith (Boston University), Thomas Fingar (Stanford University), Alice Miller (Stanford University), and Frederick Teiwes (University of Sidney) at the Johns Hopkins SAIS China Research Center in the fall of 2021. Each presenter received the same prompt, and each presenter took it in a different direction:

As our access to Chinese data sources becomes increasingly constrained, and the political atmosphere narrows opportunities for informal collaboration, many China scholars outside China have been scrambling to find new and innovative ways to mitigate these trends. One promising—but rarely mentioned—avenue is dusting off the tools Sinologists utilized from the 1960s through the 1970s, when it was impossible to contemplate the access that many of us have been able to take for granted, but which allowed these scholars to get so many things about China right. What are these skills—the analytical tools and the strategies to deploy them—and how might we be able to adapt them to the current research climate (and the foreseeable future)?

I would like to ask you to please think about the following questions and use them as a prompt for your presentation and the discussion to follow (please do not hesitate to bring in workmanlike, technical, everyday examples and practices).

- *What were the methods and the strategies that you used, and what specific circumstances privileged one over another?*
- *What was the relationship between the availability of data and the choice of research question/topic?*
- *How were you able to fill in the gaps of data you encountered and establish an interpretation of it that maintains the requisite analytical rigor of the field?*
- *Do these skills, developed in the 1960s and 1970s, travel into the present day? Which ones do and which ones do not, and why?*

The reactions to these presentations have been positive. Dan Mattingly, at Yale University, generously summed it up thus: “I’m really glad you made public the talks by Teiwes, Miller, Fewsmith, and Fingar, what a great public good.” In that spirit, and to attract a wider audience, I decided to transform these talks into a publication.

It turned out to be a bit more work than I had anticipated.

Having compiled the written transcripts, rather than simply clean up the individual transcriptions, I sought to tie them all together into a single written narrative. Several challenges immediately presented themselves. First, there were inevitably some differences in interpretation among the presenters that needed to be resolved. Second, the spoken word does not naturally translate into the written format, leading to some awkward syntax which needed refinement. I relied on quoting long passages verbatim but edited the transcripts, cutting and pasting among and between them, to consolidate the many insights scattered throughout the four presentations into a single voice. As you will see—and some might find this a bit unconventional—I sought to maintain as laid-back, informal a rhythm to the text as existed in the presentations. Although the presentation prompt was open-ended, fortuitously, many of the historical examples that the presenters offered up were from the same era: the Hua Guofeng interregnum from 1976 to 1979. While the process took a bit longer than any of us anticipated, I believe it remains as relevant to the present—if not more so—than it was when we started. We collectively enjoyed doing it; we hope you find it useful.

In addition to the four scholars above, I want to thank Anne Thurston, Elly Rostoum, Hasta Colman, Cole DeVoy, and Zhuoran Li for their contributions to the project. I am immensely grateful to Liu Dan for generosity supplying his extraordinary artwork for the cover and for the Center website. The printing is made possible by the SAIS Innovation Fund, an initiative established by my colleague, Professor Kent Calder. Despite the considerable contributions of all the persons listed above, I am, as editor, responsible for the errors that remain.

—Andrew Mertha
August 2024

Contributors

Joseph Fewsmith is professor of International Relations and Political Science at the Boston University Pardee School. He is the author of seven books, including, most recently, *Forging Leninism in China: Mao and the Remaking of the Chinese Communist Party, 1927–1934* (2022). Other works include *Rethinking Chinese Politics* (2021), *The Logic and Limits of Political Reform in China* (2013), and *China Since Tiananmen: From Deng Xiaoping to Hu Jintao* (second edition, 2008). He is also the author of *Elite Politics in Contemporary China* (2001), *Dilemmas of Reform in China: Political Conflict and Economic Debate* (1994), and *Party, State, and Local Elites in Republican China: Merchant Organizations and Politics in Shanghai, 1890–1930* (1985). He was one of the seven regular contributors to the *China Leadership Monitor*, a quarterly web publication analyzing current developments in China (2002 to 2014). His articles have appeared in such journals as *Asian Survey*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *The China Journal*, *The China Quarterly*, *Current History*, *The Journal of Contemporary China*, *Problems of Communism*, and *Modern China*. He is a Center Associate of the John King Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University and an Associate of the Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future at Boston University.

Thomas Fingar is a Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center (APARC) Fellow in the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. From 2005 through 2008, he served as the first Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis and, concurrently, as Chairman of the National Intelligence Council. Previous positions in the U.S. government include Assistant Secretary of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (2000–2001 and 2004–2005), Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (2001–2003), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Analysis (1994–2000), Director of the Office of Analysis for East Asia and the Pacific (1989–1994), and Chief of the China Division (1986–1989). Between 1975 and 1986 he held positions at Stanford University, including Senior Research Associate

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Andrew Mertha is the George and Sadie Hyman Professor of China Studies and former Vice Dean of Faculty and International Research Cooperation at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He was professor of Government at Cornell University (2008–2018) and assistant professor of Political Science at Washington University in St. Louis (2001–2008). He has written four monographs, *The Politics of Piracy: Intellectual Property in Contemporary China* (2005), *China's Water Warriors: Citizen Action and Policy Change* (2008), *Brothers in Arms: Chinese Aid to the Khmer Rouge, 1975–1979* (2014), and *Bad Lieutenants: The Khmer Rouge, United Front, and Class Struggle, 1970–1997* (2025), all with Cornell University Press. His articles have appeared in *The China Quarterly*, *Comparative Politics*, *International Organization*, and *Issues & Studies*. He has also contributed chapters to several edited volumes. His current China research project looks at the bureaucratic politics of rectification from the 1950s up to the present day.

Alice Lyman Miller is a historian and research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a lecturer in East Asian Studies at Stanford University. She worked at the Central Intelligence Agency as a Chinese translator from 1966 to 1968, later serving as a CIA analyst (1974–1990). She taught at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), first as a lecturer and then as associate professor of China Studies and as the second Director of the China Studies Program. During this time, she published her monograph as Lyman H. Miller, *Science and Dissent in Post-Mao China: The Politics of Knowledge* (University of Washington Press, 1996). She served as professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School (1999–2014). She was the general editor of the Hoover Institution's *China Leadership Monitor*, a quarterly journal providing open-source analysis of the internal workings of the Chinese Communist Party (2001–2018).

Frederick C. Teiwes is emeritus professor of Chinese Politics at the University of Sydney's China Studies Centre. He is the author of numerous works on Chinese Communist elite politics during the Maoist

era, including *Politics and Purges in China* (1979; revised edition 1993) and *Politics at Mao's Court* (1990), and co-author with Warren Sun of *The Tragedy of Lin Biao* (1996), *China's Road to Disaster* (1999), and *The End of the Maoist Era* (2007). During the past decade he and Professor Sun have published revisionist studies of the early post-Mao period, notably *Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform* (2016). They are currently completing a larger study, *Hua Guofeng, Deng Xiaoping, and the Dismantling of Maoism*. Relevant working papers for this study can be found on the University of Sydney China Studies Centre website, <https://www.sydney.edu.au/research/centres/china-studies-centre/our-research.html#cswp>.

Anne F. Thurston is the former Director of the Grassroots China Initiative and a senior research professor *emerita* at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). She has written or edited many books about China, including *Enemies of the People: The Ordeal of the Intellectuals in China's Great Cultural Revolution* (1987), *A Chinese Odyssey: The Life and Times of a Chinese Dissident* (1991), Li Zhisui's *The Private Life of Chairman Mao* (1994), and, with Gyalo Thondup, *The Noodle Maker of Kalimpong: The Untold Story of My Struggle for Tibet* (2015). Her most recent works include *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations* (2021).

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Preface

By Anne Thurston

At no time in the past half-century has the need to understand China been faced by the enormity of the barriers confronting students and scholars today. The challenges experienced by Americans studying China have often been daunting. Beijing, after all, is some 7,000 miles from Washington. Travel to the Middle Kingdom is long, expensive, and often trying. The Chinese language, written in characters and spoken in tones, is vexingly difficult to learn. Official relations between the two countries have often been problematic, beginning with their initial encounter. In 1784, when the *Empress of China* became the first American ship to dock on Chinese shores, local Chinese officials refused to acknowledge the Americans' presence. Another century would pass before the United States established its first legation in China. Such tumultuous domestic challenges as the Opium War of 1839 and the Taiping Rebellion of 1850 to 1864 had left China with little inclination for diplomacy.

In 1928, when Chiang Kai-shek became leader of the new Republic of China, the United States not only recognized the generalissimo's new government but also offered substantial economic aid. The two countries became allies during the Second World War. But with the establishment of Mao Zedong's new and revolutionary communist government on October 1, 1949, relations between the two countries were severed, not to be restored for another 30 years. The Cold War took a toll on China studies. At its height, when both the Soviet Union and China were officially labeled totalitarian and presumed to have a propensity for fomenting revolutions wherever they could, Senator Joseph McCarthy led a witch hunt against American China specialists in both government and academia. Among the victims was Owen Lattimore, who later (in 1963) established the Department of Chinese Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

When the launch of Sputnik in 1957 revealed to the world that the United States was far behind the Soviet Union in the realm of science, President Eisenhower concluded that catching up with the Soviet Union and containing China would require better education of American youth. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) came into effect in 1958, and

both the federal government and private foundations began funding China studies programs in many of America's leading universities. Grants often included funds for libraries, programming, and generous fellowships for graduate students studying China. Support for China studies also came from private sources, including, most importantly, the Ford Foundation and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). The cohort of China specialists who began their studies in the 1960s and '70s (including the scholars who have contributed to this report) were beneficiaries of such programs. In the earliest stage of China studies, as Thomas Fingar recalls here, classes on China in sociology, history, political science, and economics were small, sometimes with only a single student. Reading materials were scarce as well. Fingar recalls only two books assigned during his first class on China—Franz Schurmann's *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* and John Lewis's *Leadership in Communist China*.¹ Later, class sizes grew to three, four, or even five people, and the number of books and articles began to proliferate. In time, the number of students was large enough that many universities established centers for China studies, which housed specialized libraries stocked with a variety of publications about and from China, in both Chinese and English, and served as places where students and faculty interested in China could come together for seminars, brown-bag lunches with leading China specialists, and fellowship. In time, as the war in Vietnam began to escalate, some centers also became havens for anti-war activism.

In the absence of diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC), however, few (if any) of these students were able to study there. During the thirty-year interim when formal relations between China and the United States were severed, only a handful of Americans (sometimes labeled "friends of China") were able to visit the People's Republic. Nonetheless, remarkably, a significant number of Americans received training in the United States during that long period without direct access. Students researching contemporary China relied on translations from the Chinese press provided by the American consulate in Hong Kong (*Survey of China Mainland Press*) and U.S. government translations from Chinese radio broadcasts (Foreign Broadcast Information Service)—sources that were invaluable for understanding events in China from the official, often ideologically loaded, perspective. Many students of the time

¹ John Wilson Lewis, *Leadership in Communist China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963); Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

were also able to supplement their United States-based studies with stints in Hong Kong or Taiwan, where their language skills improved and they were introduced to vibrant Chinese societies. At the same time, in the United States, most who taught about China were often either Chinese themselves (having left China before 1949) or Americans who had lived, worked, and studied in China sometime before the revolution and hence knew both the language and the country well. Often known colloquially (and affectionately) as “old China hands,” these American China specialists were typically viewed by their students with a mixture of respect, awe, and perhaps a twist of envy. Most old China hands taught in the humanities, but by the 1960s, with the social sciences becoming increasingly important in American universities, many aspiring China specialists concluded that their future success in academia would be more likely if their graduate study of China and Chinese included a solid foundation in one of those areas: political science, sociology, or (less frequently) economics. Many of the soon-to-retire American faculty teaching in the China field, including contributors to this book, were educated during this period.

What types of people dared to enter the China field? Alice Miller recalls a 1967 conversation with William Johnson, then a professor of modern Chinese history at George Washington University, who said that “there are three kinds of people in the China field—people who were in China because they or their parents were missionaries; those who got involved because of World War II or the Korean War; and those that were just *odd*.” Among those from missionary families were Lucian Pye, A. Doak Barnett, and John King Fairbank, all of whom had extensive experience in China. The World War II and Korean War veterans included such people as Chalmers Johnson, Lyman Van Slyke, and Franz Schurmann. For them, the introduction to Asia was through Japan, and the key to becoming a China specialist was their facility with characters. These were the people who trained the first generation of postwar China specialists. As Thomas Fingar notes, they did not particularly like communism, but they had a great affection for China. And most tended to believe that the world would be a better place if they understood and tried to work with China both collectively and individually. The academic requirements for aspiring China specialists in the social sciences during that era were challenging. To begin with, very little was known or had been written about China then. Reading materials were scarce. Moreover, the social sciences at the time were aspiring to become genuinely scientific and hence emphasized methodology and quantification. Chinese studies students in the social sciences were expected to bow to the demands of scientific methodologies and quantification with results that were sometimes ludicrous.

The re-establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States on January 1, 1979, heralded a dramatic change in American access to China. Academic exchanges between the two countries soon came to flourish, both through such important national-level organizations as the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (CSCPRC), the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) through its Joint Committee on Contemporary China, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and through numerous university-to-university exchanges. The Ford Foundation became a major funder of China programs in both China and the United States. These were the golden years of academic exchanges between the two countries.

Several generations of China scholars have now benefited from the opening of China. However fraught with difficulties, and despite episodic setbacks and the seemingly constant cycles between relative openness and constriction,² China seemed to be moving in a secular, linear direction. For the generation that began their careers during this time, access to China was never in question. With access to China taken for granted, this generation never learned the skills necessary to study China from the outside. They had no need.

Today, U.S.-China relations are said to be at their lowest level since before 1979, and the strain in bilateral relations has had an impact on academic exchanges. China began closing off to outside researchers during Hu Jintao's administration, and the process has accelerated over the past several years. Access to key archives, willing interlocutors, and available survey respondents has decreased significantly under Xi Jinping. The number of Chinese students studying in the United States has declined from 368,000 in 2020 to 262,000 in 2023 (figures that also reflect the influence of COVID).³ While the two sides continue to engage in high-level

² Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³ "Chinese Student Visas to U.S. Tumble From Prepandemic Levels," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 11, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinese-student-visas-to-u-s-tumble-from-prepandemic-levels-11660210202>. "In 2015, about half of Chinese students planning to study abroad wanted to study in the U.S., but that percentage dropped to 30% in 2022, according to surveys conducted by New Oriental, a Chinese education company." "Chinese Students Outnumber American Students Learning Each Others Language," *China/Insight*, accessed August 16, 2024, <https://chinain-sight.info/2024/02/12/chinese-students-outnumber-american-students-learning-each-others-language/>. "211 US students studied in mainland China during the 2021–2022 academic year, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE). This represents a dramatic decrease from previous years, with over 11,000 American students in China from 2018 to 2019."

talks, suggesting that leaders in both countries are trying to avoid the most disastrous of outcomes, even the most respected American news media continue to allude to the possibility of war. The strain between the two countries is unlikely to be quickly or easily resolved. Many see the issue as long-term and inherently irresolvable.

To address the challenges facing China specialists today, when access to China has once more become problematic, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) China studies called upon four leading China specialists who studied and were trained in the 1960s and 1970s, when China was essentially closed to American researchers. We asked Joseph Fewsmith, Thomasingar, Alice Miller, and Frederick Teiwes to share their experiences with the research methodologies of that bygone era when access to China was closed and the country could only be studied from afar. We hope that the experiences of these veteran China scholars can help the aspiring China specialists of today find a new way to study China in this current, politically fraught environment. This monograph is based on their presentations, edited and formatted to speak to a broad range of professionals whose jobs require constant monitoring of what is happening in China, whether from the policy world, the ivory tower, or the corner office.

PART 1

The Political and Historical Context

In the late 1960s, the social sciences were strongly influenced by the U.S. government's Cold War-era interest in understanding what was occurring around the world. The wheel of history was turning at a breakneck pace, with revolutions being fomented throughout the Global South, and policymakers in Washington realized they didn't know nearly as much as they needed to. Area studies provided an important resource by enhancing officials' understanding of trends in nation-building after postwar decolonialization, establishing requisites for aid programs, lining up support at the United Nations, building military alliances, assessing capabilities, and evaluating basing options.

In the case of China, the gaps in Americans' knowledge were particularly vast, largely as a result of politics. One cannot overstate the legacy of McCarthyism and the broader "Who lost China?" debate that preceded it, which stifled the emerging China studies field. The 1950s saw attacks on people deemed uncomfortably adjacent to the Chinese Communists (such as the "five Johns"⁴) and the broad discrediting of China expertise in the government, as well as in academia and other areas. The field, such as it was, was kept alive—barely—in no small part by those people who had lived in China prior to 1949.

Beginning in the Eisenhower administration, however, the U.S. government appropriated money for area studies through the National Defense Education Act, which funded language study, libraries, and area studies centers. The goal was to facilitate research that could provide insights that would assist in policymaking, although with time there were increasing opportunities to study what a few years before were deemed "esoterica." In that moment, however, developing a formal China studies field and training future students were not priorities.

⁴ They were John Paton Davies Jr., John K. Fairbank, John Fremont Melby, John S. Service, and John Carter Vincent.

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Over time, private foundations—most notably the Ford Foundation, but also others—poured money into funding area studies, with policy relevance remaining a priority even after the primary funding moved from government into the nonprofit world. But while research continued to be driven by questions coming out of the policy arena, it was also shaped by what foundations would fund, by conferences and workshops, by book projects organized by the Joint Committee on Contemporary China (JCCC), Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), and by disciplinary advances or fads.

So much of what is conventional wisdom today was largely unknown in the 1960s. It had to be discovered, it had to be articulated, it had to be refined. It had to be conveyed to people in government, in the think tank world, and to students in the classroom.

Then, as now, research was tailored to meet a particular set of *objectives*, which in turn shaped the questions that scholars explored. What do we want to know? How do we know it? How can we find out? Later, it was driven by questions like “Why do we care?” and “Why do we want to understand?” or “What’s the purpose of this scholarship?” Still later, scholars raised questions that sought to answer empirical puzzles or resolve personal curiosities, or that they simply deemed interesting. The goals, questions, approaches, and analytic tools used were shaped by a particular set of circumstances. It is important to know what these were in order to assess their relevance today and into the future as well as to understand how and why they evolved over time.

One of the earliest incubators of such knowledge was the Universities Service Centre (USC), originally at 155 Argyle St. in Kowloon, Hong Kong, under the auspices of Education and World Affairs/International Council for Education Development and the ACLS, respectively⁵—and, from 1991, the Chinese University of Hong Kong:

The USC served as ground zero for much of the research on China before 1971 and continues to serve as a staging ground for scholarship to this very day. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the USC, or to imagine what the state of China scholarship would be today in its absence. . . . The idea for the Universities Service Centre was conceived in the late 1950s by Lucian Pye and Bill Marvel, both of whom recognized that universities were extremely nervous about sponsoring the study of contemporary China (as distinct from Chinese history, language, and literature) in the wake of McCarthyism and the purge of China expertise throughout the

⁵ Douglas W. Cooper, “The Universities Service Centre in Hong Kong,” *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 79 (1986): 29, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1374&context=jeal>.

U.S. government. . . . There were four factors that contributed to the unique environment of the USC. The first was the configuration of disciplines represented by these young scholars: political science, economics, anthropology, sociology, journalism, history, and law, as well as some of the humanities. The USC provided the opportunity for these scholars to analyze the complex organizations and developments within China as truly interdisciplinary area specialists. Second, the USC was always international in the makeup of individual scholars among its ranks, and was therefore able to push back against tendencies toward what Ezra Vogel called “American chauvinism” in the study of China. Third, unlike the rigid pecking-order system in most university departments, the USC embraced an environment where no such hierarchy existed—an extremely liberating experience for young China scholars at the time. Finally, during its initial stages, the USC was unparalleled in its ability to attract prime sources of information on the otherwise closed book that was Mainland China.⁶

It is sobering to realize how much of this has been diminished by subsequent government and university budget cuts and the increasingly frigid political climate in Hong Kong and, to some degree, the United States.

Two Broad Approaches

There were two broad approaches to China-related research in the 1960s. The first was driven by questions of what we want to know, that is, starting out with a question and finding the data to provide the best possible answer. This approach was bedeviled, as Fred Teiwes cautions, by the peril that “we only see what we look for, we only look for what we know,”⁷ that we don’t know what we don’t know. This brings us to the second approach: discovery, beginning with a shard of information—a document, an interview, an interesting newspaper article—unavailable or off-limits for years, even decades, and drawing insights from the study of that shard, open-ended and without knowing where it would take these young scholars. This was anticipated by one of Tom Fingar’s non-China specialist mentors:

I’m reminded of a conversation with Gabriel Almond, one of the founding fathers of the behavioral revolution of political science. He was 92 at the time of this conversation. . . . Looking back 60 years later, he said,

⁶ Andrew Mertha, “A Half Century of Engagement: The Study of China and the Role of the China Scholar Community,” in *Engaging China: Fifty Years of Sino-American Relations*, ed. Anne F. Thurston (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 89–119.

⁷ Fred Teiwes, Presentation at the SAIS China Research Center, September 23, 2021, video of lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNXCEjD-RrQ>.

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“At the time, I thought politics was like a clock and if I studied how the gears mesh, I would understand how it works.” He said, “Now I understand that politics is like a cloud, it forms and it drifts and it reforms and it responds to the wind.” His point was that the mental models that we bring to bear really do shape what we find at the end of the research process, as well as the way in which we undertake that process.⁸

These two approaches, and the interactivity between them, both shaped the kinds of questions Sinologists explored.

Beginning With What We Want to Know

After the end of the Second World War, much social sciences scholarship was shaped by a desire to understand its causes and what had allowed for the formation and growth of ideologies within fascist regimes. Researchers had access to troves of documents captured in Germany, Italy, and Japan, and they used these materials to explore and answer such questions. This produced a vast literature on totalitarianism that influenced the content and approaches of university courses as well as the research interests of young scholars beginning in the 1960s. Emerging China hands of the time were starting their scholarly journeys 15 years after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and a decade after the worst of McCarthyism and when the Vietnam War was beginning to escalate, both in the magnitude of the conflict and the anxiety and anger about that war within the American body politic. This outrage was felt particularly strongly in pockets of the academic community, and this shaped their research interests and approaches to studying this part of the world.

A Particular Time and Place

Of course, China was an old nation, but the People’s Republic was a new country. Its government seemed to repurpose some traditional institutions while simultaneously building shockingly new ones. These activities inspired the types of questions that U.S. government agencies and academic departments were asking about new nations in general: What makes them stable or not? What is required for them to be successful economically, to build a particular type of political system, to construct a unified national identity embraced by multiple linguistic and ethnic groups?

⁸ Tom Fingar, Presentation at the SAIS China Research Center, November 17, 2021, video of lecture, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9on7M2MI_sA.

The development of approaches to answer these questions is what shaped the evolution of area studies methodologies and the social science disciplines that employed them.

As noted, China studies had been relegated to the margins during the McCarthy era and the Red Scare of the 1950s. Experienced China hands like John Stewart Service had been hounded out of government. By the 1960s, farsighted scholars like John Fairbank and Robert Scalapino recognized the need to rehabilitate and transform the “field” of China studies. The activism and urgency of these and others were influenced by a shared judgment that the greatest foreign policy error of the post-World War II era—the ongoing war in Vietnam—had been based on faulty understandings and assumptions.⁹ More pointedly, many of their students—those who began studying Asia in the 1960s—possessed a shared and strong determination that scholarly research should not be used to justify mistaken military operations. Rather, it should be used to avoid conflict and build sustainable, mutually beneficial relationships with people on the other side of the Pacific.

Some scholars of this generation became members of the Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars (CCAS). Although recalled by many as a leftist, even Maoist organization, it in truth accommodated a range of views that were united by the preoccupation that the Vietnam War was a costly mistake in terms of blood and treasure and a threat to global stability; that it was based on historically inaccurate assumptions that could have been addressed by a more robust knowledge base of area specialists; and that it was a moral imperative to establish precisely such a knowledge base. The CCAS viewed scholarship not as an ivory tower isolated from the “real world” but rather as a bottom-up instrument to influence government policy and decision-making. Members hoped that their contributions would make the world a better place, and they were highly motivated by that aspiration.

A Modern China Field Emerges

As the nascent field of China studies continued to grow, its specialists were naturally influenced—then, as now—by concerns about rapidly evolving social science disciplines, by insights from their teachers, and by academic trends, as well as by what was required to “succeed” as a China scholar. They wanted jobs then just as people want jobs now, but they also wanted jobs that mattered. For many of them, this meant

⁹ Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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having an impact on the actions of the United States abroad. But they were also motivated by the fact that, at the time, there was virtually no English-language academic literature on contemporary China. Tom Fingar's experience was typical:

In the first course that I took on China's political system, the only text-book-like reading was John Lewis's *Leadership in Communist China*. A year or so later, Franz Schurmann's *Ideology and Organization [in Communist China]* was published. We read a lot of Mao [Zedong]'s writings—military writings, political writings—because they were available. We read history—you know, what was imperial China like. There wasn't [even] much written about Republican China at that point. We were very much groping for anything that would help us to understand this big, complex, and increasingly important international actor.¹⁰

These young China scholars viewed it as their responsibility to fill these gaps.

Even back then, the tension between disciplinary and area studies approaches already existed. The field was looking backward for lessons and forward for predictions to better understand new emerging nations, new evolving political and economic systems, the nature of ideology, the uses of propaganda, and the use of coercion. For example:

Studying authoritarian regimes and Cold War dynamics that included the Non-Aligned Movement was central to what we did. Ideology, alignment with or against the Soviet Union and the United States were central questions. Where was China on that spectrum? It had aligned with the Soviet Union in 1950. By 1960, it was perfectly clear that the break with the Soviets was real. China claimed to be both a socialist country and a non-aligned country. What did that mean, exactly? What did it mean to be non-aligned in a bipolar world? These questions, and many similar ones, motivated interests far beyond the China field, in part because this was also an era of new nations, of nation-building, of area studies. Why was that the case? The number of countries in the world doubled between 1950 and 1965. If you wanted to study West Africa before the late 1960s, you went to Paris, or London, or Lisbon. Suddenly, we had to know a lot more about a lot more places.¹¹

This was a period in which there was also a renewed quest for greater scientific rigor. It was the period of the behavioral revolution in the social

¹⁰ Fingar.

¹¹ Fingar.

sciences, the widespread effort to apply structural-functional approaches to studying other countries and systems (to put more of the “science” into political science). What were the institutions used to perform sets of activities that were thought to be common and necessary in all economic, political, or social systems? Which ones were unique to a particular place? Could the ones that were unique prove more viable than ones that were common? Scholars looked at things like interest groups, leaders and elites, dependency theory, and political economy as approaches to understand developments in our social science discipline of political science.

These approaches were applied to China. It soon became obvious that some were more useful than others. For example, numerous students of China had to learn about voter behavior during their graduate studies. This was not very useful in the study of the Soviet Union or the People’s Republic. This was also a period that saw the very primitive initial use of computers, a time when the expression “garbage in, garbage out” entered the lexicon:

We counted all kinds of stuff and we tried to correlate things that we could count. And we did content analysis of Chinese and other documents in order to find deep meaning, true meaning, messages to be communicated, drawing upon the study of propaganda from the Second World War. We did a lot of silly things. Well, the field did a lot of silly things.¹²

To wit,

I remember a study that essentially used everything that was counted already. It wasn’t generating new data, it was taking data that was available and counted things like [the] number of weekly air flights, and size of embassy staffs, and trade flows. And it produced the absolutely risible judgment that, on the basis of all these numbers that had been crunched by the computer, the United States considered the Soviet Union to be 2.8 times as important as Ghana. That was an interesting finding. I have no idea what it meant and nobody else did either, but for a while it was very faddish to do that kind of work and to wish we could do it on China, if only we had reliable numbers. Lacking them, we tried to work with *unreliable* numbers.¹³

As China began to produce oil, there were things written about it that have not aged particularly well, such as the prediction that it would

¹² Fingar.

¹³ Fingar.

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become “the next Saudi Arabia.” But dependence on oil to support economic development made energy an important subject to study. Energy takes water, and that has an impact on agriculture. So, scholars found different roads into understanding large questions about China. Eventually, there was the emergence of less sensitive areas, areas in which the Chinese were quite happy to demonstrate what they were working on, worried about, or to tap outside expertise. And area studies remained crucial to understanding the idiosyncratic nature of Chinese politics:

I remember one of my “you *really* don’t know?” questions. Before I went to the State Department, I was going to do a book that would parallel John Lewis and Xue Litai’s *China Builds the Bomb*. Mine was going to be on what China was doing in civilian science to support and complement the nuclear program. As I was getting started, I ran across references to an institute located in Tianjin and couldn’t figure out why it was there rather than with others in Beijing. I happened to have a princeling—or “princess” I guess would be the right term—friend who I thought would know the answer. So I asked the question. She looked at me and said, “You *really* don’t know?”

I said, “No, I don’t know. That’s why I’m asking the question.”

She said, “You really don’t know why that institute is in Tianjin?”

I said, “No, I don’t.”

She said, “The institute was headed by Huang Jing.”

And I said, “Yeah, so what? Why does that make it necessary to go to Tianjin?”

She replied, “That’s [Mao Zedong’s wife] Jiang Qing’s [second] husband [born Yu Qiwei]. He’s so smart he *had* to be in charge of this, but because he was Jiang Qing’s former spouse there’s no way he could be in Beijing. So, there was no way that the institute could be in Beijing.”

I asked a question that my interlocutor thought was an obvious and almost stupid query, but I learned something valuable about the dynamics of the way China worked at the time.¹⁴

The academic job market was very different then, as well. In the late ’60s and ’70s, freshly minted matriculating graduate students didn’t worry

¹⁴ Fingar. His reference is to John Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

nearly as much about getting jobs as they do today. The number of jobs in the then-exploding field of area studies exceeded the number of new Ph.D.s coming out of the pipeline. The earliest cohort was not very large, including such notables as Richard Baum, Frederick Teiwes, Thomas Bernstein, and Richard Solomon, many of whom got jobs without all the competitive pressures that apply today. Working together was not corrupted by the concern that “if I share my findings with her, she might be a better candidate for the job than I will be.” It simply didn’t come into play at the time. And there was also something qualitatively different between those who pursued a career in China studies versus those who studied the USSR:

In the Soviet studies field, many people didn’t like one another. Most of those who taught in the field were émigré White Russians or Eastern Europeans. The White Russians hated the Soviet Union because it was communist. The Central Europeans hated it because it was Russian and communist. And that spilled over . . . attitudinally, and the field had developed long enough to have factions that fought with one another. The China field was very different, in that our introduction was mainly through kids of missionaries and businesspeople who had grown up in China.¹⁵

Alice Miller recalls, “I remember William Johnson, modern Chinese history professor at [George Washington University], telling me in 1967: There are three kinds of people in the China field—people who were in China because they or their parents were missionaries; those who got involved because of World War II or the Korean War; and those that were just *odd*.” Among the first two categories were Lucian Pye, A. Doak Barnett, and John Fairbank. These were people who had extensive experience in China and probably less disciplinary training unless it was in history (Barnett was a journalist). There were also the World War II and Korea veterans, a lot of whom had learned how to read characters as Japanese language officers during the Second World War—people like Chalmers Johnson, Lyman Van Slyke, and Franz Schurmann. For them, the introduction to Asia was through Japan, and the key to becoming a China specialist was the ability to handle characters.

They didn’t particularly like communism, but they loved China, had an affection for China. And we understood that if we were really going to make progress in understanding this big place we call China, both collectively and individually, we really would do a lot better by working together. And mechanisms to facilitate collaborative work began to be developed.¹⁶

¹⁵ Fingar.

¹⁶ Fingar.

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Eventually the number of China specialists in sociology, history, political science, and economics meant that classes on China went from single digits to three, four, even five people per class. This fed into a much greater critical mass of people able to work together, to do complementary work, and to challenge one another. And they were beginning to get better language capabilities than those who went before. But there was also more collaboration and coordination because of structures: area studies centers that created a place to come together—for lunch, for brown-bag seminars, for anti-war activism, and for social interactions and fellowship. *But how did they do it?*

PART 2

Media Analysis

The “classical” method, also known as *media analysis*, was the default approach for analyzing China in the 1950s into the 1970s. The premium put on it is understandable, given what was in reach for outsiders (at least American outsiders) to study China at the time. The sources available to study contemporary Chinese affairs in the 1950s through 1966, on the eve of the Cultural Revolution, were the People’s Republic of China (PRC) state media and, to some extent, an independent Hong Kong press that offered limited insight into Mainland affairs. The Cultural Revolution opened up new sources, in particular the Red Guard newspapers and big-character wall posters with handwritten Chinese characters—*dazibao* (大字报)—that cast a degree of light onto some aspects of leadership politics. Still, the array of sources that was available was largely from the same outlets employed earlier, such as the *South China Morning Post* and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS). After China’s normalization with France in 1964, the Agence France-Presse (AFP) began operating in the PRC. There were also Japanese journalists reporting in the Cultural Revolution period (Alice Miller recalls learning about Japanese reporters wearing miner’s helmets with headlamps at night to go out and read what big-character wall posters they could find).

In addition, there was a group of émigrés into Hong Kong that could be interviewed about their experiences in China as well as a smattering of foreign visitors who could offer insight into what they saw and into the meetings they had with Chinese leaders. (Though, because China’s international relations were severely curtailed under the American policy of containment, these remained few and far between: Edgar Snow went in 1960, 1964, and 1970—all contrary to American law—while André Malraux, the French intellectual, went in 1965, just after Paris normalized relations with Beijing in 1964.) When all was said and done, variation in the sources for understanding contemporary China were still severely limited, and PRC media remained the mainstay of analysis.

Looking back, one can see that the priority attached to analyzing Chinese media in the 1950s and 1960s was largely a consequence of the

period's very restricted access. Media analysis rested on the observation that China's open media were subject to various degrees of state review and control. Because the information presented in the media reflected priorities of the regime, it was possible to reason backward from the presentation of that information to analyze the Chinese authorities' views on how politics unfolded in real time.

The methods applied to China were not new. As noted, they had been applied in the World War II era in the study of Nazi Germany. In the spring of 1941, the U.S. government set up the aforementioned FBIS to monitor German, Japanese, and Italian radio broadcasts and analyze their content. Several individuals—including Nathan Leites, Hans Speier, Edward Shils, and Alexander George—who were later to become prominent American social sciences scholars, all worked in that unit. George in particular was famous for writing a book analyzing Joseph Goebbels' diaries and comparing them to the analysis during the war years to assess how accurate that analysis had been.¹⁷

These techniques had been used as far back as the 1920s for understanding developments in the Soviet Union, and several analysts in the '50s and '60s (such as Myron Rush and Carl Linden) were well known for applying this kind of analysis to the study of Soviet politics. The French reporter at *Le Monde*, Michel Tatu, also practiced it as a fine art.¹⁸ With regard to Sinology, media analysis was the staple of analyzing China, both in academia and in government, and included such luminaries as Arthur Cohen, Donald Zagoria, and Richard Wich, who also worked at FBIS.¹⁹

The three most important of the main information systems at work in Chinese politics during this time were the confidential, internal, and public media. Each had its own channels of dissemination and operated under different mechanisms. They served different purposes in the political system and had their own distinctive content.²⁰ Knowing what to make of these relied in part on knowing the different purposes they served in the Chinese political system.

¹⁷ Alice Miller, Presentation at the SAIS China Research Center, October 14, 2021, video of lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=undQ95SDnu4&t=1334s>.

¹⁸ Miller.

¹⁹ Miller.

²⁰ Miller. It is worth noting that, like many things in modern China, analogues—or at least distant cousins—of what we see today existed in dynastic China. Alice Miller notes that there were two memorial systems. One was the general *tiben* (題本) system that conveyed information from the locales up to the imperial court. The second one, created in the 1680s, was internal. The memorials in that system, the *zouben* (奏本), went directly into the emperor's secretariat and carried more sensitive information. Over time, it also became coopted by the bureaucrats. The purposes of those systems were different from the internal *neibu* (內部) media or the open *gongkai* (公開) media. There was no *gongkai* media in imperial China.

Confidential Documents

Confidential documents (*mijian* 密件) were classified and therefore not generally available to study. They operated in an essentially three-tiered classification system: confidential (*jimi* 机密), secret (*mimi* 秘密), and top-secret (*juemi* 绝密), similar to the American government's system. They were circulated within the bureaucratic institutions of the Communist Party, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), and the Chinese government. The most important of these, for example, were the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee documents, the so-called *zhongfa* (中发).

中共中央文件

中发〔1980〕77号



〔秘密〕

中共中央批转中央纪律检查委员会 关于康生、谢富治的两个审查报告

各省、市、自治区党委，各大军区、省军区、野战军党委，中央各部委，国家机关各部委党组，军委各总部、各军兵种党委，各人民团体党组：

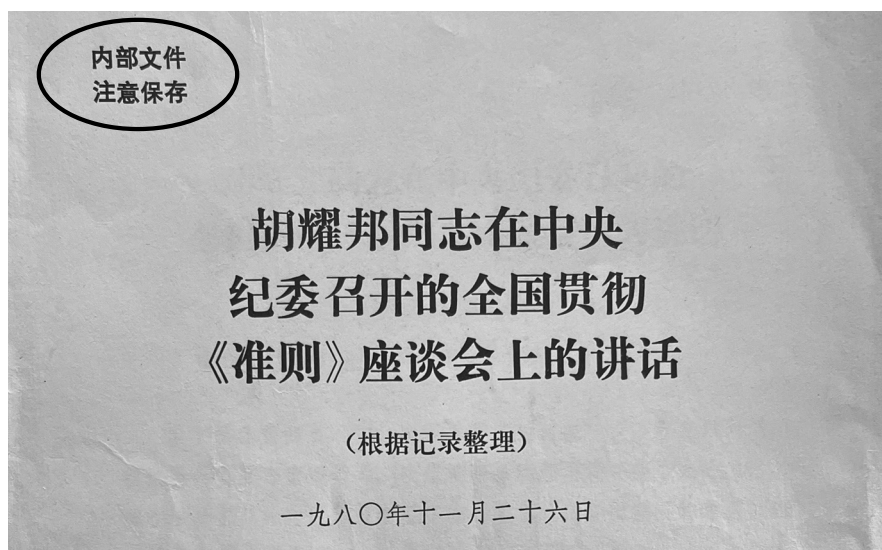
中央纪律检查委员会关于康生问题的审查报告和关于谢富治问题的审查报告，已经中央政治局讨论批准，现转发给你们。

党的十一届三中全会决定对康生、谢富治进行审查以后，一年多来，中央纪委做了大量工作，根据确凿证据，

These documents were issued several times a year and would occasionally be published outside the internal document stream. They were organized around categories that defined the levels and degrees of actionability these documents allowed, and some scholars at the time spent countless hours trying to sort out the hierarchy of these kinds of documents to see what sort of insight they might provide into the priority of the various issuances.²¹

Internal Media

By contrast, internal—*neibu* (内部)—publications were an enormous trove of material that were restricted and not publicly circulated. While not technically classified, they were also not generally available to the public and carried a warning against open circulation.



“Remarks of Comrade Hu Yaobang at the Central Discipline Commission Symposium on Implementation,” November 26, 1980

These publications were issued by most institutions in the Chinese political system, and many would publish more than one. They circulated throughout the whole system to provide information about the goings-on within various government institutions, as well as—directly or

²¹ Miller.

indirectly—developing political and policy trends within the governing apparatus. State offices throughout the system would go to some lengths to bring themselves into the document stream, knowing that information translated into power. Access to these publications was provided mainly through one's work unit or *danwei* (单位). That is, if one worked at some state-owned enterprise or at the Foreign Ministry, one had access to the *neibu* publications of that institution. There were also other ways they could be obtained. As Alice Miller recalls:

Back in the good old days, in “ancient times,” the Xinhua bookstores had a separate room that carried *neibu* publications . . . I worked briefly in the American embassy in 1981, and you could wander around in there and look at the *neibu* publications, and maybe even once in a while walk out with one, [or else you] were stopped [with them] saying you're not supposed to be in there.²²

The volume and diversity of these document-issuing institutions were truly enormous, and the universe of materials truly staggering. These featured, among other things, in-house collections of leaders' speeches as well as formal proclamations. Other publications carried ongoing policy proposals and the debates surrounding them. Some reference materials were intended merely to supply general information to help the reader make sense of what was going on in the world.

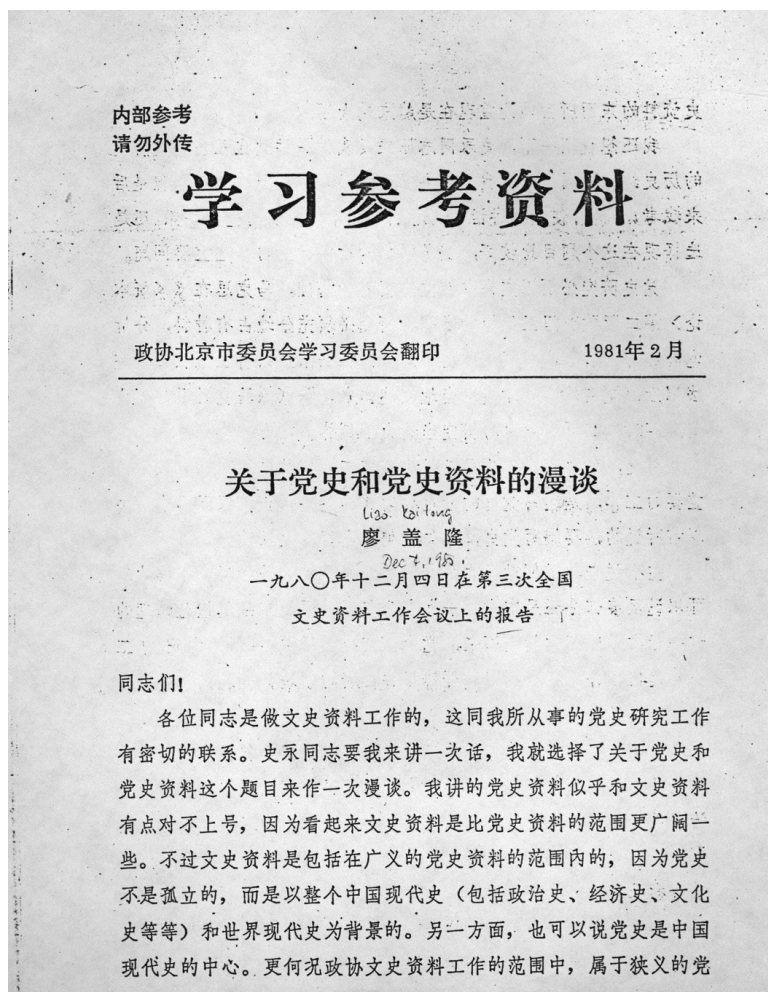


Reference Information, November 19, 1979²³

²² Miller.

²³ Miller.

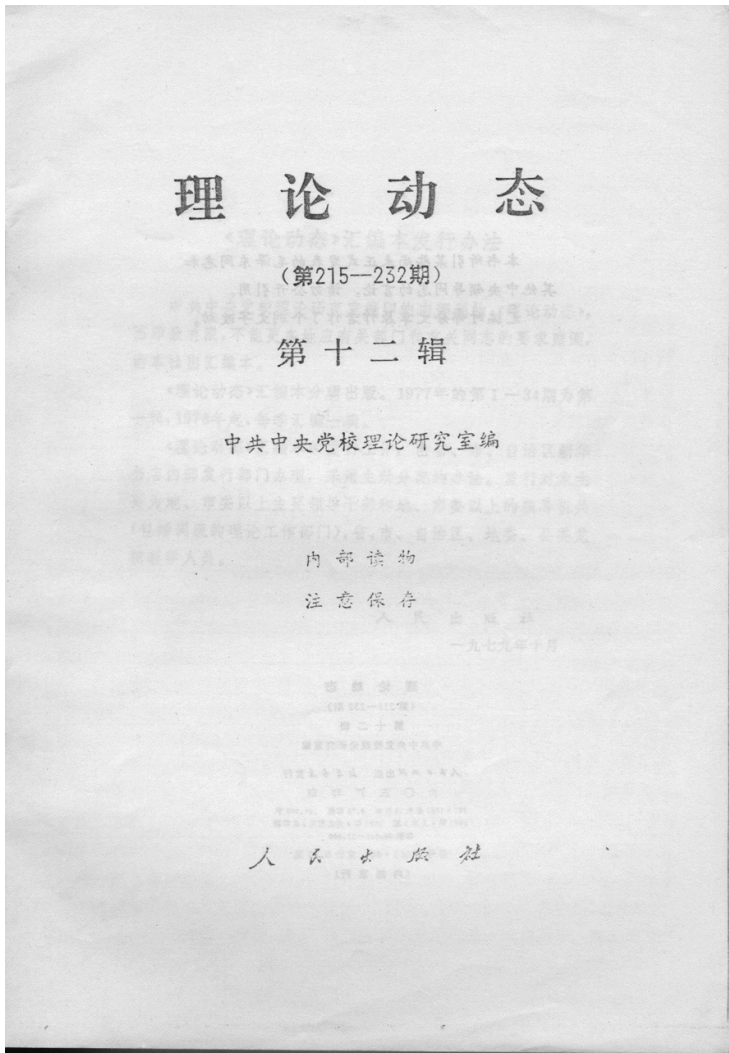
These included, most famously, *Reference Information* (*Cankao Xiaoxi* 参考消息)—a four-page tabloid publication that had a circulation more than twice that of the *People's Daily*. It consisted primarily of translations of foreign media on events in China of interest to its readership. A more restricted publication, *Reference Materials* (*Cankao Ziliao* 参考资料), was compiled for around 200 of the top leaders. These were a much more carefully selected compendium of materials of interest directly to the top leadership, compiled twice a day and with tightly controlled dissemination. The Xinhua News Agency produced both publications.



Reference Materials, February 1981²⁴

²⁴ Miller.

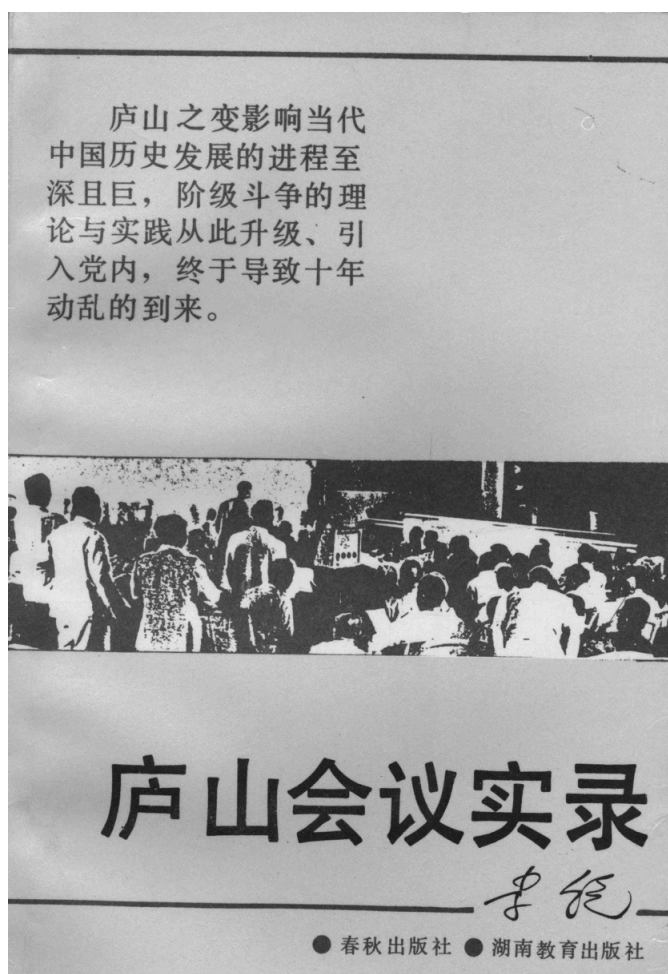
Internal publications also included various kinds of unit periodicals. The Central Party School, for example, had a publication, *Dynamics of Theory* (*Lilun Dongtai* 理论动态), that carried speeches and articles on ongoing debates about ideology taking place in the '60s and '70s. In 1981, Alice Miller was able to obtain a *neibu* collection of Chen Yun's speeches from 1956 to 1962, which had been published for reference to debates about economic reform unfolding at the time.



Lilun Dongtai 1979 No. 215 (232)²⁵

²⁵ Miller.

Books on politically sensitive subjects were frequently published within the *neibu* system. These included work by Li Rui, Mao's former secretary, who published a record of the (in)famous Lushan plenum in 1959. Sometimes what passed for "sensitive" might have seemed bizarre. For example, Alice Miller has a copy of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* that was translated *neibu* before being made available for open publication in the 1980s.²⁶ In short, *neibu* materials encompassed a vast universe of publications, the rationale for which could be genuinely difficult for outsiders to grasp.



Li Rui, *The True Record of the Lushan Meeting*, 1994²⁷

²⁶ Miller.

²⁷ Miller.

One final note about the internal media: Those on the outside may attach a certain cachet or status to the internal media—thinking perhaps that internal documents have some sort of extra credibility compared with the open media. In fact, the opposite is often the case. The whole point of the internal media is to give anybody with a certain standing the opportunity to voice an opinion (though that, of course, never meant that anybody could just walk in from the street and have his or her opinion voiced) in the *neibu* system. This is illustrated in an incident during the early 1980s at a conference being presided over by General Secretary Hu Yaobang with Party elder Chen Yun in attendance. Chen Yun “piped up and said he wanted his opinion published in *People’s Daily*.” Hu Yaobang’s response was “No, you can’t do that. You can have it published *neibu*, but you can’t have it published in *People’s Daily*.” In short, Hu Yaobang talked down to Chen Yun, a man who’d been on the Politburo since 1935, essentially saying, “Sorry, pal, but you can’t do that; that’s not the way the system works.”²⁸

The Open Media

The open, or *gongkai* (公开), media is composed of an enormous system of information that includes not only print publications, but also broadcast and, more recently, electronic media. Among the broadcast media, Radio Beijing International has long been the PRC’s national radio and remains so today. In the beginning, Radio Beijing broadcast in 38 foreign languages and five Chinese dialects. It had a national news program at 6 p.m. that was relayed simultaneously to all the provinces. All the provinces and most cities had their own radio stations, which carried hookups from the national radio system, as well as their own local programming. In the early 1980s, televisions began to become ubiquitous as well.

The Xinhua News Agency has been the Chinese Communist Party’s official news agency since the 1940s. It is formally under the State Council and, as such, is also the government’s news agency. It operates much like nongovernmental news agencies such as the AFP, the Associated Press, and Reuters. Like its Western counterparts, its reports are provided for

²⁸ Joe Fewsmith, Presentation at the SAIS China Research Center, October 14, 2021, video of lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=undQ95SDnu4&t=1334s>. It is worth noting, however, that the import of a particular circulated opinion changes exponentially if some leader writes a comment on the article, regardless of whether it is *neibu* or *gongkai*. As Joe Fewsmith muses, “I certainly have heard people brag about something that Jiang Zemin or whatever wrote on their idea. You know, I think that’s gold . . . you actually get rewards for that!”

publication in the Chinese press. Xinhua's main file is in Chinese, but it has also offered files in English, Russian, Japanese, Arabic, and French. There are two associated news agencies that carry files aimed at overseas Chinese communities in Hong Kong, Macau, and elsewhere. Although it is ostensibly a government office, some have observed that it has been run as a Party organization. For example, its first head was Hu Qiaomu, Mao's secretary, who (along with all his successors) sat on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee.

Print media in the PRC has fluctuated throughout the country's history, from 296 newspapers in 1952 to upward of 364 on the eve of the Great Leap Forward and the "three bitter years" (1958–1961), receding to 273 by 1965, and then back up again to 343. The impact of the Cultural Revolution was dramatic: By 1970, there were only 42.²⁹

Nationally circulating newspapers include *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao* 人民日报), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee's mouthpiece; *People's Liberation Army Daily* (*Jiefangjun Bao* 解放军报), the PLA newspaper published by the General Political Department; *Workers' Daily* (*Gongren Ribao* 工人日报), the All-China Federation of Trade Unions newspaper; *Enlightenment Daily* (*Guangming Ribao* 光明日报), the United Front and intellectual affairs newspaper; and *Economic Daily* (*Jingji Ribao* 经济日报), an economic affairs daily formerly published by the State Economic Commission. Provincial-level divisions and sub-provincial locales also have their own newspapers. A small sampling includes *Beijing Daily* (*Beijing Ribao* 北京日报); *Liaoning Daily* (*Liaoning Ribao* 辽宁日报); *Guizhou Daily* (*Guizhou Ribao* 贵州日报); *Southern Daily* (*Nanfang Ribao* 南方日报), Guangdong's newspaper; and *Liberation Daily* (*Jiefang Ribao* 解放日报) and *Wenhui Daily* (*Wenhui Bao* 文汇报), Shanghai's two newspapers.

The local media is required to devote a certain amount of their content to material from the central media. Local publications generally reprint *People's Daily* editorials (it is mandatory, for instance, for provincial newspapers to republish particularly sensitive editorials from the national press). They also publish their own commentary, with their own practices and ways of structuring content. This is equally true in the local media of Zhejiang Province as it is in the city of Guangzhou. For analysts, these local publications provide a useful node of comparison with how things are portrayed nationally. For example, in 2016, when Xi Jinping had not yet been designated the core leader, there were nonetheless provincial references that began to refer to him as such. But this was not uniform, and it happened well before anyone at the central level referred to him in that way. There are occasions in which some prominent topic will be underscored in

²⁹ Miller.

the central media and the provincial media may not highlight it at all. It is always worthwhile to see which local publications fall in line with the center and which end up going their own way, either by giving a central talking point short shrift or ignoring it altogether.³⁰

The *People's Daily* used to be published daily in six pages and carried no advertising. That changed in the 1970s and 1980s, but the *People's Daily* was still the first place to look for significant political information. In the 1980s, it began publishing an international edition aimed at overseas Chinese communities that used traditional (繁体/正體) rather than simplified (简体) characters. In those days, the universe of information to be gleaned from the open media was large, but not so unwieldy for it to be impossible for the FBIS to translate the materials deemed relevant to on-going intelligence and foreign policy community interest.

Daily Report China		FBIS-CHI-94-207 26 October 1994		2		China	
NOTICE TO READERS Effective 1 October, the processing indicators appearing in brackets at the start of each item in this publication will be changed. All new indicators will begin with "FBIS" to make the material more easily identifiable. Some will also indicate whether the item has been translated from the vernacular or transcribed from English.		CONTENTS		26 October 1994			
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³⁰ Miller. Alice Miller points out that this relationship between the center and the provinces (and locales) is quite important: "I did a paper on the treatment of Taiwan in *Taiwan Research* (*Taiwan Yanjiu* 台湾研究), which was the Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Taiwan Studies journal, and a journal published in Xiamen, Fujian. . . [Fujian], sitting across the Taiwan Strait, is a sensitive province, obviously, for Taiwan affairs. I compared the contents in those journals over a four- or five-year period, and there was a very distinct divergence in the way they treated Taiwan. Beijing was tough on Taiwan, on various issues. Xiamen, which had business ties across the Taiwan Strait and so forth, was much more cautious and not quite so tough. This kind of comparison of local versus center can be quite edifying."

FBIS published a translated “Communist China daily report”—one of eight daily reports published by the Central Intelligence Agency—that carried everything relevant to contemporary politics, military affairs, the economy, and foreign policy, all in one convenient packet of translations, usually somewhere between 60 and 80 pages, five days a week. It was also available publicly. Thus, not only could the U.S. government and intelligence community read translated PRC media in real time, but those without security clearance could do so, as well. Libraries and China studies departments at many universities had long files of these publications to make them available to researchers and students. Because reading in English was faster for most of us than reading in Chinese, this “green book” became the staple of government and academic analysis. The footnotes of anything China-related published in the ’60s abound with citations of the FBIS daily report. Regrettably, FBIS stopped its publication in the mid-1990s.³¹

Why Two Systems?

Why were there two systems? Why was there this vast universe of internal publications, but also this open system of information? The universes of both open and internal publications were enormous in terms of scope and volume. Both consumed vast resources. When individuals went to political study sessions Saturday mornings at their work unit, they saw and studied both sets of materials. One answer is the two systems served very different political purposes.

With respect to the *neibu* materials, dissemination was strictly controlled. While these materials were not technically classified, neither were they available that publicly. People would get them through their work unit or other confidential channels. The content in these publications was open, not censored, and they carried a wide diversity of opinions and ideas (opinions on all sorts of issues could be voiced so long as one had sufficient standing within the relevant political unit to have one’s views published). That contrasted with the open media, which *was* public. Because the Chinese state wanted everybody to receive the public media, dissemination was everywhere, but its content was controlled. Thus, the two systems had different distribution patterns commensurate with the substance contained therein.

³¹ There are recent developments that might provide this type of service in the future. See the Open Center Translation Act, https://castro.house.gov/imo/media/doc/open_translation_center_act.pdf.

To generalize (perhaps overly so), internal media published the so-called “news.” People got the information they needed to understand what was going on. But the open media conveyed the Party’s line—what the Party wanted Chinese citizens to understand about its approach to whatever issue at hand. And so, from that perspective, the internal media served the process of policy formulation and deliberation, while the open media served the process of explaining the policy once implemented (or at least formulated) and mobilizing the population to support it.

Internal (内部)

Dissemination is controlled
Content is open
Conveys the “news”
Serves the process of policy
formulation and deliberation

Open (公开)

Dissemination is open
Content is controlled
Conveys the “line”
Serves the process of policy
explication and popular
mobilization

The open media, by contrast, was public and everything in it was subject to review, at least at some level—by the publication’s editors, by the writers themselves who naturally self-censored, by the Party Propaganda Department, and, in certain instances, by top-level leaders. There are several known instances in which high-level leaders, including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping, personally reviewed material that appeared later in the open media. In the early ’70s, when Henry Kissinger would go to Beijing and meet with Zhou Enlai, they would have talks through much of the day, each negotiating team on opposite sides of the table. When they took breaks, a Xinhua personnel member would walk in and hand Zhou Enlai a sheaf of draft dispatches to be published by the news agency. Zhou would work through them line by line, as these dispatches were relevant to the negotiations then underway. There also exist draft copies of Xinhua and *People’s Daily* commentaries that were personally reviewed by Mao, with his handwriting in the margins.

To sum up, the internal media was generally not authoritative in that it didn’t speak for the regime but existed simply to provide information for the ongoing political process. The open media, by contrast, *was* authoritative and in some measure, and especially at the higher levels, spoke for the Communist Party and the Chinese state. That said, it was possible to watch debates taking place in real time through the open media, as well, through editorials (*shelun* 社论), commentator (*benbao*

pinglunyuan 本报评论员) articles, and special commentator (*teyue pinglunyuan* 特约评论员) articles within the open media. But there were also theoretical debate articles that might have shed light on different views within a certain framework. The internal publications would offer a more *extensive* debate, but much could still be learned from open media sources such as the more specialized journals. These included *Economic Research* (*Jingji Yanjiu* 经济研究)—a favorite publication of reform-minded economists at the time that featured debates on such issues as ownership reform, price reform, whether the economy should be decentralized, and so on. Specialized newspapers like the *Farmers Daily* (*Zhongguo Nongmin Ribao* 中国农民日报) also reported extensively on the ongoing economic reforms in that sector.

Open media periodicals constituted a comparably broad range in terms of authority and target audience. These included political or policy journals like *Seeking Truth* (*Qiushi* 求是)—the Central Committee’s semimonthly journal (previously called *Red Flag* [*Hongqi* 红旗 from 1958–1988] and before that *Study* [*Xuexi* 学习]); general news magazines like *Outlook* (*Liaowang* 瞭望), a weekly news magazine published by Xinhua; and *Fortnightly Talk* (*Banyuetan* 半月谈). They also included specialized policy journals like *Contemporary International Relations* (*Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 现代国际关系), published by the Ministry of State Security’s think tank; *Chinese Military Science* (*Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* 中国军事科学), published by the Academy of Military Science; as well as academic journals like *Historical Research* (*Lishi Yanjiu* 历史研究) and *Bulletin of the Dialectics of Nature* (*Ziran Bianzhengfa Tongxun* 自然辩证法通讯). Thus, even the open media pursued a range of policy views on important issues. By paying attention to them, it was possible to compare the ongoing debate to the Party decisions that came out during such important events as the annual Central Economic Work Conference. One could track where the Party was going, for example, in its thinking about economic reform.

There remains a robust debate among China watchers about how distinct the respective functions of the internal and open media were in practice. To be sure, this distinction has waxed and waned over time. In the 1980s, for example, the open media was full of debate. This was in part a reflection of the times: divided leadership (Chen Yun versus Zhao Ziyang, for example) and deep disagreement about where China was going. But there was also debate during the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao periods, which is why those leaders launched campaigns to “talk politics” and uphold the “scientific development theory,” respectively. Today there is far, far less.

Process

The agency that manages this process at the very top, of course, is the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department. There has been an attempt since the 1990s to soften the edges by calling it the "Publicity Department" in English, but it is still the Propaganda Department (*Zhongyang zhonggong xuanchuan bu* 中共中央宣传部). The Propaganda Department has supervised and mandated through its institutional networks what appeared in the open media through its own directives outlining topics and the way they should be treated. This process of review could bring about amazing consistency in treatment of almost everything in the media, thus ensuring the absence of deviations and mistakes. To quote Alice Miller:

I'd like to use a very trivial example of how this consistency in the media was obvious to the point of mind-numbing triviality. The so-called "Four Modernizations" [*sige xiandaihua* 四个现代化] were enunciated at the third National People's Congress [NPC] by Zhou Enlai in 1964. They were dropped during the Cultural Revolution, but then brought back at the fourth NPC by Zhou Enlai in January 1975. At that NPC, in his report on the work of the State Council, he called on China to build a modern socialist country with modern agriculture, modern industry, modern science and technology [S&T], and a modern national defense by the year 2000. Chinese media repeated that injunction millions of times after 1975 over the next several years. But suddenly, in February 1981, they stopped reciting it in exactly that order. Instead, they began to talk about China building a modern socialist country with a modern industry, modern agriculture, modern S&T, and modern national defense by the year 2000. And, thereafter, for millions of times they recited that formula in exactly the same way. Now, this was a change that the media did not bother to explain. But the consistencies here underscore the significance of it. And we're entitled to wonder, "Well, why?" Why would you shift modern agriculture and modern industry to modern industry and modern agriculture?³²

Finding the right answer to this question was a significant challenge for the analyst. As Simon Leys pointed out, "in the end, one learns most from the repetition of certain silences, the recurrence of a certain reticence about several points."³³ Often, one is left to make judgement calls based on a set of assumptions. Of course, this may also have required the

³² Miller.

³³ Simon Leys, *Chinese Shadows* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1978), 145.

shifting of these very assumptions. These were never ironclad, making it easy to misread the Chinese media. In fact, this happened all the time. Perhaps the biggest culprit was the fact that there was—and is—a real hierarchy to the media. For example, if one goes to the *People's Daily* website today, one will come across a list of editorials, commentaries, and other types of specific articles. It is important to pay attention to this hierarchy to identify what is more authoritative and what is less authoritative *within the open media*. The non-authoritative media content can in some cases also be very important. In fact, it can be *more* important than the authoritative media, but that is something that must be figured out, as well as identifying the reasons for why that is the case. But there is a framework, a process, that gives this exercise its credibility and effectiveness.

The foregoing shows that while the internal media assists the process of policy formulation—circulating perspectives, proposals, debates, and so on—the open media exists to explain the policy once formulated and try to enlist the people's support for its implementation. Because of the role of the open media in this policy process, the fundamental idea of propaganda analysis is simply to reason backward from what is appearing in the media to guess at the editorial and policy priorities that shaped its presentation. By comparing the substantive content of media over time and in particular contexts, one can perhaps infer valid conclusions about the regime's intentions, about its priorities, and about the degree of consensus on some issue or another.

Actually undertaking this process, however, required very careful tracking of media themes and formulations across time and context. It meant a commitment to constant tracking, which made taking breaks in one's schedule (let alone taking vacations!) difficult. It required a consistent handle on the appearance of themes and formulations across time to be able to make judgments about their importance as well as about any deviations from them.

This approach resulted in big, unwieldy files, whether physical (in the more distant past) or virtual (nearer and up to today). The researcher must have had mastery over what had been said in the past to judge the importance of information being published in the present. This required long experience, an excellent memory, and considerable patience, because the fruits of that effort became apparent only over (a long period of) time. The process was time-consuming, but paid off in the end.

When analysts were able to notice changes in theme, shifts in the authority of comment, or some new formulation underway, any number of possible explanations needed to be considered. First and foremost, the regime might have had a new position on whatever the issue at hand was; the

Party line and related policies had changed, requiring a new formulation. It may have signaled a response to a new situation—for example, in 1972, when China and the United States began talks that eventually led to the establishment of diplomatic relations, creating a new need “to talk about the United States in the public media in ways that we didn’t before that time.” It could also have been the result of—and this could be tricky—media practices themselves having changed. The enduring value of “long experience and big files” is that the process allows us to observe when the Chinese government stops using one type of commentary in favor of a new one. If we pay the right amount of attention, we are able to recognize this difference in real time. As Joe Fewsmith recalls:

The example that I would start with is the start of this important debate on practice as the “sole criterion of truth.” This was, we know now, a discussion that was started in the Party school and a lot of people contributed to it. . . . But if you’re simply looking at the Chinese media on a day-by-day basis, you don’t know any of that. That is all internal discussion. The first sign that you get is if you happen to pick up your copy of *Guangming Daily* on May 11, 1978, and you see an article by a special commentator. And you say, “Boy, that’s an interesting article, don’t know what it means.” But then you see that it’s reprinted in *People’s Daily* the next day under the same special commentator authorship and you say, “This is getting a lot of reprints here, this must be interesting.”³⁴

But that, by itself, still doesn’t really tell us anything.

So, first thing you do is you go back to your files, and you see if you can find any articles by the special commentator. And you say, “No, I don’t happen to see any files with this special commentator. So, this is something unusual, I’d better pay attention.” . . . If it is an authoritative article—an editorial or commentator article—it has to go through Wang Dongxing, who at that time was the head of the general office, not at the Propaganda Department, but he was in control of ideology. And if you were going to write an editorial or a special commentator article, it had to cross his desk. So, what’s going on here is that they’re putting it out as a *special* commentator, so it doesn’t have to go through Wang Dongxing. That is to say, there are loopholes, or there *were* loopholes, in the Chinese system.³⁵

³⁴ Fewsmith.

³⁵ Fewsmith.

But while this type of analysis tells us a *bit* more, we still may not know quite what we are looking at.

So, as an analyst at the time, all you can do is say, “Well, that’s kind of weird, I better pay attention to it.” So you put it on the top of the pile. And if you’re a serious China analyst, you have lots of piles. That comes with it. I always said, you should have lots of files, but sometimes you just end up having lots of piles. At any case, if you’ve just been paying attention to this and less than a month later, three weeks later, Deng Xiaoping gives a speech at the All-Army Political Conference. And he strongly supports “practice.” And you say, “Bingo! This is important.”³⁶

Why was this important? It was important to first note both that Deng Xiaoping gave a speech at an All-Army Political Conference and that it was reported extensively in the *People’s Daily*, which republished it the very next day. We learned that Deng, then a vice premier, strongly supported “practice.” Politically, this was extremely important. But there was still much that we did not know, and if we had to hazard a guess based solely on these two citations, the odds are that we would likely have guessed incorrectly. But after not too long, we might have started to realize that “practice” was a challenge to the “two whatevers.”

To continue with this example, the “two whatevers” (*liangge fanshi* 两个凡是)—“we will resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave (凡是毛主席作出的决策, 我们都坚决维护, 凡是毛主席的指示, 我们都始终不渝地遵循)” —is a reference to an editorial that appeared in the *People’s Daily* in February 1977. It was a key rubric to maintain the legitimacy of Mao’s immediate successor, Hua Guofeng. What Deng’s speech signaled (we have learned in retrospect) was that he was in fact picking a fight. Deng was challenging the ideological foundations of the Hua Guofeng regime. We could tell from what we were reading in the press that there was a big fight going on, but we had no way of knowing that it was really Deng Xiaoping who was picking that fight. As Joseph Torigian writes:

In August 1980, Deng famously gave a speech criticizing feudal practices and calling for an institutionalized political system. The speech is often interpreted as a programmatic statement in favor of “political reform.” However, this is a fundamental misreading of the speech’s origins and implications. Criticisms of feudalism and calls for political reform were not a real platform but rather an ideological justification for Hua

³⁶ Fewsmith.

Guofeng's removal from the leadership. . . . As [Party elder] Deng Liquan freely admitted, "This speech by Comrade Xiaoping in actuality was directed against Hua Guofeng; it was preparation for Hua to leave his position, to find a theoretical justification." When a friend pointed out that this speech was a reason why many people believed that Deng Xiaoping supported real inner-party democracy and institutionalization, Zhao Ziyang discounted this analysis, saying, "At this time, Deng was primarily addressing Hua Guofeng; he was struggling against Hua Guofeng."³⁷

In fact, even if we focused on looking at the media day-to-day, there would still be quite a bit that we would miss. In the case of the "two whatevers," we could tell that a fight was going on. We could see some people supporting "practice," while others talked about following Mao Zedong Thought. And many people were not saying anything. We probably did not know that there was a work conference happening in November, certainly not in any detail, let alone what its significance might be. But by the time of the work conference preceding the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in November-December 1978, in which the "two whatevers" were criticized and eventually supplanted by "practice [as] the sole criterion of truth," we were finally able to see the Party changing the emphasis of work from class struggle to economic construction.³⁸

³⁷ Joseph Torigian, *Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles in the Soviet Union and China After Stalin and Mao* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 164.

³⁸ Even this "settled history" is being re-opened. In their forthcoming manuscript, Fred Teiwes and Warren Sun write, "In all the developments from the original criterion of truth article to the more impactful *PLA Daily* sequel, what is most striking is the absence of Deng in any personal sense. Clearly, his speech on June 2 was very significant, given that its 'spirit' provided a considerable boost to those seeking to pursue the practice issue. Yet Deng is not present in any accounts of interaction involving Luo Ruiqing, Hu Yaobang, or any others concerning the creation of the June 24 essay. The picture of Deng-era orthodoxy, such as the claim that in the overall struggle 'Deng Xiaoping made a great historical contribution, with Luo Ruiqing his right-hand man,' is deeply unconvincing when it comes to this critical essay. A remarkable assessment over three decades later presented a blunt yet persuasive observation concerning the situation of rising pressure on the eve of publication: 'Leaders such as Deng Xiaoping evaded the sharp edge, [only] on appropriate occasions expressing support for the 'practice is the sole criterion of truth' issue in the language of politicians.' In any case, it was only after June 24, and the significant approval the article received, that Deng began to move toward clear support of the criterion article." (See "Jiangjun huoyue zai zhenli biao zhun zhong" [The General is Active in the Discussion of the Criterion of Truth], at <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-10-08/0722524280.html>, October 8, 2008; and "Zhenli biao zhun: Luo Ruiqing zhichi Hu Yaobang duikang Maoban" [Discussion on the Standard of Truth: Luo Ruiqing Supports Hu Yaobang against the Mao Office], *RMRB* online, at <https://news.qq.com/a/20110726/000908.htm>, July 27, 2011.)

Fred Teiwes warns us that an already complex task can be made even more so: Sometimes *we* get it wrong because *they*—that is, the Chinese authorities—get it wrong. With respect to the “two whatevers,” we should begin by going back to and re-reading the initial February 7, 1977, *People’s Daily/Red Flag* editorial (the joint provenance makes it a particularly authoritative document). People in the elite looked at this and said, “Oh! This is to stop Deng Xiaoping from coming back.” Some of the people involved—such as Zhu Jiamu, who later became Chen Yun’s secretary and thereafter headed one of the leading institutions on Party history—went to Deng Liqun, who in turn went to Wang Zhen, who then aired their suspicions to Deng. But this was belied by the actual situation at the time: After a January 6, 1977, Politburo meeting in which Hua declared that Deng was coming back, Hua went to see Deng and told him, “Not only are you coming back, you will be consulted on every important issue.”³⁹

More broadly, people close to the action and with interests in common had clashing understandings of what was happening. According to Fred Teiwes,

At the time of the 11th Party congress in 1977, one of the people attending, the minister of a significant industrial ministry, was very impressed with Hua. So impressed that he was contemplating proposing that Hua be named in the new Party constitution. This minister later not only attended the 1978 work conference, he was also a co-chair of one of the regional groups. But he had a son, a princeling, who was working in the office of a major Party figure and gained access to conference circulars. After reading them, he concluded that both Hua and his father were in trouble, and told his father, “Dad, you don’t understand what went down.” Three months later, the minister resisted Chen Yun’s request to make criticisms that could be interpreted as attacking Hua. . . . Even people deeply into politics from the same *family* could have quite different views.⁴⁰

Yet another example has to do with Hua after January 1980, when Deng had essentially completed a very quiet coup against him. Though he stuck around as chairman (notionally) for another year and a half, Hua’s actual status and functions had essentially shrunk to nothing.

In January 1980, Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense, comes to China. And he sees Deng, he sees Hua, and so forth. Now, the actual contents of the meetings with Deng and Hua aren’t particularly different.

³⁹ Teiwes.

⁴⁰ This statement is altered from what Fred Teiwes said on the day of his presentation. The essence of the point remains, but the details required correction.

But the atmosphere is different. Different not only between the two on that occasion, but between the way the leaders are treated by the other participants in meetings, whether it's Zhou Enlai, Mao, Deng, [or] Hua previously. Those who are there [used to be] sitting on the edge of their chairs, used to be steadily focused, you know, "we're dealing with power." Now, they're passing notes, looking at the ceiling . . . the whole thing is, "Who is this guy? He's a loser, he's gone." But five months later, Hua went on a state visit to Japan, and, upon his return, both the city of Dalian and Jiangsu province hold these over-the-top receptions for him, rolling out any and all the red carpets you can think of. They clearly didn't know Hua's situation. They were not part of a Hua faction; they simply did not know.⁴¹

As Fred Teiwes notes, "So, if scholars in the Western world hadn't got it particularly correct, people in China with very significant status didn't, either."⁴² We should not lose sight of that.

Supplementing From the Margins

Even after identifying the train of a winding policy process through the means outlined above, tremendous gaps in our information remained. For example, it was often difficult to figure out who was participating in a given conversation. Often we would come across articles that would say "somebody—*momo ren* (某某人)—thinks this, and he is wrong." Then it was necessary to figure out who these "somebodies" were. China is much more open today, but in the old days one really had to do a lot of digging to figure out who was arguing with whom and *positionally* what they were saying. The way things were (and are) incentivized within the system generated a premium on not speaking clearly. It took effort to reach relative clarity.

Even when something was "on the record," things could be complicated. Scholars used to ask themselves, "What do you do with a newspaper like *World Economy Guide* (*Shijie Jingji Daobao* 世界经济导报)?" As Joe Fewsmith explains:

I used to just love to read this newspaper. It was published out of Shanghai, and it was the most reform-oriented newspaper in China. And it really went way beyond anything that you could find in any of the Beijing newspapers. It really had far-reaching thoughts on economic and political reform. It's not authoritative, but it's important. And, in this

⁴¹ Teiwes.

⁴² Teiwes.

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case, sort of like with the example of the criterion of practices, the so-called criterion of truth, it turns out that it's important, even though it's not authoritative. And what you can measure, somewhat subjectively, is what I would call the heat index. How heated is the commentary in this newspaper getting? And I can assure you that it was heating up very strongly in the spring of 1989, and that should have been more of a clue than it was.⁴³

Well beyond what one might consider a likely source for politics would be a publication like *Study* (*Dushu* 读书, different from *Study* [学习] above), a specialized journal dealing with literary issues. Initially, it was a very liberal journal, but in the 1990s, Wang Hui and Huang Ping took over and changed the journal's orientation to what is generally referred to as the "New Left." Of course, it was easy to dismiss this as too far removed from the politics of the day, but as Joe Fewsmith cautions us:

You kind of look at this stuff at the beginning, and you say, well, this is interesting, but it's not very important, is it? I mean, after all, you basically have a handful of literary scholars discussing literary ideas and picking up on [Fredric] Jameson and others in the West, and these sorts of critiques of modernity. But following these sorts of ideas, over time, you can see them expanding, you can see them coalescing with different ideas on, say, nationalism. And, in this particular case, I think you can see the articles, or the thinking, moving from the sidelines. Marginal ideas move much more to the center.⁴⁴

In addition to the content of this thinking, it was possible to indirectly identify the relative weight of this kind of thinking within the political discourse and how that might change over time. To add yet another wrinkle, Xi Jinping's own turn against the "New Left" complicates the somewhat naïve notion that it was simply about ideology, not politics.⁴⁵

Lest we leave things in this mist of esoterica, it is important to also point out that the media can be used for something inescapably factual, like following personnel changes—an extremely important indicator of politics in China. Every five years, for example, China holds a Party congress, which enshrines important personnel changes. We usually find out about these through the media. That gives us the opportunity to work with a list of who is on the Central Committee, which in turn allows us to work

⁴³ Fewsmith.

⁴⁴ Fewsmith.

⁴⁵ Jude Blanchette, *China's New Red Guards: The Return of Radicalism and the Rebirth of Mao Zedong* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

through which Party luminary is to hold which position. For instance, a new Party general secretary will nowadays always change the head of the general office, a position that has long been important but is even more so today than in the past. There are also other critical positions, for example with regard to the military, as well as the “power ministries” and Party departments: State Security (government), Public Security (government), Propaganda (Party), and Organization (Party). These are the sorts of positions that are very critical to securing one’s leadership of the Party and to taking it in a new and different direction. And all of them are announced in the open media.

PART 3

Data Mining

In addition to media analysis, other forms of discovery were, at their roots, a sort of mining expedition: monotonous, plodding, but eventually—and cumulatively—both rewarding and exhilarating (to the researcher, at least). Fred Teiwes explains:

I'm at Columbia. I thought I was going to be studying international relations, but the way it was taught at Columbia in those days had so many models that had no relationship to the real world that I decided, "let's look for something *real*." So, I looked around and there was a course on China. "Oh, let's try that and see and see what that has to offer." That course was taught by A. Doak Barnett, one of the leading scholars of this initial generation that started the study of the People's Republic. Now, Doak was an extraordinarily empirical and pragmatic scholar. He knew enough not to try much Pekingology, which was really impossible in those days. The point I'm now going to make here with Doak, apart from my great admiration for him, is that he once said to me, "studying China's politics is like mining. There's so much dross out there you have to dig, dig, dig until occasionally you might find a piece of gold." . . . Of course, what Doak was talking about was what we might call "fossil fuels mining." Later we got to what I would call "rare earths mining."⁴⁶

To continue with the mining metaphor, it was not simply about having a big drill. As with media sources, one needed to know what to look for—and how to deal with problems and uncertainties with our current understandings and dominant narratives. Like Fred Teiwes's longtime collaborator, Warren Sun, one needed to be a committed miner and a gifted analyst, often simultaneously. And we had to wade through a lot of inconsistent and even conflicting data to be able to make such a case in a credible way.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Teiwes.

⁴⁷ For an example of doing the opposite, see Jung Chang and Jon Halliday, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006).

There were—and still are, and always will be—many, many gaps in the data: missing conversations, unspecified stages in any given process, distortions, and faulty memories. This meant being scrupulously honest with oneself and one's audience in not overstating findings, avoiding the seductiveness of data “that looked too good to be true” (which it often was), and recognizing what remained insufficient, what didn't meet the kind of necessary academic standards.

One more caveat: In the years since, the Internet has become a key tool for data collection, especially as access to other forms of data has become increasingly curtailed under Xi Jinping. But, as Fred Teiwes rightly points out, “it has a lot of rubbish on it, and you have to know what's rubbish and you have to have reasons why it's rubbish, and reasons why [given that situation] something is worth pursuing.”⁴⁸

So, to get back to data mining, what kind of “rare earths” are we talking about today?

Archives and Databases

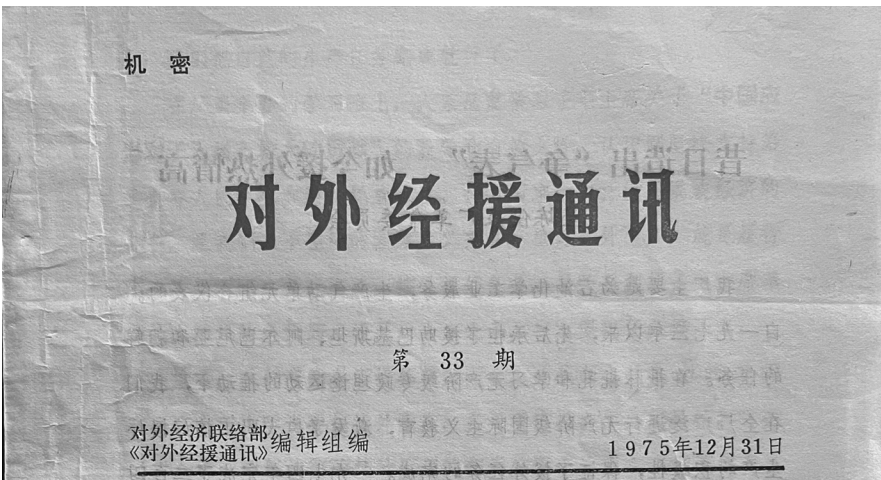
This is a largely catchall category that includes several different sources of information and knowledge. There are obviously different types of materials available in various archives. This variety, of course, holds true for China as well, as those scholars lucky enough to gain access to local archives have demonstrated in their often extraordinarily illuminating work. One interesting and often helpful resource is what one might term “*ad hoc* publications.” The Cultural Revolution, for example, produced an extraordinary outflow of Red Guard publications and publications of Mao Zedong's speeches. Overall, these presented a false message, but they nevertheless relayed enough information to really enliven one's understanding of what had gone before the Cultural Revolution, if one were willing to carefully parse what was being printed.

Policy documents, which have always been a mainstay of research on Chinese politics, have become much more available than they had been in the past. They are also extremely useful in illustrating the incentives for and constraints on behavior that allow us to derive a general sense of how individuals operate in the system. Open media, as discussed above, in its archived form allows us to uncover answers to questions such as What was being said? What happened on specific dates? What was the Party line? What evidence is there of other currents?

⁴⁸ Teiwes.



Red Guard Publication, November 12, 1966



Confidential Document 1975 (33), Ministry of Foreign Economic Liaison

There has of late been an explosion, for example, in the deployment of personnel materials to build databases for individual leaders' career trajectories. These can help us understand career pathways as well as suggest how leaders' own priorities and policy preferences have evolved (if only—or mostly—in retrospect). This can in turn provide much information that demonstrates what is commonly believed is not necessarily accurate.

In addition to sources like the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) mentioned earlier, various foreign policy documents—such as transcripts of or notes from meetings with Chinese leaders—are extraordinarily insightful. MEMCOMS (memos flowing back and forth) can include records of the meetings of people like Deng Xiaoping or Hua Guofeng with Brzezinski or Kissinger. Of course, the Chinese also have their own corresponding records, but we have only had the most limited access to these. Other countries that have declassified theirs have also been an important source for this type of information. Finally, there are people who have interacted with Chinese leaders and written their own books, whether analyses or memoirs, with reference to these individuals. These can say very insightful things—or they can say utter nonsense.

Another source that falls under the “archival” heading is what we might term “sensitive documents.” As Fred Teiwes articulates:

One of the sources, I think, really began in the 1980s, when there were dumps of internal documents. I think of Harvard, in particular, where [these dumps of internal documents] were lovingly curated by the Fairbank Center's noted, beloved librarian Nancy Hearst. Some of them resulting in significant books, like *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao*, which I don't think really were terribly sensitive, but quite revealing.⁴⁹

This extended to other libraries, which sent their librarians and curators out to collect documents and establish caches at various libraries in the United States and abroad.

⁴⁹ Teiwes. His reference is to *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 1989).

绝密文件

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中共中央文件

中发〔1972〕24号



毛主席批示：照发。

中共中央通知

各省、市、自治区党委，各大军区、各省军区、各野战军党委，军委各总部、各军兵种党委，中央和国务院各部委领导小组、党的核心小组：

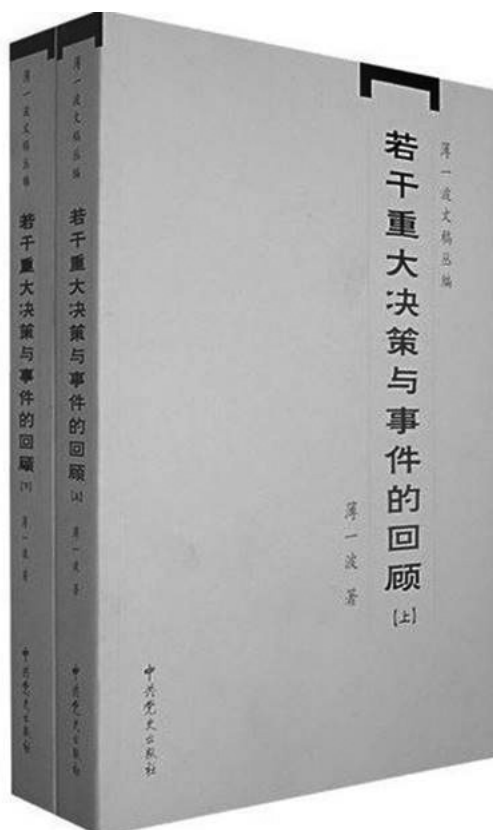
现将《粉碎林彪反党集团反革命政变的斗争（材料之三）》，即中央专案组选印的《林彪反党集团反革命政变

- 1 -

And then there are the “personally obtained” documents: those that fell off the back of the proverbial truck. These can be quite remarkable, like the handwritten notes of various important officials. More than simply a boon for the autograph collector, these bulletins of meetings provide a sequence of events, a record of who read what and when (and how they commented on it), what people were saying to each other, and other key dimensions of the process of Chinese politics. Many of these were available in Chinese flea markets up until a dozen years or so ago. Many were snatched up by collectors, with some being donated to or acquired by China research centers housed in universities scattered throughout the United States and elsewhere.

Party History Materials

A second area of these “rare earths” is Party history materials. These can have many forms, including official publications, such as the biographies or memoirs of leaders, and the chronologies—the *nianpu* 年谱—of those leaders.



Bo Yibo Memoir, *A Look Back at a Number of Events and Decisions*, 2008

Of course, constraints on Party history apply to Party historians. The articles they write in serious journals or have published on the Mainland are more restrained, while what is released in Hong Kong may have a great deal more information, but requires careful scrutiny. In either case, much of what they provide are simply *clues*. Unfortunately, Xi Jinping has gutted this kind of Party history endeavor. *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (炎黄春秋), which was the leading, edgiest Party history journal, was in effect neutered in 2016 (it still exists, but is not worth consulting). The Chinese website *Gongshiwang* (共识网), one of the best aggregators of these materials, was also disbanded in 2016. From this we can see there has been a severe cur-tailing of what this particular rare earth can provide.

With regard to Party historians, we must assess them one-by-one on the quality of their work while noting their personal quirks. Overall, however, this is an extremely impressive group of people, serious about conveying and pre-serving “truth from facts.” Importantly, they know when facts are not avail-able to them, and they will say that they don’t know. But even a single nugget of information can open up a whole new way of interpreting events that we might have otherwise taken as settled fact. Fred Teiwes provides such a case:

I’ll give an example from [which] you can see really striking things . . . things you never imagined, or you should have imagined but didn’t. . . . But one of the things which came out of interviews with Hua Guofeng’s family is that Chen Yun was tougher in his treatment of him [Hua] than was Deng Xiaoping. And we can go into various reasons for that, but one of the reasons . . . is that Chen Yun thought that in 1977, when they were creating the Politburo for the 11th Congress, he was excluded. . . . And he is even said to have told one of his colleagues, *he* didn’t want me—“he” being Hua Guofeng. . . . What really happened was that . . . Deng is coming back, and . . . they [the Hua leadership] consult him, “Who else should be in the Politburo?” And they show him this list, [Deng says] no, no. It’s too much too soon [to put Chen Yun back on it]. We can have all sorts of speculations as to why Deng did this, and so forth [but the point is that it was Deng not Hua who made the decision]. Now, we fast forward to 1981, and so the whole question of Chen being excluded comes up. And Hua was being attacked, you know, and all this. And Hua does the ritual of admit-ting to mistakes but stands up for himself. And he says, “No, no, Chen (or whatever he called him), that’s not what happened, this is what happened [and tells him about Deng’s opposition at the time].” Deng is sitting at the table and does not contradict him. Well, Chen Yun, who came to that meeting wanting to really pile shit on Hua, now says, “Oh . . .” And now, when they vote to include Hua as a vice chairman, after they’ve kicked him out as chairman, Chen’s hand goes up.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Teiwes.

This not only changes the perception of Hua Guofeng's approach to reaching out to Chen Yun. Arguably more importantly, it identifies a potential source of tension between Chen Yun and Deng Xiaoping that was to complicate and even unravel key initiatives of the early reform era, with consequences extending into the present day.

Interviews

Going beyond written materials is also an important part of gaining new insight into our topics of study. Interviews are nothing new (or *old*) when it comes to obtaining information unavailable elsewhere. Interviewing well-placed and -informed individuals has been a mainstay in the study of Chinese politics, as at the Universities Service Centre in Hong Kong:

Meanwhile, a small army of interviewees shuttled between Western academics eager to learn from them. Of course, one had to be very careful about the veracity of such sources. Attracted by the rate of \$20 HKD per hour, refugee interviewees were not exactly incentivized to stick to the facts. Two of the most entrepreneurial—but at the same time, among the most knowledgeable—were the “Yangs” (fondly recalled as “Xiao Yang” and “Lao Yang”). The Yangs were important informants for “the vast majority of scholarly books, articles, and Ph.D. dissertations written about China during the Cultural Revolution decade, 1966-1976,” recounted Rick Baum, with tongue only half in cheek. In fact, people like Sai-cheung Yeung (“Lao Yang”) were instrumental in providing data necessary for the work of scholars like [Michel] Oksenberg, Ronald N. Montaperto, and [David] Lampton (who even credited him in his monograph, *Paths to Power*).⁵¹ These informants became research assistants as well, helping scholars like [Ezra] Vogel, Oksenberg, [Susan] Shirk, B. Michael Frolic, [Steven] Goldstein, Jerome Cohen, Suzanne Pepper, John Dolfin, and a host of others in their work.⁵²

With respect to interviewing people about elite politics, there are two broad categories: Party historians and people connected to leaders. The latter may be family members, secretaries or *mishu* (秘书), and other types of personnel. There is a bit of an overlap in that some Party historians also

⁵¹ David M. Lampton and Sai-cheung Yeung, *Paths to Power: Elite Mobility in Contemporary China* (Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, Vol. 55) (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 1988), 55.

⁵² Mertha, “A Half Century of Engagement”; Michel Oksenberg and Sai-cheung Yeung, “Hua Kuo-Feng's Pre-Cultural Revolution Hunan Years, 1949–66: The Making of a Political Generalist,” *The China Quarterly* 69 (1977): 3–53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741000011590>.

have close links to individual leaders. Sometimes, their families grew up in the same village! Each group—but particularly among the families and former associates—has a potential “we owe something to our people [as distinct from the historical record]” bias.

Some of the most significant information we have comes from the families and colleagues of “the people in the room,” as well as from the documentary record. In the case of the Deng Xiaoping-Hua Guofeng “power struggle” at the Third Plenum in late 1978, Fred Teiwes has unearthed some data that points to a different narrative. First, according to the relevant documents, the clarion call of “reform and opening up” or *gaige kaifang* (改革开放) does not appear in the communique of the Third Plenum—it in fact does not appear as an overriding *tifa*, or the official formulation for an idea (提法), until five years later. At the time, the plenum zeroed in on the “Four Modernizations,” an early 1960s idea associated with Zhou Enlai. Beyond parsing the sloganeering, however, it is worth looking at what some of the leaders at the 1978 work conference were actually saying. On November 25, Hua Guofeng delivered a summation of what had been accomplished up to that point, which largely dealt with the reversal of verdicts on people who had been attacked and punished during the Cultural Revolution. This whole process, as it turns out, was much more Hua’s doing than Deng’s. And Hu Yaobang returned home with a spring in his step, thanks to Hua Guofeng’s initiatives to enter a post-Mao era:

After this meeting . . . Hu Yaobang comes home. So, what does he say? Well, according to his son, Hu Deping, Hu Yaobang returned home and talked happily about his thoughts, he [Hu Yaobang] said, “The pain and disaster suffered by the Chinese people has brought the entire nation to an awakening today.” . . . Facing a dam, Hua Guofeng made a breakthrough, actually a *big* breakthrough, in the trend of history.⁵³

This complicates the narrative of “Third Plenum, Deng makes reform, and in the process defeats Hua in a gargantuan power struggle.” These and other data point not so much to another “two-line struggle” but rather to a far more nuanced paradigm. Joe Fewsmith notes:

One of Hua Guofeng’s nicest, most charming aspects is that he actually gave up relatively easily. He could have, I think, put up a much bigger fight. Reform was inaugurated by Hua Guofeng. . . . He has begun, in his own way, slowly to downgrade the emphasis on Mao’s ideology. He makes two trips to Europe, one to Eastern Europe, one to Western Europe. So, it

⁵³ Teiwes.

was really Hua Guofeng who began the opening-up policy. And, by the way, what was called the “Great Leap Outward” is also started by Hua Guofeng, and with [the] full support of Deng Xiaoping.⁵⁴

Indeed, the nodes of conflict between Hua and Deng were far more complicated—and more subtle. As Fred Teiwes argues, “the leadership was really concerned that they not be seen as ‘de-Mao-izing’ the place.” This was a country that had been, for decades, marinated in Mao’s theories, imbued with Mao’s persona, and this created a deathly fear of being seen as distancing oneself from the Great Helmsman.

Now what’s the way around this? The way around this is by both changing policies, slowly, gradually, but trying to hold high the flag of Mao the whole time. Now as time goes on, you know, the flag can be held a little bit lower, but it was very much a consideration. Early on, this involved criticizing Deng, which is of course one of the great sins of Hua Guofeng. Well, guess who said, in this very early period, we have to continue [to] *pipíng* [that is, criticize] Deng during this period? And he knew nothing about how he was going to get screwed: Chen Yun! It was just an understanding of this kind of sensitivity to “de-Mao-ization,” that was a driving factor of context for what the leadership was doing. And of course, it created problems because many aspects of the party wanted to do more “de-Mao-ing,” quicker.⁵⁵

Moreover, Deng was not simply a victim—or collateral damage—of this, but a supporter of it as well:⁵⁶

Now, it’s also quite interesting that Deng himself was one of the leaders most concerned with the threat to Mao’s reputation. His main concern, after the reversals of verdicts at the [1978] work conference, was that

⁵⁴ Fewsmith.

⁵⁵ Teiwes.

⁵⁶ Teiwes. Fred Teiwes continues, “To the extent he did get involved in, if you want, a struggle basis with other leaders, it was not Hua. It was *Wang Dongxing*. And this is a consistent view of the best Party historians, on the basis of the kind of information they have. Moreover, there’s a question of how closely was this linked to any particular policy dispute? Well, not very much. If you want to look, once provinces started signing up to say, ‘oh, we support the criterion of truth,’ one of the earliest was Heilongjiang, which, on the policy of agriculture, was certainly the most collectivist part of the equation because that suited their conditions in Heilongjiang. And who lagged? The greatest lagger was Wan Li, [whose] attitude was, ‘oh, this is nonsense, this is the *biao tai* [a public statement of one’s own position]. This is just deference, just showing that you agreed to something. Just do your work—work is important—not this bullshit.’ So, it’s a lot different—all sorts of levels of conflict get mixed in there—but it’s not the kind of gigantic thing, which has become the dominant narrative of the time.”

this not go too far and damage Mao's prestige. And he even told Jimmy Carter in the White House, "We're not "de-Mao-izing" . . . we're doing whatever he wanted us to do." Of course, the specific reference was foreign policy and that wasn't quite totally honest, anyway. But there was this thing which was part of Deng.⁵⁷

In fact, it goes even further than this, wading right into the treacherous waters of the "two whatevers" themselves:

Hua had sort of three different versions of the "two whatevers," all of which were fairly flaccid, really. Now, in September 1979, well after the Third Plenum, *Deng* writes on a document, "All policies formulated by Chairman Mao were correct. Our mistakes came from not insisting on Chairman Mao's line [signed] Deng Xiaoping." It's genuine, we've seen the document. So, that's that context. Contexts will differ. Contexts are also very different in the post-Tiananmen period. . . . And this speaks to the larger notion of stability and unity as a very basic part of Party culture. Even Mao talked about it, even if he worked to destroy it, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. Deng, I think really believed in it, even if he conducted a coup against Hua and dismissed Hu and Zhao. And on good authority, we have it that he was considering dismissing Jiang Zemin.⁵⁸

The contemporary ramifications are that in preserving the overriding norms of stability and unity, it is very difficult to handle a leader who actively cultivates a monopoly on power—like Xi Jinping (i.e., you don't kick out the leader and have stability and unity).

These are precisely the kind of complex inferences that are possible when we have the full arsenal of "classic methods" at our disposal. The picture of what actually happens is much more complicated than would be the case of solely focusing on the media. Of course, the usual caveats about bias, memory, and authentication apply, whether the interview is on the record, anonymized, or confidential. It is very important to triangulate wherever possible. But not only does one get closer to the truth, but the scholar also uncovers a bit of the "flavor" of the times. For example, Fred Teiwes notes:

Gu Mu [was] one of the most important economic officials, particularly in the opening of China, who went to Europe in 1978 and played a key role in developing the whole notion of opening to the outside world. Now, if

⁵⁷ Teiwes.

⁵⁸ Teiwes.

you go to Gu Mu's memoirs and see his discussion of that—I forget what it was, 20 pages, 15 pages, or whatever, [it's all] Deng, Deng, Deng! I mean there may have been some passing reference to Hua, but . . . [in fact] it *was* Hua, not that Deng didn't agree with it, or thought it wasn't great, but it was Hua who was the one who was moving that [policy plank]. And subsequently, in an interview, let me be precise here, it wasn't an interview with us. It was an interview with Chinese historians, who get these retired leaders and want to find out what the hell really happened and talk to them. . . . So, in this interview Gu Mu says, "Come on! Everything *had* to be credited to Deng. Everything."⁵⁹

By forcing these source materials into open conflict with one another, a fascinating truth emerges: Some of the key foundations of economic reform almost universally credited to Deng were in fact initiatives from Hua Guofeng.

⁵⁹ Teiwes.

PART 4

Lessons for the Present Day

The field of China studies is much larger, more diverse, and, in many ways, very different than it was 50 years ago. Far more people with the requisite linguistic and disciplinary skills possess greater opportunities to access what wisdom has been accumulated over the decades. There has been a welcome explosion of more collaborative work with Chinese counterparts, many of them Western-trained (in the same social science methodologies) and willing and able to work collaboratively with American partners. But the deepening of U.S.-China tensions has created an environment of insecurity when it comes to research. What happens if the opportunities for access—the resources, openings, and goodwill that a generation of China scholars have by now taken for granted—are closed off to them? Can the methodological lessons bequeathed to us by our earlier colleagues serve us in the present day?

As with anything regarding China, the answer is both yes and no. Certain things are replicable—both in terms of the system we are studying, as well as how we study it—while others are not. And while there is a great deal of continuity within the Chinese system, one key, perhaps inevitable, difference post-1989 is that it is impossible to replicate the individuals who came of age during the Chinese Communist Party's rise to power, China's own "greatest generation." The current Beltway narratives notwithstanding, Xi Jinping is no Mao Zedong. The outsized importance of individuals today cannot compete with the significance of those during the Mao and Deng Xiaoping eras.

Quite apart from the formative experiences of these first-generation leaders, there is the unmatched degree of reverence with which these people were regarded. Fred Teiwes cites a statement by Hu Yaobang at the Sixth Plenum, at which he'd just been made chairman:

I consider our Party is lucky that some old revolutionaries from the founding period are still alive, and moreover function as the mainstay of the Party's leading core. This is not to say that we want these elderly comrades to deal with concrete issues, but it is my responsibility to

explain that two things have not changed. One is that the function of the old revolutionaries has not changed. Second, that my lesser standard has not changed. Comrade Deng Xiaoping is the principal decision-maker of the Chinese Party. With the center's leading core in place, political life is very normal and collective leadership is truly restored.⁶⁰

This lines up with other examples, such as Zhao Ziyang's statement "that we—myself, Hu Yaobang—we're just mere big secretaries to Deng [and] Chen Yun." Deng himself said that the Party needs to have a *popo*, a mother-in-law (婆婆), who has to be obeyed.⁶¹

There was never institutionalization in the Chinese context, never. I think I may have said Deng would have kind of liked a bit, particularly after him, when he was not around to be *popo* anymore. Jiang Zemin, he wanted to stay on: head of the Military Commission. But in that period, this has to do with the difference of status. Often, you see all these old guys who supposedly have such authority. And I sometimes think that whatever happens, if so and so, if Bo Xilai had been selected, I think people would have said that it was Jiang Zemin. But it was Xi Jinping that got selected. *That* was Jiang Zemin. We don't really know that process of selection. We do know that there was, in 2007, which is essentially when Xi Jinping got chosen because then he became on the Standing Committee the second person and the secretary and so forth . . . he was essentially chosen. We know that there was this broader consultation within the Party which was later junked, but we have no idea how that worked. We also have no idea how does one campaign for office. In the Mao era you didn't campaign. Obviously, you wanted to stay on the good side of the chairman, but you waited to [be chosen]. You might have taken a certain line that you thought would appeal to the chairman.⁶²

And what about the early reform era, under Deng?

Deng had nominated Wan Li as premier. He then went around to the elders and asked for their support, which was not forthcoming. Li Peng then became premier. Deng subsequently told Wan, "I had no idea how disliked you were among other top Party leaders." But what that says is—and I think this is true with Deng—he was willing to let a system . . . apart from himself as the leader, function, with the Standing Committee having its own dynamic. But you change when there's no longer ["another Deng"]—Hu Jintao had been selected by Deng for

⁶⁰ Teiwes.

⁶¹ Teiwes.

⁶² Teiwes.

God's sake! No one had been selected after Hu Jintao, so it's a different process. How did that work? What did Xi Jinping do to get himself into a position that he could be selected? He hung around Shanghai with Jiang Zemin, or what? Or I'm told that the actual person who was most influential in pushing him was Wen Jiabao. So, who knows? But what's the process? We don't know, [but] we should try to find out these things, whether we can or not.⁶³

This is relevant when we talk about levels and degrees of institutionalization versus individual agency among China's top leaders, and to what degree these have changed since Mao and throughout the reform and Xi eras. Change does not necessarily mean incomparability—a hopeful truth for reinvigorating methods from the past and applying them in the present day.

Second, there are differences regarding publications and in data mining opportunities. On the one hand, there's been a slow erosion of *neibu* publications. There are still a lot of them, but the restrictions on them have become much looser. *Cankao Xiaoxi* (*Reference Information*), which used to be a restricted publication, can now be purchased at newsstands. Technically, it is not a true “open publication,” but it is now available publicly. In addition, the government and the Party have retreated from areas of activity that were previously highly politicized and subject to the full-scale control of media presentation. By becoming depoliticized, publications in these areas have become, perhaps ironically, less credible. On the other hand, the People's Republic of China (PRC) media have become much more prolific. Commercialization, in many instances, has taken over as a new motivation for publishing. This raises questions about the validity and the degree of control being exercised in China's media today, which in turn raises questions about the validity of traditional methods today. Finally, there's the new media—the Internet and various social media—that have emerged since the mid-1990s.

It can be difficult to grasp the scale at which new publications have become available since the Cultural Revolution. As far as newspapers alone are concerned, the 42 distributed regularly in 1970 ballooned to over 2,000 by 2003. While the number of newspapers has been declining since then (due primarily to the rise of the Internet), it remains a huge number. The number of books has gone from a little under 5,000 published in 1970 (down from a previous high of 27,571 in 1957) to over 499,884 in 2018. This has even drowned out some of those traditional sources that

⁶³ Teiwes.

had served as a foundation for the study of elite politics; for example, in 1995, there were 104 books published on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought compared to 42,000 on topics like culture, education, and sports.

OPEN (公开) PRINT MEDIA: A PUBLISHING EXPLOSION

<u>Year</u>	<u>Newspapers</u>	<u>Periodicals</u>	<u>Books</u>
1952	296	354	13,692
1957	364	634	27,571
1962	273	483	16,548
1965	343	790	20,143
1970	42	21	4,889
1978	186	930	14,987
1980	188	2,191	21,621
1985	698	4,705	45,603
1990	773	5,751	80,224
1995	1,049	7,583	101,381
2000	2,007	8,725	143,376
2003	2,119	9,074	190,391
2008	1,943	9,549	274,123
2013	1,915	9,877	444,427
2018	1,894	10,084	499,884

Source: National Statistics Bureau, Beijing (1996, 2001, 2004 and 2019)⁶⁴

There has also been a similar boom in periodicals. The periodicals available today cover an enormous range of topics and materials: on society, the economy, politics, the military, international affairs, and so on. The new media also offer new avenues for fresh insight into Chinese society, especially the Internet and social media. While these avenues may be

⁶⁴ Miller.

scaling back a bit under Xi Jinping, they remain quite relevant.⁶⁵ As Alice Miller points out:

I would suggest to you that even without Xi Jinping increasing restrictions on media and other aspects of political life in China today, this method still works because the regime has always maintained very close control and management of critical sectors and over media that are central to the regime's presentation of its media . . . [this includes] the Xinhua News Agency, the *People's Daily*, *Qiushi* (the Party's policy journal), and so forth. Xinhua, *People's Daily*—they are still as important as they ever were. Their job is to convey the regime line on any particular topic. . . . You should all pay attention to the *People's Daily*. Don't pay attention to the *Global Times*. They serve different purposes, and so spending time trying to dissect the media presentation methods in *Global Times* is going to provide different insights than you might get from analyzing the *People's Daily*.⁶⁶

She goes on:

The situation is somewhat similar to the situation in the later '80s in the Soviet Union and trying to understand Soviet affairs in the period of Gorbachev's *glasnost*. . . . There is a brilliant analysis/report that showed back in the late '80s and early '90s that the traditional method of Kremlinology applied every bit as well in understanding those issues that were of critical [importance] to Moscow versus the information now openly available to the Soviet public due to changes in Soviet media.

But there are challenges as well:

I think the impediments to applying this method these days, first of all, are in a major reorientation in the study of contemporary China as a consequence of the new avenues of access to China since the late 1970s. There's been a withering away of interest in leadership politics and things like that in favor of much more interesting and profitable or accessible topics, like the study of society locally and otherwise, and so forth. And so, the method simply has been forgotten, I think, in large part. I'm impressed by how few people still around do it. Just one comment, a while back, I read Liz Economy's new book [*The Third Revolution*], which I liked very much. But her main chapter on politics in the Xi Jinping period drew almost entirely on Western media reports, non-Chinese media sources or documents. Liz's book is a good book,

⁶⁵ Miller.

⁶⁶ Miller.

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but I think it just shows the kind of tilting of the field away from traditional methods in favor of others since the 1980s.⁶⁷

Moreover, on our end, there is another set of speed bumps facing scholars who wish to undertake this sort of research:

Another problem, I think, is there isn't an agency like the old FBIS to sort through the ocean of materials. And to gather together the materials relevant to topics that might be of interest, in this case, to the American government, and that's a real problem. I think there is movement these days to try to bring back an agency like that, given the enhanced interest in China these days as a concern to the United States. So, there are real impediments to applying it, [even though] I think the validity of the method is just as useful as it was back in the good old days.⁶⁸

The revolution in information collection and communication has softened some of the edges required for this type of research:

The other point that I want to make, which I think is relevant to people studying the [People's Republic of China] today, [is that] we're all using word searches. It comes with the field these days. But I would argue that it's not sufficient because [what sheds light] is a *conversation*. So, word searches will take things out of context. You might say, "Gee, in 1986 there are X number of references to some formula, and three years later there are more or less." But unless you're reading the articles that those references go to, you're not going to understand why the number has increased or decreased. The Chinese have this terrible habit of changing the *tifa*, the official formulation for an idea. So, if you're in the late Deng Xiaoping period and you're trying to search the *People's Daily* for the next five years or something, you miss some of the *tifa* that Jiang Zemin is using. Or, that when Hu Jintao comes in, he talks about the scientific development theory. If you haven't searched for that you don't see it. If you're reading your paper on a daily basis, you do see it. If you . . . [just] do a word search, you're not picking up that Hu Jintao is criticizing Jiang Zemin for being insufficiently scientific. That strikes me as an important bit of information.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Miller. Her reference is to Elizabeth Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶⁸ Miller.

⁶⁹ Fewsmith.

Over the past three decades, field-intensive research has displaced the more traditional methods of data collection and discovery discussed above. However, given the current state of the field—and the increasingly opaque nature of elite politics in China—these earlier methods may be returning to occupy a more prominent role in our toolbox for understanding the contemporary PRC.

Conclusion

It is worth taking a step back, closing one's eyes, and imagining what it was like working with these traditional sources of information back in the day: the faintly musty smell of books and bound periodicals in the stacks, the tactile sensation of paper that was sometimes too rough and other times impossibly fragile, smudges on fingers from incessant manual notetaking, the clatter of manual typewriters. No Internet. No social media. This is a world that is no longer available to us, at least not without a significant, conscious effort on our part to re-create it. Yet the arts of data collection and analysis forged at that time are not necessarily relegated solely to a sepia-tinged era of the not-so-distant past.

Three key considerations emerge from the previous discussion that are as relevant today as they were a generation ago when it comes to analyzing Chinese politics from afar. The first is that it is a full-time job. As the scholars above indicate, this is not something that one can skip for a few days and return to at one's leisure. It is tedious, it is cumulative, and it requires one's full attention. It is not something to be casually fobbed off to random research assistants. Each person who is involved in a given project must be invested in it, and there must be fully transparent collaboration. As far as solo work is concerned, it is solitary—at times even downright lonely. That carries its own significant burdens.

Second, and perhaps related, is that China research was never easy or straightforward. Mao described Deng Xiaoping as a “needle in a ball of cotton”—were the significance of a given data point so easy to discover! Extending the metaphor, in *Saving Private Ryan*, the Tom Hanks character describes his group's mission as akin to “finding a needle in a stack of needles.” That is what doing close media analysis is like, day in and day out. For data mining, one must essentially become a reactive agent to fortune and circumstance, something that does not come easily to the extremely driven, controlling, breadcrumb-following political scientist incentivized to work within an ever-evolving, interrelated, and self-referential discipline. How does a shard like an arcane reference from an obscure 1930s political campaign fit into that sort of professional scholarly environment

in the first quarter of the 21st century? How is it meaningful to the discipline or to the policymaking apparatus? How does one make it so in a world of increasingly short deadlines, attention spans, and time horizons, in which “efficiencies” outweigh “effectiveness”?⁷⁰

Finally—and this may be the key element that mitigates these first two—conditions change, and approaches and strategies must be eminently adaptable. This is not to say that reviving earlier practices is easy, straightforward, or obvious in its many potential applications. And there are challenges in transmitting old ways of doing things to a new, younger generation with expectations—and experiences—of a relatively open China. Earlier openness (*fang* 放),⁷¹ which had been taken for granted, has left us vulnerable in times of closure (*shou* 收), as China finds itself today. Indeed, as David Shambaugh has noted, China has been in that rut for some time now.⁷² It is at times like these that the “lost arts” of an earlier era need to be dusted off and studied seriously to help provide a future direction for China scholarship and analysis. This publication marks a step toward such a revival.

⁷⁰ Brian Klaas, *Fluke: Chance, Chaos, and Why Everything We Do Matters* (New York: Scribner, 2024).

⁷¹ Baum, *Burying Mao*.

⁷² “Toward Xi’s Third Term: China’s 20th Party Congress and Beyond,” Brookings, January 20, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/events/toward-xis-third-term-chinas-20th-party-congress-and-beyond/>.