The Politics-Administration Dichotomy in Time of Global Crisis: Neutral Competence or Cadre Organizations

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The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) placed enormous pressures on local, regional, and national governments to remain responsive, transparent, and equitable when developing solutions to protect the public. The focus of this article is an examination of these challenges, the lack of preparedness, and the resulting response to Covid-19 through the lens of the politics-administration dichotomy. Despite the fact that China does not practice a Weberian democratic form of government that divided the politics of governing from the administration of government thought essential for national development, the nation has managed to become a global economic powerhouse. Through a high degree of centralization and control, China has implemented market-based economic reforms synchronous with sustained socialist practices. However, this system presents unique challenges for effective governance, and when Covid-19 first appeared in China the government was not prepared for the scale of the emergency that would ensue. Some of these challenges are the result of the governmental system in China, the role of the Chinese Communist Party and local cadre organizations. For China to continue to grow as a global leader, leadership will need to promote liberalization of governance structures and greater separation between the politics of governing and the administration of governing. Despite considerable pressure by the United States on corporations and other governments to disentangle themselves from China, Western investment by multinational corporations that disregard human rights abuses, along with a Chinese government that continues to limit access to information, makes this scenario unlikely.

The 2020 Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) placed enormous pressures on local, regional, and national governments to remain transparent, responsive, and equitable when developing solutions to protect the public. Responding to such a crisis involves processes, procedures, and structures that reduce the threat, aid in the recovery, and mitigate future potential threats. An important factor in the government response to a crisis is preparedness before an incident occurs. When Covid-19 first appeared in China, the government was not prepared for the scale of the emergency that would ensue. As it spread to other countries, they too were ill-prepared for the crisis. This lack of preparedness, in many nations, led to reactionary, inconsistent, and at times haphazard responses by governments at all levels. The focus of this article is an examination of the risks and consequences resulting from the lack of governance capacity and the resulting response to Covid-19 through the lens of the politics-administration dichotomy.

THE POLITICS-ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY

The politics-administration dichotomy refers to the separation of politics of government from the administration of government and was first introduced in the United States by Woodrow Wilson (1887). Central to this dichotomy is the role of the public administrator to balance the demands of efficiency and political responsiveness. To accommodate these demands, Wilson advocated a politics-administration dichotomy framework, under which, the administration and application of policies, laws, and programs are the responsibility of professionally trained career administrators who are separate and neutral from the political pressures of elected officials who must
be responsive to citizen’s needs (Brennan & Koven, 2009; Uwizeyimana, 2013; Wilson, 1887).

Governance in the United States

Wilson was not the first to address these issues as the proper role of administration and administrators had been the object of concern for European scholars for years before Wilson published his seminal work. Concerned with efficiency and the abuses of the patronage systems which dominated American politics, he looked toward French and German scholars and sought to develop a science of administration. Wilson recognized that the efficiencies of German and French governments were the results of highly centralized decision making and to make it applicable in the United States context, his framework needed to be “Americanized.” Public administrators should be impersonal, passionless, and value-neutral, removed from politics, neutral in all things political (Fry & Nigro, 1996).

In Western democracies, particularly in the United States, the concept of governing or government has been replaced with the concept of governance, which involves transparency, dispersed power, and shared decision making among a variety of actors, only one of which is the formal government which sets the rules and enforces the laws that everyone, including the government, must operate under. Using the language of New Public Management, government steers the boat while others do the rowing. In a system where power is divided among three branches and among different sovereign levels of government, diffusing power among stakeholders is not a significant leap. However, as evidenced in the democrat worlds’ response to Covid-19, this can and has created coordination problems as multiple stakeholders at multiple levels of government along with non-governmental actors share responsibility for implementation. This system also creates a voice for a variety of actors and makes it easier for a relatively small set of players to prevent or limit government action. Under this system, transparency and voice are paramount over efficiency (Guo & Jiang, 2017; Y. Zhao & Peters, 2009).

Governance in China

Governance in China has a very different meaning than as it is conceived in the U.S. Rather than power being decentralized within a competitive political system that attempts to mitigate the influence of politics over the administration of government, the Chinese system seeks centralization and control to promote efficiency. This is best outlined by Xi Jinping himself in his 2014 text “The Governance of China” (2014). Xi outlines the “Chinese Dream” to make China prosperous and strong, build the economy, and bring happiness to the Chinese people through the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. What this means, according to Xi, is market-based economic reforms that are synchronous with sustained socialist practices, including a strong national government to centralize decision making to improve the lives of the Chinese people. Throughout the text, Xi couples the Party, state, and social affairs as a singular unified entity while emphasizing ways to improve the capacity of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to govern efficiently and democratically, promoting the general public’s ability to follow the rule of law (Jinping, 2014).

Much like his recent predecessors, when Xi came to power in 2012 he initiated a series of reforms to improve Chinese governance. In November 2013, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee adopted a series of reforms to “modernize China’s system and capacity for governance.” Xi framed reforms as the “new normal” and sought continued and expanded economic reforms and more effective central control than under Hu Jintao. These reforms have been labeled the “China Model,” or perhaps more appropriately “socialism with Chinese characteristic” which features economic freedom, strong central control, and political oppression (Bai & Liu, 2020; Womack, 2017; S. Zhao, 2010). Despite reforms referring to the rural of law, and governance based on the Chinese constitution, it is the Party that controls the government and hence the rule of law. As the “core leader,” Xi has sought to minimize dissent under the umbrella of anti-corruption reform to strengthen his control over the Party and the government (Guo & Jiang, 2017).
The Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China identifies the separation of politics from administration while explicitly emphasizing the role of the CCP in China gaining its independence. Further legislative acts and political reforms emphasized the independence of the state while continuing to recognize the overarching role of the Party in all things governmental, including significant overlap between the Party and sub-national levels of government. Some researchers have claimed reforms have led to less Party control and a greater distinction between the Party (politics) and governance (administration); however, the strength and control of the Party at all levels of government remains strong with forces tightly focused on centralized decision making (Bai & Liu, 2020; “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,” 2004).

CHINA AS AN OUTLIER

While it is generally held among scholars, particularly those in the West, that the Weberian model of predictable, rule-of-law-oriented, unpolitical, and impersonal administration of government is thought to be essential to national development, China has achieved massive growth over the last 30 years without practicing Weberian style democracy. This suggests that either Western assumptions about good governance are wrong, or there are unique qualities about the Chinese system that are missed in Western analysis. Indeed, while Western assumptions about the one best way to achieve development may be somewhat presumptuous, there are elements of the Chinese system that, while not unique to China, are less common in Western democratic systems (Rothstein, 2015).

Unlike the neutral and deliberately apolitical goals of Western governance, the Chinese system of local governance relies on highly political cadre organizations that are obligated to support party goals while also conscious and responsive to local public values. These cadre institutions can, under certain conditions, be highly efficient at meeting local needs. This has led to a high degree of confidence in public institutions. Despite comparatively low scores in virtually all commonly used measures of corruption and quality of governmental institutions, the Chinese people appear happy with their government (Ahlers & Schubert, 2011).

The preferences and positive attitudes the Chinese people have for their government are in sharp contrast to the extremely low ratings many Western governments receive from their citizens. Widespread belief, often supported by media reports, about the failure of the government to effectively respond to the pandemic has led to strong criticisms of the government in many western countries, including France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere (“Confidence in Institutions,” n.d.; Horton, 2020; Ingraham, 2020; Rawnsley, 2020).

The Politics-Administration Dichotomy in China

Given the development of public administration in China and the importance of cadre organizations, applying the politics-administration dichotomy to the Chinese context can lead to useful insights. Chinese public administration dates back thousands of years before the British, French, or Spanish settled in North America, although a systematic study of public administration did not begin in earnest until the 1980s under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. Mao Zedong had outlawed many social science disciplines and they were removed from university study and research institutions. Under the leadership of Deng, scholars and practitioners were encouraged to re-start their work in developing the field. The focus of society shifted towards economic development and efficiency, including government efficiency. (Holzer & Zhang, 2009).

Promoting economic development and functional efficiency of the government under the leadership of Deng included the official separation of government from the Communist Party and state-run enterprises, although the actual degree of separation was nominal (Holzer & Zhang, 2009). The focus on economic development has led to a massive expansion of the Chinese economy, raised the standard of living for millions, and turned China into an economic rival of the US. At the same time, rapid growth and development
have come at a cost. Environmental pollution and income disparity between those in urban areas who have been able to capitalize on the new economy and those in rural areas have become significant issues of public policy (Holzer & Zhang, 2009; Jing & Savas, 2009).

Following the events of June 4, 1989, despite ongoing factional struggles within the CCP, the leadership in China, including the CCP, moved cautiously to restore confidence and order. Under Jiang Zemin’s leadership, the CCP sought to expand its reach into society by admitting entrepreneurs as part of his “Three Represents” reforms which focused on economic development, cultural development, and political consensus, thus further reducing the separation between the politics of governing and the administration of government (Jing & Savas, 2009; Womack, 2017).

When Xi Jinping replaced Hu Jintao in 2012 as General Secretary and President, corruption had become a major obstacle to reform. While Ju and Jiang sought out broad agreement and consultation, Xi almost immediately promoted an image of power and strength. He promoted anti-corruption efforts and continued broad economic reform strategies, while at the same time emphasizing the rule of law and centralized authority, thus appearing less committed to openness and transparency (Womack, 2017). Rather than separate the Party from the administration of government, Xi has sought to bring them closer together through centralization and a focus on the rule of law.

Cadre organizations play an important role in promoting the party as a source of good governance. Unlike in the U.S., Chinese civil servants include both party-affiliated cadre organization members and non-party government officials. Party members hold 80% of all civil service posts. (Rothstein, 2015). Performance goals for local government are a mix of ideological and policy outcomes. This open blurring of the boundary between politics and administration is unique to authoritarian regimes and would not be tolerated in a US context. However, in a time of crisis, this allows the party to control both the actual government response and the message that is carried forth by the party-controlled media. This approach to governance, where politics and administration are officially separate but in practice inseparable, had significant implications for the response to the pandemic in Wuhan in late 2019.

Table 1 above outlines the differences in governance structures between the United States and China, highlighting differing priorities and values. Among the key differences is that in China, the CCP is inseparable from the government. This contributes to centralized decision making, political decision making, opaque governance, and an important role for cadre organizations. As significant as political parties are in the United States, they are separate from the administration. It is this separation that leads to decentralized and apolitical decision-making, impersonal administration, transparent governance,
and a high reliance on the rule of law.

**Responding to Covid-19 in China**

To illustrate the influence of the Party and politics over the government response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is useful to compare the official timeline of events as reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) by the Chinese government with unofficial accounts reported to local and international media and other observers on the ground as the epidemic unfolded.

The WHO was first notified of a novel virus on December 31, 2019, when the China Country Office of the WHO reported a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause in Wuhan City, Hubei Province. The likely source of the outbreak, an open-air seafood market in Wuhan, was closed by government officials on January 1. This account is contradicted by local media reports of the early days of the outbreak. On March 12, 2020, the South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported on several cases of Covid-19 that were recognized as early as Mid-November. Citing government data, the SCMP identified a 55-year-old Hubei resident as becoming infected with a new virus on November 17. By December 20, the number of confirmed cases reached 60. The SCMP also noted that a week later on December 27th, Zhang Jixian, a doctor from Hubei Provincial Hospital told Chinese health officials that more than 180 people have been infected. On December 31, the number of confirmed cases reached 266, rising to 282 in just one day on January 1, while the official number of cases reported by Chinese authorities stood at 41 (Ma, 2020; Muccari, Chow, & Murphy, 2020; “WHO Timeline - COVID-19,” 2020).

Conflicting reports are not uncommon at the beginning of a major health crisis, and there is no evidence of malice on the part of the Chinese government. As a novel virus, misdiagnosis was likely going to occur, however, is that a reasonable explanation for the wide discrepancy between official published government figures and unpublished government data? Or, is it more likely that centralized control and Party influence over local cadre organizations within the bureaucracy encouraged the bureaucracy to limit reporting about the severity of the outbreak to central planners in Beijing? If it is accurate that Party politics influenced administrative decision making, was this a deliberate attempt to subvert the free flow of information or the inherent system response to bad news by local or regional officials?

**Centralized Decision Making and the Public Interest During a Pandemic**

Centralized, top-down decision making under a party-centered governance structure limits the ability of local actors to react in a crisis. While reforms have delegated some authority to subnational governments, including local governments, those officials are responsible to the Party first. All decision making from local municipal governing to national policy in Beijing is carried out within a political context; thus, there is no separation between politics and administration. In local governments, the Party Secretary has the final say on all decisions, regardless if that person has a formal role in the government.

When a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause was discovered in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, local officials had to balance the public interest and the Party interest. Their responsibility to the Party superseded their responsibility to the general public. This is a different type of response than occurred in the U.S. where public officials hold the public interest as a core value and ethical responsibility, whereas Chinese officials cannot consider the public interest ahead of Party interests. This does not suggest that politics does not play a role in how western public officials act; however, in the United States most local elections are non-partisan and competition among multiple political parties often disappears in times of crisis.

In China, the single-party system, centralized control and, lack of transparency had very dire consequences for the Chinese people and the rest of the world as it soon spread across the globe. Whether the earliest cases were discovered as early as August or in December, by early January the disease was quickly spreading, overwhelming local officials. American media reports suggest that Chinese officials delayed notifying the public for six days once it was clear they were likely facing a pandemic. During that six-day
delay, the City of Wuhan hosted a mass banquet for
tens of thousands of people as millions began to travel
for the Lunar New Year celebration (Associated Press,
2020).

Concern over CCP control of information and loyalty
to the Party among local officials angered Chinese
citizens as news of the disease spread. In December,
local police in Wuhan reprimanded eight doctors for
posting “rumors” on social media about an unknown
virus spreading in Wuhan. One of the doctors, Li
Wenliang, contracted the disease and later died. All
were eventually cleared of any wrongdoing, and in
a rare move the police were chastised by the courts
for their actions. Despite the surprising action by
the courts (which are also controlled by the Party),
the action by the police represents the values of the
Chinese system, the centrality of the Party over the
state, and the capacity of local government officials
to respond. In January, as the virus was quickly
growing out of control, the mayor of Wuhan publicly
acknowledged criticism of his handling of the crisis,
admitted information had not been disclosed in a
timely matter, but also pointed out that the local
government was not allowed to disclose information
without permission from Party officials (Associated
Press, 2020; “China exonerates doctor reprimanded
for warning of virus,” 2020; Ratcliffe & Standaert,
2020; Shih & Knowles, 2020).

The obligation local officials have to the CCP
and the discretion they have to implement policy
results in tradeoffs between competence and loyalty.
Competence requires the ability and experience to
manage a wide set of tasks and policy problems. It
requires education, insight, creativity, and the ability
to make decisions that are in the best interests of those
most affected (Edwards, 2001). Loyalty, in this case
to the CCP, may require compromise and reliance on
party priorities over the best interest of the affected
community. This may mean local officials downplay
the significance of a quickly spreading epidemic,
or that doctors concerned with rising infections are
not allowed to share their concerns publicly. The
professional competence of medical personnel or
professionally trained administrators is subservient to
the domination of the party.

The separation of politics from administration in
the US context requires a different set of tradeoffs, a
balance between efficiency and responsiveness, and the
ability to lead with a high degree of independence and
integrity. As has been illustrated in the United States,
tension exists between the efficiency of competently
trained medical staff and the need to be politically
responsive to the public. Independence from political
pressures allows local civil servants to focus on the
efficiency of response. In times of acute crisis, as
occurred in the spring of 2020, recommendations of
the professionally trained medical staff were largely
accepted and promoted by most administrators and
elected officials as necessary to recover. At the same
time, administrators are not completely immune
from the need to be responsive to political pressures,
especially as the public grows weary of restrictive
measures put in place to limit the spread of the virus.

The key to successfully separating politics and
administration is the appointment of a competent
neutral administrator. As noted by Fry and Nigro
(1996), the neutral competence model specifies that
“the administrator should be neutral in matters of
policy, but professionally competent in selecting the
appropriate means to carry out our policies decided on
by their political superiors.” Appointed and elected
public officials are accountable to each other as well
as to the general citizenry. Appointed public officials
are responsible and answerable directly to elected
officials to implement policy as intended fairly and
neutrally. Elected public officials are accountable and
must be responsive to the people through elections.
Both of these elements are present in the United States
but at least one is missing in China.

In the Chinese context, cadre organizations, along
with local elected officials, including those elected
to represent their region at the National People
Congress and the Local People’s Congresses, and
Local Governments are always members of the
Party or are approved by the Party. This represents
a different tradeoff between competence and loyalty.
Here loyalty is the preferred value and it guarantees
the priorities of the CCP will be followed. When the police questioned the doctors in Wuhan, they were responding to the expectations of the public (i.e., Party) officials to monitor and control information. As street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010), they were following what was expected of them from a neutral competence standpoint. The value system in China, which emphasizes respect for authority and communal thinking over individualism and the public interest (as it is understood in the U.S.) does not disassociate politics from the administration of government. From their point of view, local government officials had a professional responsibility to silence doctors from spreading “rumors,” which might lead to widespread panic as it is in the public interest to maintain order.

LOYALTY TO PARTY

The inability of officials to look beyond Party concerns indicates a lack of professional governing capacity in China, not a devious plot designed to thwart Western interests. It represents a governance choice to prioritize loyalty to party over neutral competence. The Party-centered state is limited in its ability to promote transparency and accountability as understood in democratic nations; however, from the Chinese perspective, it is accountable to the people by acting in what the government (i.e. Party) perceives to be in the public interest. This situation masks the inherent flaw of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” as a governing philosophy under Xi Jinping. Chinese leaders have applied neoliberal market forces to remake the nation, eventually, as the world’s preeminent economic and military power. At the same time, this governance model has led to greater wealth inequality and greater class divisions, the very opposite goal of Marxist-Leninist socialist thought. While economic reforms have lifted millions out of poverty in China, the long-term negligence of environmental and social sustainability has not only led to alarming wealth inequality rivaled only in the United States, but also contributed to the country’s ineffectiveness in dealing with crises that may have global dimensions and geopolitical consequences.

In China, both appointed and elected officials’ primary allegiance is to the CCP. The reliance on loyalty to party over competence has more profound and longlasting negative consequences. Through efforts to reassert the importance of the party in local governance that began under Zemin’s “three represents” reforms, Xi valued political loyalty and sought to use anti-corruption efforts to root out potential rivals. While this may be a successful path to increase authority, it may lead to subordinate government officials who are loyal, but perhaps less competent (Zakharov, 2016). When faced with conflicting choices in a time of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, they answer first to the Party, not the people. Politics dominates over the public interest and administration.

As a result, citizens tend to seek information outside of official channels, particularly when they realize their health and safety are in great danger. The Wuhan doctors’ whistleblowing in December of 2019 reflected the limited administrative capacity of the government to respond to the growing pandemic. The local police interrogation of the eight doctors who warned their peers of the problems in Wuhan reflected loyalty to the Party, the lack of transparency, and governmental suppression of information, which are critical in managing risks in a crisis, particularly one with global implications. Although the public servants (police) who followed what they believed was in the public interest were ultimately punished by the government, the outcome is in essence only the result of a circular firing squad and cannot disguise the systemic barriers and failures of governmental crisis management under “socialism with Chinese characteristics”.

Responding to a Global Crisis

Globalization, the loosening of economic borders, increases in immigration, and ease of international travel have both brought the world closer together, and created new potential threats as major crises in one part of the world will, in one way or the other, likely impact other parts of the world. When a major crisis occurs and it is sustained to one country or a single region, when the public interest is limited to a relatively small geographic space, closed Party-State authoritarian systems such as in China only need to be responsive to their people. The economic impact across
borders is likely to be limited and temporary. When a crisis becomes global, such as Covid-19, placing loyalty and political (Party) interests ahead of the public (administrative) interests may be catastrophic, with hundreds of thousands of dead, millions infected, and untold negative economic impact on developed and developing countries across the globe.

Any large-scale crisis creates substantial cross-cutting challenges that can threaten regional stability and, in some cases, as with Covid-19, global stability. The Covid-19 pandemic represents an existential threat to global stability and requires a global response. Failure to provide accurate and timely information to global officials exacerbates the threat to the global community. It reduces the ability of leaders to respond and threatens the world order as it seeds distrust among nations and threatens future collaboration. Western governments’ response to China, led by the United States in the weeks and months following the discovery of the pandemic, evidences the extended ramifications and consequences of government failures to separate politics from administration. China’s lack of openness led to charges of possible collusion between the Chinese government and the WHO. It was also used as an excuse to justify government failures to respond to the crisis in the United States and elsewhere. In response, the Trump administration targeted the CCP and the Chinese government with hard political rhetoric and used the tension between the two countries to implement policy changes that tackle long-standing, but unrelated political differences. There is also a growing concern that as the virus continues to spread to impoverished nations, political bickering between the two global powers will prevent a coordinated global response to aid the least prepared nations to avoid a cataclysmic crisis (Christensen, 2020; Luhnow & de Córdoba, 2020).

Unlike the 2013-2014 Ebola outbreak in Africa, where the governments lacked the administrative capacity to respond to the crisis, in China, there was a lack of political (i.e. governance) capacity to respond effectively. In Africa, the virus went undetected for nearly three months, and even then, it was largely underestimated by local officials and the WHO. Once it was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, global forces united and mobilized; however, by that time, the virus was out of control and spread throughout West Africa. When it was finally contained, over 11,000 were dead, 28,638 were infected and the economic loss is estimated to have been USD 2.2 Billion in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, the three countries most affected by the outbreak.

In China, administrative capacity was not of concern in the fall of 2019. China had gained valuable experience dealing with two previous major health crises, the SARS outbreak in 2003 and H7N9 in 2013. SARS and Covid-19 share similar characteristics. Both were widespread and infected thousands of people across a large geographic area. Also, much like Covid-19, many accused the government of withholding information which led to rumors spreading through social media and other venues. While the first cases of SARS were confirmed in November 2002 China did not inform the WHO until February 2003. The Chinese Ministry of Health reported the outbreak was likely Chlamydia pneumoniae. This lack of information and transparency led medical experts in China to question the government. Soon, as this information became public, international media and others outside China became equally concerned, and Chinese authorities were heavily criticized for their poor response by the international community. By the time the epidemic had been contained and treated, it is estimated that it cost China and southeast Asia between USD 12-18 billion in lost tourism, travel, and retail sales. This was not lost on Chinese authorities trying to maintain strong economic growth. Globally, the impact is estimated to have been between USD 30 and 100 billion (“CDC SARS Response Timeline,” 2013; Kamps & Hoffmann, 2003; Qiu, Chu, Mao, & Wu, 2018).

Unlike SARS, most in the international community credit China with managing the H7N9 epidemic well. In response to heavy criticism of the government response to SARS, China invested heavily in surveillance, emergency preparedness, response capacity, and public health institutions. When the
first cases were reported in February 2013, China quickly responded. Poultry farms thought to be the source of the virus were quickly closed in infected areas and surveillance of the public was increased. China also worked closely with the WHO to be open and transparent. By November 2015, 681 cases had been confirmed. While the numbers dwarf SARS and Covid-19, the fatality rate of H7N9 was 40.1%, making it a much more dangerous viral infection. Since 2015, H7N9 has reappeared several times in China, and the government has quickly responded. Unlike SARS, H7N9 did not lead to social panic, and there were not widespread rumors about potential causes and cures (“Asian Lineage Avian Influenza A(H7N9) Virus,” 2018; Qiu et al., 2018; Vong, O’Leary, & Feng, 2014).

These widely differing responses, along with the response to Covid-19, demonstrate the priorities of the Party and the central government at the time. China had been granted acceptance to the World Trade Organization in 2000, and economic growth was the primary goal of the Party. In 2013, President Xi was new in office and was in the process of accumulating power within the CCP. Openness and transparency, especially to the world community, aided his endeavor to secure the Party in the hearts and minds of the people, especially following the disaster of SARS 10 years earlier. With power secure, and without limits on the length of his rule, Xi had the freedom to return to greater authoritarian control in 2019.

All three responses represent a politics- (Party) first orientation. Effective administrative response in 2013 served the Party as much as it did the people. From the Chinese perspective, the administrative response in 2003 and 2019 also served the people and represents the public values of the Chinese governmental system. Politics and administration are distinct but inseparable under this system. Acting as a leader in the global community, China, and its current governance structure will continue to struggle as the values and discourses underpinning authoritarian governance are contradictory to the democratic and humanistic values of the U.S., whose socio-cultural and economic connections with China are greatly increased due to globalization and international mobility. The Covid-19 global pandemic has resulted in a global backlash and deep distrust of the Chinese government, which in turn increases the difficulties in dealing with the global crisis and geopolitical conflicts through global collaboration. As mistrust grows, and western companies begin to question their investments in the authoritarian state, cooperation among countries is likely to be significantly impacted.

**GOING FORWARD**

For China to continue to grow as a global leader, leadership will need to promote liberalization of governance structures and greater separation between the politics of governing and the administration of governing--but is that even a possibility? Many say no, and blame the current world order on China gaining Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) with the United States in 2000. Prior to receiving PNTR, the U.S. Congress was required each year to approve China’s favorable access to U.S. markets. The possibility that this might not be approved prevented U.S. firms from increasing their reliance on China as a supplier. It also created an opportunity to highlight human rights abuses by China against Tibet and the Uighur minority (Lardy, 1999; Pierce & Schott, 2016; Salam, 2018).

Holding a Get-out-of-Jail Free card for human rights abuses along with permanent access to U.S. markets give the CCP a strong incentive to strengthen its control in local decision making by further reducing the separation between the politics of governing and the administration of the government, while incentivizing American corporations to work with Beijing to invest in the expanding Chinese economy. The result has been a quickly growing market-like economy in China without what many scholars believe were the essential qualities of strong governance and development, including objective administration of government dominated by the rule of law, transparency, and formalized decision-making processes. For significant change to occur that would lead to greater separation between the party (politics) and the government (administration) would require one or both of the following to occur:
The first potential change would require American and other corporations to withdraw investments in China due to ongoing instability or political pressures at home. This would drain China of significant foreign direct investment and, rather than the significant income inequality seen in China today, it would encourage a more balanced development strategy that would likely reduce the role of the central government, and as was practiced in the 1980s rely on further national and local business development to improve the lives of workers. The second potential options for restructuring the relationship between politics and administration would be a political and economic revolution not seen since Tiananmen Square in 1989. Unlike the years that followed the 1989 crackdown where Beijing was seeking access to U.S. markets and liberalized trade policy, the response to protests in Hong Kong which began in 2019 demonstrate the current party regime maintains firm control over local governance through cadre organizations and the reliance on the party for access to money, jobs, and other resources.

Either of these scenarios would lead to a drastic change in the CCP, something seemingly unlikely today. However, as the Covid-19 crisis continues to unfold, or as new, perhaps more deadly global crises emerge from China, the Chinese people as well as the international community will become increasingly untrusting in the CCP or the Chinese government, which could lead to drastic change. How that change will look is unknown. China has no experience with Weberian style democratic governance. It was only during a brief period following the May Fourth Movement that Western-style liberal democracy had begun to gain significance as the nations’ intellectuals turned away from traditional Confucianism. However, anger and distrust of the United States and the refusal of the Chinese government to sign the Treaty of Versailles turned students, intellectual activists, and the Chinese people against such values and towards support for the newly formed Chinese Communist Party in 1921 (Hunt, 2014; Shan, 2020).

Years of conflict between Communist revolutionaries and the Nationalist Party led by Chiang Kai-shek, which supported traditional Confucianist values, along with Sino-Japanese wars prevented any semblance of democratic governance from taking hold and had a strong influence on the development of the Chinese political system. It is a far cry from objective neutral competence, and shared power under democratic governance that seeks to separate politics from administration. Today, the CCP continues to limit access to information through the “Great Firewall of China.” This limits the perspective of the Chinese people to that espoused by the party. A China further isolated by dis-investment and sanction by the West seems unlikely to look towards democratic governance that reduces the role of the party and separates politics of governance from the administration of government.

REFERENCES


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