CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

Introduction: The Evolving and Eclectic Modern Chinese State

DAVID SHAMBAUGH

THERE are few issues that have interested China scholars over the years as the evolution of the Chinese state.[1] As the following chapters illustrate, the Chinese state in the modern era has been a particularly dynamic entity. While it has evolved, the Chinese state has shed and absorbed a variety of organizational and normative features – becoming, over time, an eclectic amalgam.

CHINA'S ECLECTIC STATE

Unlike many Western polities that have evolved over the same period of time generally within a singular liberal paradigm, the modern Chinese state has undergone several macro transitions: from imperial to republican to revolutionary communist to modernizing socialist and, in Taiwan, to democratic phases. While radically different in its basic ethos and organizational structure in each phase (monarchical-republican-Leninist-liberal), the Chinese state on the mainland has had three enduring missions: modernization of the economy, transformation of society, and defense of the nation against foreign aggression. The intended goals of social transformation varied (from neo-Confucianist to neofascist to radical Maoism to pragmatic Dengism), but for more than a century these have been the central and consistent missions of the Chinese state regardless of their fundamentally different cast. As one evolved to the next, some elements of the past survived each transition and were woven

[1] Recently, for example, see the masterful study by R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

into new institutional frameworks. Each new departure was never total, although all were sharp and each sought to "overthrow" and replace the former. In reality, though, each new Chinese state maintained certain features of the old. Moreover, in each phase, different foreign elements were imported and grafted on to the evolving indigenous root, creating an ever-more complex hybrid. This eclectic state is apparent from examining the evolving tables of organization of successive Chinese states, but is particularly evident when one speaks with bureaucrats and officials of different government ministries, different components of the military and security apparat, and educational institutions. In interviewing Chinese officials, bureaucrats, and cadres on the Chinese mainland and Taiwan today, one encounters distinct institutional identities, which seem to derive, at least in part, from the different foreign nations that served as "models" of administrative development and trained officials accordingly. These organizational identities exist apart from bureaucratic missions and "turf," as they help to form a kind of "inner ethos" within different state organs – thus giving rise to multiple, coexistent, and competitive subidentities within the eclectic modern "Chinese state."

As the Chinese state evolved over time and took on different missions, it varied in size, scope, and organizational complexity. The ensuing chapters in this volume elaborate this in great detail. The late imperial state, from the late Ming dynasty through the "High Qing" period, expanded constantly to manage the ever-growing state monopolies over key commodities, irrigation and agriculture, local taxation, and management of commercial and diplomatic interactions with foreign "barbarians" as well as those in the "Sinic zone" of the "tributary system." Late Qing efforts at military modernization, the policy of building "shipyards and arsenals," also spawned new industrial structures and bureaucracies. By the time of its collapse, the imperial Chinese state was a sprawling and unwieldy set of bureaucracies (one might say that it collapsed under its own weight). The early republican government, after the revolution of 1911 (*Xinhai Geming*), produced a more circumscribed state apparatus, although it never fully took shape and soon was limited to a finite sphere of activity as warlords dominated and administered different sections of China. When the Nationalist state finally eliminated warlordism and constituted a new government in Nanjing in 1928, the Chinese state had shrunk and been functionally redefined from its imperial predecessors. The Nanjing Government was an eclectic mix of some late imperial organs, but it also drew on a range of foreign institutional models: Japanese, German, British, Soviet,

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

and American.[2] Despite these reforms, the "reach of the state" remained geographically and functionally limited; the rule of law did not underpin government activity; while a variety of neofascist paramilitary thugs, secret police, and gangs coerced the populace to comply with supposed government edicts. After the Japanese invasion, the Nationalist state, as a functioning national entity, collapsed for all ostensible purposes. With the victory of the Chinese Communists in 1949, the state began to grow again. While retaining some elements of the imperial and Nationalist organizational structure, it essentially morphed into a cloned version of the "High Stalinist" Soviet communist state. This produced a variety of new structural and functional hierarchies. Mao's various attempts at social engineering and transformation also contributed to the growth of the party-state, particularly at the local level.[3] With the post-Great Leap economic reforms of the early 1960s, the state and its purview grew further – which had much to do with Mao's attempts to attack and reduce it during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). With post-Mao economic, scientific, and military reforms under Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese state was reconfigured and grew in size yet again, although its scope of activity was reduced. By the 1980s, however, the size of government had become an impediment to economic, scientific, and military modernization. As a result, the government undertook four successive waves of retrenchment, downsizing, and streamlining (1982, 1988, 1993, 1998) in attempts to improve efficiency and economies of scale. Still, the Chinese state today remains a sprawling set of functional and territorial bureaucracies, and possesses the largest number of bureaucrats of any government in the world.

THEMES

The contributors to this volume trace this historical evolution of successive Chinese states, and ably capture the complexities of each distinct phase. In the process, vast amounts of information are distilled for the reader.

H. Lyman Miller begins (Chapter 1) with an overview assessment of the late imperial state, from the mid-sixteenth century to the 1911 Revo-

[2] This is recognized, for example, by Julia Strauss in her *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927–1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[3] See Timothy Cheek and Tony Saich, eds., *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China, 1949–1965* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1997).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

lution. He sets forth a number of themes and identifies several components of the modern Chinese state that are seen in subsequent chapters. Students and scholars of twentieth-century Chinese states will be struck by the numerous continuities with China's *ancien régime*. Despite the twin revolutions of the twentieth century (1911 and 1949) and the reinvention of the Nationalist state on Taiwan after 1949, Miller's chapter is a refreshing reminder that, organizationally and behaviorally, the Ming and Qing state practices presaged their twentieth-century counterparts. Consider the following examples noted in Chapter 1.

The legitimization of the late-imperial state was the product of, among other things, a moralistic ideology (neo-Confucianism), which was propagated through a variety of state organs. Concomitantly, the educational system was highly elitist and a tool for propagating and inculcating the official cant in the educated literati who staffed the state – who, in turn, were co-opted and patronized by central and local elites. With neo-Confucian orthodoxy the ethical-moral basis of rule, there was a natural ritualistic basis of state authority. Regime change in such a system was thus precipitated more by the perceived loss of moral authority (the "Mandate of Heaven") than as the result of the incompetence of rulers or their unpopular policies. Needless to say, there was no routinized process of elite turnover or regime change. Miller notes the longstanding, and chronic, Chinese inability to manage what nowadays is called leadership succession. In traditional China, as today, leaders stay in office until they become incapacitated, die, or are overthrown by rivals. He further calls attention to the endemic maneuvering for power among the elite in the imperial court, eunuchs, and members of the emperor's clan.

It is important that Miller's chapter also delineates how the Chinese state was structured and ruled over the millennia, and how imperial China established a "modern" state structure long before the West. The precursor of the centralized administrative system established in France under Louis XIV had existed in a highly complex and functional form in China at least since the Song dynasty – indeed, as noted by French historian Jacques Gernet, the totality of imperial Chinese state control over the population, economy, and military far exceeded that of the embryonic modern European state.[4] While reaching its zenith in the Song and

[4] Jacques Gernet, "Introduction," in Stuart R. Schram, ed., *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press and London: School of Oriental & African Studies, 1987), pp. xxii.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

Ming dynasties, the Chinese state dates to the third century B.C. – easily the earliest known government in human history. By the "High Qing" period, as Miller notes in his chapter, many of the attributes now associated with the "modern" state functioned smoothly in China. China developed functionally defined and highly specialized civil and military bureaucracies, stretching vertically from capital to localities. Central edicts and laws (and indeed this was a system based on law and an extensive codified judicial system) were implemented by an extensive corps of civil servants, the "mandarinate," who underwent lengthy exam-based training and were subject to meritocratic criteria of performance and promotion. The military was a similarly elite system, with strategically garrisoned troops. Miller also describes the system of internal government communications, and the internal organization of the imperial court, which were also highly advanced and specialized.[5] The central state established procedures and humiliating rituals for dealing with foreigners, particularly non-Sinic "barbarians." It also established state monopolies over the production and distribution of key commodities, such as salt, water, and bronze.

Despite the reality of the highly advanced imperial Chinese state, Miller also draws attention to its limits. Fiscally, the late imperial state had a weak capacity to extract resources and revenue from the populace. One result of this inability was that the central state did not possess the means to redistribute resources to needy sectors or invest in strategic priority projects. A value-added tax on commerce would have gone far to fill state coffers and stimulate growth in key industries. Many historians, notably the late Joseph Needham, point to this fact as one of the key reasons that China remained, in essence, a handicraft economy and never industrialized when the West did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He further argued that, while science was highly developed in imperial and late imperial China, there were few commercial incentives to create the investment necessary to convert "basic" science into "applied" technology. The social stratification of society, which placed merchants at the bottom of the social ladder, was a further impediment.

Finally, Miller's chapter discusses the limits on state power at the local level and the persistent centrifugal forces in Chinese history that have always made it difficult for the sovereign to extend total rule over its sub-

[5] Also see Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

jects in such a far-flung empire. The lowest representatives of the imperial state were the district and county magistrates, but their writ of rule was extremely circumscribed as their jurisdictional responsibilities numbered hundreds of thousands of subjects. In an effort to maintain some semblance of control over local security and trade, Miller notes, the *baojia* and *lijia* systems, respectively, were established. But this was not sufficient – the local magistrates had to enter into an extensive web of patron-client ties with local elites, the rural gentry, and militias.[6]

Thus Miller paints a picture of the late imperial state as having developed a highly centralized and specialized bureaucracy, but one that encountered real difficulties extending its writ over society. The "minimalist state" reigned, he argues, but did not really rule. It was only with the establishment of the republic, after 1911 and particularly after 1937, that the penetrative, mobilizational, and extractive elements associated with strong state capacity were truly established – and these were, of course, taken to an extreme under Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist state.

The steady erosion of late imperial state capacity, described by Miller, set the stage first for the "Self-Strengthening Movement" (*Zi Qiang Yundong*) of the 1870s and then the attempted reforms of 1898 – which, while ultimately failing, served as the bridge to the twentieth century, republicanism, and a more modern state for China. Together they set the Chinese state on the paths of modern industrialization, military modernization, scientific inquiry, and Western educational reform. These twin movements were inspired by studying a combination of Japanese Meiji reforms, European industrial and military strategies, and American science and education. To be sure, the dismemberment of China at the hands of Western powers and Japan spurred the urgency of the mission. From that point on, state-building in modern China was equated with nation-building, and the majority of Chinese elites agreed that a strong state was necessary to guide economic and military development. Only with a strong nation could China overcome its weaknesses, repel aggressors, and regain China's rightful place in the world as a modern power with dignity and self-respect. This has been the singular mission of Chinese statesmen ever since.

The Chinese state during the republican era is the subject of Chapter 2, by Ramon Myers. The republican era (1911–1949) was one of a series

[6] See, for example, Frederic C. Wakeman, Jr., and Carolyn Grant, eds., *Conflict and Control in Late-Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

of abortive initiatives, failed constitutionalism, and persistent militarism and war. In such an environment, the new republican state was constantly on the defensive – against bandits and warlords, opposition communist armies, invading Japanese forces, rebellious commanders, incompetent and corrupt officials, a factionalized and bloodthirsty political elite, personalistic rule, and the dictatorial persona of Chiang Kai-shek. This was not the way the father of modern China, Sun Yat-sen, had envisioned it. Sun's Three People's Principles (nationalism, people's rights, and people's welfare) offered a blueprint for a modern democratic state, a modern society, and a modern economy. But, as Myers shows, not all agreed with Sun's vision. Influential intellectuals such as Liang Qichao disagreed that the Chinese people were ready for such modernity, arguing instead that an extended "enlightened autocracy" was required for an indeterminate period of tutelage (just prior to his death, Sun agreed). Myers cites Thomas Metzger's belief that these two differing visions were not only different in terms of their estimate of China's social structure, but they also represented, respectively, "transformative" (Sun) versus "accommodative" (Liang) modes of statecraft. These differing approaches illustrate the two distinct strands of Chinese statecraft – sweeping "totalism" versus incremental pragmatism – which later became manifest during the People's Republic in the contrasting approaches of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.

The republic's first president, Yuan Shikai, advocated state-strengthening and had little time for the constitutional constraints on executive power or his rule. Myers shows how Yuan Shikai ruled as an autocrat and schemed to install his militarist cronies in power. Yuan even attempted to restore the monarchy and crown himself emperor in 1916, but this effort failed and he died a year later. Various military strongmen vied for the control of the national government and north China for the ensuing twelve years, a period during which centralized rule and national unity collapsed in the face of warlords, personalistic rule, and constantly shifting factions and coalitions.[7] During this period the central state, in effect, collapsed. The anarchic period came to an end when a coalition of military forces, led by Chiang Kai-shek, launched the "Northern Expedition" from Guangdong in 1927, and swept up to the Yangzi Valley. This effort was ultimately successful in unifying much of the country under a single government, established in Nanjing in 1928.

[7] See Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

Thereafter, for the next decade prior to the full Japanese invasion, the Nationalist state in Nanjing reestablished and reconstituted itself (the "Nanjing Decade"). Unfortunately, as Myers traces in illuminating detail, the Guomindang (Nationalist) party-state fell prey to many of the same machinations and bad luck that beset its predecessor. Nonetheless, the Nanjing government was able to constitute itself organizationally and programmatically to a considerable extent.[8] Myers interestingly shows how Sun Yat-sen's ideology combined with neo-Confucian values and Leninist organizational techniques during this period to constitute a unique hybrid form of Chinese state. The underside of this state was the neofascism expressed in Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement and gangster-like terror against political enemies. Myers also shows how this was a period of bureaucratic growth and economic development. Unfortunately, domestic and international security concerns preoccupied Chiang and his government, requiring the diversion of substantial resources not only into the military and paramilitary security services, but also into defense industries. The Nanjing Government also fell prey to the same cancer that plagued the late imperial state (and present-day regime): fiscal insolvency due to a weak tax base and deficit spending. Following the anti-Japanese war the hyperinflationary spiral caused by deficit spending, poor macroeconomic management, and an uncontrolled money supply left the nation bankrupt and the populace destitute. This was a major contributing factor to the collapse of the Nationalist state, causing the government to flee to Taiwan.

Once on Taiwan, the Guomindang-led Nationalist state reconstituted itself, under the protection of the United States. This is the subject of Chapter 3, by Bruce Dickson. As Dickson notes at the outset, from the vantage point of the end of the twentieth century and after five decades of growth, the Nationalist state on Taiwan appears to be a textbook case of a modern and democratic Chinese state. Dickson reminds us, however, that this has not always been the case, and that the Nationalist state on Taiwan also had a long, dark history of oppression and authoritarianism under martial law. But, throughout, Taiwan reaped the benefits of state-led development – doing much to coin the term "the developmental state."

Dickson shows how the state on Taiwan evolved over time and drew upon an "uneasy amalgam of traditions" from imperial China, the Nationalist era on the mainland, as well as distinctive features of Taiwan.

[8] See Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities*.

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

It also drew heavily upon American advice and advisors. Taiwan's political elite since has been almost entirely U.S.-educated.

The Guomindang transferred the five-branch organization of government from the mainland to Taiwan, and for awhile this centralized "national" system was superimposed on the "provincial" government on the island, but this bifurcated fiction eventually gave way to a unified system in 1997 when the provincial level of government was abolished. Once this was formally done, any pretense to the Nationalists' claim to sovereignty over the mainland disappeared. Subsequently, the Nationalist state on Taiwan has maintained that there exists a situation of "one nation, divided country" with two ruling "political entities" which should deal with each other on the basis of "special state-to-state relations." For many years the new Nationalist state on Taiwan was merely a tool in the Guomindang's hands, during the long period of martial law under Chiang Kai-shek. But following the Generalissimo's death in 1975 and the ascent of his son Chiang Ching-kuo, martial law was gradually relaxed until its formal elimination in 1987. This decree opened the door, under Chiang Ching-kuo's successor, native Taiwanese Lee Teng-hui, to amend the Constitution, disband the security state and release political prisoners, give increasing power to the legislative branch, permit opposition parties, institute island-wide elections, and establish – for the first time in Chinese history – a true democratic and popularly elected state/government. To be sure, this has been (and still is) a bumpy political process, as the system is still fraught with corruption and vote-buying. Although immature, the democratic Nationalist state on Taiwan has provoked extreme displeasure from Beijing, which tried to influence the first-ever presidential elections in 1996 with a barrage of ballistic missile "tests" near the island, aimed at intimidating voters. President Lee has also successfully overhauled the Guomindang by bringing large numbers of native Taiwanese, like himself, into the party at all levels. As a result, Dickson notes that the Nationalist state on Taiwan can no longer be regarded as an unwelcome occupying force. Yet the twin processes of Taiwanization and democratization have precipitated a profound identity crisis for the inhabitants of the island: Are they Chinese, Taiwanese, or both? Is Taiwan part of or separate from China? These are core issues that will continue to plague the collective identity of Taiwan's citizens and politicians, as well as the governments in Beijing, Washington, and throughout East Asia. Despite this uncertain identity, the Nationalist state on Taiwan is unique in Chinese history.

The "democratic breakthrough" on Taiwan contrasts sharply with

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
0521776031 - The Modern Chinese State
Edited by David Shambaugh
Excerpt
More information

Communist Party rule on the Chinese mainland. Chapter 4, on the Maoist state, by Frederick Teiwes, elucidates the "totalistic state" that Mao and his comrades built after 1949, which was torn asunder in 1966–67 during the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution." Teiwes distinguishes Maoist totalism from classic totalitarianism on the basis of several indicators: the mode of policy implementation, the broad relationship of state to society, the nature of the party-army relationship, the degree of factionalism among the political elite, and the degree to which state control was founded on perceived legitimate authority or simply brute force. Teiwes further finds that the unique revolutionary experience of the Chinese Communists had much to do with how they adapted Soviet Leninist practices to create the totalist Maoist state. From its outset, Teiwes finds, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) embraced a far more devolved and decentralized model of rule than its Soviet counterparts, and the "mass line" and "united front" strategies contrasted sharply with the insular and conspiratorial style of the Bolsheviks. He also notes that Chinese Communist leaders adopted a greater degree of collective decision-making, at least until Mao gained unquestioned preeminence. Yet, normatively, Teiwes argues that the CCP implemented strict Leninist discipline within the party and adopted the "organizational weapon" of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" to extinguish domestic political enemies as well as significant segments of the populace. The harsh reality of China under Mao was that tens of millions perished in political "campaigns" (*yundong*), targeted purges, or as the result of state and nature-induced famine.

Organizationally, Professor Teiwes sketches the structure of the Maoist state and finds that there was "considerable structural continuity" throughout the period 1949–76. Of course, during the Cultural Revolution (particularly 1966–72) the central and provincial party and state apparat was decimated, and much of it ceased functioning. In its place, new structures – such as Revolutionary Committees – were formed, and the "affirmative action" policies of putting workers, peasants, and soldiers (*gong-nong-bing*) in positions of governmental and enterprise authority were implemented. Teiwes provides a detailed description of the structure and functioning of the CCP and its constituent Central Committee departments. This vertical hierarchical party-state system borrowed from the Soviet Union formed the backbone of Chinese Leninism and penetrated society to an extent far greater than imperial, late imperial, or the series of Nationalist governments were ever capable of. Central to this apparat was the Leninist *nomenklatura*, the role of internal security

© Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org