

Please Let Us Know Next Time You Are in Ottawa / Beijing: Comparing the Relationship Between Academic Research and the Forging of Government Policy in China and Canada

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The structure and function of universities in China and universities in Canada appear quite similar. Scholars in both places lecture to undergrads and supervise graduate theses and in addition Chinese and Canadian universities expect their professors to engage in research and publish the findings in academic journals.

But there is a fundamental difference in the assigned mandate of universities in China and the self-perception of universities in the Canada. For example Fudan University's website under "Current Leadership" shows a hierarchical listing with the University Chinese Communist Party Secretary, his two deputies, the eight members of the University Chinese Communist Party Standing Committee and the Secretary for the University Chinese Communist Party Disciplinary Commission at the top of the page. The University President, two executive vice-presidents, five vice-presidents and four assistant presidents are placed underneath and subordinate to the listing of the University's Chinese Communist Party leaders.¹ On the face of it, at least this suggests that Fudan professors are expected to respond to the leading dictates of the Chinese Communist Party. Teaching and research should therefore be consistent with and enhance the Marxist program of the Chinese Communist Party. For example affirmation by the university professors that multi-party democracy based on free and fair elections and separation of the powers of the executive, legislative and judicial branches would serve China's national goals better than the existing authoritarian one-Party rule has led to sanctions against Chinese academics who have openly expounded such a perspective, so most of those who are sympathetic to liberal democratic approaches find it prudent to not express them openly and directly. Professors in Chinese universities are essentially civil servants with cadre rank whose ultimate function within the Party-State is to support the purposes of the current regime in China.

Canadian universities like our counterparts in China are also public institutions largely funded by government. Their academic programming is subject to extensive monitoring and review by provincial authorities to ensure that the institutions are fulfilling provincial standards for quality of education. But the process of supervision of Canadian universities is carried out through arms-length structures. Attempts by governments and political parties to impinge on the liberal democratic principles of independent inquiry and scholarly freedom through administrative measures is not tolerated by the academy in Canada. There are strong institutions

¹ "Xianren lingdao" (Current leadership). Accessed April 23, 2011. http://fudan.edu.cn/new_genview/leader.htm

including rigorously independent faculty unions that explicitly function to protect academic freedom in universities in Canada. But there is a contemporary trend of increasing prevalence of non-academics in university administration. This trend corresponds to a proliferation of development of bureaucratic structures to put the fiscal arrangements for university academic units on business principles of profit and loss. There is concern among professors that these can work at cross purposes to principles of scholarly integrity.

Looking further at Fudan's website the University identifies itself as subordinate to both the Central Ministry of Education and to the Municipal Government of Shanghai.² As a colleague there expresses it "the City of Shanghai and the Ministry of Education fund the University so we are required to respond to the demands of the development of Shanghai and of the Chinese nation as a whole"³ The University is thus conceived as a training institution and think tank in support of the imperatives of the Chinese state.

Fudan professors are encouraged to compete for research projects in response to the needs of the current five-year plan as assigned by the Shanghai Government and the Central Ministry of Education. Some of these projects are highly specific nature, while others tend to define looser parameters as to the proposal requirements. These usually come out in tranches annually, but sometimes if the regime identifies a more immediate issue a call for proposals will come out in between.

It is expected that professors who seek promotion should have succeeded in being granted Government research funding or funding from foreign funding agencies.⁴ . Aside from the professional benefits of successfully competing for research funding, there are personal benefits as well. This that there is more latitude in use of funds granted than would be the case for comparable Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded projects. So funds are able to be applied to some entertainment and travel that might not be considered directly related to the research topic and typically 10% of the funding does not need to be accounted for at all.

But the quality of the Chinese Government funded research may be wanting due to two factors. First of all Chinese scholars complain that awards may be made more of the basis of personal connections and exchange of favours rather than objective assessment on academic grounds of the merits of competing proposals. Secondly the highly programmatic and specific applied nature of the projects put out in the Government calls for proposals may not speak to the

² "Fudan gaikuang" (Fudan Profile). Accessed April 23, 2011. http://fudan.edu.cn/new_genview/genview.htm

³ Telephone interview April 20, 2011, translated by me.

⁴ A list of projects of the School of Social Development and Public Policy at Fudan that are not classified Government research is given here: "Keyan xiangmu" (Research Projects). Accessed April 26, 2011. <http://pubmanage.fudan.edu.cn/%E7%A7%91%E7%A0%94%E9%A1%B9%E7%9B%AE.html>

scholarly interests of the political science applicants, so there may a certain attitude of "going through the motions" in fulfillment of the grant requirements.

Nevertheless high quality policy papers which are filtered up through the system and may be read by senior policy-makers can be awarded generous cash prizes.

In addition distinguished scholars from universities the social science academy system and the Central Party School are often called upon to participate in academic seminars directed to Chinese civil servants and Party officials that are attended by political leaders even as high as at the Politburo level.

Canadian China Scholars and Canada's China Policy-making Process

Certainly the Government of Canada does not so directly conceive of university departments of political science as a significant source of policy advice. Similarly Canadian universities do not give much professional credit to scholars who do applied work for governments. While the mandate of professors is ascribed in three aspects of teaching, research and service to the community, the last is not readily quantified in the sense that a sound record of service to the community even if in the form of advising a government through extensive preparation of policy documents is unlikely to be a very significant factor in tenure and promotion decisions or highly regarded in one's annual report to the dean.

Furthermore Canada does not have a tradition of university professors spending part of their careers in government service. In contrast, the Government of the United States has employed U.S. university professor China specialists in key policy roles, These include Susan Shirk former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State during the Clinton administration in the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs), and Richard H. Solomon United States (Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 1989 to 1992), and Michel Oksenberg who served as a senior staff member on the National Security Council under the Carter administration, overseeing issues involving China and East Asia.

Within the Chinese system there is the possibility of promotion through the ranks to senior Government posts. For example Wang Huning has worked his way from professor of International Politics at Fudan to Dean and now is a member of the secretariat of the 17th CPC Central Committee and director of the policy research office of the CPC Central Committee.⁵

For some 35 years after Canada established diplomatic relations with China a Canadian academic was seconded to work as a diplomatic in the Canadian Embassy in Beijing at

⁵ "Wang Huning" Accessed April 26, 2011. http://www.chinavivae.com/biography/Wang_Huning%7C3538

the relatively junior rank of First Secretary or Counsellor. Most of the "Post Sinologists" administered cultural and educational programs as well as reading the "circ pack" a daily compendium of all the telexes between Peking and Ottawa. Later on with advent of internet e-mail it became impossible to monitor and comment on all communications in and out of the Embassy. Moreover DFAIT had by this time developed a cohort of diplomats with extensive China expertise and the Post Sinologist program was terminated.

But some Canadian political scientists with China expertise do have informal or contractual relationships with agencies of the Government of Canada that are involved in development and implementation of Canada's China policy. For example in 2005, DFAIT contracted an academic to make an assessment of the Canada-China bilateral human rights dialogue which led to hearings about this program in the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee International Human Rights Sub-Committee and subsequently by the full Foreign Affairs Committee. Several Canadian political scientists were among those called to give evidence to these hearings.⁶

But in the case of that Report the scholar in question had an active security clearance as this was essential to accessing classified Government documents relating to the Dialogue. Part of the report that touched on classified matters was not able to be released publicly. The fact that so much of Canada's political interaction with China is kept secret as it impinges on Canada's national security makes participation of Canadian academics in this aspect of policy formulation problematic. The process of getting cleared to Top Secret can take several months and is highly intrusive. The clearance at this level must be renewed every 3 years. Some Canadian China scholars might not be eligible for this level of security clearance.

Aside from DFAIT, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service has invited Canadian China scholars to speak at the CSIS HQ in Ottawa providing reimbursement of travel costs and a small honorarium. Nevertheless the content of these presentations does not closely match CSIS's ongoing priorities with regard to China and many CSIS officers with responsibility for China programming may not take time out of their work schedules to attend the talk or small group discussion afterwards.

Similarly the International Assessment Secretariat of the Privy Council Office has arranged roundtables with Canadian China scholars and lower-level officers in the Communications Security Establishment, the Department of Defense, CSIS, and DFAIT. These also tend to be of the "current situation in China" nature and so do not allow the academic to

⁶ "Links relating to Charles Burton's DFAIT report Assessment of the Canada-China Bilateral Human Rights Dialogue and related Parliamentary Committee Hearings." Accessed April 30, 2011. https://docs.google.com/View?id=dcfd6fxz_20377xgvk2zb

have any meaningful input into policy matters as such.

The Asia Pacific Foundation and now the Canadian International Council among other think tanks have produced reports with analysis and recommendations for Canada's China policy but there is not a lot of evidence that these have significantly impacted on the Government's approach to China. Some of these have had their recommendations reported in Canadian newspapers which may draw the attention of concerned citizens and their political representatives.⁷

Some multi-year Social Science and Humanities Research Council funded research projects do have content that is relevant to Canada's China programming, but mechanisms for review and implementation of the findings by Government have not been developed. Dissemination of the results at conferences, through scholarly publications or monographs is of limited impact on Canada's policy formulation process as most civil servants do not give priority to reading scholarly publications, even those who research has been funded by Government. But relevant publications do circulate through the internal mail in Canada's government agencies concerned with China policy in Canada and China.

But there are specific aspects of the Canadian Government's interaction with China for which civil servants have drawn on the expertise of Canadian academics who specialize in China. Canadian political scientists have testified as expert witnesses in refugee hearings, such as the Lai Changxing matter, as well as espionage-related matters legal proceedings. The International Refugee Board has invited Canadian China experts to write reports on matters relating to refugee claims. Some of these have included travel to China to make investigations. The IRB has also invited Canadian political scientists to participate in nationwide video-conferences with question and answer sessions to assist Board members in making more informed determinations. Citizenship and Immigration Canada has similarly invited Canadian China specialists to discuss matters relating to fraudulent visa applications. But these processes are largely ad hoc.

It would be fair to say that the expertise of Canadian academics working on China is underutilized by Government. Now that the Post Sinologist program has been wound down, there are no formal regular funding mechanisms or institutional programs to bring China scholars "into the loop." Canada's government programming in this aspect does not appear to be as effective as that of other nations. This is an area that deserves a proper comparative study. But it is evident that Canada's inability to effectively mobilize the China expertise in our universities

⁷ See for example "Links relating to Charles Burton's CIC report A Reassessment of Canada's Interests in China and Options for Renewal of Canada's China Policy." Accessed April 30, 2011. https://docs.google.com/View?id=dfd6fxz_20377xgvk2zb

almost certainly has an impact on Canada's capacity to innovate in making more effective, efficient and systematic China programming. Canada's national interest suffers as a consequence

Canadian China Scholars and China 's Policy-making Process

In the early years of China's post-Mao reform and opening, the reverence with which the counsel of invited "foreign experts" promoting open markets and liberal democracy was often received was probably based on a misimpression of how efficacious the recommendations of outsiders could be in facilitating China's escape from "backwardness." Today the writings of foreign China specialists that are at odds with the Chinese Communist Party's official perspectives tend to be pro forma rejected, in formal interactions at least, as based in "not understanding the situation in China."

Nevertheless Western China scholars continue to be invited to participate in academic exchanges with Chinese colleagues in universities, academies of social science at central and regional levels and at Party schools at the central, provincial and municipal levels.

Many of these contacts are largely responsive to foreign approaches. Canadian International Development Agency programming in good governance, democratic development and human rights fulfils a political mandate in Canada to promote pluralism and human rights abroad. Certainly the motivation on the Chinese side for undertaking such projects in political sensitive areas is likely quite mixed.

Some Chinese organizations who characterize themselves as NGOs are highly reliant on foreign origin grants to meet their pay roll and operating costs and have quite sophisticated skills in successfully fulfilling the onerous requirements of CIDA and other national development agencies and foundations governance programs' application process.

For larger institutions under the leadership of Chinese Communist Party branches there is also a desire to engage Canadian China specialists and attempt to defuse Canadian concerns over reports of Chinese Government human rights abuses. In general there is a mandate to make "the Canadian friends" understand that China is genuinely moving toward respect for human rights and democracy but due to China's distinctive culture, historical and developmental circumstances this cannot be accomplished "overnight." So the Chinese colleagues counsel that patience and trust are very important in Canada-China governance programming and that it is unrealistic to expect measurable progress in human rights and political democratization.

The Chinese scholars who are active in interactions with Canadian academics are subject to internal regulations governing academic contacts with foreign scholars. So there

is a tendency for the Chinese participants in international conferences to simply repeat well-established Chinese Government positions. Similarly, Canadian scholars do not identify their participation in these conferences with Chinese colleagues as central to their academic work and show little serious commitment to it. As consequence, the Canadians often lack sophistication in responding to the Chinese discourse. The interaction can resemble a “dialogue of the deaf” with stilted statements of little scholarly value and almost never any follow up collaboration between the Chinese and Canadian scholars. As one Chinese participant in a CIDA-funded activity characterized it in a private conversation: “You say your piece. I say my piece. Then we have a banquet to celebrate. Then we all go home. Come back next year for the same thing again. No progress.”⁸

But foreign scholars, particularly if the conference or seminar is conducted in the Chinese language without interpretation, can say things that their Chinese colleagues may be thinking but would be reluctant to raise in such a forum themselves for fear of getting too close to limits of acceptable political discourse, the “high voltage lines” as these are known. So Canadian participation may help push debate on certain matters forward albeit under quite restrictive parameters. Moreover Chinese institutions may be interested in the alternative approaches to knowledge on political matters by Canadian academics in anticipation that some of the information proffered, after “critical acceptance” (*pipande xishou*) filtering, may be useful to the “building of socialism with Chinese characteristics,” that is to say in responding to China’s crisis of modernity in ways that do not undermine the continued authoritarian one-Party rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

But there are foreign contacts that are initiated by Chinese institutions who are even in some cases prepared to subsidize international travel from Canada and expenses in China and offer an honorarium to a Canadian China scholar. This can be understood in the context of the mandate of the institutions like the Central Party School⁹ or the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences “to promote research and to undertake and fulfill key state research projects in light of China’s national conditions, economic and social development strategies and the trends”¹⁰ [sic]. In terms of political science-related research the Central authorities task these think tanks with quite challenging assignments. In particular for example how to bolster the legitimacy of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party by showing in a meaningful and convincing way how the Party’s current political, economic and social program is consistent with the ideological bases of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. Or how to effectively address destabilizing ethnic discontent in Tibet and Xinjiang.

⁸ Private meeting in Beijing, September 5, 2005.

⁹ David Shambaugh . “Training China's Political Elite: The Party School System.” *The China Quarterly*, 196 (2008): 827-844

¹⁰ “Chinese Academy of Social Sciences”. Accessed April 26, 2011. http://www.gov.cn/english/2005-12/02/content_116009.htm

So there are some matters of sufficient concern to the regime that Canadian experts are solicited to participate in scholarly exchange with a view to assisting the Chinese think tank in providing data and approaches that will feed into reports to the national leadership's policy making process.

An example of such a project initiated spontaneously by the Chinese side in the fall of 1991 became the "Chinese Academy of Social Sciences – Royal Society of Canada Democracy Project." The project was broached as part of an assignment characterized by the initial Chinese interlocutor as originating with Jiang Zemin the President of China himself. Teams of specialists from CASS were sent out to explore the nature of democratic institutions in a range of Asian and European nations as well as Canada. From 1992 to 1998, 18 related conferences were held alternating between Canada and China. Aside from a core group of distinguished political scientists and historians: Stéphane Dion, Peter Russell, Ramsay Cook, Alan Cairns, John Meisel, Blair Neatby and Craig Brown, dozens of Canadians from Government, political parties, NGOs and universities were involved. The five-person Chinese team followed municipal election candidates as they went door to door asking people to vote for them. They attended meetings of Canadian political parties. They met speakers of provincial legislatures. Former heads of the CRTC and the Canada Council explained how cultural policy works in a free society. Figures in Canadian media including Knowlton Nash and Geoffrey Stevens met them. Canadian specialists in tax policy, pensions, and unemployment insurance were all mobilized to explain how Canada's political institutions operate. They met ombudsmen, judges, lawyers, and speakers of parliaments to explore how democratic legislative agendas are set and how it is determined what will be debated in parliament. They even visited the head quarters of the Canadian Communist Party in Toronto. They seemingly wanted to know everything about how Canada's democracy functioned with a view to application of these principles and practices in China. The Chinese delegation asked many interesting questions about Canada's political history such as "After the quiet revolution in Quebec what happened to the priests?" Passing a Zellers with the prominent slogan on its front wall reading "The lowest price is the law," they immediately requested more details on how this Canadian "lowest price law" is implemented and enforced(!) The Chinese working group drafted extensive reports and recommendations for the Chinese Communist Party based on the Canadian information. Then to cap it all off, to mark the 20th anniversary of China's economic reform in December 1998, the Chinese President would make a landmark speech defining Jiang Zemin's contribution to the legacy of Mao Zedong's revolutionary transformation and Deng Xiaoping's introduction of market economics as the engine of the rise of China. Jiang's legacy project was to have been extensive democratic reform of China's political institutions.

But as is clearly evident today, Jiang's 1998 anniversary speech launched no such program of political democratization, despite China's signing of the International Covenant on

Civil and Political Rights earlier that year. In the end the only objectively verifiable evidence that this extensive activity had had any impact was an oral statement by Premier Li Peng to Prime Minister Chretien when Mr. Li made a brief visit to Canada in 1995 in which he briefly thanked Canada for providing China with policy advice on implementation of shared taxation mechanisms for allocation of state revenues between central and provincial governments. Evidently the Canadian expertise had translated into increased access to tax revenues by the Central Government in Beijing thus evidently enhancing the efficacy of the Chinese Communist Party's authoritarian rule. This was not the Canada's intention in funding this program but arguably a consequence not entirely without merit as there was a problem of the capacity of the central government to make transfers for social programming due to a drop in Central revenue as revenues generated by the planned State-owned sector of the economy continued to decline over the those years.

Conclusions

The lack of participation of Canadian political scientists specializing in China studies in Canada's China policy formulation does not serve Canada's national interest well. One might be inclined to attribute this to a lack of vision on the part of Government or to reluctance on the part of civil servants to include outsiders in the governance process. But as this paper has argued there are significant factors prevailing on the Canadian university side that offer a more compelling explanation for this unfortunate state of affairs. Unlike professors in universities in China, Canadian academics do not perceive a professional obligation to serve the imperatives of the Canadian state through their academic work. Nor do Canadian universities offer much professional recognition to preparation of government policy reports.

For these reasons the contributions of Canadian China specialists to policy-related seminars in Canada and in China tend to lack focus and rigour because they are generally perceived by the scholars as a lesser "add-on" to their body of scholarly output. So the papers that Canadian scholar do produce to this end are generally weak and off-topic and of little value to either government in their policy formulation process.

It is unrealistic to expect the Government of Canada to allocate resources to create institutional mechanisms and incentives to better mobilize the China expertise in Canadian universities if the Canadian academics are not prepared to prioritize their commitment to this sort of work over other aspects of their professional activities.

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