

# International Political Science

## Contemporary Chinese Politics

*Editor's Note: The following address, given in Beijing by Tang Tsou, University of Chicago, was translated into English by Wang Wei-cheng of the University of Chicago and Brantly Womack of Northern Illinois University. An introduction has been provided by Theodore Lowi.*

### Introduction

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The address below was given in Chinese on April 29, 1986, on the occasion of the ceremony conferring an honorary professorship of the University of Peking on Tang Tsou, Homer J. Livingston Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago.

The honorary professorship at Peking University is a significant expression of the post-Cultural Revolution spirit in the Chinese universities and is recognized far beyond Peking University as a great national honor. Honorary professorships at Peking University have been conferred upon a number of outstanding Chinese scholars and a small number of foreign scholars. Selection of honorary professors is made in the first instance by the Academic Council of Peking University. It is then reviewed and approved by the Commission on Education under the State Council.

Beyond the distinct honor intended and conferred, the selection of Tsou as honorary professor was apparently related to the Chinese effort to revive political science as a discipline, which had been abolished in the early 1950s when the Chinese authorities uncritically adopted the Soviet model in education. Tsou's presence in China during the aca-

demical year of 1985-86 was seized upon by some Chinese scholars as the right moment to send a signal that they would welcome the help of American political scientists as well as other social scientists to develop a discipline urgently needed by China but also politically more sensitive than any other field. Tsou's honorary professorship also stood as a symbol of the spirit of political toleration, the desire to undertake political reform, and a quest for ideological revitalization.

This change in the political atmosphere in the winter and spring of 1986 is truly remarkable. During the Cultural Revolution, Tsou's book, *America's Failure in China*, was denounced. In 1983, it was still characterized as a book written from the "viewpoint of American bourgeoisie." In a note to a Chinese translation of Tsou's article published in the *China Quarterly* in 1984, the editor of the authoritative journal on party history, *Dongshi Tongxun*, called attention to the article's "limitations derived from the author's viewpoint of 'bourgeois liberalism.'" Tsou's book *The Cultural Revolution and Post-Mao Reforms* was available to the Chinese in early 1986. There, Tsou analyzes the historical functions of the deep penetration of political power into society, its culmination during the Cultural Revolution with catastrophic effects, and the welcomed results of its reversal after 1978 despite the twists and turns of Party policies.

In the address translated here, Tsou tries to examine contemporary Chinese history through the concept of "totalism" as contrasted with "totalitarianism." At one level, Tsou's analysis is complementary and optimistic. The Chinese term which he uses to express the concepts of "totalism" and "totalistic politics" means literally the doctrine of total competence of political power. It does

not carry the opprobrium, ideological overtone of the Chinese translation of the term "totalitarianism," used by the Chinese to characterize Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Furthermore, he links "totalism" with social revolution and gives "totalistic politics" a share of credit in the success in mobilizing and organizing the masses, thus paving the way toward expanding participation.

But at another level, his analysis is unsettling and challenging. By "totalism," Tsou intends to convey the sense of a Party-State that penetrates every level and sphere of society. In this, totalism shares a common element with totalitarianism. Tsou goes a bit further, from an attempt to describe the contemporary Chinese system objectively to an attempt to recommend where the Chinese ought to go next—where the government ought to go with its totalism and where Chinese political science ought to go with its research. As for the government, he argues in effect that they should move from a government based on individuals only as masses toward a concept of real citizenship, including individual rights. At one point he issues a warning that "if social revolution and totalistic politics cannot be kept within certain limits, they can have contrary effects and negative outcomes." Chinese socialism can avoid the negative aspects of totalitarianism by recognizing that the most fundamental value of Marx was that individuals should "fully actualize their ability through creative work." Although the Chinese would come to this from a direction opposite that of the West, the concepts of the individual, of citizenship and of rights should be incorporated as a cornerstone of Chinese socialism.

To Chinese political scientists, Tsou is equally challenging, through the very simple message that the Chinese ought to spend more time studying their own system. And, rather than rejecting the guiding principles and institutions of the West, Chinese scholars ought to study them with the eye toward making reforms in the Chinese system consistent with Chinese tradition and socialist principles.

Although the speech was reported in the

leading newspaper devoted to educational and intellectual matters only in August and printed in an academic journal only in September, the gist of it was widely known in intellectual circles in Beijing almost immediately. An article based on extensive interviews with Tsou was published in two installments in the August and September 1986 issues of a reformist journal, *Dushu*. A report on Tsou's view on human rights was published in the *World Economic Journal* (Shanghai) in October.

The general "process of decompression" was halted abruptly in January of 1987. How far this reversal will go and how long it will last is not a projection that any expert of my acquaintance is willing to make. Nevertheless, it seems very clear at least to me—based upon reactions to Professor Tsou's address, and also upon my five weeks of lecturing and interviewing in several Chinese universities in the summer of 1986—that the energies and spirit of inquiry uncorked by the Chinese reform leaders cannot be put back in the bottle of totalitarianism without a great deal more violence and suppression than even the most right-wing communist apparatchik would appear to be willing or able to employ. The American Political Science Association ought to be proud of the honor bestowed on its colleague Tang Tsou. But this is also an occasion to take more pride in being political scientists, pride in our capacity to keep alive the most fundamental political principle of all, the principle of the individual defined in opposition to the state.

*Epilogue.* When Tsou was in China in 1986, he had thought seriously of developing a project under which American political scientists would help Chinese academics revive political science, as distinguished from the study of international relations, for which Robert Scalapino had already taken the lead by forming a committee three years ago. Now Tsou is in poor health but still believes that this project deserves the attention of American political scientists and expressed at the time of this translation the ardent hope that someone would take up the lead and continue with what he has so effectively begun.