

Policy Culture Seminar, March 24, 2004

Peter Perdue started with an overall view of the Foucauldian concept of “governmentality.” His presentation includes:

1. The general development of the governmentality paradigm from Foucault’s lectures given between 1978 and 1979.
2. A summary of the general thematics of Foucault’s work:
 - The constructed nature of power (power is not understood in the conventional sense of historians and political scientists as “domination, repression”)
 - Power is capillary, found everywhere, in daily interactions.
 - Language and power are mutually constitutive (for instance, the power of classification, creation of concepts)
 - Discontinuities: breakthroughs in discourses occur, [contrary to historians’ stress on continuities and origins.]
 - Biopower: “forms of power exercised over persons specifically in so far as they are thought of as living beings”, subjects as members of population.
 - Governmentality: “A mentality of government which found its way into political discourse at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when a new array of governmental technologies emerged to police, survey, and secure the welfare of the newly constituted object of government: the population.”
[Michael Dutton : p.17n33]
3. A brief recap of Foucault’s seminal essay “governmentality”: Derived from 16c treatises advising princes how to govern others and govern oneself; to go beyond Machiavelli by articulating the rationality of governing without linking it to the personality of the prince. NB principles of upward continuity: first learn to govern yourself then you can govern state; & downward continuity: if state is well run, head of family can govern his family. [same on Daxue!] This downward continuity called police. [cf Daxue!] Economy in modern sense was also introduced into this discourse [economy originally meant household governance]. Governance is the right disposition of things: things means not just territory, population; govt like a ship. Disposition of things means directing to a common good. Law is not what is important. Need for wisdom in direction of things, diligence, like that of bees [Stoic ideal]. . . . The problem of population replaces family model. Population is the ultimate end of governmental savoir.
4. Peter then talked about the Eurocentrism of the governmentality paradigm and its relevance to China studies:
 - Foucault mainly analyzes texts of 18th century France;
 - Internalist view of European thought, only addresses indirectly issues of race, colonialism. Tends to generalize from European experience alone to create model of “modernity” [violating his own strictures on specificity and historicity].

Nevertheless, there are striking resonances between imperial Chinese state and developing European practices of early modern period

- Cf to Weber on Confucianism: police is a rationalism of order. [cf. Confucian statecraft notions]

- p.11 praise of Turkey [post 1648 in Europe] as model of state arranged like a clock [Oriental source of rationality]
- emergence of Stoic ethics connected to duties of ruler to serve people [China: serve the people rhetoric, both Confucian and Communist]
- Civil society not aboriginal, preceding society, but concerns nature of man in society [Confucian embeddedness of human nature in social roles of individuals]
- civil society no longer [end of 19c] can be seen as autonomous element from alien state. [entanglement of state and society]
- Relevance of Foucault's critique of the welfare state to current issues in PRC re: neo-liberal doctrines in socialist transition?

5. Peter then discussed recent uses of governmentality by historians and political scientists:

- Rogaski, Ruth. *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-port China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
Examines link between public health and modernity seen in urban sanitation in Tianjin from late Qing through 1950s. Control of population and directing it toward a common goal of "hygienic modernity" invokes Foucault's themes of biopower, use of statistics, medical gaze, surveillance of living spaces, but also collective mobilization. Notes esp. effectiveness of Japanese colonial regime in cleaning up Tianjin; sequel in 1950s of campaign against anti-biological warfare vectors claimed to be used by US in Korean war led to mass campaigns to kill rats and clean up garbage. Cleanliness continues as an important index of modernity and state legitimacy in PRC China.
- Dutton, Michael Robert. *Policing and punishment in China : from Patriarchy to "the People"*. Cambridge [England] ; New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
One of the best theoretical works that integrates Foucault's paradigms into a long view of the role of "police" in general sense in China from ancient times till the PRC. Tax & pop registers and baojia as mechanisms of collective surveillance are continued in PRC, but Dutton argues they are fundamentally different. Imperial regimes used them to reinforce "patriarchy" [? unspecific], while PRC aimed for non-kin collective classifications. Both reflect the role of registration and language of classification as instruments of governmentality.

Discussion Question: A discussion followed as to whether the relevance of Foucault to the China field should lie in his thematics or methods?

Jing argued that Foucauldian methodology is the real meat of his works, rather than his themes. By that, she meant Foucault's *archaeology*, the description of an archive out of which an event or a discourse emerged. By that word, he does not mean "the mass of texts gathered together at a given period. . . but the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define:

- (1) the limits and forms of the *sayable*. What is possible to speak of? What is the constituted domain of discourse? . . .
- (2) the limits and forms of *conservation*. Which utterances are destined to disappear without any trace? Which entered into memory through ritual recitation, publicity . . .?

- (3) the limits and forms of *memory* as it appears in different discursive formations. What utterances does everyone recognize as valid, debatable, or definitely invalid?
- (4) The limits and forms of *reactivation*. Among the discourses of previous epochs or of foreign cultures, which are retained, which are valued, which are imported...?
- (5) The limits and forms of *appropriation*. What individuals, what groups, or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience? “ (see “Politics and the Study of Discourse”)

Historians are probably more concerned with (4)? while Cultural Studies folks with the rest. One can of course push this further by asking: Which domain above is considered more accessible to your own disciplines? Or, is Foucault’s archaeology relevant to your own discipline?

Peter and Jing disagreed as to whether archaeology is methodologically ‘ahistorical’ or ‘historical.’

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Rob Weller led a discussion on Pasquale Pasquino’s “Theatrum Politicum: The Genealogy of Capital: Police and the State of Prosperity” in *The Foucault Effect*. Rob gave a quick summary of her discussion of the change from "political economy" to "social economy", that is from an economic to a moral discourse, in the 19th century. The key term for her was "pauperism," stemming from Malthus and Sismondi. Rich and poor would always be with us, the argument ran, but "pauperism" is a special problem because of its mobility, independence, improvidence, insubordination, ignorance, etc. It cannot be pinned down by state power and does not seem to respond sensibly to market incentives. And so we end up, by the end of the century, with a world of hygiene movements, education reform, social work (and philanthropy, I would add). She played this up in a Foucault sort of way -- defining pauperism this way justifies an increase in governmentality. But one could also see it as a testament to the limits inherent to the governmentality project.

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Jing introduced Qin Hui’s work and set it up within the context of the importance of *wenti yishi* (problem consciousness) for critically minded Chinese scholars. The seminar group read his interview published in *The Left Review* (see <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR25403.shtml>). Qin Hui is on the agenda this time because he is the April speaker. It would be useful to know a little bit about his intellectual background before he came.

问题意识与主义 (problem vs. theory)

One thing that is striking about influential Chinese social/intellectual thinkers is their astute sensitivity to *wenti yishi*, “problem consciousness.” Those thinkers are critical of Western paradigms and Western isms precisely because they often bring in default agendas and 西方的 *wenti*.

Jing said she shared with them a conviction that 问题意识 needs to be prioritized over 理论. Unfortunately, most disciplines reverse the priority. Mainstream Cultural Studies, for one, is delinquent in fetishizing theories at the cost of 问题意识. The ideal is to have both. Jing quoted Qin Hui to drive home this point:

“In my view, a weakness of the current intellectual scene in China is the separation of debate ‘isms’ from examination of ‘questions’ in social reality. The merit

of general 'isms' lies in universal values that inform them; yet the specific theory of a given 'isms' is usually in response to particular historical questions, not universal ones. Therefore, when we universal values we should be careful not to confuse them with universal questions. My slogan is: 'isms' can be imported; 'questions' must be generated locally; and theories should be constructed independently."

Jing went on to discuss one particular *wenti* (as in *wenti yishi*) with which Qin Hui is preoccupied: the debate over government capacity vs. responsibility.

The current terms of debate are: Whether China should big government (the Left) or small government (the Right)? According to Qin Hui, this is a pseudo-problematic.

According to Qin, the real problem is: how to make a government's power corresponds to its responsibilities.

At the moment, the Chinese Left argues that “政府权力大”。The Right argues: 政府权力小。What they should have argued: 左派应该要求政府权力大，义务也应该大；右派可以要求小政府，可同时应该要求这个政府尽义务。

In Qin Hui's view, the Chinese problem of government should NOT be construed as Big vs. Small government, but rather as 政府的权力与义务对等

Right now, he feels that the Chinese state that has too much power and too few responsibilities— “In China today, we need to restrict powers of the state and enlarge its responsibilities.” For Qin, there should be no conflict between increasing the government responsibility and reducing its powers at the same time.

Questions and Comments from Margaret Woo and Lily Tsai:

Margaret: I agree with Qin Hui's views that the issue is not too much or too little government, but rather, appropriate government responsibilities. However, I was simply commenting on how we need to further the analysis to assess what constitutes appropriate government responsibilities. In other words, **what legitimating principle should we use to determine governmental powers and responsibilities?** I'm assuming that Qin Hui believes in a limited government in the areas of political and civil rights, but greater governmental powers in the areas of socio-economic rights. However, I am not sure that the two areas are as distinct as we may like. Indeed, governmental powers to secure socio-economic rights might mean some infringement on political and civil rights. How do we decide what governmental responsibilities should be when the rights collide?

Lily: In terms of Qin Hui's observations, I think it all depends on what one means by "power" and "small vs. big states." Different concepts of power might be "the right to make decisions concerning the use of an asset," "effective control over decisions," or "the resources under one's control."

My interpretation of Qin Hui's remarks is that both the state's "decisionmaking rights" and the state's "decisionmaking control" should be curtailed by rules which can be enforced against it. The problem right now is that what Guillermo O'Donnell calls a "truncated legality" exists in China -- there is no guarantee that the state will enforce and apply its rules against itself. A is accountable when A has a responsibility or obligation to do X, and B can hold him responsible for doing X. But right now, it's not clear that the state's agents feel an obligation to provide public services, and it's very clear that

citizens (and even other parts of the state) cannot hold the state's agents responsible for providing public services.

So the idea is to set enforceable rules and guidelines that reduce the state's decisionmaking rights and control, thereby making the state more accountable. I don't, however, think accountability necessarily entails democratic institutions, which is what I argue in my diss.

Obligation can be based on social contracts and voluntary consent, but it can also be based on utilitarianism or moral principles of indebtedness and exchange. Institutions based on these can also be self-enforcing.

On a different note, there's also the issue of power as resources, which the "small state, big state" debate often touches on. **Though related, power as (over?) resources should be conceptually distinct from power as decisionmaking rights or control.** The state may have unlimited decisionmaking rights, and even a large amount of decisionmaking control, yet have few fiscal, personnel, infrastructural resources (though resources of course helps it increase its control.)