

A Chinese Kaleidoscope; An American Mosaic

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Immediately after China fought the Second Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese Civil War took place, in which the Chinese Communists seized political power. Liberation ushered in a new era that began with the nullification of laws that had stood for thousands of years. The old laws of the Republican era were abolished, yet were not replaced with new ones.

In this legal vacuum, so-called evil landlord tyrants and counter-revolutionaries were imprisoned or summarily executed. However, some of these people were not really true criminals or bad people. Many good people were treated unjustly under these circumstances. Landlords were all considered by the masses to be capitalists who had deprived the workers of their property, yet amongst the landlords there was no lack of good people. Nevertheless they were all cut down in one stroke. All were sentenced to severe punishments or execution. Generally speaking, the farmers and local cadres would apprehend and convict any group of people with whom they felt a little dissatisfied. Those who were apprehended would be subjected to a public trial in front of a crowd with no judges or lawyers. These criminals were not permitted to speak in their own defense. They would be berated by the crowd, and then taken out and executed by firing squad. There were some people whose punishment would not be as severe as execution, but who were still kidnapped and subject to a mock execution which would leave them severely rattled.

During the fifties this system of merciless public trials was out of control. The upper levels of the Communist leadership saw the situation and realized things were wrong; as a response they established a system of local courts, mid-level courts, and high courts. However, lawyers and judges from the old system could not be used in the new system because they had all come from land-owning or political families and had been sent to reeducation through labor. New judges and lawyers had not been trained, and so there was a serious shortage of legal talent.

Under these circumstances, the children of workers, farmers, and soldiers were promoted in the legal world. However since they lacked legal knowledge, they were of no use when someone was wronged and brought a lawsuit to the courts. Since legal knowledge is very specialized and it was the children of workers, farmers, and soldiers who were acting as judges, people were lucky to encounter a good judge and receive a fair judgment. However those who were less lucky would have even minor crimes severely punished.

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In the early period after liberation in China, although all laws had nominally been abolished, “repressors” such as counter-revolutionaries were still punished severely, so society was actually somewhat stable. The crimes of hoodlums, underworld gangs, and thieves were not at all forgiven however. If a criminal was apprehended, he or she would at least be sentenced to eight or ten years of reeducation through labor, and the more serious criminals would be executed by firing squad. During this time, no matter whether you were in the city or the countryside, you could leave your door open at night and nothing would be stolen. If you were to lose your wallet in a public place, it would always be returned. Even though there were shortages of goods and everyone was living through hardships, no one dared to break the law. The will to survive was strong, and nobody wanted to be sent to their death.

Today’s situation with respect to rule of law is not as good. Although people’s lives have improved, society is unstable. The phenomenon of social instability is present worldwide. With the expansion of civil liberties, criminal sentencing is lenient and society has become disorderly. One reason in particular is the corruption of morals.

The Chinese government, from central government down to local government, is divided into different departments, for example different departments dealing with sanitation, transportation, customs, police, and courts. The purpose of all these agencies is to ensure public safety and serve the people. Generally officials in these departments have special rights to examine and approve applications. Because of this officials are often able to get some private gain from their positions. In Europe and the United States however, officials themselves do not have such privileges, as approval must come from a group of people rather than just one official. Therefore for instance when a business registers, the matter is handled by secretaries or other clerical workers rather than high level officials.

Due to the growing distance between officials and common people, there is a growing number of citizens who are resentful of the unjust treatment and bullying they suffer at the hands of officials. These citizens sometimes then personally contact the official’s superiors and request the opportunity to visit them or just write a letter about the issue. However such complaint letters rarely have much effect.

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Twenty-six: The current time is one of prosperity, but law enforcement is lax and public safety has declined. Petitions are ineffective.

Policemen in China's old society often bullied the common people. So in the early stages after the liberation, the personal integrity of public safety officers experienced a change for the better. They would help the common people with many things, take care of the elderly, and help impoverished households. Those who served as public safety officers were all very honest. Those who were good enough to be called the people's officers truly never went so far as to take a single cent from anyone.

Society is now prospering economically, and has undergone structural changes. Local safety is suffering. Hoodlums, underworld organizations, and evil tyrants have all once again emerged. The police of the past loved the citizens and were close to them, and did not eat at their expense. In present times things are different. Police expect to be entertained at the people's expense, even taking bribes, because their superiors are currying favor with wealthy businesses. So the police want to make connections with factory owners and general managers of businesses, not with the common people.

The courts are divided into civil courts and criminal courts. The civil courts deal mainly with liability cases and business disputes. In each case there is a plaintiff and a defendant. The plaintiff must provide evidence that the defendant has violated a contract or has not paid a debt. The judge will usually try to mediate between the two parties and encourage them to reach a settlement out of court. If a settlement cannot be reached, then the judge will decide whether the defendant owes anything to the plaintiff. In any case, the defendant will not go to jail if the judge rules against him.

Criminal courts deal with all manner of criminal cases for example, theft, robbery, fraud, and murder. The plaintiff in these cases is not the victim of the crime, but the police and inspectors. In the Chinese system, the police and inspectors present the evidence against the defendant, and the defendant's lawyer speaks in his or her defense. The judge then decides whether to convict the defendant, and then hands down a sentence if he or she is convicted. Besides these two types of courts, the United States also has courts dedicated to issues with buildings, families, and inheritance.

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In Europe and the United States, workers who suffer injury or infection during their duties are compensated in full by their employers. The business is also obligated to cover medical costs and cost of living that result from the injury. Also, if a physician in the United States or Europe misdiagnoses an illness or commits some error, then the cost of can be astronomical if he or she is charged with malpractice.

In China, not much attention is paid to workers' safety. If a worker is injured in any situation, perhaps even losing a leg or hand, then the worker will likely only receive thirty thousand renminbi in addition to medical treatment. This is true even if after the accident the worker is permanently handicapped and can no longer find work. If the accident occurs in an independent business, and the owner cannot afford to compensate the worker, then the situation is even worse.

Twenty-seven: The news media rarely report good news, and focus attention on the images of leaders, manufactured holidays, and large expenditures.

Since the Chinese Communist Party owes its rise to propaganda, it places absolute importance on issues of ideology, and knows first-hand the power of the media. Therefore after establishing power, the Communist Party strictly regulated the media. Although regulations were relaxed after the economic reforms of the eighties, the news media is still not completely free.

Although in China the media can interview heads of government organizations, there are definite restrictions. This is because the media's potential to criticize leaders is a source of power. Reporters must write down and submit their questions one week before any interview with a senior official for this reason. Then when the interview takes place, the official will answer with responses prepared in advance. If the reporter's questions are not within the range of what the official wants to answer, then the officials will simply not answer the question. The difference with the West is that Western leaders at a press conference can at any time answer any question from a reporter. Although China's national leaders have gone to the United States and Europe to visit and observe, when they return they have no desire to study the Western democratic system.

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Suppose that before the invention of television there were a program host who interviews the leaders of every nation. Such a person would become very famous. Television cameras in China rarely show both government leaders and their interviewers. Since Chinese television audiences only see the leader who is being interviewed, television interviewers rarely become well known celebrities. This is different from Europe and the United States, where the hosts of news channels are almost like superstars because when they interview famous leaders they are in the shot as well.

This reflects that in China only the image of the leader is given prominence. News interviewers are not valued highly enough, and hosts of programs are just ordinary workers. This is different from the West, where such reporters are very famous, so China is unable produce complete media freedom.

In American and European countries, hosts of news and entertainment programs broadcasted during the time of the day with the largest audiences are always paid more than the television channel's head or the general manager. Generally speaking, hosts of popular news and entertainment programs are not famous when they first begin their jobs, but after several years they will have become famous news anchors. Weather reporters, news reporters, and programs hosts are often changed in China. For this reason it is very difficult to become a celebrity through television. Thirty years ago in China, only Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangdong had news and entertainment programs on television. Programs would be broadcasted throughout the day until 11PM, when they would stop. But things have improved very quickly; now there are many television channels and programs are plentiful. Now programs from Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are broadcasted in China, in addition to some English-language programs.

Chinese Central Television productions are particularly strong because the government provides large amounts of funding and the facilities are the most advanced in the world. When United Nations meetings are held, CCTV reporters report live at the location. Since economic circumstances are favorable, there are local television stations in addition to CCTV. Camera teams are often sent to New York to conduct interviews with local Chinese people.

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In China there is a lot of news about senior officials being promoted or demoted. These events cannot be announced within the country before they take place, but rumors about such things often leak in from outside the country. The foreign media have often already reported the inside story on such issues before the national papers do. Of course information from such rumors is not necessarily correct, however it is usually reliable.

When the foreign media reports about officials losing or gaining office, another thing happens. The ability for information from the foreign media to find its way into China reflects the foreign media's great power, especially the fact that the media has obtained the facts before the official report has been released. However the domestic media cannot report on such things, even if they have been widely reported by the foreign media, because of lack of freedom in the press. If such things were to be reported by the domestic media, then it would be considered leaking government secrets and would entail punishment.

In America and Europe, you can usually buy newspapers and magazines the day they are published, except when incidents like September 11 occur and interfere with the transportation. This is true of both famous and common publications. However in China, even the most famous of newspapers, such as the People's Daily and Shanghai's Liberation Daily, cannot be bought at newspaper stands on the day they are printed. The exception to this is subscribers. Who knows what the cause is or how to fix it. Newspaper stands will often carry old editions of newspapers and magazines. In the United States, old newspapers are just trash.

In China there are often important conferences taking place at both the local and central level. Reporters are permitted to conduct interviews at these conferences, but they are arranged in groups, rather than as individuals. At such conferences, the seating arrangements are very important. People can tell who is important from the officials' seats. From this one can see how finely hierarchy is divided. In China the news media can only report information that is included in the official reports about a conference. Foreign media will add commentary to such reports, and each time a big conference takes place there are disagreements. The foreign media will put forth conjecture about who has been promoted and who has been dismissed from office, but the domestic media cannot do things like this.

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All officials in the United States, no matter whether in federal or local government, must be chosen in public elections. Officials need to receive contributions from the population, and disseminate information about their campaigns through electronic and print media. They must also take part often in debates between candidates. For these reasons, election candidates are exhausted and always rushing about on errands. Candidates' family members and supporters also find the process arduous. To win the hearts of the people and visit every home possible to canvas for votes is undoubtedly a very taxing undertaking.

Chinese officials in central and local government basically do not need any votes or contributions from the population, and definitely do not need to advertise themselves. Nor is it necessary for them to compete in debates with one another. Therefore these types of officials whose careers are planned by superiors are often of lesser abilities.

Electronic media, especially television, have developed very quickly in China. There are numerous television programs. There are programs dedicated to drama, song and dance, exercise, films, financial news, news reports, and many other subjects. The prevalence of television has had a severe impact on the business of theaters. The success of television has of course drawn advertising from businesses, a major source of income for television stations.

Newspapers, television stations, and magazines all rely on income from advertisements for survival and to take care of the costs of running. In the West the media pay attention to public health and morality. For example, a little more than ten years ago the media's major advertising customers were alcohol and tobacco companies. Afterwards however the Department of Health released research showing that tobacco and alcohol were harmful to health, and these types of advertisements gradually diminished in number. Even if an advertisement for tobacco products appears in a publication, it must be accompanied by a written notice that tobacco products are harmful to your health. One after another, federal laws prohibited smoking on flights, then in public places and offices, and finally advertisements for tobacco and alcohol faded away too.

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Twenty- eight: Government assistance for the elderly in China and care from family members; both sides help bear the burden.

In the United States it is not necessary for young people, middle-aged people, or people nearing retirement to have savings. Why is this? This is because the American government provides citizens with social security when they retire, and additional money from welfare assistance if they are low-income, as well as government-provided health insurance. So Americans generally spend their money at will, and do not worry about providing basic necessities or healthcare for themselves in their old age.

In recent years in China the economy has taken off. The overall income of the population has risen. Even though incomes have risen, the average income is still very low compared to The United States and Europe. Other than a few very well-off people in China who are even wealthier than wealthy Americans and Europeans, the majority of Chinese people must save their money to provide for themselves in old age, and must also rely on the help of their children. Those who are truly impoverished can also rely on government assistance. The incomes in the northwest of China are particularly low, and even though the government would like to help it has no means of doing so. Therefore in the northeast it is considered lucky even to be able to just provide the most basic necessities for yourself.

In China people traditionally have the custom of saving money and find employment when they are of age, no matter their level of education. Common people work several decades and then retire with a small amount of retirement savings. The nation's population is very large, so sick and handicapped people can arrange for early retirement. Most people's retirement savings are very small, but the government will provide enough retirement assistance to bring their quality of life up to standard. Traditionally, common people who work for the government or for government-owned industry are provided with government worker's health insurance, which allows them to see a doctor for free. This basically takes care of health care problems in old age for these people. Chinese people coddle their children too much. It used to be that children would work as soon as they received an education and left school. However now it is common for young people to finish school and then not find work because they consider the available jobs to be low-paid and full of difficulties.

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Generally the parents of families that are not very wealthy have to leave the home to work because they have small children or elderly parents to provide for. Therefore they often hire nurses to help provide care. However they have a practical need for nurses, it is not just a convenience. Of course, wealthy households will hire many workers, such as cooks, cleaners, drivers, and gardeners etc.

The typical household nurse today is not healthcare workers at all. They generally have only received short term training on how to provide care for the elderly, mainly helping them with daily things like preparing meals, buying groceries, taking medicine, and cleaning. If there is also a young child in the household, it is not necessary for the nurse to care for the child as well. In the United States however it is very strange; it is only low-income elderly people that enjoy the benefits of nurses coming to their home to care for them. Middle class elderly people do not want to spend the money necessary to hire a nurse. The United States government is very good and caring to low-income people. Chinese people who have not been to the United States would not believe such a thing was true if they heard of it. In China, the wealthy people enjoy the best of everything, the middle class enjoys mid-level things, and the poor have the worst of everything. However in the United States, poor people do not have such difficult lives, and enjoy various forms of welfare assistance.

Since thousands of years ago at the beginning of China's history, Chinese parents have cared for and educated their children. Then the children would take responsibility for the care of their parents and the older generation when they became aged. Adults would therefore have to work and care for a household that included not only their own children, but also their parents. The best of the food would go to the parents to show gratitude for the care they provided in earlier times.

Nowadays with the influence of Western social customs, the new generations of young people are more knowledgeable and work better. In Western society, a generation generally only cares for the next generation down. Parents care for their children, and when the children become adults they only provide care for their own children. This model has influenced Chinese society, and current generations of elderly people are in similar circumstances to those of elderly people in Europe and America, which are not very ideal.

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Before the economic reforms, there was little or no cost to seeing a doctor. However after the reforms, prices increased. When a poor elderly person was sent to the hospital, he or she would be admitted and cared for if they happened upon a good hospital administrator, but if they were not so lucky then they would not be admitted to the hospital to be cured. Actually hospitals' task is to aid and cure sick people, so the above type of situation is immoral and should be corrected. But nowadays in China everyone looks to money, so the poor people who do not have the money to see a doctor can only wait for death to come

China's average homes for the elderly are crudely decorated, cramped, get little natural light, and lack hygienic facilities. The nurses are all workers from the countryside. They lack common medical knowledge and are not able to provide sufficient care to ordinary elderly people. In the summer there is not enough air conditioning, and in the winter there is not enough heating. The meals provided are not very good either.

Small-scale nursing homes are sometimes run by an individual household, and lack doctors or nurses. In these types of homes, if an elderly person gets sick, they contact the family members to come pick them up and take them to the hospital. In the United States, if someone in a home for the elderly gets sick, they are sent to the hospital right away by the staff. In China if the patient is not able to afford care, they are not admitted to the hospital.

Large-scale nursing homes are operated by businesses and have nurses to provide care. In these nursing homes, the facilities are hygienic and the meals are relatively good. The allowance provided to private nursing homes by the government is very small. The family members of every elderly person admitted must cover the costs. Generally speaking, the care provided to the elderly in China is of insufficient quality. The government currently has a huge amount in reserves of stock and cash, and has a responsibility to provide better care for the elderly, and increase the welfare of elderly citizens. This is particularly true with respect to medical care. Elderly people should be living healthier, happier lives. Housing prices have been rising in recent years as well, and the actions of property developers, aided by the government, have made it difficult for elderly people to obtain housing. Many elderly people live in homes without kitchens or restrooms, and many people are relocated against their will by the government to make room for property developers.

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Before the economic reforms, elderly people who lived in the city either worked in government-owned industries or were cadres working in government organizations. Although their wages were not high, they were guaranteed work and retirement money. As long as they did not cause trouble with anyone, their livelihood would be safe and stable. Most people's retirement money would be sufficient for solving the problems of daily life. Workers in government-owned industries or government agencies would also have the added benefit of healthcare.

Elderly people in China generally have good moods and practices. They rise early and go to the park for morning exercise. Some practice T'ai Chi and do ballroom dancing. Generally they are happy and have healthy diets. Elderly Chinese people are relatively healthier and have longer life expectancies.

Although nearly all of us are born, study in school, and go to work when our studies are done, we each have different hardships and experiences. Some people live magnificent lives with many ups and downs, while others lead ordinary lives that are very stable. However, when people reach the age of 65, they ought to be able to lead tranquil lives. Some people still do all they can at age 60 to make money as though their lives depended on it. In reality, you do not start with anything when you are born, and you do not leave with anything when you die. It is not necessary to persist in struggling every day. When you reach 65 years of age, the successes and failures of your life have already been decided. People are like cars. After a car has been driven for ten or so years, it needs to be exchanged for a new one due to mechanical or engine problems. If you do not get a new one, it just causes pedestrians and other drivers problems. The elderly require society's care, but should not expect too much. Living peacefully and taking care of your health will be the greatest help.

Domestic small-scale government-owned industries in China generally run at a loss, so in recent years changes have been enacted. Small government-owned businesses have all been privatized and are now companies owned by shareholders. As these types of changes take place, many of the workers being laid off are elderly people. In the past they were government workers and were entitled to government benefits and healthcare. Now the owners of companies are private citizens rather than the government, and so they cannot afford to provide such benefits.