The Cultural Logic of Politics in Mainland China and Taiwan

Tianjian Shi shows how cultural norms affect political attitudes and behavior through two causal pathways, one at the individual level and one at the community level. Focusing on two key norms – definition of self-interest and orientation to authority – he tests the theory with multiple surveys conducted in mainland China and Taiwan. Shi employs multilevel statistical analysis to show how, in these two very different political systems, similar norms exert similar kinds of influence on political trust, understanding of democracy, forms of political participation, and tolerance for protest. The approach helps explain the resilience of authoritarian politics in China and the dissatisfaction of many Taiwan residents with democratic institutions. Aiming to place the study of political culture on a new theoretical and methodological foundation, Shi argues that a truly comparative social science must understand how culturally embedded norms influence decision making.

The late Tianjian Shi was an associate professor of political science at Duke University. He also taught at Tsinghua University in China. Shi was the author of Political Participation in Beijing (1997). He specialized in comparative politics with an emphasis on political culture and political participation in China and Taiwan.
“Over the course of his career, Tianjian Shi came to realize that culture could not be dismissed as irrelevant to the politics of nations. Instead, it kept resurfacing as a critical determinant of political legitimacy, participation, interests, and leadership. This final casebook of a great detective solves once and for all the puzzle of culture. It will serve as a model for anyone on the trail of culture.”

– Bruce Gilley, Associate Professor of Political Science, Portland State University

“This book is Shi’s most ambitious. It is at once both a circling back to his personal and scholarly roots and a stretching of his reach and ambition. He develops this account – of individual and social norms and how they shape cultural understandings of rationality and orientations to authority – remarkably well. Nothing is a ‘fitting tribute,’ but his own words come close.”

– John Aldrich, Pfizer-Pratt University Professor of Political Science, Duke University

“Tianjian Shi has written an important book that investigates culture as norms. Through comparative survey work in mainland China and Taiwan, Shi illuminates the workings of cultural commonalities in distinctly different institutional settings. Not least of all, Shi reveals a common hierarchical orientation to authority, with roots in traditional Chinese culture, that provides legitimacy to a communist party–state in one setting and is the source of democratic tensions in the other. A theoretical and empirical tour de force.”

– Melanie Manion, Vilas-Jordan Distinguished Achievement Professor of Public Affairs and Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison

“A pioneer of survey research in China, the late Tianjian Shi left a rich intellectual legacy in this book. Using multiyear survey data from China and Taiwan, one authoritarian and one democratic, to examine the interactions between political culture and political behavior, Shi demonstrated that cultural changes are relatively independent of social structural and political institutional changes. A fascinating study, this book provides many fresh and original insights into the ongoing debate of political modernization.”

– Suisheng Zhao, Professor of International Studies, University of Denver, and Editor of Journal of Contemporary China

“This groundbreaking study offers not only a new full-fledged theory of political culture but also the most credible answer to East Asia’s political puzzle of democratic underdevelopment. It also challenges the increasingly popular claims among neo-modernization theorists in the West that China and all other East Asian economic powerhouses will join the exclusive club of fully liberal democracies in a couple of decades. Among Asian-born scholars, therefore, the late Tianjian Shi should be remembered as the most brilliant theoretical pioneer.”

– Doh Chull Shin, Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California, Irvine

“This is a remarkable achievement: not just a cultural explanation of Chinese politics, but a new theory of culture that has applications well beyond China. Innovative ideas, sophisticated data analysis, provocative conclusions – it is the culmination of Tianjian Shi’s lifetime of scholarship and will stand as his ultimate legacy.”

– Bruce Dickson, Director, Sigur Center for Asian Studies, and Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, George Washington University
The Cultural Logic of Politics in Mainland China and Taiwan

TIANJIAN SHI
Duke University
This book is dedicated to Christine, Eleanor, and Sarah
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Tianjian Shi passed away unexpectedly on December 25, 2010, leaving this book’s completed manuscript, which had been accepted by Cambridge University Press. I undertook the final editing with the professional assistance of Mary Child and the technical help of Tianjian’s former student, Jie Lu. As peer reviewers for the Press, Dorothy J. Solinger and Doh Chull Shin provided valuable suggestions for revisions. I thank John Aldrich for finding the funds to support Mary Child’s work. Some minor queries that came up in the course of editing could not be resolved. I regret any errors or confusion that I may have introduced into the text.

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More information
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Tianjian Shi