Chinese politics

This assignment has, broadly speaking, three related objectives. You will demonstrate your

ability:

• To do research and critically reflect on a particular topic;

• To apply (or disprove) the concepts under discussion; and

• To build your own argument based on the course material.

Since we are trying to understand Chinese politics, and particularly its ideological and organisational character, is it worthwhile to reflect on previous attempts to do so and see where and how we can make a different analysis. Fortunately, the US State Department’s Policy Planning Staff (PPS) recently published its “The Elements of the China Challenge.” It is a document that puts forward a conceptual framework on how to understand the challenge emanating from China’s rise.

**Background:**

The American diplomat George F. Kennan, in his capacity of US Ambassador to the Soviet Union, famously wrote two documents, “The Long Telegram” and “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” “Elements” tries to revive Kennan’s spirit, who established the PPS in 1947. Described by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, the PPS’ mission is to: “To anticipate the emerging form of things to come, to reappraise policies which had acquired their own momentum and went on after the reasons for them had ceased, and to stimulate and, when necessary, to devise basic policies crucial to the conduct of our foreign affairs.”

**Your task:**

For your essay, I have already identified three elements that I think are worthy of discussion.

Below, these elements are put into suggested essay questions, that you can use as a sort of “hook” for your own argument and research. You can of course, also come up with a different question altogether, as long as it is derived from the “Elements” document. Pretend that you are all staffers in the incoming Biden Administration, who have to write a memo on the usefulness of this document.

• Are descriptions of contemporary China as a 20th century Marxist-Leninist state useful for

our understanding of China or do they limit our approach both in time (to the previous

century) and in substance (Marxism-Leninism)?

• What ideological framework can be used to understand China if it is here described as

neither strictly communist, nor purely nationalist but resolutely authoritarian, collectivist,

and imperialist?

• What holds greater weight: China’s Marxist-Leninist beliefs or its nationalism and why?

• What value is there to approach China via its own internal documents? What advantages

and challenges are there in such an approach?

Write a brief analysis of the particular element of your choosing. To do so, please consult the “Elements” document. It has been argued that this document is too long, unoriginal, and not interesting. For this reason, please focus your reading on the following pages:

• “Executive Summary” (pp. 1-3);

• “The China Challenge” (pp. 4-7);

• “China’s Conduct” (pp. 8-13); and finally

• “The Intellectual Sources of China’s Conduct” (pp. 28-39).

**Your objective**:

We are here not trying to recreate the “Elements” document in its entirety but, rather, to select one particular topic and provide your own argument (how and why you agree or disagree). The required wordcount of 2,000 should be more than enough space for you to do so. The wider “Elements” document intends to provide you with some contextual backing, upon which you can build your own argument through a critical reading of this material as well as the related topics that we (will) discuss during the course. After selecting a particular topic that can be gleaned from the “Elements” master document, please identify several related elements and debates that can be introduced in your discussion. A good writing strategy of course starts with a solid approach to reading. Marking interesting passages and concepts, while taking notes in the margins will assist you in the drafting of your essay.

**Structuring your essay**

**Head of document – Page 1**

Please include a title (set in bold), as well the relevant personal information.

• Plan of investigation (Question + Methodology) – Page 1

As all decent writing websites will tell you, it is important to start of your article with a gripping first line. Make, for example, a controversial claim or frame your question as such. Immediately following this “hook,” it is important to outline the main problematic/question that your essay will tackle (can you link it to current events?). Next, it is crucial to outline your essay’s objectives (what are you trying to prove?). Other elements that you should spend some time on delineating are the parameters of your research: what timeframe are you looking at? Where? What sources are you using? What methodology are you applying (what will you base your research on?). This one will here, be easy: a critical engagement and reflection on the “Elements” document.

• **Summary of the article** – Page 1

To retain the reader’s attention, it is important to briefly summarise your key findings in one paragraph at the end of the introduction (in what way is the topic you studied problematic in previous studies, what lessons can be learned from your insights?).

• **Overview** – Page 2

Ideally following on the article summary is a brief (in just a few sentences and within the same paragraph) of the structure of your article.

• **Evaluation of sources** – Page 3-5

Raul Pachecho-Vega (an excellent resource on all sorts of tips & tricks on writing!) describes the literature review as “achieving concept saturation:” to render as good as possible an overview of the literature related to your chosen topic, touching upon most of the relevant debates (while not necessarily including all relevant studies). A good literature review can be found throughout the book China’s Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation by David Shambaugh (2008). While essentially a work on the nature of the CCP as an institution, I believe the work is great for students of all disciplines as it acts as a prime example of what a critical reading of the literature in the field – the ultimate goal of any literature review – looks like.

• **Analysis – Page 6-8**

Building on your review of the literature, you will identify a “gap” in the literature, a flaw, something you think is either missing or mispresented in the analysis and ought to be rectified. You will do so with a sound argument, backed up by sources.

• **Conclusion – Page 9**

The conclusion repeats, paraphrases, and summarises your main points: what it is that you studied, how you studied it, flaws you identified, and how you resolved those. Please do not insert any new findings in the conclusion, these should be integrated in the main body of text.

**References-Page 10 and beyond**

Harvard referencing style