

3-20-1998

Trends. Human Rights in the People's Republic of China: On Rewards and Leverage

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Human Rights Law Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(1998) "Trends. Human Rights in the People's Republic of China: On Rewards and Leverage," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 11 , Article 4.

Available at: <http://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol4/iss11/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. Human Rights in the People's Republic of China: On Rewards and Leverage

Author: Editor

Volume: 4

Issue: 11

Date: 1998-03-20

Keywords: China, Clinton, Human Rights, People's Republic of China, United Nations

The Clinton administration has publicly announced that it will not sponsor this year's resolution before the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva that would condemn the People's Republic of China (PRC) for human rights violations. However, both supporters and opponents of the administration's action have it wrong.

Supporters posit that not sponsoring the resolution is not a reward. Instead, they state that the decision has been made as a calculation that not sponsoring the resolution will lead to human rights progress in the PRC. In other words, the decision will increase the probability that a behavioral class--human rights violations--will decrease in intensity and frequency. However, operant conditioning research on modifying undesirable behavior (in the eyes of the modifier) would suggest that punishment and omission training best result in decreasing behavioral intensity and frequency. Certainly, dropping the resolution is neither--instead being an example of negative reinforcement that usually increases a behavioral probability. Moreover, engaging in operant conditioning, before as opposed to after the event to be conditioned, usually leads to a less effective result. Research on the psychology of change does not support the supporters.

Opponents of the administration's decision posit that there is now no leverage inducing human rights change in the PRC. The problem with this position is that it is founded on the assumption that threats that are face-valid (to the modifier) will be perceived as threats to their target. Opponents also seem to believe that leverage could not include creating a psychological situation wherein decreasing human rights violations might be perceived by the target as being in its own interests--not merely those of the modifier. (In fact, the perception of a change in one's own behavior being in the interest of a modifier can induce reactance in a target thereby decreasing the likelihood of any behavioral change--and in some cases even strengthening the target behavior judged by the modifier to be undesirable.)

The psychology of change suggests that lasting behavioral change would best occur when it is in the PRC's interest. Behavioral change through combinations of positive (reward) and negative reinforcement, omission training, and punishment too often induce compliance not identification and internalization. The process of illustrating why the rule of law is conducive to the PRC's leadership maintaining political control and economic growth would be the optimum psychological prescription to decrease human rights violations. (See Kollins, S.H., Newland, M.C., & Critchfield, T.S. (1997). Human sensitivity to reinforcement in operant choice: How much do these consequences matter? *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 4, 208-220; O'Donohue, W., & Noll, J.P. (1995). Is behaviorism false because there is no such thing as conditioning? *Popper and Skinner on learning. New Ideas in Psychology*, 13, 29-41; Schoenfeld, W.N. (1996). Conditioning the whole organism. *Integrative Physiological and Behavioral Science*, 31, 258-260; Shenon, P. (March 14, 1998). Anti-China U.N. statement loses usual U.S. support. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; US foreign policy and the People's Republic of China: A behaviorist perspective. (November 8, 1996). *IBPP*, 1(2).) (Keywords: China, Clinton, Human Rights, People's Republic of China, United Nations.)