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T038｜If Other Countries Have Problems Too, Why Must China's Problems Still Be Answered?

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Core answer

Yes, other countries have real problems — and no, that does not answer the question about China. A flaw in Washington is a fact about Washington. The question "is this problem real here, and what will be done about it?" can only be answered here, by the people responsible for it. Pointing elsewhere changes the subject; it does not discharge the duty. That move has a name: *tu quoque* — "you too." What makes this case interesting is that the primary source for this essay, the Foreign Ministry's own report on American democracy, agrees with the rebuttal: it does not ask the United States to point at other countries, but to fix its own system. Its standard is that every country answers for itself — and that standard answers the question in the title.

1. The opposing argument, stated fairly

The strongest version of the objection runs like this. Criticism of China is selective and hypocritical. The countries that lecture China fail their own standards: the Foreign Ministry's report documents American democracy as a game of money politics, elite rule, political polarization, and a dysfunctional system, and catalogues the Capitol riot, entrenched racial discrimination, a pandemic death toll that was the world's highest,

and a widening wealth gap. Western critics denounce in China what they tolerate at home. Why should China answer critics who will not answer for themselves?

There is a genuine point inside this objection. Double standards are real, selective criticism is unfair, and a critic who applies a rule to others but not to himself loses credibility. The demand for one standard applied to all is itself sound. The question is what that demand requires. The objector treats it as a reason not to answer. In fact it is a reason to answer — because a universal standard binds the person invoking it too.

2. Why "you too" does not answer the question

Consider the logic stripped of politics. A driver stopped for speeding does not get the ticket cancelled by pointing out that other drivers speed too. A company caught polluting a river does not clear itself by showing that another company pollutes a different river. In each case the reply is true and beside the point: the question was never "is anyone else at fault?" but "did you do this, and what will you do about it?"

Two questions are being collapsed into one. The first is whether the problem alleged in China is real: did the event happen, is the policy what it is said to be, does the harm exist? The second is whether the critic is consistent. Answering the second does not answer the first. A hypocritical critic can still be stating a fact: hypocrisy impeaches the messenger, not the message.

Deflection also carries a cost: the question is left standing — and the audience notices. The unanswered question does not go away; it acquires a second question beside it, namely why it could not be answered directly. A confident answer would address the facts.

None of this denies that comparisons have legitimate uses — that is the subject of section 4. The point here is narrower: comparison as a substitute for an answer is not an answer.

3. The primary source's own standard

The report is an instructive witness, because its own logic runs against the deflection it is often used to support. Its preface begins from a universal principle: "Democracy is a common value shared by all humanity. It is a right for all nations, not a prerogative reserved to a few. Democracy takes different forms, and there is no one-size-fits-all model." It continues: "The political system of a country should be independently decided by its own people." And it is unsparing about its subject: "The United States'

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system of democracy is derived from its own practices. This system is unique, not universally applicable, and it is far from perfect."

But the report does not conclude that American flaws excuse anyone else's. It concludes that the United States must answer for its own: "It is hoped that the US will improve its own system and practices of democracy and change its way of interacting with other countries." The conclusion is more direct still: "What is now imperative for the US is to get to work in real earnest to ensure its people's democratic rights and improve its system of democracy instead of placing too much emphasis on procedural or formal democracy at the expense of substantive democracy and its outcome." The report demands that the United States fix its own house rather than point outward — and adds that "No country can be immune from these risks and challenges. All countries should pull together."

That standard is symmetric, and symmetry is the whole argument. If the United States must answer for American problems instead of pointing at China, then China must answer for Chinese problems instead of pointing at the United States. To invoke the report while refusing its logic is to use it as a shield against the very standard it asserts. The preface's "independently decided by its own people" points the same way: a system decided by its own people is one in which the people can ask questions and receive answers.

4. When comparison is legitimate — and how to tell

None of this means foreign examples may never be mentioned. Comparison is legitimate in at least three ways: as diagnosis — another country's failure can reveal a risk worth watching for at home; as calibration — knowing whether a problem is common or exceptional helps judge its severity; and as evidence about a policy tried elsewhere.

Three tests separate these uses from deflection. Does the comparison change the facts in China? A diagnosis changes what we look for; a deflection changes nothing except the subject. Does it identify a remedy? A legitimate comparison points toward a fix; a deflection points away from any fix, toward a different country. And would the speaker accept the comparison turned around? If the United States may not answer a question about itself by citing China's problems, then China may not answer a question about itself by citing America's. The report's own language is written in that universal form: "All countries need to uphold peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, which are common values of humanity."

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5. What answering looks like

Answering a question about one's own country is not the same as conceding it. An answer can take several honest forms: the facts are as alleged and here is what is being done; the facts are partly as alleged and here is the correction; the facts are not as alleged and here is the evidence. What all three share is engagement with the claim itself — evidence, reasons, and a remedy or rebuttal that can be checked.

On reading official claims — including the Foreign Ministry's report itself — see CCE-100, "How Can We Verify Information Published by Official Media?" (https://freechina.live/china-news-updates/democracy-civil-society/en-cce-100-how-to-verify-information-published-by-official-media/). Its procedure separates three layers of any official report: what an institution publicly said and when, the factual assertions it makes, and the interpretation it offers. Applied here, the first layer is secure — the report is a primary record of what the Foreign Ministry said on December 5, 2021 — while its factual claims are a second matter, to be corroborated on their evidence, and its evaluation a third, a judgment to be examined on its reasons. That discipline is what an answer consists of: not a slogan, and not a counter-accusation, but a claim taken apart and dealt with piece by piece.

Conclusion

Foreign countries do have problems — serious ones, documented in detail by the very report this essay is anchored on. But a problem in another country is not an answer to a problem in one's own. Hypocrisy in a critic does not falsify the criticism; a fault elsewhere does not cancel a fault here; and the standard the objector invokes — one rule for all — binds the objector as well. The Foreign Ministry's report makes this case better than any critic could: it demands that the United States stop pointing outward and get to work in real earnest on its own democracy, on the principle that no country is immune from shared challenges. That principle does not stop at the border of the country that wrote it. China's problems still need answering — not because foreign critics are right about everything, but because the only place a country's problems can be answered is in that country, by the people responsible for them, with evidence and in public.

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- CCE-100, "How Can We Verify Information Published by Official Media?" — the three-layer method for verifying official-media information: what an institution publicly said and when, the factual assertions it makes, and the interpretation it offers: https://freechina.live/china-news-updates/democracy-civil-society/en-cce-100-how-to-verify-information-published-by-official-media/

Sources

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3. Civic Education 123 hub index consulted for overlap resolution: https://freechina.live/civic-education-100-questions/ (live; the older hub path https://freechina.live/china-news-updates/democracy-civil-society/ returned 404 at time of check).

Quotations verified

#	Quotation as used in this essay	Verified against

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1	"Democracy is a common value shared by all humanity. It is a right for all nations, not a prerogative reserved to a few. Democracy takes different forms, and there is no one-size-fits-all model."	Source G, official English text, Preface — verbatim
2	"The political system of a country should be independently decided by its own people."	Source G, official English text, Preface — verbatim
3	"The United States' system of democracy is derived from its own practices. This system is unique, not universally applicable, and it is far from perfect."	Source G, official English text, Preface — verbatim
4	"It is hoped that the US will improve its own system and practices of democracy and change its way of interacting with other countries."	Source G, official English text, Preface — verbatim
5	"What is now imperative for the US is to get to work in real earnest to ensure its people's democratic rights and improve its system of democracy instead of placing too much emphasis on procedural or formal democracy at the expense of substantive democracy and its outcome."	Source G, official English text, Conclusion — verbatim
6	"No country can be immune from these risks and challenges. All countries should pull together."	Source G, official English text, Conclusion — verbatim
7	"All countries need to uphold peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, which are common values of humanity."	Source G, official English text, Conclusion — verbatim

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