

# 1

---

## *Introduction: Assessing China's Political Development*

CHENG LI

China is able to change the world because it has first changed itself.

LING ZHIJUN, *China's New Revolution* (2007)

One of the world's most stunning development stories of recent decades is China's market transition and economic rise. The nation's rapid and continuing economic growth, the revival of entrepreneurialism, and the ever-growing integration with the world economy all stem from the policy of "reform and opening" adopted in 1978. The magnitude of this development is evident in the miraculous changes in China's physical landscape, from its coastal cities to its vast interior regions. A great deal has been written about this drastic transformation, not only the remarkable achievements in poverty alleviation, rural-urban migration, and foreign investment, but also the attendant devastating problems such as the growing income disparities, social dislocation, and environmental degradation.<sup>1</sup>

This volume focuses on changes in a different landscape: China's political terrain. For the most part, China's political development in the reform era, though intriguing and potentially consequential, has been far less fundamental or systemic than changes in the economic realm. Although a new generation of leaders that is strikingly different from its predecessors is coming to the fore at the Seventeenth Party Congress and political reforms are on the agenda of the top leadership, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still favors a one-party monopoly of power without an independent judicial system or free media. Human rights violations, especially in the areas of religious freedom, labor rights, and public health, remain prevalent. These facts have made most stu-

I would like to thank Sally Carman, Christina Culver, Scott Harold, and Carlos Pascual for their very helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

## 2 *China's Changing Political Landscape*

dents of China skeptical about Chinese political development and the nation's prospects for democracy.

Yet it is too simplistic to think that the earthshaking socioeconomic changes of the past three decades have taken place in a political vacuum, with no corresponding changes in the Chinese political system. Some Chinese scholars would argue that China's transition from a totalitarian regime under Mao to an authoritarian system under Deng and his successors amounts to a fundamental political transformation.<sup>2</sup> One might also ask how it was possible for a supposedly stagnant ruling party to achieve modern China's first peaceful political succession in 2002–03. Furthermore, how has this monolithic ruling elite been able to drastically and successfully alter the course of the country's socioeconomic development from a single-minded emphasis on economic growth to a broader concern for social cohesion and a fair distribution of wealth? When Chinese leaders talk about political democracy and inner-party elections, are they simply spouting rhetoric? Or have Sinologists overlooked some potentially important trends? Will China surprise the world with a fundamental political transformation in the years to come?

Politics and economics are, of course, closely interrelated. In a study of present-day China, one cannot really separate economic reform from political change. People living in China in 1978 would not recognize the degree of civic and political freedom in the country today. New social forces unleashed by China's economic reforms have been transforming the country's political landscape. The expansion of new social and economic groups alone has been spectacular. Private firms, for example, which were not allowed until the early 1980s, numbered 4.3 million by 2006, while private entrepreneurs totaled 11 million.<sup>3</sup> By 2002 the country had a middle class of 80 million people whereas a decade earlier such a class barely existed.<sup>4</sup> According to a recent study by McKinsey & Co., by 2025 China's middle class is expected to consist of about 520 million people.<sup>5</sup> Rural-to-urban migration, another important force for social and political change, pushed the number of migrant workers up to 119 million in 2006, and this group continues to expand.<sup>6</sup> Some particularly interesting changes have occurred in leadership politics, political institutionalization, commercialization of the media, legal reform, the dynamics between central and local governments, and civilian-military relations. These developments are the subject of this volume. By way of introduction, I offer some comments on the recent discourse on democracy in China, Western theories of democracy, and the Chinese agenda for political development.

### **The “New Wave” of Discourse on Democracy in China**

Top Chinese leaders and their advisers are remarkably candid about the fact that China's political reforms have lagged behind the country's economic and social

changes. Hu Angang, the head of Qinghua University's Center for China Studies, a leading think tank in the country, argued in 2003 that the Chinese authorities should shift their principal task from the "first transition"—namely, economic transformation—to the "second transition," which should center on political reform.<sup>7</sup> He outlined the four main areas in need of political reform: the Chinese Communist Party, the National People's Congress (NPC), the Chinese government, and the judiciary. Hu has suggested that "democratic state-building" (*minzhu de guojia zhidu jianshe*) is essential for China as it confronts various daunting social and demographic challenges.<sup>8</sup>

Since 2006, Chinese intellectuals and the official media have engaged in a nationwide public discussion about democracy, something David Shambaugh has called the "democracy wave" debates.<sup>9</sup> This "wave" began with a well-known article entitled "Democracy Is a Good Thing" by one of this volume's contributors, Yu Keping, a professor at Beijing University and deputy director of the Translation Bureau of the CCP Central Committee. The article, which was based on an interview with Yu by the Hong Kong-based *Takung Pao* in 2005, was reprinted first in *Beijing Daily* in the fall of 2006 and since then has appeared in almost all major newspapers in the country.<sup>10</sup> The article concisely and thoughtfully discusses the desirability, feasibility, and identity of democracy in China. While acknowledging many of the potential problems that democracy may cause, Yu argues that China could make a transition to democracy with "minimum political and social costs."<sup>11</sup> Calling this approach "incremental democracy" (*jianjin minzhu*), Yu suggests that China's political reforms should be incremental over time and manageable in scale. Specifically, political reforms should place priority on inner-party democracy, grassroots village elections, and legal development. Such an approach, he believes, will ultimately result in a "democratic breakthrough" when various existing political forces are ready.

China's top leaders, including most notably President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, recently endorsed the idea of accelerating political reforms.<sup>12</sup> On many occasions, both at home and abroad, Hu and Wen have highlighted the need for democracy in China. In an interview with the *Washington Post* in November 2003, for instance, Wen Jiabao acknowledged that "without the guarantee of political reform, economic reform will not be successful."<sup>13</sup> Hu Jintao, too, has repeatedly said, "If there is no democracy, there will be no modernization."<sup>14</sup> At an important meeting of ministerial and provincial leaders at the Central Party School in June 2007, he went so far as to call for broader democratic political participation for both the public and the political establishment.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, the political rhetoric of Chinese leaders has changed over the past decade. The question is whether this change in rhetoric translates into new

policies and behavior, and whether they in turn have the potential to transform the political system in China.<sup>16</sup>

Understandably, most overseas observers tend to be cynical about Chinese rhetoric on democracy. The prevailing view in the West is that Chinese leaders are not thinking of a “real democracy.” This may well be the case if historical circumstances and current political conditions in China are any indication. Democratic rhetoric, certainly not lacking in China’s modern history—from the Nationalists’ “Three People’s Principles” (*sanminzhuyi*) and the Communists’ “New Democracy” (*xin minzhuzhuyi*) to Mao’s “Great Democracy” (*da minzhu*)—has often invoked democracy to justify political forces whose actions and values were distinctly non- or even antidemocratic.<sup>17</sup> For the Chinese people, the story of democracy has been a record of failures and pitfalls far more than a record of successes and progress. At present, political power in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is monopolized by the CCP, which prohibits the formation of competing political parties. The party also exercises strict control over the content of the mass media and the Internet and has even tightened censorship since Hu Jintao became secretary general of the party in 2002. In the area of religious freedom, neither Jiang Zemin nor Hu Jintao has scored very well.

In the opinion of some China watchers, however, democracy should not be the only criterion used to measure China’s political progress. According to Maurice R. Greenberg, “Every country has its own culture and comes by its political system through its own history.”<sup>18</sup> Hence “we should stop pressing China to adopt a democratic political system—this is up to the Chinese. If it is to occur, it has to be their own choice.”<sup>19</sup> Greenberg’s emphasis on “choice” is well taken because China’s political structure is unlikely to develop teleologically along a direct, linear trajectory. Many see a variety of possibilities, ranging from a highly optimistic future, in which the country will become a stable liberal democracy, to a highly pessimistic one, in which China will collapse and be left in a state of prolonged civil war, domestic chaos, environmental catastrophe, and massive human exodus.<sup>20</sup> Somewhere in the middle is perhaps the most widely accepted (though not necessarily the most likely) scenario that there will be a market economy combined with an authoritarian one-party political system. In this view, Chinese politics will remain by and large the same in the foreseeable future as it is today—although this combination may be far more institutionalized than at present.<sup>21</sup>

If decisionmakers throughout the international community, especially in the United States, are to formulate better policy options for how to deal with China, it is vital for them to be well acquainted with the political scenarios that could transpire over the next fifteen years or so. China will, of course, choose its own destiny, but the choices it makes—which will determine how Chinese poli-

tics will unfold and whether the PRC can maintain social stability—will have profound implications for the United States and the world. The political future of China is undoubtedly crucial to the Sino-American relationship, arguably the most important bilateral relationship of the twenty-first century. Hence the United States must consider how to relate to a changing China. If Washington's vision is narrow, U.S. options will be inadequate. If Washington's views of China are distorted, U.S. policies will be misguided and perhaps counterproductive. Without some insight into the direction and motivations of China's leaders and people, the United States cannot expect to conduct an effective foreign policy that advances its future interests.

### Democracy: Universalism and “Chinese Characteristics”

The significance of recent political developments in China and its discourse about democracy goes beyond the policy realm. The democratization of the world's most populous nation, if it occurs, will greatly enrich theoretical understanding of the essential features and varied forms of modern democracies—some of the most important and enduring subjects of the social sciences. As Sunil Khilnani has pointed out in the context of India's political evolution since 1947, democracy is in essence “the adventure of a political idea.”<sup>22</sup> In his view, India's transition to democracy was the “third moment in the great democratic experiment launched at the end of the eighteenth century by the American and French revolutions.”<sup>23</sup> Khilnani explains:

Each is an historic instance of the project to resuscitate and embody the ancient ideal of democracy under vastly different conditions. . . . Each of these experiments released immense energies; each raised towering expectations; and each has suffered tragic disappointments. The India experiment is still in its early stages, and its outcome may well turn out to be most significant of them all, partly because of its sheer human scale, and partly because of its location, a substantial bridgehead of effervescent liberty on the Asian continent.<sup>24</sup>

Although the motivation, condition, process, and outcome in all three of these “historic instances” were quite different, notes Khilnani, they did have one striking feature in common: a high degree of unintended consequences with fortuitous outcomes, as a result of which they all “became a democracy without really knowing how, why, or what it meant to be one,” yet they felt a sense of collective democratic identity and a national pride.<sup>25</sup>

Observations about the paradoxical nature of democratic transitions in India and elsewhere seem to be relevant to the ongoing Chinese political experiments

(such as inner-party democracy). Despite the recent wave of Chinese intellectual discourse on democracy and the top leaders' promises, the general public and political elites appear unable to reach a consensus on which direction politics in China should take. Understandably, a significant number of officials at various levels of leadership are resistant to political reforms that would subject them to greater oversight by the people, as this would likely undermine their own power and interests. In a recent survey of midlevel officials at the Central Party School, 90 percent of the respondents indicated they were not enthusiastic about political reform.<sup>26</sup> It seems the collective mind of the Chinese people is strongly wedded to the idea that chaos and political instability may result from a transition to democracy. Their fears are stoked by the recent financial scandals surrounding President Chen Shui-bian's family in Taiwan, political deadlock in India and other democratic countries, and the phenomenal amount of money spent on political campaigns in the United States. In a country that has valued meritocracy and the *selection* of bureaucrats for many centuries, the general public may be suspicious about, and impatient with, *elected* politicians. Thus to many observers, it seems incomprehensible that China might be genuinely interested in democratic reform, even though—ironically—it is those very bureaucrats, along with the Chinese Communist Party, that have led China to embrace a market economy and capitalism.

At the same time, one cannot discount the possibility that the CCP may, in fact, be serious about pursuing political reform because circumstances are moving it in that direction. Such circumstances might include a sharp decline in the legitimacy of one-party rule, the petering out of strongman politics, or the emergence of diverse and conflicting interests within the political elite. Other forces that would seem to augur well for democratization and transparency are growing public awareness of the rights and interests of citizens, the diffusion of international norms and democratic values, rising demands for freedom of the press, and commercialization of the media. A desire to improve the country's international image, to build its national reputation and pride, and to win the hearts and minds of the Taiwanese people could also press Chinese leaders to pursue political reform and democratization.

Some would argue, however, that China's political development will be influenced mainly by cultural prerequisites and historical experiences. Proponents of this view tend to overlook the fact that Chinese leaders and public intellectuals have become increasingly interested in and willing to accept international norms in recent years. Since the mid-1990s, Chinese scholars have been exploring the general characteristics of Western democratic theories and ideas, and official publishing houses affiliated with the Central Party School, the Translation Bureau of the CCP Central Committee, and the Chinese Academy of Social

Sciences, as well as many university presses, have translated and published numerous books by Western scholars on democracy, civil society, law, media, and interest groups.<sup>27</sup>

Such publications on the theory and practice of liberal democracy in other states are enormously valuable to China. Yet, as has been widely observed, the enthusiasm for “democracy” displayed in certain quarters—for example, among the students and activists at Tiananmen Square in the spring of 1989—is anchored in some misconceptions about democracy in practice.<sup>28</sup> Some of China’s dissident intellectuals define democracy in normative and utopian terms that equate it with almost all “virtues.” Their perception of democracy and the desirability of a democratic transition in China is extremely “idealistic” in the sense described by the prominent theoretician Joseph Schumpeter:<sup>29</sup> that is, they tend to focus almost entirely on the *source* (“the will of the people”) and *purpose* (“the rights of the people”) of democracy, while undervaluing the importance of democratic *methods* and *procedures* (the “institutional and procedural guarantees of the people’s will and rights”).<sup>30</sup> The political demands expressed at Tiananmen Square were for the most part substantive, not structural; they were laced with emotion and delivered via petitions but made no specific mention of broad elections. Not surprisingly, constitution makers were scarce in Beijing in 1989.<sup>31</sup> In the past fifteen years, however, Chinese discourse on democracy has changed profoundly, and today much of it focuses on institutional and procedural matters.

If Western scholars hope to assess the prospects for democratization in China, they obviously need to understand the Chinese view of democracy, as well as the political agenda of Chinese leaders. Otherwise it may be well-nigh impossible to grasp the implications of specific political developments, or to distinguish between universal components of democratic systems and unique Chinese innovations. As Chinese scholars, practitioners, and state officials search for the lessons of democratic transition, consolidation, and good governance from around the world, their endeavors can serve as a case study in how democratic concepts translate into practice in the world’s most populous country.

At this juncture, a few words are in order about those concepts. To begin with, it is important to remember that democratic political institutions vary greatly from place to place and across time. In a way, democracy is a continuous historical process and a matter of degree. It also has three distinctive traits, all interrelated.

First, a polity’s institutions must offer genuine political choices, and such choices must be made available to a broadly defined electorate. In practice, this means that elections are regular and fair, that all the votes of all adult citizens are equal in weight, and that competition for political office is institutionalized through a multiparty system and real choice among candidates. According to

E. E. Schattschneider, democracy is a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define public policy alternatives in such a way that the public can participate in the decisionmaking process through the ballot box.<sup>32</sup> As Robert Dahl observes, Western democracy evolved from a political system dominated by one coherent set of leaders to a pluralist system run by many sets of leaders, each having access to a different combination of political resources.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, democracy is a matter of establishing institutions and rules for mediating conflicting interests among social groups in a given society.

Second, institutions must be based on a respect for the law and an ability to administer a genuine rule-of-law system. Under such a system, rule achieved through power and privilege would be drastically reduced, and the legal system (including the courts, police, procuratorate, and penal system) revamped to ensure that the people are governed by laws, and that government itself is ruled by, and subject to, the law. This democratic principle is rooted in two basic assumptions about social order. The first is that all individuals are equal before the law. As Dahl argues, democracy is based on the consensus that human beings possess a fundamental sense of right and wrong that is not significantly stronger in some groups than in others.<sup>34</sup> The second assumption is that all human beings “are imperfect, all are prejudiced, and none knows the whole truth,” and therefore none can be above the law.<sup>35</sup> For these reasons, democracy requires the rule of law.

Third, institutions must permit the kind of freedom (civil liberties, freedom of the press) that enables the public to participate in the political process. Democratic institutions should respect political diversity in terms of values and attitudes, protect the interests of minority groups, and stress institutional means of solving socioeconomic problems. Government accountability should be monitored through various nongovernmental channels. It is also crucial to set up checks and balances among branches of government and across levels of government.

By these criteria, China has a long way to go before its institutions will qualify as democratic structures. Indeed, no one should expect China to develop a multiparty system in the near future. But this should not obscure the significant changes that have taken place both in the leadership's perceptions about the desirability of democracy and in the Chinese political system itself. One important trend is that many Chinese leaders and public intellectuals now talk about democracy, rule of law, governmental transparency and accountability, and human rights as being universal values; perhaps more important, they also treat these as Chinese goals. While some Chinese leaders and scholars may still be obsessed with “Chinese characteristics,” others unambiguously favor defining democracy along universal lines (*pushi jiazhi*). For example, when Yu Keping



writes “democracy is a good thing,” he is not referring to Western-style democracy or to Chinese democracy, but simply democracy in a universal sense.

On a number of occasions, Premier Wen Jiabao has, in fact, emphasized the universal value of democracy. In a meeting with a delegation from the Brookings Institution in Beijing in October 2006, in which he carefully explained China’s objectives for political democracy, Wen’s idea of democracy was much the same as the Western concept: “When we talk about democracy, we usually refer to the three most important components: elections, judicial independence, and supervision based on checks and balances.”<sup>36</sup> These are exactly the same three conceptual components just discussed.

In explaining the current Chinese mix of direct and indirect elections, Wen noted that direct elections are used for choosing village heads and that in the past few years the number of villages implementing these elections has risen to 680,000. Direct elections have also been used to fill seats in the local people’s congresses at the township and county levels. Indirect elections are the means of selecting the members of people’s congresses at the city level and above, as well as government leaders at the county, city, and higher levels. In addition, indirect elections are employed to fill posts within the party leadership at various levels. The number of candidates on the ballot for both direct and indirect elections is increasing, Wen said, adding that he could foresee a day when direct elections, if shown to be successful, might gradually be expanded, “moving up the ladder from the villages to towns to counties to provinces. Indirect elections will be improved further with increased competition.”

The judicial system, Wen emphasized, was also in urgent need of reform in order to “ensure its dignity, justice, and independence.” The legal system, he noted, has already undergone “comprehensive” changes: the newly established death penalty review system, for example, specifies that all death penalty cases should be subject to final approval by the Supreme People’s Court.

He further explained that the function of “supervision” (*jiandu*) in the Chinese system is to restrain official power through oversight by the media and other civic channels. “Absolute power without supervision corrupts absolutely,” Wen said, paraphrasing a well-known Western concept to affirm a similar Chinese view of power and its possible abuse. Wen called for checks and balances within the party and said officials need to be more accountable to the people. He felt both the media and the more than 110 million Internet users in China could participate in this supervision. All in all, Wen concluded unambiguously, China has to “move toward democracy. We have many problems, but we know the direction in which we are going.”

Although Wen did not offer a timetable for further developments in these areas, he clearly outlined the party’s plan for future political reforms. This was

no idle promise, inasmuch as China has already launched some important experiments in these areas, with potentially far-reaching implications. By way of example, village elections are being better judged, not by how many party-nominated candidates win or lose, but by their utility in serving as a democratic training ground for 69 percent of China's total population, which includes many who live in less-developed areas, most of whom have poor to nonexistent educational backgrounds. The fact that these villagers can participate in the election process should boost the national confidence in China's capacity to hold democratic elections.

This does not necessarily mean that such elections always provide rural dwellers with real, substantive choices that can affect the quality of village governance. However, grassroots elections and political competition, in the form of inner-party democracy, are by no means insignificant developments. It remains to be seen whether the CCP will introduce multicandidate elections into the selection of Politburo members—including possible successors to Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, and other top leaders—any time in the near future. If that does happen, the rules of Chinese elite politics will change fundamentally. The practice of inner-party democracy will likely make political lobbying more transparent, factional politics more legitimate, and elections more genuine and regular at higher levels of political power.

To complicate matters, the Chinese leadership's position on the rule of law and judicial independence has been inconsistent. On one major occasion, Hu Jintao called the constitution "the fundamental law of the country," urging all government agencies, political parties, armed forces, business firms, and social groups to safeguard the dignity of the constitution and ensure its implementation.<sup>37</sup> Yet on most other occasions, Hu has stated that the party has ultimate authority over the military, the selection of government officials, the judiciary, and the media.<sup>38</sup> In reality, China has a constitution (*xianfa*), but no real constitutionalism (*xianzheng*). Note, however, that the PRC has, in fact, tried to establish a legal system from scratch during the reform era. In the past two decades, China has issued 245 new laws, about 1,000 new administrative laws, and some 7,000 new provincial laws.<sup>39</sup> The number of lawyers has also increased markedly, from a total of about 40,000 in the early 1990s to 110,000 by 2002, and will probably double in the next few years.<sup>40</sup> China today has 620 law schools and departments that produce roughly 100,000 law students a year.<sup>41</sup> It remains to be seen whether the rapid growth of the Chinese legal profession will help expand the rule of law in China.

From the standpoint of civil liberties and media freedom, the Chinese authorities are finding it more and more difficult to exert control over society. One sign of this is the growing number of registered nongovernmental organiza-

tions (NGOs), which according to the Ministry of Public Affairs was close to 280,000 in 2005; other estimates put the real number at as high as 3 million.<sup>42</sup> Chinese NGOs have been engaged in issues touching on the environment, public health, consumer rights, and the rights of what the Chinese call “vulnerable groups,” including women, children, the elderly, the disabled, migrants, gays, and other groups. Another sign is the growing presence of teahouses, Internet cafes, karaoke bars, disco clubs, fan clubs, private bookstores, art galleries, fitness centers, private salons, home churches, and private theaters all over China. If one accepts Jürgen Habermas’s argument that the pubs and coffeehouses of seventeenth-century London were the real force behind the formation of British civil society, the surge in places for informal association in reform China may signify the impending emergence of Chinese civil society. Equally important, both the ongoing commercialization of the media and the telecommunication revolution have made it more difficult for the government to control the flow of information. China today has some 2,700 television and radio stations that air some 3,800 programs.<sup>43</sup> By 2006 the number of mobile phones had reached 438 million, a penetration rate of 32.6 percent.<sup>44</sup> Twenty years ago there were no mobile phone networks, and the penetration rate of fixed phones was only 0.6 percent.<sup>45</sup> The Chinese authorities will almost certainly continue to use their resources to engage in censorship and from time to time will continue to ban select media outlets and arrest journalists. At the same time, the public’s demand for civil liberties and media freedom is undeniably on the rise.

The emergence of civic institutions is a critical factor in the creation and consolidation of a viable democracy. Yet these institutions alone cannot ensure that democratic modes of governance will take root and be preserved. Forceful and determined authoritarianism may persist and surge again even in the face of widespread popular civic mobilization. Moreover, ingrained attitudes, expectations, and behaviors in the realm of human rights can be slow to change, thus providing a reservoir of authoritarian resilience ready to undermine the prospects of democratic consolidation. Despite the current budding of civic organizations, the regime has indeed sought to keep a very tight grip on social organizations for fear that they might serve as a platform for antiparty activities that would pose a threat to its power. In particular, the CCP has been extremely ruthless about suppressing incipient religious movements such as the Falun Gong and underground Christian house churches and has crushed any attempts to organize independent labor unions.

Like all nations, China has its own history, cultural values, and socioeconomic and political landscape, and it needs to choose economic and political systems that fit the particular circumstances created by its history, geography, and tradition. Yet its people and political leaders alike are beginning to take note

of and even accept certain international norms and basic universal values. The Chinese are clearly engaged in an experiment of unprecedented scale in virtually all aspects of their political life. The following chapters provide detailed analyses of the dynamics of and constraints upon their quest.

## **Objectives and Organization of the Volume**

This volume is the product of an international conference organized by the John L. Thornton China Center of the Foreign Policy Studies Program at the Brookings Institution on April 12–13, 2007. Approximately 300 people attended the conference to hear and discuss papers presented by 15 political science, history, law, and economics specialists (13 were from the United States, 1 from the PRC, and 1 from Taiwan). Offered here are all of these papers, revised to reflect insights gained in scholarly exchanges at, and after, the conference. This introductory chapter has been added to provide an overview of the central theme.

The main objective of this book is to address the overarching question of whether democracy will emerge from incremental political change in China. Obviously, each chapter can address only one or two specific aspects of China's changing political landscape. Chapter contributors have vastly different views regarding the idea of democracy in China. Some are pessimistic about the prospect of Chinese democracy, whereas others believe that incremental political changes will eventually lead to a more fundamental democratic transition. Some find the CCP's adaptability impressive, whereas others think it simply cannot handle daunting challenges such as official corruption or impending demographic shifts. This clash of ideas makes the volume especially lively and interesting. The emphasis of this book lies not in its theoretical innovations, but in the richness of its empirical evidence, the multidimensional nature of its intellectual inquiry, the diversity of methodologies employed, and most important, in the contrasting assessments of China's political future.

Chapter 2 by Andrew J. Nathan focuses on what influential political leaders and public intellectuals in China think about the country's future, especially the possibility of making a transition toward democracy—a question that this introductory chapter touches on as well. Nathan, however, is far more pessimistic about the prospects for Chinese democracy. He adopts what some Western social scientists call the “minimal definition of democracy,” which requires that top power holders in a given country be elected “through open, competitive, and periodic elections.” After examining the ideas and values of four major elite groups (the current leaders, up-and-coming Fifth Generation leaders, neoconservative intellectuals, and liberals in the political establishment), he concludes that none of these prominent Chinese actors really favor the adoption of demo-

cratic elections in the near or midterm future. What Chinese elites are really interested in, Nathan observes, is improving the quality of party rule so as “to make the authoritarian system more fair, more effective, and more—not less—sustainable.” Therefore ongoing Chinese political experiments should not be seen as steps toward democracy, but rather as efforts to achieve what Nathan calls “resilient authoritarianism.”

Like Nathan, PRC scholar Yu Keping concentrates on the ideological aspects of China's political development during the reform era. Yu's assessment in chapter 3 of recent Chinese political discourse on democracy differs markedly from Nathan's, especially with respect to how Chinese leaders and public intellectuals envision their country's political trajectory, and whether China is in the midst of an ideological transformation. Yu argues that China's reform and opening are to some extent a process in which new ideas and old ideas collide and the new ideas win out over old ones. He explains that ideas such as human rights, private property rights, the rule of law, civil society, and societal harmony (that is, class reconciliation)—most of which were considered taboo subjects as recently as one or two decades ago—have now become mainstream values in Chinese society. Yu believes that these ideological changes have both reflected and brought forth broad political transformations in state-society relations. Like Nathan, Yu believes that “democracy, no matter what form it takes, is defined by the free election of political leaders.” Yet democracy cannot, and will not, be achieved in China overnight, Yu adds, since its logical path is an “incremental one,” and he gives three “road maps” for implementing it in China in the near future.

Chapter 4 by Alice L. Miller and chapter 5 by Jing Huang both examine the trend toward political institutionalization. Miller reviews the tensions early on between the paramount leader's personalized power (*renzhi*) and the CCP's institutional norms and rules for collective leadership to show how two decades of institutional development have made Chinese leadership politics more stable, regular, and “on the whole, more predictable.” She sees evidence of this “deliberate,” “incremental,” and “dynamic” institutionalization in elite promotion, retirement regulations, policy formulation, and political succession. Offering an insightful evaluation of the newly consolidated “leadership work system,” she argues that China's ongoing political institutionalization has produced an increasingly consensus-oriented collective leadership.

Huang believes that “structural and behavioral change” is behind this political institutionalization. In his judgment, China's political structure has been transformed from a system of informal, hierarchical, faction-ridden, strongman-dominant politics based on personal ties to a more formal and orderly system based on a more balanced distribution of power. This new system is “secured by institutional arrangements” such as term limits, age requirements for retirement,

and norms governing bureaucratic and regional representation. These institutional developments have had a profound impact on elite behavior. Reviewing the history of political succession in the PRC, Huang argues that Chinese leadership politics has moved from the zero-sum games of the past to an emerging pattern of power sharing, compromise making, and consensus building among competing factions, regions, and social groups. He closes his discussion with some predictions about upcoming changes in China's leadership structure and civil-military relations.

Chapter 6 by Cheng Li is about the so-called Fifth Generation of leaders that is poised to emerge at the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007 and the Eleventh National People's Congress in March 2008. This generation is composed of the age cohort born in the 1950s. Many refer to it collectively as the "lost generation" since its members were barred from formal schooling during the Cultural Revolution. Studying 103 prominent leaders in this age cohort, Li finds that the Fifth Generation differs profoundly from preceding generations of leaders in their formative experiences, educational credentials, political socialization, administrative backgrounds, foreign contacts, and worldviews. Many of these leaders were "sent-down youth" who spent years working as manual laborers in rural areas when they were teenagers. They later made remarkable "come-backs," entering college when the higher education system resumed functioning after 1978 and rapidly rebuilding their professional careers. If the Fifth Generation's collective characteristics are any indication, says Li, its members may think it is in their best interest to pursue substantial political reform, culminating in democratic elections, sometime in the next decade or so.

In a case study focusing on China's national oil companies (NOCs), chapter 7 by Erica S. Downs examines the role of state-owned enterprises in Chinese politics and the growing power of business elites. Downs sees the NOCs as an interest group in economic policy and leadership politics whose interests "do not always coincide with those of the party-state" because of their global business portfolios and profit-driven nature. Although the party-state maintains control over these companies, they "have become more autonomous and influential under the umbrella of China's rapidly expanding, increasingly market-oriented, and internationalizing energy sector." Their sense of accountability to the stockholders (as some of their subsidiaries are listed on both domestic and foreign stock exchanges) and the professionalism of their senior executives (especially those who were trained in the West) are causing NOC interests to further diverge from those of the state energy bureaucracy. In a broader context, Downs argues, these changes may pave the way for more Chinese NOC managers to enter the national leadership in the future, perhaps creating more diverse channels to political power and a more pluralistic decisionmaking process.

Barry Naughton's central concern in chapter 8 is the economic policies under Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. During the past few years, observes Naughton, Hu and Wen have "presided over a systematic reorientation of economic and social policy that has, in nearly every respect, shifted Chinese policy to the left." By "left," Naughton means populist policies that help to redistribute national wealth broadly, across geographical and class divisions, but, he adds, they do not imply a "rollback" or "halt" in reform. Examining major policy areas, he demonstrates that "Hu and Wen have extended government patronage to much larger groups of people than in the recent past," when Jiang Zemin was mainly interested in representing the interests of China's elites. Naughton goes on to explore what this economic policy shift indicates about China's political system and decisionmaking process. He provides three contrasting views of the political logic of this shift and in doing so shows there is no linkage between the leftward tilt and the prospects for democracy. Nevertheless, Naughton notes, the interests of large-scale social groups—whether "elite forces" or "disadvantaged social groups"—are now "routinely brought into the decisionmaking process."

Media independence, the rule of law, and civil society—often considered important forces for democratization—are discussed in chapters 9, 10, and 11, respectively. In chapter 9, Richard Baum examines the impact of the information revolution and media commercialization on politics. Recent developments in print, broadcast, and Internet-based media, says Baum, reflect growing tension between the Chinese authorities' desire to control and the public's demand for more varied sources of information. "Beneath the surface continuity of tight media censorship, intimidation of journalists, stringent regulatory barriers, and the ubiquitous 'Great Firewall,'" observes Baum, "a quiet revolution is under way." Drawing on several recent empirical cases, Baum argues that "the media are beginning to find an independent, critical voice." Looking at the changing role of the media in the broader context of ongoing legislative pressures to strengthen private property rights and the growing public demand for greater transparency in government, Baum finds that to some extent the media have become a "natural ally" of an emerging Chinese civil society. All these "peripheral" developments, Baum concludes, "cannot help but further erode the presumptive power monopoly enjoyed by the Leninist Party-state."

Chapter 10 by Jacques deLisle makes the thought-provoking and well-documented argument that the rise of law or "legalization" in reform-era China "is not meant to advance, and has not been advancing, democracy." Instead, from the perspective of the Chinese leadership, rule by law and the growth of the legal system "have substituted for democracy and postponed effective demand for democratization." This "legalization without democratization," says deLisle, may prove sustainable for a relatively long time, given that the relation-

ship between rule of law and democracy, “while broadly positive, is not simple or linear.” In view of the tension between Hu era populism and China’s legal development (including constitutionalism) in recent years, he concludes that despite the political rhetoric of the new leadership, its strategy has been to consistently emphasize the substitution effects and check the mutual reinforcing effects between legalization and democratization.

In chapter 11 Joseph Fewsmith turns to the relationship between central and local governments in the context of China’s growing social demands. Because of the daunting challenges that the CCP faces, Fewsmith points out, Chinese leaders often respond quickly to social demands and are particularly effective in localizing conflicts before they get out of control. Drawing on several recent comprehensive surveys by Chinese research institutes and think tanks, Fewsmith notes that most citizens are relatively satisfied with the current conditions in the country and express a “high degree of trust in the ability of the central government to manage the problems the country faces.” At the same time, local officials are clearly aware that the governing capacity of the ruling party needs improvement. Fewsmith also presents some interesting case studies illustrating the growing role of NGOs, especially chambers of commerce, along with democratic consultation meetings and grassroots elections. All these innovations in governance, Fewsmith observes, aim to make local leaders more responsive to citizens’ needs.

Chapter 12 by Minxin Pei focuses on the issue of corruption. Pei cannot imagine how China “could confront its multifold economic, social, and political challenges in the decade ahead without waging a more committed and successful campaign against official corruption.” Despite all the recent rhetoric and efforts by the Chinese leadership to fight official graft, says Pei, all evidence suggests that corruption has not been constrained in any significant way, and he highlights several business areas and government institutions in which it appears to be worsening. Chinese leaders may call for the establishment of a modern legal system, he adds, but the judiciary remains heavily politicized. In assessing what rampant corruption means for China’s future trajectory, Pei presents two intriguing scenarios. First, the CCP’s need to fight corruption could persuade its leaders to expand the role of the media and civil society, as well as the autonomy of the judiciary. Alternatively, corruption could lead to the collapse of the regime. In Pei’s judgment, such a regime collapse would not usher in a new era of liberalism but would be more likely to lead to the birth of a new oligarchy.

Chapter 13 by Dorothy J. Solinger offers a pessimistic view of China’s political future on the basis of some broad demographic trends in China such as aging and urbanization. Solinger looks at the social groups most affected by these trends—namely, the aged, bachelors, rural-to-urban migrants, the urban



poor and the jobless, the new middle class, and wealthy entrepreneurs—and makes some preliminary assessments of their political importance as well as their likely attitudes toward democracy, if it were to develop. She argues that the regime forms an “alliance with the upper strata of the population” but tries to keep those at the base “minimally satisfied but still politically excluded.” The chapter concludes that elitism, not democratization, is likely to be the dominant feature of Chinese politics in the years to come.

Civil-military relations in authoritarian regimes such as China are often among the most important variables in determining the country's political trajectory. In chapter 14, James Mulvenon acknowledges the CCP civilian leadership's firm and effective control over the Chinese military but finds a new trend developing: the military is beginning to challenge the command mechanisms and foreign policy apparatus of the party-state in new and unexpected ways, stemming largely from the growing operational capabilities of the military. The post-Mao civil-military arrangements remind him of Ellis Joffe's concept of “conditional compliance.” Mulvenon employs three contending hypotheses to analyze the case of the recent antisatellite missile test for an inkling of Chinese intentions and military/foreign policy decisionmaking processes, concluding that the military is unlikely to make any fundamental changes in the way it would react to a major political crisis similar to the 1989 Tiananmen incident. Indeed, it does not seem to possess a veto on crucial issues such as political succession, major shifts in socioeconomic policy, or democratic reform.

The two final chapters of the volume focus on the linkage between external models and China's political trajectory. Chapter 15 by David Shambaugh tells, in a systemic way, the story of China's broad interest in the lessons and experiences of foreign ruling parties since the Tiananmen Square crackdown and the fall of the Soviet and East European communist regimes. Shambaugh believes China's internal analysis of foreign political systems can shed a great deal of light on the nature and objectives of the CCP's reforms. In exploring the backgrounds and motivations of the party's ideological innovations, political adaptability, policy changes, and institutional reforms over the past two decades, he finds that one can trace many of these political developments to the CCP's “eclectic borrowing” from a wide range of communist, former communist, and noncommunist ruling parties.

In chapter 16 Chu Yun-han sets out three ambitious objectives. First, drawing on longitudinal survey data, he analyzes the almost parallel evolutionary trajectories in political values between Taiwan beginning in the early 1980s and China since the early 1990s. Second, he compares the similar political developments of these two originally Leninist regimes in terms of ideological transformation, elite recruitment, social movements, commercialization and liberaliza-

tion of the media, and the development of limited competitive elections. Third, he argues that Taiwan is a good case for comparison with the mainland not only because of its “heuristic value” but also because it can be seen as “an agent of change”—“with important implications for China’s political future.” Chu finds that Taiwan’s formula of “democratization by installment,” which was favored by the Kuomintang leadership before the fundamental democratic transformations of the 1980s, is similar to the idea of “incremental democracy” that the CCP leaders have recently proposed. Yet, as Chu emphasizes, nothing is foreordained in the development of a country’s political trajectory, and there is no guarantee that China will end up democratizing.

As the chapters of this volume demonstrate, China’s political landscape is rapidly changing, with a wide range of possible future scenarios emerging from empirical information and theoretical analysis. At this point, it is impossible to determine what its final shape will be, yet the assessments here provide provocative ideas for both intellectual and policy debates on a subject that merits the utmost attention. Needless to say, the ramifications of political developments in China, the world’s most populous country, will extend far beyond its national borders.

## Notes

1. For the problems of economic disparity, social dislocation, and environmental degradation, see Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *The Political Economy of Uneven Development: The Case of China* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); Dorothy J. Solinger, *Contesting Citizenship in Urban China: Peasant Migrants, the State and the Logic of the Market* (University of California Press, 1999); and Elizabeth C. Economy, *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China’s Future* (Cornell University Press, 2004).

2. He Zengke made this point in his article “Jianjin zhengzhi gaige yu minzhu zhuangxin” (Incremental political reforms and democratic transition), *Journal of the Beijing Academy of Administration*, nos. 3–4 (2004). Quoted from Liu Jie, *Zhongguo zhengzhi fazhan jin Cheng 2007 nian* (China’s political development, 2007) (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2007), p. 306.

3. Zhang Houyi, “The Status of Private Entrepreneurs in the New Century” ([www.china.com.cn/info/07shxs/txt/2007-01/17/content\\_7667784.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/info/07shxs/txt/2007-01/17/content_7667784.htm) [July 15, 2007]).

4. Li Xueyi, *Dandai Zhongguo shehuijieceng yanjiu baogao* (Research report on social strata in contemporary China) (Beijing: Shehui kexuewenxian chubanshe, 2002), pp. 254–56.

5. Quoted from *Zhongguo jingying bao* (China Business Daily), July 9, 2006, p. 1. According to this McKinsey report, the proportion of Chinese urban families with an annual income of ¥25,000 or less will drop from 77 percent in 2006 to 10 percent in 2025. For a comprehensive discussion of the definition of the middle class in China, see Zhou Xiaohong and others, *Zhongguo zhongchan jieji diaocha* (A survey of the Chinese middle class) (Beijing: Shehui wenxian chubanshe, 2005).

6. This is based on data from China’s Ministry of Agriculture ([cnc.nfcmag.com/Read-News-12400.html](http://cnc.nfcmag.com/Read-News-12400.html) [July 15, 2007]).

7. Hu Angang, "Dierci zhuanxing: Cong jingji jianshe wei zhongxin dao zhidu jianshe wei zhongxin" (The second transition: From economic growth-centered development to the state building-centered approach). In *Dierci zhuanxing: Guojia zhidu jianshe* (The second transition: State system building), edited by Hu Angang, Wang Shaoguang, and Zhou Jianming (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2003), p. 22.

8. Hu and others, eds., *Dierci zhuanxing*, pp. 378–79.

9. David Shambaugh, "Let a Thousand Democracies Bloom," *International Herald Tribune*, July 6, 2007.

10. Yu Keping, "Minzhu shige haodongxi" (Democracy is a good thing), in *Minzhu shige haodongxi* (Democracy is a good thing), edited by Yan Jian (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006).

11. For a more comprehensive discussion of Yu's ideas about the democratic transition in China, see Yu Keping, *Zengliang minzhu yu shanzhi* (Incremental democracy and good governance) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2003), and *Zhongguo gongmin shehui de xingqi yu zhili de bianqian* (The emergence of civil society and its significance for governance in reform China) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2002).

12. For their recent speeches on this issue, see *Dang de chuanguang lilun* (Theoretical innovation of the Chinese Communist Party), 2 vols. (Beijing: Red Flag Publishing House, 2007).

13. "Text of *Washington Post* interview," in *China Daily's* webpage ([www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-11/24/content\\_284076.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-11/24/content_284076.htm) [July 14, 2007]).

14. "President Bush Meets with President Hu of the People's Republic of China," White House Press Release, April 20, 2006 ([www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060420-1.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/04/20060420-1.html) [July 14, 2007]).

15. For excerpts of Hu's speech, see [www.xinhuanet.com/politics/hjt625/index.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/hjt625/index.htm) (July 14, 2007).

16. I am grateful to Carlos Pascual for this point.

17. This is probably not unique to China. As E. E. Schattschneider observed in the United States, people reconcile their democratic rhetoric and their undemocratic behavior by remaining comfortably unaware of the inconsistency of theory and practice. See Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1960).

18. Maurice R. Greenberg made this point in "Additional and Dissenting Views," in *U.S.-China Relations: An Affirmative Agenda, A Responsible Course*, edited by Carla A. Hill and Dennis C. Blair, Independent Task Force Report 59 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2007), p. 101.

19. *Ibid.*

20. For a detailed discussion of the contrasting scenarios of the political future of China, see Cheng Li, "China in the Year 2020: Three Political Scenarios" *Asia Policy*, no. 4 (July 2007), pp. 17–29.

21. For a work that presents largely this assessment, see James Mann, *The China Fantasy: How Our Leaders Explain Away Chinese Repression* (New York: Viking, 2007).

22. Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1997), p. 4.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

26. Qing Lianbin, "Zhongyang dangxiao diaocha: Guanyuan shouci renwei zhi'an cheng zuiyanzhong shehui wenti" (Survey at the Central Party School: Officials believe for the first

time that social stability is the most serious social problem in China), *Beijing ribao* (Beijing Daily), December 18, 2006, p. 2; also the editorial, “Zhonggong ganbu moshi zhenggai zhengshi Hu-Wen tizhi de xin yinhan” (Neglect of the need for political reforms among CCP officials is the new hidden problem for the Hu-Wen administration), *Shijie ribao* (World Journal), December 25, 2006, p. A3.

27. For lists of published books from these presses, see [www.ssap.com.cn](http://www.ssap.com.cn), [www.dxcbs.net/index.asp](http://www.dxcbs.net/index.asp), [www.cctpbok.com/apply/jianjie.asp](http://www.cctpbok.com/apply/jianjie.asp), and [www.csspw.com.cn](http://www.csspw.com.cn) (July 14, 2007).

28. Vera Schwarz, “Memory, Commemoration, and the Plight of China’s Intellectuals,” *Wilson Quarterly* (August 1989), pp. 120–29.

29. Joseph Schumpeter first drew the distinction between rationalistic and idealistic definitions of democracy, on the one hand, and descriptive and procedural definitions, on the other. He preferred the latter. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 269.

30. *Ibid.* For a further discussion of Schumpeter’s distinction of two democratic concepts, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), pp. 6–7.

31. For a more detailed discussion of the 1989 Tiananmen movement, see Cheng Li and Lynn White, “China’s Technocratic Movement and the World Economic Herald,” *Modern China* 17 (July 1991): 342–88.

32. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*, p. xiv.

33. Robert A. Dahl, *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* (Yale University Press, 1961), p. 86.

34. Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and Its Critics* (Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 59–60.

35. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*, p. xiv.

36. This discussion of Wen’s meeting with the Brookings Institution delegation is based on John L. Thornton, “Assessing the Next Phase of a Rising China,” memo, December 2006; “Riding the Dragon: Brookings Launches New Center with a Journey across China,” November 2007; and my own notes.

37. Xinhua News Agency, December 5, 2002 ([www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Dec/50396.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Dec/50396.htm)).

38. Liu Junning, “Zhongguo zhengzhi tizhi gaige: Dangnei minzhu yihuo xianzheng minzhu” (China’s political reform: Intra-party democracy or constitutional democracy?) (<http://forum.chinesenewsnet.com> [December 5, 2005]).

39. This is based on an interview with Jiang Enzhu, chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National People’s Congress, June 25, 2007.

40. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “Zhongguo de sifa gaige” (China’s Judicial Reform) ([news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/china\\_news/newsid\\_2149000/21492061.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/chinese/china_news/newsid_2149000/21492061.stm) [July 27, 2002]).

41. Jerome Cohen, “Can, and Should, the Rule of Law be Transplanted outside the West?” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Law Schools, Washington, D.C., January 4, 2007.

42. See [www.sachina.edu.cn/htmldata/news/2005/12/656.html](http://www.sachina.edu.cn/htmldata/news/2005/12/656.html).

43. This is based on an interview with Tian Jin, vice minister of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, June 26, 2007.

44. See the monthly statistical report of the Ministry of the Information Industry of the People’s Republic of China ([www.mii.gov.cn](http://www.mii.gov.cn)), September 21, 2006.

45. The penetration rate of 0.6 per 100 people refers to the year 1985. See Zheng Qibao, ed., *Cong longduan dao jingzheng: Dianxin bangye guizhi lilun yu shizheng yanjiu* (From monopoly to competition: Empirical study and theoretical discussion of the telecommunications industry) (Beijing: Post and Telecom Press, 2005), p. 344.

