

## INTRODUCTION

### *Making Democracy Safe for China*

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American discourse about China,” observed Richard Madsen, a distinguished sinologist in the United States, “has long been as much about ourselves as about China.”<sup>1</sup> Far too often we American analysts evaluate China according to our own preconceived notion of what the country is like rather than paying much attention to the Chinese mentality and reality. Throughout history, American views, values, and interests have shaped our assessments of and debates on China’s political trajectory, especially the possibility and desirability of democracy in the world’s most populous country. Optimists often envision the promotion of democratic principles in China as the best way to fulfill President Woodrow Wilson’s century-old idealistic appeal that “the world must be made safe for democracy.”<sup>2</sup> A democratic China, they believe, would not only mollify ideological and political tensions between China and the West, but also inspire Chinese policymakers to abide by international norms and standards. In contrast, pessimists are cynical about any discussion regarding China’s political progress toward democracy in the foreseeable future. In their view, China’s remarkable economic

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development makes the one-party-state system more resilient and thus more capable of resisting any significant political change.<sup>3</sup> According to these pessimists, this resilient Chinese authoritarian regime, with its rapid economic and military modernization, inevitably constitutes a significant threat to the United States.

What is largely absent in the English-speaking communities of contemporary China studies, however, is a knowledge and understanding of the Chinese discourse about the country's political future. In fact, since the late 1990s, and even more so in recent years, Chinese public intellectuals have engaged in heated discourse on various aspects of China's political reform. Since 2005 Chinese scholars and the official media have fostered a nationwide public discussion about democracy, something that American political scientist David Shambaugh has called the "democracy wave" debates.<sup>4</sup> This Chinese discourse reflects some new thinking about democracy, governance, and civil society in the scholarly communities of the People's Republic of China (PRC). But unfortunately, as noted recently by a Singapore-based scholar, "most leading social scientists in China do not write in English and most of their work has not been translated."<sup>5</sup> As a result, their work goes largely unread by members of the Western academic and policymaking communities.

It is critically important, however, for the outside world to understand the ongoing Chinese intellectual and political discourse. Although foreign pressure or influence may have played an important role from time to time in the political development of China, ultimately only the Chinese leaders and their people can decide the course of the country's political trajectory. The following three interrelated questions are crucial to any analysis of China's political future. First, what incentives do Chinese leaders have for pursuing political reforms? Second, what factors or obstacles will prevent them from doing so? And third, what measures should China adopt to help overcome these obstacles?

Arguably no one has been more articulate in addressing these three questions than Yu Keping, the author of this volume. In fact, the aforementioned "democracy wave" debates in China began with Yu's now well-known article entitled "Democracy is a Good Thing" (chapter 1). The article, which was based on Yu's interview with the Hong Kong-based *Dagong Daily* in 2005, was reprinted first in the *Beijing Daily* in the fall of 2006 and since then has appeared in almost all of the country's major newspapers.<sup>6</sup> In 2007 the *Southern Daily*, a leading liberal newspaper in China, ranked "Democracy Is a Good Thing" as one of the most influential articles in the country during

that year.<sup>7</sup> That same year, Yu himself was selected by the Chinese media as one of the most influential public intellectuals in China. In 2008 Yu was named by the Chinese media as one of the top fifty people who have been most influential for China's development in the past three decades.<sup>8</sup>

In a way, Yu's thesis is similar to Winston Churchill's famous witty remark that "democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried." Using simple and explicit words, Yu directly addresses a profound suspicion and concern that is deeply rooted in the minds of many Chinese nationals: why is democracy good for China? The public discourse on the desirability of democracy that Yu's article has stimulated is much needed for the country, currently in the midst of a far-reaching socioeconomic transformation. If democracy will lead to chaos, or even the dissolution of the country, there is no incentive for the Chinese leaders and people to pursue it. In addition, if democracy is perceived by the country's political, economic, and cultural elites as something that will undermine, rather than enhance, their interests, there will be no strong consensus for such a political future in China. Therefore, the greatest intellectual challenge for Yu and other like-minded scholars is to make democracy safe for China both conceptually and procedurally.

### **The Book's Objective, Organization, and Outlook**

This book aims to help those in the English-speaking communities of China studies better understand some of the dynamic new thinking occurring in the PRC around Chinese political reforms and democracy. It features translations of some of Yu Keping's most important essays on politics, society, and culture in contemporary China. These essays, selected by Yu himself, were all originally published in Chinese; most of them appeared in prominent academic journals and magazines in China between 2006 and 2008. With a couple of exceptions, they were translated into English exclusively for this volume.

The book is organized into four thematic parts. Part one highlights political changes in post-Mao China, especially in the wake of the agenda for political reforms announced at the recent Seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It also includes an overview of the groundbreaking developments in the academic disciplines of political science and public administration in reform-era China, illustrating how these developments contribute to the diffusion of international norms throughout the country. Part two focuses on China's emerging civil society. In this section,

the author provides comprehensive information about, and a thorough analysis of, the types, status, and characteristics of China's civil society organizations, as well as the government's administrative regulations that both guide and restrict them. Part three examines various challenging dichotomies that the country faces. Among them are culture and modernity, economic growth and sustainability, and human society and environmental protection. The final part places China's ongoing socioeconomic and political transformation within the context of the broader issue of global governance. The author argues for a delicate balance between the need to preserve the Chinese cultural and sociopolitical identity in the era of globalization and the imperative for the country to participate more actively in the construction of a harmonious world.

All four of these parts not only present multidimensional political changes occurring in Chinese state and society but also serve to reinforce the book's central thesis about the feasibility of democracy in China. While acknowledging many of the potential problems that democracy may cause, Yu argues that there is a way by which China can make a transition to democracy with "minimum political and social costs."<sup>9</sup> Yu calls this approach "incremental democracy" and suggests that China's political reforms should be incremental over time and manageable in scale. These political reforms include intraparty democracy, grassroots elections, and legal reforms. Yu believes that these reforms will ultimately result in a "democratic breakthrough" when various existing political forces are ready for such a drastic change. This approach, in Yu's view, is the best way to achieve a political "soft landing" in China.<sup>10</sup>

## Universal Values of Democracy

A frequently raised question is whether Yu Keping's conception of democracy is similar to that of most people in the world, especially those in the West. Conceptual clarity is essential in the political and intellectual dialogue between the Chinese and the outside world. At the same time, however, foreign analysts need to understand the political context in which Chinese leaders and their advisors, such as Yu Keping, address this question. Like Chinese leaders, Yu Keping does not argue that China should experiment with a multiparty democratic competition, nor does he believe that the country should move toward an American-style system based on a tripartite division between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. In fact, while stating unambiguously that China should draw some positive elements from

the Western political culture and system, Yu maintains that “Westernization of the Chinese political system” should not be a political objective for China.

Yu’s position is understandable. Even those who are most optimistic about the potential democratization of China do not expect the country to develop a multiparty system in the near future. Chinese thinkers such as Yu have every reason to argue that the PRC’s version of democracy will, and should, have its own unique features. After all, British democracy, Australian democracy, Japanese democracy, Mexican democracy, and American democracy all differ from each other in some important ways. They all, however, feature institutional checks and balances, political choice, constitutionalism, the independence of the media, and certain civil liberties. China’s political system can have its own unique characteristics, but it must include these same elements if it wishes to be considered democratic in nature.

Throughout his writings, Yu Keping clearly and consistently advocates the universal values of democracy (*minzhu de pushijiazhi*). When Yu states that “democracy is a good thing,” he means that it is good for all of human society, not just for the Americans or the Chinese. In his discussion of cultural developments in the era of globalization, Yu observes, “globalization not only makes people realize that they share a common fate but also helps them identify with such basic values as freedom, equality, justice, security, welfare, and dignity. Pursuit of such basic values is the core principle, as well as the ultimate destination, of cultural globalization” (chapter 8).

It is interesting to note that China’s leaders are also speaking about the universal values of democracy. In a meeting with a delegation from the Brookings Institution in Beijing in October 2006, Premier Wen Jiabao spent a substantial amount of time explaining China’s objectives for political democracy.<sup>11</sup> He defined democracy in largely the same way as many in the West would explain it. “When we talk about democracy,” Premier Wen said, “we usually refer to the three most important components: elections, judicial independence, and supervision based on checks and balances.”<sup>12</sup> In addition to expressing such sentiments in private forums, Wen and President Hu Jintao have repeatedly announced publicly the importance of democracy in building an ever-stronger Chinese state. Indeed, the word *democracy* has become a mainstay in the political speeches of many among the Chinese leadership.

Both Yu’s thesis about democracy and Wen’s remarks about China’s road map for political development reflect new thinking in the liberal wing of the Chinese political establishment. For a long time, the party doctrine has portrayed Western democracy as a system that represents only the interests of a

small number of the rich and powerful. To Chinese critics, politics in the West has particular problems that result from the way in which campaigns are financed. At the same time, Chinese leaders and scholars have tended to overemphasize the uniqueness of China's conditions and the Chinese characteristics in their economic and political system. Make no mistake, not all Chinese leaders or public intellectuals agree with the enthusiastic views regarding democracy articulated by Premier Wen and Professor Yu. One may even reasonably assume that Wen and Yu represent a minority view in both the Chinese leadership and scholarly communities.

As some Chinese scholars have observed, the fact that Yu argues that "democracy is a good thing" implies that many in the country hold the opposite view that "democracy is a bad thing."<sup>13</sup> According to Shi Tianjian, a political scientist at Duke University, Yu's thesis does not necessarily reflect an ideological breakthrough in the CCP establishment, but it does reflect a new trend or a new school of thought emerging from the Chinese leadership. "It is a major change as one previously considered a thing as bad, but now views the same thing as good," observed Shi.<sup>14</sup> All these observations highlight the originality and importance of Yu's thesis in the Chinese political discourse. The following pages provide a more detailed description of Yu's professional career, his main scholarly contributions, and how he differs from other prominent Chinese thinkers on the issue of democracy.

### **Yu Keping: A Thinker from a New Generation**

The Chinese media often identify Yu Keping as a "rising star of the new generation of CCP theoreticians" (*Zhonggong lilun xinxiu*).<sup>15</sup> His scholarly accomplishments have earned him a reputation in the field of political science in China. This is evident in the fact that he concurrently serves as a guest professor in about a dozen of the country's most prestigious universities including Peking, Tsinghua, Renmin, Beijing Normal, Nankai, Fudan, Shanghai Jiaotong, Zhejiang, Xiamen, Sichuan, Jilin, the Harbin Institute of Technology, and China National School of Administration. Very few political scientists, Chinese or foreign, have received the academic honor of teaching at so many top schools in the PRC.

In addition to being actively engaged in academic research and theoretical thinking, Yu is also an insider in the Chinese political establishment. Since 2001 he has served as deputy director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) under the Central Committee of the CCP. This is a

ministry-level official position. Therefore, Yu has a dual identity as a scholar-official (*xuezhexing guanyuan*). The CCTB is a major research institution responsible for four important tasks: translating the classic foreign language works of Marxist theoreticians into Chinese; translating the works of the top Chinese leaders into foreign languages; conducting research on Chinese socialism in both theory and practice; and conducting research on new theoretical developments in social sciences and philosophy around the world.<sup>16</sup> Although much smaller than the Central Party School (CPS), the CCTB also serves as a major think tank for the Chinese leadership, especially in the area of theoretical research. Yu currently also serves as director of the China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics and of the Center for Chinese Government Innovations at Peking University. These two university-based think tanks have been active in keeping abreast of both the global trends in social science research and China's domestic political changes.

During the reform era, a number of CCP establishment theoreticians have played an important role in attaining ideological breakthroughs. For example, in 1978 Hu Fuming, then an instructor of philosophy at Nanjing University, published an article entitled "Practice Is the Sole Criterion for Testing Truth" in the *Guangming Daily*, challenging the orthodox view of the CCP leadership abiding by the tenets of Maoism. Not long thereafter the party jettisoned Maoism in favor of the policies of reform and opening the country to the outside world. In 1991, when party conservatives criticized Deng Xiaoping's bold market reforms, Zhou Ruijin, then deputy editor in chief of the *Liberation Daily*, wrote an article that was very controversial at the time, rejecting the simplistic and dichotomist way of thinking about socialism and capitalism. Both theoretically and practically, the article justified the acceleration of market liberalization in the country, especially in the pacesetter city of Shanghai. In 2003 Zheng Bijian, then vice president of the Central Party School, gave a keynote speech at the Boao Forum in Hainan, outlining the reasons why China's rise would not be a threat to the rest of the world.<sup>17</sup> Zheng's work has since been used extensively by Hu Jintao in his formulation of the "theory of China's peaceful rise." It should be noted that Hu Fuming, Zhou Ruijin, and Zheng Bijian were all born in the 1930s and belong to a generation of CCP theoreticians who had their formative experiences in the Communist revolution and the first decade of the PRC. Yu's generation of CCP theoreticians, on the other hand, came of age during the Cultural Revolution and became actively engaged in intellectual discourse in the reform era. Thus, in many ways, their views differ profoundly from those of this preceding generation.

Yu Keping was born into a humble family in Zhuji County, Zhejiang Province, in 1959. He grew up during the Cultural Revolution. In 1976, at the age of seventeen, he began to work as a farmer and later a village cadre at Huashan Village in his home county. This experience was similar to that of many prominent leaders of the so-called fifth generation including Vice President Xi Jinping, Vice Premier Li Keqiang, Vice Premier Wang Qishan, and Director of the CCP Organization Department Li Yuanchao, as well as of distinguished public intellectuals and artists such as economist Hu Angang, sociologist Li Yinhe, historian Qin Hui, movie director Zhang Yimou, and artist Chen Danqing. The hardships these people experienced in the countryside have fostered some valuable traits in the generation such as endurance, critical thought, and humility as well as an intimate knowledge of rural China.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of Deng Xiaoping's policy initiatives, China resumed the use of college entrance exams in 1978. Yu was among the first group of students to enter college after passing the most competitive entrance exams in the history of the PRC. He enrolled in a three-year program in the Department of Political Science and History at Shaoxing Normal College in his native province. Following graduation, Yu spent the next ten years in Chinese educational institutions, first as a graduate student and then as an instructor. He received a master's degree in philosophy at Xiamen University in 1985 and then became one of the first two doctoral recipients in political science in the PRC when he was awarded a PhD degree in 1988 by Peking University.<sup>19</sup> Yu's doctoral advisor was Professor Zhao Baoxu, who is often regarded, in both China and abroad, as a founder of the academic field of political science in the PRC.

Throughout Yu's time in school, China was undergoing a series of phenomenal social and economic changes. Indeed, the decade between 1978 and 1988 was an exciting period marked by an enthusiasm among Chinese youths for drawing lessons from the Cultural Revolution and absorbing all sorts of new knowledge, including Western liberal ideas. According to Li Jingpeng, a political science professor at Peking University who taught Yu in the late 1980s, in his student years Yu not only showed enormous interest in Western intellectual history and recent trends but also paid particular attention to the selective application of Western theories to China's political development.<sup>20</sup> Yu's doctoral thesis was entitled "An Analytical Framework for Contemporary Chinese Politics."

Like many prominent social scientists in his generation, Yu has spent much time overseas. In the mid-1990s, as a visiting professor, he taught at schools such as Duke University in the United States and the Free University



in Germany. Over the years, Yu has developed a wide-ranging intellectual interest in Western thought through a voracious reading of Western social science writings. He was particularly influenced by the work of prominent Western thinkers such as Jürgen Habermas, Harold Laski, and Lester M. Salamon. Yu has also collaborated with some distinguished American and European scholars including Arif Dirlik, Anthony Saich, and Thomas Heberer. He served as consultant for a government innovation project organized by the United Nations Development Programme and currently is a board member for some international journals such as *Global Studies* in Great Britain and *New Political Science* in the United States.<sup>21</sup> In 2008 Yu was awarded an honorary PhD degree at the University of Duisburg-Essen in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia; he was the tenth Chinese national in German history to be awarded such an honorary degree.

Since the beginning of his academic career, Yu has been known for his unconventional thinking and bold ideas. In 1990, for example, Yu argued in a scholarly article that human rights should be considered fundamental values of human society.<sup>22</sup> At the time, the Chinese media and mainstream scholarly communities still rejected the concept of human rights and often characterized it as a hypocritical Western idea or a term used in anti-China rhetoric. To a great extent, Yu's view of human rights challenged the ideological status quo of the time.

Yu was also among the first group of Chinese scholars in the PRC to study civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). According to Yu, civil society and NGOs are not the “patents of the West.” As he articulates in his section on China's social transformation and civil society in this volume, the multiple and dynamic roles of NGOs could share the burden of governance and contribute to a harmonious society. In Yu's view, the rapid rise of Chinese NGOs has profoundly changed state-society relations in the country. Yu believes that under the current conditions the objective for the Chinese government and the public should be “good governance” (*shanzhi*) instead of the traditional way of “good government” (*shanzheng*). Probably earlier than anyone else in China, Yu applied these Western concepts to contemporary Chinese political values.

For Yu, the basis of good governance is cooperation between the public and the government with the aim of maximizing public interest in the process of societal management. This does not mean that no conflict should be allowed but that both sides should be willing to negotiate and compromise. Changes in state-society relations will naturally put more pressure on

the government, which needs to constantly adjust its policies to meet the demands of an ever-changing society. Yu lists ten basic components of good governance: legitimacy, transparency, efficiency, stability, responsibility, responsiveness, rule of law, justice, participation, and cleanness.

Yu's research has also contributed a great deal to central-local relations in terms of good governance. To help local officials improve their leadership skills and search for local government reforms and innovations, Yu initiated the program of China Local Government Innovation Awards, which is jointly administrated by the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, the Central Party School, and Peking University. Three rounds of competition have been completed. More than 1,100 local governments applied for the awards; forty of them became final winners. In this regard, Yu is not only a thinker but also a doer.

It should be noted that several leading public intellectuals in Yu's generation who once had the dual identity of scholar-official recently became full-time officials. Examples include Wang Huning, Cao Jianming, and Xia Yong. All of them are in their late forties and early fifties, all are well-accomplished scholars in the fields of political science and law, and all spent several years as visiting scholars in the leading universities of the United States and Europe. Wang served as dean of the law school at Fudan; Cao was president of the East China University of Political Science and Law; and Xia worked as director of the Institute of Law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Currently, Wang is a member of the secretariat and director of the Policy Research Office of the CCP Central Committee, serving as one of the top aids to Secretary General Hu Jintao; Cao is procurator general of the Supreme People's Procuratorate; and Xia holds the position of director of the Central Bureau of Secrecy of the CCP Central Committee. Their current high-ranking official positions do not allow them to participate in intellectual discourse or to publish their scholarly work.

In contrast, Yu Keping has actively engaged in academic research and debate. His remarkably long list of scholarly publications in the past decade, which can be found at the end of this volume, shows his many professional interests and his ardent commitment to his field of expertise. A prolific writer, Yu, who is still in his forties, has already written twelve monographs, coauthored four books, edited fourteen volumes, and published numerous articles. His most famous works include *Liberation of Thoughts and Political Progress* (2008), *Democracy Is a Good Thing* (2006), *The Institutional Environment of Chinese Civil Society* (2006), *Globalization and Sovereignty* (2004),

and *Incremental Democracy and Good Governance* (2003). These widely circulated and respected publications are transforming the Chinese view of political reforms, civil society, governance, and cultural modernization in the era of globalization. His most important contribution, however, is his painstaking endeavor to offer a road map for China's democratic future.

## Mapping a Chinese Path to Democracy

For many political and cultural elites in present-day China, the idea of democracy probably generates more fear than hope. Fear regarding a democratic transition is deeply rooted in the mindset of the Chinese, who believe it could lead to one of several disastrous futures. Among them are possible prolonged domestic chaos (*luan*), another 1989 Tiananmen-like tragedy, the loss of privilege or power on the part of the establishment, vicious political conflicts among leaders, the rise of demagogues, an anti-China conspiracy by foreign powers, the breakdown of the multiethnic nation, and the uprising of a large number of poor and resentful social groups such as migrant laborers. From the perspective of the political establishment, China cannot afford the tensions and possible frictions generated by that fear.

In a recent interview with the Chinese media, Yu Keping pointed out three major obstacles for governmental reforms and democratic experiments in the country. First, there is no strong incentive for government officials to experiment with democratic reforms. Second, government reforms involve big political risk, and officials worry that the current political environment has a low degree of tolerance for any mistakes. Consequently, officials are not willing to take the risk. Third, "institutional inertia" does not encourage bold political experiments. To a great extent, political reforms involve the readjustment of interests and redistribution of power. Understandably, no institution or interest group is eager to experience heavy losses in power and privilege as a result of political reforms.<sup>23</sup>

A survey of 200 Chinese officials and scholars conducted in 2005 showed that 50 percent believed that China's economic and political reforms have been constrained by "some elite groups with vested economic interests" (*jide liyi jituan*).<sup>24</sup> A good example of how government officials and business interest groups have formed a "wicked coalition" can be found in the realm of real estate development.<sup>25</sup> Some Chinese observers believe that the various players associated with property development have emerged as one of the most powerful special interest groups in the present-day PRC.<sup>26</sup> According to

Sun Liping, a sociology professor at Tsinghua University, the real estate interest group has accumulated tremendous economic and social capital since the mid-1990s.<sup>27</sup> The group includes not only property developers, real estate agents, bankers, and housing market speculators but also some government officials and public intellectuals (economists and journalists) who promote and protect the interests of the property developers and investors.<sup>28</sup> Not surprisingly, another recent survey of Chinese local officials conducted by the Central Party School showed that 90 percent of the officials were not willing to pursue large-scale political reforms.<sup>29</sup>

Despite, or perhaps because of, these obstacles to political reforms, Yu believes that democracy should be seen as a solution for China rather than a problem. He argues that democracy provides answers to some of the daunting challenges that China now faces. Although democracy can possibly undermine legal institutions, cause political divisions within the country, and is generally less efficient than a dictatorship because of the time involved in negotiation and compromise in the policymaking process, Yu believes that it provides more political legitimacy and long-term stability than an authoritarian regime. In his view, the social and cultural changes fostered by successful economic development since 1978 have also generated political pressures for the increased autonomy of civil society. In addition, public concern about the elite groups with vested economic interests, and especially public grievances regarding official corruption, should be seriously addressed rather than suppressed. In Yu's words, "all power must be effectively balanced; otherwise, it inevitably leads to arbitrary rule and corruption" (chapter 3).

Recognition of these obstacles leads Yu Keping to pay a great deal of attention to charting a road map for China's democratic development. According to Yu, a premature rush to democracy or "the unconditional promotion of democracy will bring disastrous consequences to the nation and its people" (chapter 1). In accordance with this line of thinking, Yu has developed three important concepts. First is the "price of democracy" (*minzhu de daijia*) that the country has to pay. This price is sometimes so high as to be unacceptable. "It requires the wisdom of the politicians and the people to determine," as Yu argues, "how to pay the minimum political and social price in order to obtain the maximum democratic effects" (chapter 1). Reducing "political and administrative costs" in China's democratic pursuits, therefore, should be the central concern. Whether or not Chinese citizens will achieve strong public consensus about democracy largely depends on their calculation of these perceived costs.

The second concept that Yu has developed is “incremental democracy” (*jianjin minzhu*). Under the current sociopolitical circumstances, in Yu’s view, China’s transition to democracy should not, and will not, be achieved through radical means. Instead, it should be carried out in multiple dimensions and through an incremental process. These dimensions include intraparty democracy, grassroots elections, administrative reforms, and the growth of civil society. Yu has particularly emphasized intraparty democracy. In his view, “without intraparty democracy,” it will be “difficult to attain democracy in China” (chapter 3). According to Yu, “if grassroots democracy means pushing forward democracy from the bottom up, intraparty democracy entails doing so from the inside out.” As he describes in chapter 3, the focus of improving intraparty democracy “lies in the reform of intraparty election, decisionmaking and policymaking, and in revamping oversight systems.”

Yu goes into great detail on why incremental democracy is the optimal strategy for Chinese political reform. He believes that gradual changes are conducive to China’s own historical experiences. Democracy requires sufficient political, economic, social, and legal capital; and the attainment of positive improvement in all of these areas not only will quantitatively increase democratic feasibility but will also eventually result in a fundamental qualitative “breakthrough.” Meanwhile, incremental political development will gain momentum when an increasingly large portion of the public benefits from socioeconomic reforms. Yu, however, does not offer a timetable regarding when “the democratic breakthrough” will take place.

Third, Yu has developed the notion of “dynamic stability” (*dongtai wending*) to characterize the new approach used by the CCP to deal with sociopolitical tensions in the country. While Chinese political and cultural elites may have valid reasons to be concerned about the need for social stability, their obsession over stability may be counterproductive in the new demographic and political environment (chapter 6). Yu refers to the Chinese authorities’ traditional approach toward attaining stability as a strategy for “static stability” (*jingtai wending*) based on “holding everything in place” (*yi du wei zhu*).<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Yu advocates dynamic stability based on “channeling everything into its proper place” (*yi shu wei zhu*). Some new mechanisms such as public hearings, opinion surveys, letter petitions, and group protests are good examples. In his words, “‘dynamic stability’ aims to maintain order through negotiation instead of repression.”<sup>31</sup>

According to Yu, the Chinese authorities should negotiate with social forces and should constantly adjust policies to meet the needs of the general

public in order to maintain dynamic stability. In present-day China, the CCP holds power, but power does not necessarily mean legitimate authority or good governance. With regard to dynamic stability, legitimate authority is more important than power because good governance can lead to stability, order, trust, and efficiency.<sup>32</sup> Yu believes that the best way to prevent social unrest or revolution is to promote good governance rather than rely on strict control.

As a whole, these three concepts—the price of democracy, incremental democracy, and dynamic stability—aim to draw a road map for a new phase of China’s sociopolitical development. Of course, Yu Keping has not been alone in advocating democracy in today’s China. Distinguished scholars such as Jiang Ping (former president of China University of Law and Political Science), Xie Tao (former vice president of Renmin University), Zhou Ruijin (former deputy editor in chief of *People’s Daily*), Li Rui (former personal secretary to Mao), Cao Siyuan (a prominent scholar in the field of bankruptcy law), He Weifang (a law professor at Zhejiang University and a leading scholar on constitutionalism in China), Liu Junning (a long-time leading advocate for political reforms), and Mao Shoulong (a professor of public administration at People’s University) have all actively participated in the political and intellectual discourse about democracy in China.

Xie Tao, for example, has recently argued that the assessment of a political system is not just a theoretical question but in fact should be a practical one that can affect the lives of millions of Chinese people. In an article widely circulated in the Chinese media, Xie asked pointedly: “How is it possible that China’s political system is a good one, when it could not prevent the national madness of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, and could not protect basic human rights?”<sup>33</sup> Some scholars, such as He Weifang and Cao Siyuan, even argue that China should make the transition from a Leninist party-state political system to a constitutional state. In that regard, their proposed democratic transition for China seems far more radical than Yu’s.

Some overseas Chinese dissidents argue that Yu’s democratic road map for China is no more than an empty promise to the Chinese people and the outside world. For example, Hu Ping, the author of “On Freedom of Speech,” one of the first and most comprehensive papers on the democratic movement in the PRC and one that shaped intellectual discourse during the Democracy Wall Movement in Beijing in 1979, criticized Yu for creating a “false notion” in the outside world that the CCP is interested in democracy.<sup>34</sup> Hu believes that any discussion of democracy that does not seriously consider a multi-party system will go nowhere. In addition, Hu argues that Yu’s proposed

mechanisms for dynamic stability fundamentally differ from democratic principles such as the freedoms of speech and assembly.

Criticism of Yu's thesis emanates not only from those of the "New Right" who advocate a more radical path for China's democratic future but also from those "New Left" public intellectuals who challenge the desirability and feasibility of democracy for the country. They believe that any serious effort to move toward political democracy in China may release long-restrained social tensions and quickly undermine the CCP's capacity to allocate social and economic resources. Pan Wei, a Berkeley-educated political science professor at Peking University, favors legalistic political reforms instead of democratic elections and is more interested in a Singaporean-style rule of law rather than Western-style democracy. He bluntly criticizes what he calls "democracy worship and election obsession" among his Chinese colleagues. Pan is cynical about Yu's concept of incremental democracy. In his view, both intraparty elections and grassroots democracy are currently primarily "political shows."<sup>35</sup> Pan argues that in a country such as China without the rule of law, it would be a disaster to move toward democratic elections. In his words, "the CCP will split if the party adopts elections; and the PRC will disintegrate if the country adopts elections."<sup>36</sup>

The new wave of the intellectual and political discourse about China's future democracy initiated by Yu Keping and other Chinese thinkers will likely continue in the years to come. This wave can probably best be characterized by the intriguing and thoughtful idea of making democracy safe for China. Each reader, of course, can make his or her own judgment about the significance and implications of this Chinese intellectual discourse about democracy. It is reasonable to assume, however, that ideas matter in China as well as elsewhere in the world. As an emerging economic power, China is in the midst of searching for its new international image and core political values. The information and insights offered by Yu in the following pages may not only reveal Chinese perspectives, anxieties, and dilemmas, but also be indicative of the future political trajectory of the country.