

The Return of Liberalism and Social Democracy: Breaking Through the Barriers of State Socialism, Nationalism, and Cynicism in Contemporary China*

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After having been sidelined and overwhelmed several times, the gathering momentum of liberalism and social democracy in China today may constitute the most profound change in Chinese intellectual development since the mid-nineteenth century. However, it is a daunting task for both liberalism and social democracy to win the minds of the majority of Chinese intellectuals by breaking down the barriers of state socialism, nationalism, and cynicism. It is not easy to determine the political persuasions or ideological beliefs of many intellectuals in contemporary China: Are they liberals, socialists, or nationalists? One can easily find devotees of liberalism, socialism, or nationalism among intellectuals in modern and

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contemporary China; the problem lies in the heterogeneous nature of their ideological beliefs and political persuasions. As a pattern, many of these intellectuals are, or intend to be, liberals, socialists, and nationalists at the same time, without fully understanding the tensions or contradictions between these different ideologies. One consequence is repeated bewilderment at many historical junctures, when such elite display political precariousness and ideological bankruptcy. These intellectuals may subscribe to liberal and democratic values, but in the end cannot resist the seduction of state socialism and nationalism. The combination of these three political beliefs has actually formed a hierarchy in the ideological structure of progressive Chinese intellectuals in modern times. Nationalism came first, followed by socialism and liberalism in order of relative importance. It is impossible to find any influential political or intellectual leaders in modern China who are not nationalist. The strong commitment of the elite to nationalism has not only eventually led to the prevalence of state socialism over any other brands of socialism, but has also set a clear limit on the development of liberalism. There is now a real possibility that liberalism will prevail over both nationalism and state socialism in China.

KEYWORDS: intellectuals; China; nationalism; socialism; liberalism.

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The turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been marked by two major events. One is the reemergence of liberalism by way of a heated debate between liberals and the "New Left" (新左派).¹ The other is

¹For accounts from the liberal camp, see Ren Jiantao, "Jiedu 'xin zuopai'" (Deciphering the "new left"), in *Ziyou zhuyi zhi zheng yu Zhongguo sixiangjie de fenhua* (The debate on liberalism and the split in the Chinese world of thought), ed. Li Shitao (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 191-214; and Yuan Weishi, "Ziyou zhuyi lunzheng guankui" (A restricted view of the debate on liberalism), *Kaifang shidai* (Open Times), no. 138 (July 2000). For a lengthy account in English from the "new left" camp, see Xudong Zhang, "The Making of the Post-Tiananmen Intellectual Field: A Critical Overview," in *Whither China: Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China*, ed. Xudong Zhang (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-75. For relatively neutral reports and comments, see Xu Jilin, "Qimeng de mingyun: ershi nian lai de Zhongguo sixiang jie" (The fate of enlightenment: The Chinese world of thought in the last twenty years), *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-first Century), no. 50 (December 1998); Xu Jilin, Liu Jing, Luo Gang, and Xue Yi, "Xunzhao 'disantiao daolu': guanyu 'ziyou zhuyi' yu 'xin zuopai' de duihua" (In search of the "third way": A dialogue about "liberalism" and "new left"), in *Lingyizhong qimeng*, by Xu Jilin (Another kind of enlightenment) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1999), 276-302; Li Zehou, "Ziyoupai he mincuipai" (Liberals and populists), in *Bozhai xinshuo* (New statements from the boulder house), by Li Zehou (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 1999), 115-22;

renewed interest in social democracy, a phenomenon which has hardly received discussion in the academic world. Several major studies in English on the themes of intellectual development in contemporary China—in addition to the two by Geremie R. Barmé and Xudong Zhang (張旭東)—do merit mention here. Merle Goldman provides a succinct overview from her typical perspective of the intellectuals vs. state dichotomy;² the rise of nationalism among Chinese intellectuals as a response to globalization is vividly described and penetratingly analyzed by Yongnian Zheng (鄭永年);³ Joseph Fewsmith offers a comprehensive observation of the linkage between the maneuverings of the top leadership and the intellectual trends of the last decade (the rise of neoconservatism and nationalism in particular);⁴ and the complicated relationships between China's problem of democracy and various post-Tiananmen cultural discourses in China are very skillfully untangled by Ben Xu (徐賁) through the discipline of cultural criticism.⁵ Built on these observations and informed discussions, this article is an attempt to assess the simultaneous return of liberalism and social democracy in contemporary China. An analysis of this intellectual development is essential for understanding the transition in China, both the seemingly evasive reality and the seemingly unpredictable future.

In the following pages, I will begin with an observation on the re-emergence of liberalism in contemporary China. Then I will look into the prospects for social democracy in Chinese intellectual and political development, followed by a brief discussion of the intellectual barriers of

and Geremie R. Barmé, "The Revolution of Resistance," in *Social Change in Contemporary China: Conflict and Resistance*, ed. Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (London: Routledge, 2000), 198-220.

²Merle Goldman, "A New Relationship Between the Intellectuals and the State in the Post-Mao Period," in *An Intellectual History of Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-Fan Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 499-538.

³Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵Ben Xu, *Disenchanted Democracy: Chinese Cultural Criticism after 1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

state socialism, nationalism, and cynicism to the further development of liberalism and social democracy in China.

The Revival of Liberalism

Chinese liberals themselves claimed that a "rebirth of liberalism" had already occurred in China in the late 1990s.⁶ According to some leading Chinese liberal intellectuals, one of the most important events in intellectual circles in China in 1998 was—after fifty years of silence—the "open discourse" on liberalism.⁷ The beginning of the "open discourse" was best embodied in a preface written in early 1998 by Li Shen zhi (李慎之), a senior communist expert on international affairs and former vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who claimed that:

After three hundred years of comparison and selection in the whole world since the age of industrialization, and particularly after more than one hundred years of Chinese experimentation, the largest in scale in human history, there is sufficient evidence to prove that liberalism is the best, universal value. Today's revival of the liberal tradition which began in Beijing University will beyond doubt guarantee the emergence of a liberal China in the era of globalization.⁸

⁶The term "liberals" in this article refers to those absolute liberals who have established a firm belief in philosophical, economic, and political liberalism and openly defend this belief in practice. In the context of contemporary China, one must make a clear distinction between liberals, on the one hand, and semi-liberals, on the other. The latter believe in economic liberalism and support the project of privatization and marketization but reject political liberalism and oppose the project of democratization. More often than not, liberals and those semi-liberals within the party-state in China are sworn enemies.

⁷Liu Junning, "Ziyou zhuyi: jiushi niandaide 'bu su zhi ke'" (Liberalism: An "unexpected guest" of the 1990s), *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), May 29, 1999; Xu Youyu, "Ziyou zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo" (Liberalism and contemporary China), *Kaifang shidai*, no. 128 (May/June 1999); and Zhu Xueqin, "1998 nian ziyou zhuyi xueli de yanshuo" (Discourse on liberalism in China in 1998), in *Xueshuo Zhongguo* (Theories in China), ed. Lu Yuming et al. (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), 202-24.

⁸Li Shen zhi, "Hongyang Beida de ziyou zhuyi chuantong" (Promoting and developing the liberal tradition of Beijing University), preface to *Ziyou zhuyi de xiansheng: Beida chuantong yu jinxindai Zhongguo* (The harbinger of liberalism: The tradition of Beijing University and modern China), ed. Liu Junning (Beijing: Zhongguo renshi chubanshe, 1998), 1-5; also in Li Shen zhi and He Jiadong, *Zhongguo de daolu* (The road for China) (Guangzhou: Nanfang ribao chubanshe, 2000), 242-46. As a great blow to Chinese liberals, Li Shen zhi died on April 22, 2003.

By 1998 the camp of Chinese liberals had actually gathered a large number of well-known outspoken scholars, old and young, from a broad range of disciplines. The group of semi-liberals is much bigger, including large numbers of managers, professionals, students, and a large part of the communist bureaucracy.

Liberalism is a complicated edifice of ideas centralized around the rights of individuals vis-à-vis the power of the state and the interests of society. Having first appeared on the historical stage in seventeenth century England, liberals acquired their identity by opposing privilege and favoring equality, progress, and reform. Eventually liberalism developed into a very complicated ideology: *philosophical liberalism*, providing philosophical and moral foundations for the rights of individuals; *economic liberalism*, privileging personal property rights, free competition in economic activities, and fair trade; and *political liberalism*, prioritizing personal rights and individual freedom and advocating constitutional government in social and political spheres. In terms of the historical development of liberalism, we can discern *classical liberalism* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries promoting laissez faire, limited government, personal liberty, and progressive reforms. Next comes *modern liberalism* or *new liberalism* since the late nineteenth century, which abandons laissez faire for the active government management of economic life, and makes a concession to socialism in allowing some degree of collective responsibility for the provision of social welfare, without compromising the firm belief in the unalienable personal rights and other core liberal values of individual liberties.

There are those who intend to prove the existence of the liberal tradition in Chinese traditional culture, as represented by the Daoist (道家) concept of *xiaoyao* (逍遥, unburdened and unrestrained roaming), and even the Confucian (儒家) concept of *ren* (仁, taking man as the center and internalizing the sanctioned code of conduct) and the Buddhist (佛家) concept of *jieltuo* (解脫, extrication).⁹ Obviously the scholarship along this line tends

⁹For a recent publication promoting this line of thinking, see Huang Dechang et al., *Zhong-*

to provide strained interpretations and draws far-fetched analogies by ignoring the fundamental difference between modern liberalism, on the one hand, and the Confucian concept of *ren*, the Daoist concept of *xiaoyao*, and the Buddhist concept of *jietuo*, on the other. Modern liberalism is centered around the rights of individuals within a constitutional framework limiting the power of the state; the Confucian concept of *ren* subordinates individuals to groups and state authority; the Daoist concept of *xiaoyao* seduces individuals into retreating into their un-rationalized inner nature for the sake of enjoying calm and peace of mind and accepts without struggle the experience of life; and the Buddhist concept of *jietuo* demands individuals accept predestined fate and give up their rights and even their lives.

Nevertheless, there is a tradition of Chinese liberalism established in the late nineteenth century, when some Western missionaries along with late Qing (清朝) reformers and revolutionaries began to introduce the Chinese people to Western liberalism and democratic institutions. One major limit of their liberal thinking was that they tended to bend the Western concepts of individual autonomy, personal rights, and the supremacy of law by reaffirming inherited Chinese values of the supremacy of the state (ruler) and the ideal of harmony (unity). Chinese liberalism culminated in the first phase of the New Culture Movement (新文化運動) from 1915 to 1919, in which the intellectuals of the Chinese enlightenment advocated the idea of supplanting "Eastern ethics"—based on the principles of subordinating individuals to the family, to the clan, and to the state—with "Western ethics"—based on individual dignity, individual rights, individual freedom, the development of individuality, and scientific reasoning.¹⁰ This trend was quickly sidelined, however, by the rise of nationalism and socialism. The cause of liberalism was still fought by its believers who eventually constituted the "the third force" (第三勢力) between the Kuomintang (KMT, or

guo zhi ziyou jingshen (The Chinese liberal spirit) (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2000).

¹⁰For details see Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960); and Feng Chongyi, *Luosu yu Zhongguo* (Bertrand Russell and China) (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1994; Taipei: Daohe chubanshe, 1996).

the Chinese Nationalist Party, 中國國民黨) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, 中國共產黨); most Chinese liberals eventually shifted ground, however, from the priority of defending individual freedom toward the priority of advancing collective and national interests. This occurred to the extent that individual freedom became a means to achieve a higher end defined by stronger political forces, such as the KMT and the CCP, who chose to settle differences through a life-and-death struggle in the battlefield. By the time of China's war of resistance against Japan (which was triggered by the latter's full-fledged invasion of the former in 1937), the intellectual trend in China did an about-face from modernization and cosmopolitanism back to conservatism and Sinification. A whole range of traditional Chinese values that centered around loyalty and subordination of individuals to hierarchical authority, a school of thought which had been under severe attack during the May Fourth period, resurfaced with, ironically, the protection of "revolutionary" ideologies such as Marxism and the Three People's Principles.¹¹ Liberalism encountered a dead end in the process of civil war between the KMT and the CCP in the late 1940s.

The voice of liberalism was effectively silenced in the People's Republic of China for over twenty years—until the late 1970s when elements of liberalism thinly appeared through the narrow crack created by the official reversal of the Cultural Revolution.¹² The current "rebirth of liberalism" should be understood against the backdrop of its recent death in 1989. The "democratic movement" during that period fell short of setting a clear agenda for democratic goals as we usually understand them—goals such as multiparty pluralism and competitive elections. The concrete demands of the democratic activists were for typical liberal goals such as the

¹¹For an analysis of the intellectual trend of Sinification in China in the 1930s, see Feng Chongyi, *Guohun zai guonan zhong zhengzha: Kangzhan shiqi de Zhongguo wenhua* (Chinese culture during the war of resistance against Japan) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1995).

¹²For accounts in English on intellectual development in China in the late 1970s and 1980s, see note 4 above; Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Xue Liang Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Ka-ho Mok, *Intellectuals and the State in Post-Mao China* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association. In the meantime, in the process of marketization reform and opening to the outside world, basic concepts within liberalism (such as personal liberties, limited government, and checks and balances of power) as well as the notions of the public sphere, civil society, and liberal democracy were widely publicized even through the official media.¹³ Liberal ideas were so powerful that even top Party leaders including Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦), Zhao Ziyang (趙紫陽), Hu Qili (胡啟立), and Zhu Muzhi (朱穆之) became inclined to liberalism to a certain extent.

Unfortunately, the liberal trend in China was put to another sudden end beginning with the brutal crackdown in June 1989. Through such methods as selective punishment, the diversion of people's energies to money making, and masterly manipulation, the party-state succeeded in silencing the Chinese liberals—until 1998, when liberalism forced its way out again. Several factors contributed to this new development of liberalism, including the expectation for change after Deng Xiaoping's (鄧小平) death, the authoritarianism-rooted Asian financial crisis, further reform necessitated by economic development, provocative attacks on liberalism by the "New Left," awareness of the accelerating pace of globalization, and the posturing of Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) leadership in further liberalizing political control, as shown by the action of government restructuring and the signing of the "International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights" and the "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."¹⁴

¹³Hu Ping, "Ziyou zhuyi zai Zhongguo de mingyun" (The fate of liberalism in China), in *Zhongguo minyun fansi* (Reflections on democratic movement in China), by Hu Ping (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992), 159-207; Cao Weijing and Wei Shensi, eds., *Zhongguo bashi niandai renwen sichao* (Humanist thinking in China in the 1980s) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1992); Qiu Shi, ed., *Jiefang wenxuan* (A collection of liberation essays) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998); Li Honglin, *Zhongguo sixiang yundongshi, 1949-1989* (A history of ideological campaigns in China, 1949-89) (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 1999); and Jing Wu, ed., *Yanlun Zhongguo: guandian jiaofeng ershinian* (Opinions in China: Confrontation of ideas in China in the last twenty years) (Beijing: Zhongguo jiancha chubanshe, 1999).

¹⁴For the impact of human rights discourse on China, see Michael C. Davis, ed., *Human Rights and Chinese Values: Legal, Philosophical, and Political Perspectives* (New York:

The Chinese liberals chose to advance their cause through a debate with the "New Left," a label imposed by the liberals on their theoretical rivals, a cohort which actually includes three groups of people: nationalists, populists, and neo-Marxists. The nationalist group includes xenophobes who borrow theoretical weapons from post-colonial criticism and blame the invasion of Western goods, capital, and values for the escalation, if not creation, of inequalities and other vices in contemporary China.¹⁵ This nationalist group also includes statisticians who argue for an agenda of "state capacity," seeing not only China's national pride and sovereign state power being sacrificed in an economy increasingly dependent on world capitalism, but also the dangers posed by the process of economic decentralization which undermine the fiscal, economic, and political power of the central government so necessary to address inequalities in Chinese society and to maintain national unity.¹⁶ The populist group, mainly literary critics, spares no effort in exposing the "social polarization" (兩極分化, *liangji fenhua*), the "inequalities" (社會不均, *shehui bujun*), and the "spiritual degeneration" (精神墮落, *jingshen duoluo*) brought about by market reforms and capitalist modernity.¹⁷ The neo-Marxist (or post-modernist) group is the most sophisticated of the three. Borrowing neo-Marxist, post-modernist,

Oxford University Press, 1995); and Marina Svensson, *Debating Human Rights in China: A Conceptual and Political History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

¹⁵For the three most aggressive attacks, see Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China can say no) (Hong Kong: Mingbao chubanshe, 1996); Li Xiguang et al., *Zai yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou* (Behind the scenes of demonizing China) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1996); and Fang Ning et al., *Quan-qiu hua yingying xia de Zhongguo zhilu* (China's road under the shadow of globalization) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1999). For wider discussions of nationalism in China today, see also Li Shitao, ed., *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun* (Nationalism and the fate of China in transition) (Changchun: Shidai wenyi chubanshe, 2000).

¹⁶See, for example, Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *Zhongguo guojia nengli baogao* (Report on China's state capacity) (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁷For a typical example, see Han Yuhai, "Zai ziyou zhuyi zitai de beihou" (Behind the liberal pose), *Tianya* (Frontiers), no. 5 (1998); Han Yuhai, "Women shifou yao jieshou yige tong-zhihua shijie" (Do we need to accept the world of uniformity), *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 54 (August 1999); and Han Yuhai, "Ziyou zhuyi de lilun pinfa" (Poverty of the liberalist theory), *Yazhou yuekan* (Asia Monthly), no. 1 (2000). See also Liang Xiaosheng, *Zhongguo shehui ge jieceng fenxi* (An analysis of social strata in China) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1997).

and post-colonial critique from the West, utilizing class-based discourses, and raising the issues of social justice, class exploitation, and the hegemony of global (Western) capital, they have effectively problematized the Chinese quest for Enlightenment values (such as liberty, science, and rationality), modernity, and globalization. They fiercely attack liberalism as it has become mainstream ideology responsible for social injustice and other evils.¹⁸

The debate has focused on three themes: whether a critique of capitalism in China has become the task of the greatest urgency for Chinese intellectuals; whether China should pursue modernity as defined by the West; and whether "economic democratization" should be prioritized over liberalism. Chinese liberals have elaborated and sharpened their views in this ongoing debate initiated by the camp of the Chinese "New Left." In response to the attacks by the "New Left," the Chinese liberals insist that the authoritarian political system and an inadequate development of the market economy are the main sources of social inequality and other social evils in contemporary China; that the future of China lies in the market economy and liberal democracy embodied by the West; and that the current trend of globalization offers the best opportunity for China to achieve its long overdue goal of modernization, rather than representing a new wave of invasion by international capital.¹⁹ Zhu Xueqin (朱學勤) summarized the propositions of Chinese liberalism as follows:

¹⁸Wang Hui, "Dangdai Zhongguo sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing" (The state of thought in contemporary China and modernity), *Tianya*, no. 5 (1997); and Wang Hui, "Guanyu xiandaixing wenti dawen" (Questions and answers about modernity), *ibid.*, no. 1 (1999).

¹⁹Li, "Hongyang Beida de ziyou zhuyi chuantong," 1-5; Li Shen zhi, "Fengyu canghuang wushinian" (The somber fifty years), *Kaifang zazhi* (Open Magazine), no. 2 (2000); Li and He, *Zhongguo de daolu*; Liu, *Ziyou zhuyi de xiansheng*; Liu, "Ziyou zhuyi: jiushi niandai de 'bu su zhi ke'"; Zhu, "1998 nian ziyou zhuyi xueli de yanshuo"; Qin Hui, "Zhongguo xiandai ziyou zhuyi de lilun shangque" (A theoretical deliberation on liberalism in modern China), in *Wenti yu zhuyi* (Issues and isms), by Qin Hui (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1999), 116-33; Qin Hui, "Zhongguoshi de 'xin zuopai' lilun bianxi" (The theory of the "new left" with Chinese characteristics: An analysis), in Qin, *Wenti yu zhuyi*, 156-76; Wang Dingding, "Zhongguo jiushi niandai gaigede zhengzhi jingji xue wenti" (Issues of political economy for reform in China in the 1990s), *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 53 (June 1999); Wang Dingding, "Ziyou: yiduan jiaotashidi de xushuo" (Liberty: An earnest and down-to-earth narrative), in Li, *Ziyou zhuyi zhi zheng yu Zhongguo sixiangjie de fenhua*, 362-68; Xu, "Ziyou zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo"; and Yuan, "Ziyou zhuyi lunzheng guankui."

Empiricism is its philosophy, as opposed to apriorism; the evolutionary theory based on the process of trial and error is its concept of history, as opposed to any kind of historicism; gradualism is its strategy for change and development, as opposed to radicalism; it supports the market mechanism in economics, as opposed to a planning mechanism; it demands representative democracy and constitutional government in politics, as opposed to mass dictatorship by the majority in the name of "public opinion," or dictatorship by one man or oligarchy; and it demands protection of individualist values in ethics, on the grounds that an individual cannot be further reduced to anything else and cannot be sacrificed for any abstract goals.²⁰

That there are liberal elements within the CCP ruling elite is also worth noting.²¹ Compared to the role played by communist liberals within the system of the party-state in the political transformation in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the feat of liberal dissidents within the CCP has been much less impressive. The existence of communist liberals within the CCP is itself significant, however, a group that started to openly challenge the Party line after the June 4th Incident. Hu Jiwei (胡績偉), former editor-in-chief of the *People's Daily* and former member of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, complained in 1996 that the CCP under Mao's leadership overthrew the Nationalist dictator only to supplant it with the CCP dictatorship, and that Mao's successors, the current leaders after the June 4th Incident in particular, had maintained the despotic system and become more corrupt. He also pointed out that multiparty democracy is the only way to save and regenerate the CCP.²² In November 1997, Fang Jue (方覺), a former deputy director of the Fuzhou City (福州市) Planning

²⁰Zhu, "1998 nian ziyou zhuyi xueli de yanshuo," 204.

²¹From the start of the CCP, many of those who had established their belief in liberalism before their conversion to Bolshevism during the May Fourth period or later would maintain their belief in liberalism to various extents. Chen Duxiu (陳獨秀), the most important founder of the CCP, never completely gave up his liberal ideas and was to reject Bolshevism in his late years. Li Dazhao (李大釗), another patriarch of the CCP and known as the "father of Chinese Marxism," still identified with the reform program for "good government" in 1922 and maintained a close relationship with Hu Shi (胡適) and other liberals. Li Hanjun (李漢俊), Shi Cuntong (施存統, alias Shi Fuliang 施復亮), and other "lawful Marxists" who participated in establishing the CCP soon abandoned the communist movement and returned to their original liberal cause.

²²Hu Jiwei, "Xin chun fang yan" (Unrestrained comments in the early spring), *Beijing zhi chun* (Beijing Spring), no. 34 (March 1996).

Commission, distributed a plan for a comprehensive program calling for the acceptance of mainstream international political norms, multiparty democracy, and direct elections of legislative bodies at all levels.²³ Li Rui (李銳), former secretary to Mao and former deputy director of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, has devoted himself to exposing the personality cult of late Mao and advocating democratization of the party-state since the 1990s. Recently, in overt defiance to Jiang Zemin's conservative call for "*san jiang*" (三講; three stresses, namely stress on politics, correctness, and discipline), Li Rui called for "*si jiang*" (四講, four stresses) different from the Party leader: stress on democracy, science, the rule of law, and the market economy.²⁴ At the CCP's 16th National Congress in November 2002, he went even further by presenting a bold proposal for comprehensive democratization.²⁵ On the National Day of 1999, Li Shenzhi directly attacked the personality cult of current Party leader Jiang Zemin and warned that Jiang and the Party would perish unless the currents of the world—globalization, market economy, democracy, and human rights—are followed.²⁶ Bao Tong (鮑彤), former member of the CCP Central Committee and secretary of the CCP Politburo Standing Committee, categorically dismissed Jiang Zemin's theory of "three represents" (三個代表, *sange daibiao*)²⁷ as a big lie on the grounds that the CCP has denied basic human rights to working people, devastated all forms of culture through cultural despotism, protected only the interests of the privileged, and never allowed the people to choose their representatives. He

²³Fang Jue, "Zhongguo xuyao xin de zhuanbian" (China needs a new transformation), *ibid.*, no. 57 (February 1998).

²⁴Li Rui, "Yingjie xin siji yao sijiang" (Four stresses to usher in the new century), *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Chronicles of China), no. 12 (1999).

²⁵Li Rui, "Guanyu woguo zhengzhi tizhi gaige de jianyi" (A proposal for political reform in our country), *ibid.*, no. 1 (2003).

²⁶Li, "Fengyu canghuang wushinian."

²⁷In a speech in February 2000 Jiang Zemin claimed that the CCP had been representing the most advanced productive forces, the most advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the vast majority of Chinese people. Following Jiang's speech the Party launched a nationwide campaign to study the new "theory of three represents," and this theory has now been written into the Party constitution.

also called for an immediate end to one-party dictatorship, demanding the establishment of a genuine representative democracy.²⁸

One thing that needs to be made clear is that nothing would be more misleading than to liken liberalism in China today to liberalism in the West. Whereas liberalism is the mainstream ideology in the West, liberalism in China is a subversive thought that challenges the authoritarian status quo and thus is the target of harsh suppression by the authoritarian regime. Furthermore, in terms of the evolution of liberal thinking in China, several major developments deserve attention when evaluating the "rebirth of liberalism." The first is a much higher level of sophistication in Chinese liberal thinking, which is greatly enriched by both the Chinese experience of state socialism and the development of liberalism in the West.²⁹ At the philosophical level, liberals in China have wholeheartedly embraced the classical liberal conception of freedom for empirically existing individuals, especially the liberal notion of human rights; they consciously reject the Marxist utopian notion of "truly human freedom" in accordance with human species essence, which treats humanity as a whole as the real bearer of freedom.³⁰ On the legal-political plane, current Chinese liberals not only openly challenge the "anti-bourgeois liberalism" position of the party-state, but also place tremendous emphasis on the concept of rights and the concept of "rule of law" (as opposed to the concept of "rule by law").³¹ This new consciousness contrasts sharply with the naiveté of their predecessors in the 1950s, who repeatedly voiced their grievances to the party-state when they were persecuted during the "Anti-Rightist Campaign" (反右

²⁸Bao Tong, "Shi he weisheng zhi ji: zai ping sange daibiao" (Between the dead and the unborn: The second assessment of the three represents) (Unpublished manuscript, 2000). For a collection of Bao Tong's recent writings see Bao Tong, *Zhongguo de yousi* (China's anxiety) (Hong Kong: Taipingyang shiji chubanshe, 2000).

²⁹For an indication of the sophisticated understanding of liberalism in China in the late 1990s see Li Qiang, *Ziyou zhuyi* (Liberalism) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998).

³⁰Zhu, "1998 nian ziyou zhuyi xueli de yanshuo," 204.

³¹See, for example, Liu Junning, "Cong fazhiguo dao fazhi" (From a country ruled by law to the rule of law), in *Zhengzhi Zhongguo: mianxiang xin tizhi xuanze de shidai* (Political China: Facing the era of the choice for a new system), ed. Dong Yuyi and Shi Binghai (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998), 233-66.

運動) but never cited the constitution to defend their freedoms of speech, press, and association.

The second development in the evolution of liberal thinking was the stress on "economic liberalism," which has become an essential part of the current liberal project. As observed by Liu Junning (劉軍寧), liberalism in modern China was traditionally characterized by its ignorance or rejection of a free market economy. The Chinese liberals in the Republican period, although paying much attention to philosophical liberalism and political liberalism, were all social democrats as far as economic issues were concerned. Even die-hard liberals such as Hu Shi also admired state socialism in the former Soviet Union.³² The Chinese liberals in the 1990s have supported the core values of economic liberalism, including the protection of personal property rights, free competition, fair trade, and trust in the market to allocate resources and justly distribute wealth. The Chinese liberals have also waged an attack, however, on what they termed as "*quanguo siyoushua*" (權貴私有化, bigwig privatization): the practice of transferring (either legally or otherwise) public property to private ownership by officials. They have been among the first to raise the issues of inequality and social injustice that have resulted from "*quanguo siyoushua*," and call for simultaneous marketization and democratization for the purpose of carrying out a genuine privatization based on the principles of free competition and fair trade.³³

³²Liu, "Beida chuantong yu jinxiandai Zhongguo de ziyou zhuyi," 8-9.

³³Xu Youyu, "Chongti ziyou zhuyi" (Bring up liberalism again), in *Ziyoude yanshuo* (Liberal discourse), by Xu Youyu (Changchun: Changchun chubanshe, 1999), 283-94; Xu Youyu, "Ziyou zhuyi, Falanketu xuepai ji qita" (Liberalism, the Frankfurt school, and others), *ibid.*, 317; Xu, "Ziyou zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo"; Qin Hui (Bian Wu), "Gongzheng zhishang lun" (On supremacy of justice), *Dongfang* (Orient), no. 6 (1994); Qin Hui (Bian Wu), "Zailun gongzheng zhishang: qidian gongzheng ruhe keneng" (The second essay on supremacy of justice: Possibility of justice at the starting point), *ibid.*, no. 2 (1995); Qin Hui (Bian Wu), "Gongzheng, jiazhi lixing yu fan fubai: sanlun gongzheng zhishang" (Justice, value rationality, and anti-corruption: The third essay on supremacy of justice), *ibid.*, no. 6 (1995); Qin Hui (Bian Wu), "Gongzheng wei daode zhi ji: silun gongzheng zhishang" (Justice as the foundation of morality: The fourth essay on supremacy of justice), *ibid.*, no. 5 (1996); Qin Hui, "Shehui gongzheng yu xueshu liangxin" (Social justice and academic conscience), in Li, *Ziyou zhuyi zhi zheng yu Zhongguo sixiangjie de fenhua*, 388-96; Qin Hui, "Shehui gongzheng yu Zhongguo gaige de jingyan jiaoxun" (Social justice and the

The third and perhaps most important development in the evolution of liberal thinking in China is a better understanding of the tension between liberalism and nationalism. There is a clear indication that current Chinese liberals are endeavoring to substitute the nationalist project of "wealth and power" for the project of individual freedom, universalism, and globalization. In a politically charged environment where nationalism has become the most important tool of legitimation, and where nationalist sentiment is running high among a population fed with highly selective information by the state propaganda apparatus, the Chinese liberals warn against the potential dangers of nationalism in causing social disorder, in arousing xenophobia and chauvinism, in suppressing individual freedom and personal rights, and in sabotaging the project of the country's democratization and modernization. These liberal thinkers even openly assert that the state is only instrumental relative to the primary value of individuals.³⁴ They stress that modern Chinese nationalism has been informed by backward Sino-centrism and has held China back from learning from other civilizations and making progress; these elite call for an end to fanatical populist nationalism (leftist xenophobia) which promotes violence and rejects liberal values in the name of patriotism (愛國主義, *aiguo zhuyi*).³⁵ This group also declares that democracy and liberal values are the prerequisite for rationalism, that no abstract "national interest" exists apart from the sum of individual interests of the members of a nation, and that this kind of "national interest" can only be legitimated by democratic pro-

lessons of reform in China), in Qin, *Wenti yu zhuyi*, 33-40; Qin Hui, "Ziyou zhuyi, shehui minzu zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo 'wenti'," *Zhanlue yu guanli* (Strategy and Management), no. 5 (2000); He Qinglian, *Xiandaihuade xianjing* (The pitfall of modernization) (Beijing: Jinri Zhongguo chubanshe, 1998); and Zhu, "1998 ziyou zhuyi xueli de yanshuo," 202-24.

³⁴Liu Junning, "Minzu zhuyi simian guan" (A full view of nationalism), in Li, *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun*, 12-17; and Ren Bumei, "Guojia heyi 'zunyan,' huo minzu zhuyi heyi 'lixing,' you heyi 'xiandai'" (In what way can the state be "dignified," or nationalism "rational" and "modern"), available online at <<http://www.sinoliberal.com/forum/national>> (accessed on November 22, 2001).

³⁵Lei Yi, "Zhongguo xiandai de 'huaxia zhongxin guan' yu 'minzu zhuyi'" ("Sino-centrism" and "nationalism" in modern China), in Li, *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun*, 305-10; and Zhu Xueqin, "Wusi yilai de liangge jingshen bingzhao" (Two mental viruses since May Fourth), *ibid.*, 500-507.

cedures.³⁶ Finally, they argue for the superiority of universal values—such as peace, nonviolence, democracy, rationality, freedom, and human rights in particular—over nationalism, and urge compatriots to abide by these values when conducting international relations.³⁷ Given that the statist tradition has dominated educated minds in China since the birth of state Confucianism and given that since the nineteenth century several generations of Chinese liberals have fallen into the trap of nationalism and brought tragedy upon themselves by abandoning their beliefs in liberalism for the sake of national salvation or national construction, the gathering momentum of Chinese liberalism today may constitute the most profound change in Chinese intellectual development since the mid-nineteenth century, if not since the Spring and Autumn Period (春秋時代).

Prospects for Social Democracy

Interestingly, as with their predecessors in the 1930s and 1940s, many of today's liberals in China are also social democrats at the same time. Some leading liberal intellectuals in the 1990s have also argued directly for the case of social democracy in China.³⁸ According to Qin Hui (秦暉),

³⁶Qin Hui, "Ziyou zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi de qihedian zai nali?" (Where is the joining point of liberalism and nationalism?), in Li, *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun*, 381-88; Sun Liping, "Huiru shijie zhuliu wenming" (Joining the world's mainstream civilization), *ibid.*, 372-80; and Li and He, *Zhongguo de daolu*.

³⁷Xu Xun, "Jiegou minzu zhuyi: quanli, shehui yundong, yishi xingtai he jiazhi guannian" (Deconstruction of nationalism: Power, social movement, ideology, and values), in Li, *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun*, 34-50; Chen Shaoming, "Minzu zhuyi: fuxing zhidao?" (Nationalism: The road to rejuvenation?), *ibid.*, 389-94; Qin, "Ziyou zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi de qihedian zai nali?" 381-88; and Sun, "Huiru shijie zhuliu wenming," 372-80.

³⁸Originally the terms "communism" and "social democracy" were interchangeable. For the evolution of social democracy in Europe, see Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996). For the latest development of social democracy, see Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); and Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way and Its Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000). Mainly to the credit of social democracy, capitalism as known by Marx has been revised and transformed almost beyond recognition.

China is still at the stage where the "liberal order" (自由秩序, *ziyou zhixu*) has not yet been established. The basic values of liberalism and social democracy are not incompatible, not least because they are facing the same enemies of despotism and populism and because they are defending the "same bottom line" (共同的底線, *gongtong de dixian*) defined by human rights, liberty, and procedural justice. Therefore, there is a strong "overlapping consensus" for the time being between liberalism and social democracy in contemporary China, and the differences between liberals and social democrats have not yet become an issue.³⁹

The quest for social democracy surged twice before in China, first during the May Fourth period and then in the 1940s. We all know that after May 1919 the May Fourth New Culture Movement changed focus from liberalism to socialism. However, it needs to be pointed out that while some members of the Chinese modernizing elite embraced socialism with great enthusiasm during the May Fourth period, these individuals were by no means breaking away from liberalism. Instead, socialism was regarded—except perhaps by a very small minority who had been attracted to Bolshevism—as a natural extension of liberal democracy.⁴⁰ For most Chinese intellectuals during this period, socialism developed from liberalism—two complementary doctrines. Democracy and socialism were not mutually exclusive but rather defined, complemented, and reinforced each other. The cause of social democracy was promoted with greater vigor by the "third force" in the 1940s. The core of the "third force" is usually thought to be liberals, but the label of social democrats is more suitable, simply because they simultaneously pursued a polity of liberal democracy and the economic program of social democracy. The appeal of social democracy to Chinese liberals was best summarized by the key liberal figure Yin Haiguang (殷海光) in 1948:

During this "unfortunate period," most of those who love our country and worry about the situation are searching for a conclusion and a way out. Although the

³⁹Qin, "Ziyou zhuyi, shehui minzhu zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo 'wentì'."

⁴⁰See note 21 above.

conclusions drawn by individuals are not exactly the same, the belief that China should take the road of "social democracy" is by and large a consensus. Social democracy is a child resulting from the marriage of democracy and socialism, a combination of the blood and advantages of both.⁴¹

One obvious indication of the re-emergence, after several decades of silence, of social democracy in China in the 1990s is the re-evaluation of and strong interest in the theory and practice of social democracy as practiced in Eastern Europe as well as in the West.⁴² Actually, some Chinese intellectuals were enthusiastic about social democracy in the 1980s. One strong argument that emerged from the discourse on social democracy during that period was that social democracy was a legitimate branch of socialism.⁴³ Even some establishment intellectuals argued that social democracy had proved to be the best way for the developed capitalist world to achieve socialism.⁴⁴ The fervent praise for the "Swedish Model" came closest to the direct promotion of social democracy in China.⁴⁵ It was the sudden col-

⁴¹Yin Haiguang, "Women zou na tiao lu?" (What road should we take?), in *Yin Haiguang xuanji: zhengzhi yu shehui* (Selected works of Yin Haiguang: Politics and society), ed. Lin Zhenghong (Taipei: Guiguan tushu gongsi, 1990), 6; originally published in *Qingnian zazhi* (Youth Journal) 1, no. 2 (September 1948). For accounts and explanations on the failure of the "third force," see *Roads Not Taken: The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Roger B. Jeans (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992), 339-45, especially the introductory chapter by Jeans.

⁴²For re-evaluation of social democracy in China from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, see Hans Hendrichske, "The Chinese Discourse on Social Democracy," in *China Review 1996*, ed. Maurice Brosseau, Suzanne Pepper, and Tsang Shu-ki (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1996), 95-124.

⁴³For the most comprehensive discussion of the "schools" of socialism in the 1980s, including social democracy, see Gao Fang, ed., *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi gailun* (An introduction to socialism in the contemporary world) (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1989). For two sophisticated discussions of social democracy in the West, see Li Xinggeng, ed., *Dangdai Xi'ou shehuidang de lilun yu shijian* (Theory and practice of social democratic parties in contemporary Western Europe) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1988); and Yin Xuyi, ed., *Dangdai Xi'ou shehuidang renwu zhuan* (Biographies of social democrats in contemporary Western Europe) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1988). These two edited volumes were publications resulting from a national key research project entitled "Research on Contemporary Schools of Socialism," which was managed by the Compilation & Translation Bureau of the CCP Central Committee.

⁴⁴For example, see Gao, *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi gailun*. These views were also cited in Xu Chongwen, *Minzhu shehui zhuyi pingxi* (Analysis of social democracy) (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1995), 2.

⁴⁵See, for example, Huan Fanzhang, *Ruidian "fuli guojia" de lilun yu shijian* (The theory and practice of the "welfare state" in Sweden) (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1987);

lapse of communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe that turned social democracy into the target of all-out official attack in China. Since the late 1990s, however, some scholars with theoretical courage have started to carefully examine the change in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and have come to the conclusion that the disasters were rooted in state socialism and Stalinism, rather than in either social democracy or mistakes made by the party leaders there.⁴⁶ With this new assessment clearing the way, these scholars have gone further to introduce the achievements and new development of social democracy in the West.⁴⁷ Partly related to the theme of social democracy, there has also been since the late 1980s a powerful discourse in the public sphere among Chinese intellectuals regarding social and political development in China.⁴⁸

Even the CCP leadership is flirting with social democracy, or at least with some values and policies of a social democratic nature. There is a debate taking place within the ruling elite about whether the Party is transforming itself into a social democratic party. Jiang Zemin's recent theory of "three represents" has been criticized by a conservative group on the left—led by Party elders Deng Liqun (鄧力群) and Song Ping (宋平)—for

and Huang Anmiao and Zhang Xiaojing, eds., *Ruidian moshi chutan* (A preliminary investigation of the Swedish model) (Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1989).

⁴⁶For the best example of this scholarship see Gong Dafei, ed., *Sulian jubian chutan* (An exploration of the drastic change in the Soviet Union) (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 1998).

⁴⁷Yu Keping, ed., *Quanqiu hua shidai de "shehui zhuyi"* ("Socialism" in the age of globalization) (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1998); Xiang Wenhua, ed., *Shijimo de sikao* (Thinking at the end of the century) (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1998); Wang Xuedong et al., *Jiushi niandai Xi'ou shehui minzhu zhuyi de biange* (The change of social democracy in Western Europe in the 1990s) (Beijing: Zhongyang bianyi chubanshe, 1999); Wang Zhengdong et al., *Chongsuo Yingguo: Bulaier yu "disantiao daolu"* (Reconstruction of Britain: Blair and the third way) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2000); Chen Lin and Lin Deshan, eds., *Disantiao daolu: shiji zhijiao de Xifang zhengzhi biange* (The third way: Political change in the West at the turn of the century) (Beijing: Dangdai shijie chubanshe, 2000); and Yang Xuedong and Xue Xiaoyuan, eds., *"Disantiao daolu" yu xinde lilun* (The third way and the new theories) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000).

⁴⁸For details see Ma Shu Yun, "The Chinese Discourse on Civil Society," *The China Quarterly*, no. 137 (March 1994): 180-93; He Baogang, "The Ideas of Civil Society in Mainland China and Taiwan, 1986-1992," *Issues & Studies* 31, no. 6 (June 1995): 24-64; and Deng Zhenglai, *Guojia yu shehui: Zhongguo shimin shehui yanjiu* (The state and society: A study on civil society in China) (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1997).

abandoning the definition of the Party as "the vanguard of the proletarian class" and changing the nature of the Party along social democratic lines.⁴⁹ By implication, the theory of "three represents" does tend to favor the "new rich," including private businesspeople—who are clearly the agents of "the advanced productive force" and the "advanced culture," over traditional industrial workers—who are losing out in the process of market transition. The top Party leadership, however, is ignoring all warnings from the left and is choosing instead to strengthen the relationship with and learn from social democratic parties in the West. Traditionally, despite the fact that friendly relations were maintained between China and some countries with social democratic parties in power, the CCP deliberately kept such ties low-profile. This tradition was changed no later than October 2000 when Wei Jianxing (尉健行), an important member of the Politburo and Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee, led a CCP delegation to pay a high-profile visit to Germany at the invitation of the Social Democratic Party of Germany. Using terms previously reserved for exchanges with other communist parties, Wei made crystal clear that the aims of the visit were not only for the CCP to learn from the experience of the Social Democratic Party of Germany in managing social and economic development but also to foster cooperation between the two parties.⁵⁰

In the meantime, arrangements were made for aides and think-tank members associated with the top Party leadership to conduct research into the structure and philosophy of European social democratic parties.⁵¹ For

⁴⁹Huang Rutong, "Ping Li Junru guanyu dang de jianshe wenti de yanlun" (On Li Junru's opinion on the issues of party reconstruction), *Zhenli de zhuiqiu* (Pursuit of Truth), no. 2 (2001): 20-25; Huang Rutong, "Jiujing yao jiancheng yige shenmo dang: ping Li Junru guanyu dang de jianshe wenti de mouxie yanlun" (What kind of party is to be built: On some of Li Junru's opinion on the issues of party reconstruction), *Zhongliu* (Midstream), no. 3 (2001): 16-19; Cheng Yu, "Ba shui jiaohun yi yu hewei" (What are the hidden intentions in muddling the water), *ibid.*, no. 4 (2001): 13-15; and Yang Xinjun, "Lun quanmin dang sichao dui guoji gongchan zhuyi yundong de weihai" (Damages done on the international communist movement by the concept of the party for the entire people), *ibid.*, no. 4 (2001): 9-12.

⁵⁰Wei Jianxing kaishi dui Deguo jinxing zhengshi youhao fangwen" (Wei Jianxing undertakes formal friendly visit to Germany), *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), October 13, 2000.

⁵¹The author's interviews in Beijing and Shanghai (April 2001). See also Willy Wo-Lap

this purpose, high-profile delegations were sent to carry out fieldwork in countries with social democratic parties in power. One of these delegations was led by Zheng Bijian (鄭必堅), member of the CCP Central Committee and managing vice-president of the CCP Central Party School.⁵² Equally important, in preparing for the 16th Party Congress in 2002, the tradition of consulting leaders in "brother parties" of the communist party-states was abandoned. Instead, top leaders and theoreticians of the major European social democratic parties were invited to Beijing for consultation on a theoretical framework for the coming Party Congress. According to one report, a special two-day seminar—for consultation on issues centered around the theme of "social changes and the parties"—was organized by the International Liaison Department of the CCP Central Committee in May 2001. This seminar included distinguished guests from European social democratic parties, including Alain Bergounioux from the Socialist Party of France, Alberto Costa from the Socialist Party of Portugal, and Detlev Albers from the Social Democratic Party of Germany.⁵³ Advice was ardently sought in the areas of welfare and social security, the legal framework for social transition, and the role of the government and the ruling party in a market-oriented economy. A change of this kind can be regarded as a major revolution in thought given the fact that in the past the CCP, following the Leninist tradition, regarded social democratic parties in the West as allies of the capitalist camp and treated social democracy or any brand of "revisionism" as the "most dangerous enemy," even more dangerous than capitalism because it was seen as capable of subverting communism from within.

More dramatically, in his July 1, 2001 speech commemorating the

Lam, "Appealing to the Modern Comrade," *South China Morning Post*, January 11, 2000; and "Jiang zong chuan pizhuan zhenggai fang'an" (Report on plan for political reform signed and passed by General Secretary Jiang), *Xianggang jingji ribao* (Hong Kong Economic Daily), February 22, 2001.

⁵²"Zheng Bijian shuai Zhonggong kaocha tuan chufang Ouzhou si guo" (An investigation group led by Zheng Bijian pays a visit to four countries in Europe), *Renmin ribao*, May 9, 2001.

⁵³"Senior CPC Official Meets West European Guests," *China Daily*, May 24, 2001.

80th anniversary of the founding of the CCP, Jiang Zemin took a further decisive step toward adding more social democratic flavor to the CCP by making the Party more inclusive. His speech has attracted fierce attacks of unprecedented ferocity from the Party's conservatives on the left, both old and new. Most noteworthy in Jiang's otherwise tediously long speech were several short paragraphs providing theoretical justification for the practice of recruiting private businesspeople into the Party. Jiang proclaimed:

Since China adopted the policy of reform and opening up, the composition of China's social strata has changed to some extent. There are, among others, entrepreneurs and technical personnel employed by scientific and technical enterprises in the non-public sector, managerial and technical staff employed by foreign-funded enterprises, the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, employees in intermediaries, and freelance professionals.... They are also working toward building socialism with Chinese characteristics.... The basic components and backbone of the Party are workers, farmers, intellectuals, servicemen, and cadres. At the same time, it is also necessary to accept those outstanding elements from other sectors of society who have subscribed to the Party's program and Constitution, worked for the Party's line and program wholeheartedly, and who proved to meet the requirements for Party membership through a long sequence of tests.⁵⁴

Jiang's speech was a head-on blow to the leftists within the Party, who have since launched a counterattack. Their furious denunciations are best embodied in two recent open letters to the CCP Central Committee circulated on the Internet. One of these missives is dated July 15, 2001 and signed by Hu Angang (胡鞍鋼), a New Left leader who is well known for his views on strengthening the power of the central government and leveling the disparity between China's east and west through allocation of administrative resources. The other is dated July 20, 2001 and signed by seventeen preeminent old-left leaders, including Deng Liqun, Ma Wenrui (馬文瑞), Yuan Mu (袁木), Wu Lengxi (吳冷西), Duan Ruofei (段若非), Yu Quanyu (喻權域), Li Erchong (李爾重), Wei Wei (魏巍), Lin Mohan (林默涵), and Lin Yanzhi (林炎志). The focus of their denunciations is precisely the theoretical justification for opening the Party door to private businesspeople. According to these leftists, accepting businesspeople into

⁵⁴"Jiang Zemin's Speech on Party's 80th Anniversary" (Part V), *China Daily*, July 1, 2001.

the Party is nothing less than an act of treason against the interests of both the "working class" and the Party. This group defines their differences with the Party boss as a matter of fundamental principle: "whether to maintain the political line of Marxism-Leninism and follow the socialist road, or to pursue social democracy and follow the capitalist road." One new point made in the two letters is the accusation that Jiang Zemin has violated the Party constitution, which bans private business owners from entering the Party and prohibits any individual of the Party from making a personal decision to change the nature of the Party without discussion and approval by the CCP Central Committee, Politburo, or the Standing Committee of the Politburo.⁵⁵ Accusations of this sort heralded a showdown between fundamentalists and the mainstream within the Party, and—for the first time in the reform era—two journals of the left were forced to close down.

Of course, recruitment of a certain number of businesspeople is not tantamount to the CCP becoming a social democratic party; the CCP still remains a communist party, having already adopted a plethora of other social democratic policies such as market-oriented reforms and a mixed economy. One is hard-pressed to argue that the CCP used to primarily serve the interests of the working class. Despite the rhetoric for both fundamentalists and the mainstream of the CCP, highly unlikely is that anyone still truly believes the myth that the CCP after 1949, or any communist party in power, is a "party of the working class"—or a "party of the proletariat" to use a more orthodox term. Needless to say, before 1949 the CCP fought for the interests and enjoyed the support of a large proportion of the working masses (who were a small number of proletarians in a pool of predominantly peasants) in China. After its rise to power, while classes of landlords and capitalists were eliminated, the CCP transformed into what Milovan Djilas called the "new class." Through effective mechanisms such as the monopoly of political power and "office ownership" of the means of production, this class has managed to put all resources and the entire so-

⁵⁵Under current circumstances the authenticity of these signatures cannot be verified, but there is little doubt that the two letters express the views of these individuals.

ciety, including the lives of the working class, under tight control.⁵⁶ There are neither meaningful elections or any other authorization procedures for the CCP to "represent" the working class, nor are there any institutional guarantees to make the CCP accountable to the working class or any other part of the population. The CCP, as the authoritarian ruling party, shares little in common with the working class, who have been at best hired laborers of the party-state yet are ironically flattered with the title of "masters of the country."

As a more fundamental difference between the CCP and a social democratic party, the former insists on one-party dictatorship while the latter holds a firm belief in representative government and multiparty democracy. The theory of "three represents," particularly the idea of fully legitimizing the recruitment of private businesspeople into the Party, may help to further soften the militant aspect of the CCP as a "revolutionary party." The Party leadership continues to categorically reject the notion of multiparty democracy as a "Western bourgeois party system unsuitable for China," however, and is as determined as ever to maintain the one-party dictatorship. This is not to say that the concept of the multiparty system is beyond all members of the Party. On the contrary, to the rank and file of the CCP, multiparty democracy has become an irresistible global trend and will inevitably come to China in the long run. What remains in doubt is whether China can achieve a smooth transition to this stage in the perceivable future.⁵⁷

To ease Party fears of such a democratic transition, some CCP members have argued the case for the creation of a "socialist multiparty system" in China. The most eminent among them is Gao Fang (高放), a retired professor from the People's University. Gao Fang joined the communist

⁵⁶Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1957). According to Djilas, "Ownership is nothing other than the right of profit and control," and in a communist country, "it is the bureaucracy which formally uses, administers, and controls both nationalized property as well as the entire life of society. The role of the bureaucracy in society, i.e., monopolistic administration and control of national income and national goods, consigns it to a special privileged position" (p. 35).

⁵⁷Author's interviews in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, April-May 2000.

movement when he was an undergraduate student of politics at Beijing University in the late 1940s. His extensive research and numerous publications in Chinese academia in the 1980s established him as the authority on international communist movements. Toward the end of his academic career the focus of his research shifted to political development in China; since the late 1990s he has published extensively on sensitive theoretical and practical issues regarding political reform in China.⁵⁸ He first advocated the "socialist multiparty system" in China in an article published back in 1987.⁵⁹ In his latest article on the same topic published at the end of 2000, Gao draws from the lessons of the collapse of communism in both Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and elaborates in great detail his theory of the "socialist multiparty system." First, the founders of the communist movement (Marx and Engels) themselves advocated and practiced the multiparty system, as embodied in the experience of the First International (full name: the International Working Men's Association) and the Paris Commune of 1871. Second, it was bad communist leaders, Stalin in particular, who eventually abandoned the multiparty system for the one-party system. Third, the experience of the rise and fall of communism in both Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has proved that the one-party system failed to serve the purpose of socialism and the interests of the people, and, as a consequence, led to the destruction of the socialist project. Fourth, a multiparty coalition government was the original intention of the CCP in the 1940s. Gao's conclusion is crystal clear: "Political democratization and party politics have become a powerful global trend, ... accelerating development and betterment of the socialist multiparty system is the only way that the influence of the Western capitalist multiparty sys-

⁵⁸See Gao Fang, *Gao Fang zhengzhixue luncui* (Gao Fang: Selected works on political science) (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2001). According to Gao, the original title was *Zhengzhixue yu zhengzhi tizhi gaige* (Political science and the reform of the political system) but it was changed to the current title with two-thirds of the manuscripts being regarded as too sensitive and thus cut by the publisher.

⁵⁹Gao Fang, "Lun shehui zhuyi guojia de zhengdang zhidu—guanyu shehui zhuyi duodang-zhi zhi wo jian" (Political party systems in socialist countries: My views on the socialist multiparty system), *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* (Studies in Political Science), no. 4 (1987).

tem can be eliminated in China."⁶⁰

The Barriers of State Socialism, Nationalism, and Cynicism

The above discussion indicates that the obstacle that state socialism poses to the development of liberalism and social democracy in China stems not so much from the fast declining state economy as the persistence of, and the remaining belief in, the one-party dictatorship. If democratization of the party-state is successful, the current mixed economy in China can be transformed into an economy that is social democratic in nature. Apart from the obstacle of state socialism, however, the rise of nationalism and cynicism also presents problems to liberalism and social democracy. The current CCP regime in China relies on nationalism as a major source of legitimacy; due to the waning of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought as the state ideology, however, state nationalism and the skillful manipulation of the state media have generated a strongly resonant, popular nationalism.⁶¹ According to Xu Jilin (許紀霖), there were three waves of anti-Westernism in China during the early to mid-1990s.⁶²

This popular nationalism gathered new momentum in 1994 when the book *Looking at China Through a Third Eye*⁶³ became a best seller and

⁶⁰Gao Fang, "Zai lun shehui zhuyi guojia de zhengdang zhidu—guanyu shehui zhuyi duodangzhi zhi xin jian" (Political party systems in socialist countries revisited: My new views on the socialist multiparty system), *Zhongguo shichang jingji luntan—Wengao* (Forum on Market Economy in China: Drafts), no. 6 (2000). The concept of "socialist two-party system" was coined earlier in 1973 by Gu Zhun (顧準) in his private notes, which were published in 1994. See Gu Zhun, "Minzhu yu zhongji mudi" (Democracy and the ultimate aim), in Gu Zhun, *Gu Zhun wenji* (Collected works of Gu Zhun) (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1994), 370.

⁶¹For description and analysis see Geremie Barmé, "To Screw Foreigners Is Patriotic," in *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture*, by Geremie Barmé (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 255-80; and Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Its International Orientation," *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 1-33.

⁶²Xu Jilin, "Fan Xifang zhuyi yu minzu zhuyi" (Anti-Westernism and nationalism), in Li, *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun*, 421-28. See also Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, part II in particular.

⁶³Luo Yi Ning Ge Er (Wang Shan), *Disan zhi yan kan Zhongguo* (Looking at China through

when a new journal *Strategy and Management* organized a forum to directly discuss the topic of nationalism. *Looking at China Through a Third Eye* alleged that the United States fears a strong China, and advised the Chinese government to take a tougher stand against the West in general and the United States in particular. Several articles from this symposium on nationalism—published in the June 1994 issue of *Strategy and Management*—praised the spirit, pride, and strength contained in nationalism. A new wave of nationalism was aroused in 1996 by the publication of, and overwhelming reception received by, another book, *China Can Say No*, with its outpouring of nationalistic sentiment. From 1993 to 1996 there were several incidents widely reported in China's media that allegedly "deeply hurt the feelings of the Chinese." These included an episode where a Chinese cargo ship, *Yin He* (銀河), was stopped and searched by the U.S. Navy in the Arabian Sea in August 1993 on suspicion of carrying military materials; the effective block by the United States and other Western nations of China's bid in September 1993 to host the 2000 Olympics; and the visit of Taiwanese president Lee Teng-hui (李登輝) to the United States in mid-1995. The book *China Can Say No* and several other books with similar titles cited these examples as proof that the United States and the West in general were determined to hold the PRC down due to a fear of China's fast-growing power. This allegation of a U.S.-led containment strategy soon became a widely held belief in China. Nationalistic sentiment in China peaked in May 1999 when NATO bombs struck the Chinese embassy in Belgrade; Chinese students and other groups of citizens in major Chinese cities demonstrated and threw bricks and bottles at the American embassy and consulates.⁶⁴ When both state nationalism and popular nationalism are at fever pitch, democratization is likely to be

a third eye) (Taiyuan: Shanxi renmin chubanshe, 1994). For discussions of the book see Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen*, 146-51; and Liu Zhifeng, ed., *Jieshi Zhongguo: Disan zhi yan kan Zhongguo pipan* (Explaining China: Critiques on *Looking at China Through a Third Eye*) (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998).

⁶⁴For details see Fang Ning, Wang Bingquan, Ma Lijun et al., *Chengzhang de Zhongguo: dangdai Zhongguo qingnian de guojia minzu yishi yanjiu* (Growing China: A study on the state and national consciousness of contemporary Chinese youth) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2002).

scapegoated (once again) as a threat to political stability, national "wealth and power," and national unity.⁶⁵

Apart from the daunting battle with nationalism, a new threat to democratization has appeared: namely cynicism. The interplay of political suppression and consumerism has dispelled enthusiasm for any ideology, including liberal democracy. According to Hu Ping (胡平), one of the most profound thinkers produced by the Chinese democratic movement in the reform era, cynicism is the most popular "ism" in contemporary China. The communist ideology is itself a strange combination of idealism and cynicism in the sense that it aims to establish a perfect paradise for humankind on earth but in the meantime shows contempt for basic human rights or humanist values. Despite the cynical rhetoric of Marxism, current Party rule in China relies on a depressing mix of habit, lies, repression, and the success of partial economic development. This communist despotism is accepted or tolerated by a population poisoned by a popular cynicism resulting from fear and pessimism. While almost the entire society has been indulging in hedonism since the June 4th tragedy of 1989, a majority of intellectuals have been busy rationalizing their fear of political suppression and pessimism about democratic transformation. Therefore, the prevailing practice is to belittle virtue and seek glory, without any desire to "distinguish between the crooked and the true" (難得糊塗).⁶⁶ Ben Xu also points out that while cynicism is not uncommon in modern societies, cynicism in a democratic society manifests itself mainly as political indifference. Cynicism in contemporary China, however, is a "mass cynicism" displaying itself as social indifference toward the entire public life; has become a way of life in a typical post-totalitarian society; and is not only a mentality of suspicion toward politics, but also a special relationship between the rulers and the ruled, one in which the regime not only no longer bases its legitimacy on the people's confidence in itself, but the ruled also

⁶⁵See Baogang He and Yinjie Guo, *Nationalism, National Identity and Democratization in China* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

⁶⁶Hu Ping, "Quanru bing: dangdai Zhongguo de jingshen weiji" (Disease of cynicism: The spiritual crisis in contemporary China), *Beijing zhi chun*, March, April, and June 1998.

accept the regime out of fear.⁶⁷ For a population content with muddling along despite oppression and manipulation by an authoritarian regime, it is not easy to arouse them to the ideals defined by liberalism and social democracy.

Conclusion

With China achieving its remarkable "wealth and power," democratic transformation has duly become the most important concern for liberal intellectuals in China, the major remaining communist party-state. The Chinese communist party-state is skillfully employing state nationalism to legitimate its outdated one-party dictatorship, echoed in a rising popular nationalism. The state ideology continues to regard liberalism—including the multiparty system, general elections, and the separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers—as "Western" and "bourgeois" concepts and institutions unfit for China. The project of liberal development in China has been repeatedly thwarted by nationalist and socialist projects thought to command a higher urgency. Some in the West have gone as far as to argue that China is in transition from communism to a maturing fascist regime; this claim is made on the grounds that China, like earlier fascist regimes, ruthlessly maintains a single-party dictatorship, uses nationalism to rally the masses, and sublimates individual interests to the greater good of the nation. The argument continues, however, by stating that the CCP is superior to earlier fascist regimes in that it is based no longer on charisma but on a more stable state corporatism, professionalism, and political repression.⁶⁸ An intellectual breakthrough removing the suicidal barrier of nationalism has become a prerequisite for a breakthrough in the democratization of China.

⁶⁷Ben Xu, "Dangjin Zhongguo dazhong shehui de quanru zhuyi" (The mass cynicism in China today), *Ershiyi shiji*, June 2001, 82-88.

⁶⁸M. A. Leddeen, "Black Shirts in Red China? Beijing Today is More Fascist Than Communist," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2002.

As elsewhere, nationalism and liberalism coexist and indeed reinforce each other to a point. Initially strong patriotism was what drove generations of Chinese intellectuals in modern China to embrace liberal ideas and institutions as a means to achieve national independence and national "wealth and power"; those elements of liberalism, such as the concept of popular sovereignty, the concept of citizen rights, and the concept of the international recognition of equal status of nations, were precisely what differentiated modern nationalism from its earlier forms. In the final analysis, however, liberalism and nationalism are different in nature and follow opposite logic. Liberalism takes individuals as the *end*, and takes government and nation—or any other political organization and any other formation of communities—as a *means to achieve the end* of individual independence, dignity, liberty, and happiness. Nationalism, on the other hand, takes the nation or nation-state as the end and individuals as a means. Liberalism by its very nature is a doctrine of universalism granting equal status to any human, whereas nationalism—no matter how liberal or civic—is a doctrine of particularism setting boundaries between human communities.

In particular, modern Chinese nationalism has contained a strong element of suspicion of and hatred toward the West simply because this phenomenon has been stimulated by and emerged in the context of Western imperialism and aggression. More often than not, Chinese nationalists fail to draw a distinction between Western imperialist policies and Western liberal values. These nationalists even hold liberal values responsible for imperialist policies. As a consequence, in their struggle for "national salvation," they eventually abandoned liberal values, which, ironically, were one of the most important factors contributing to the emergence of the nation-state in the West. By blocking the emergence of independent citizens and their voluntary political participation, the one-party dictatorship has actually weakened civic nationalism and the development of the nation-state in China.

Chinese liberalism was born with neither the solid social base of the middle class nor the solid moral support of individualist values, and was severely restrained by successive wars and other social and political upheavals. For most—if not all—Chinese liberal intellectuals in modern

China, the overriding concern is to achieve national "wealth and power." As a result, they take democracy and other liberal institutions and values as a means rather than an end, even though some of these intellectuals do see the intrinsic value of liberalism in one form or another.

The power of nationalism in shaping human history since the modern time is beyond exaggeration. Nationalism not only destroyed the ideal of internationalism originally pertaining to communism and turned the world communist movement into a nationalist project, but also modified liberalism to various extents even in those countries and societies founded on liberal principles. Based on the painful experience of the two world wars and other wars initiated by nationalists, the mainstream thinking of humankind has at long last reached the point where sharp vigilance is increasingly maintained against the scourge of nationalistic fanaticism, and where human rights are considered superior to sovereign rights, as evidenced by the principles which guided the recent NATO intervention in Kosovo.⁶⁹ It is unrealistic to eliminate nationalism in the perceivable future, but it is possible to relegate its value as secondary to liberal values. China is still a long way from catching up to this new trend, but the emerging elements of thinking in some intellectual and political circles are promising.

Gao Fang's arguments for a "socialist multiparty system" may sound odd to the ears of many communist bureaucrats in China, but so too did many alien concepts—such as the "socialist commodity economy" and the "socialist market economy"—in the early 1980s. In a decade or so, the CCP may be able to turn the capitalist attributes of "commodity economy" and "market economy" into a fully legitimate part of the state ideology and the socialist identity. If so, the concept of the "socialist multiparty system" may prevail in China in a new round of political reform to be brought on by socioeconomic development and a worsening legitimacy crisis resulting from widespread corruption.

⁶⁹For an overview of cosmopolitan consciousness of human rights and international relations see Nigel Dower, "Human Rights and International Relations," *International Journal of Human Rights* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 86-111.