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**TOWARD AN INCREMENTAL DEMOCRACY AND
GOVERNANCE : Chinese Theories and Assessment Criteria**

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ABSTRACT

The article elaborates the development of Chinese democracy and governance, in theory and practice, since the introduction of the market-orientated economy. It contrasts the similarities and differences between the traditional view of democracy and the reformist one, and between the official and the academic one. The article generalizes the practice and theories of democracy and governance in China as "Incremental Democracy". First, this means that the previous centralist system is in a process of collapsing and, a pluralization of political life is emerging. However, the political pluralization is conditional: China's politics is in a transitional stage from the traditional totalism towards a conditional democracy. Second, compared to economic liberalization, the extent and degree of political liberalization is much lower. In this paper, the author tries to develop a new theory and assessment criteria to explain and evaluate the recent changes in democracy and governance taking place in a context of economic and social reforms.

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Chinese Concepts of Democracy during the Mao Zedong Era	3
3.	Deng Xiaoping's Perspective on Democracy	5
4.	Democratization and Chinese Economic Growth	7
4.1.	Separating the Party from the State	8
4.2.	Emergence of Civil Society	9
4.3.	Taking the Rule of Law as a Goal of China's Political Development	10
4.4.	Broadening the Scope of Direct Election and Local Self-governance	11
4.5.	Separating Government Functions from Enterprise Management	11
5.	Recent Chinese Discourses on Democracy	12
5.1.	Orthodox Marxism	13
5.2.	Liberalism	14
5.3.	Incremental Democracy	14
5.3.1.	Highlighting Democratic Procedures and Institutions	15
5.3.2.	Accepting Civil Society as a Precondition for Democracy	15
5.3.3.	Esteem for the Rule of Law	16
5.3.4.	Affirming the Critical Role of Government in Promoting Democracy	17
5.3.5.	Advocacy of Cooperative Democracy	17
6.	Recent Chinese Discourses on Governance	18
	Appendix	21

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1. Introduction

Any political discourse is bound by the political era. This is especially true in China where people have witnessed many political movements since 1949. The political terms which prevailed before are replaced by the new ones as the old political era gives way to the new. Among the most popular political terms from 1949 to 1978 were "revolution", "dictatorship," and "class struggle". But they have disappeared from the list of popular terms since 1978. Instead, new terms like "reform", "rule of law" and "stability" are well known to people. However, the term of "democracy" is an exception. Most Chinese scholars held that democracy was a foreign word and "there was neither democracy nor science in traditional Chinese culture"¹. It is interesting that "democracy" is always on the list of popular terms in modern Chinese political history, irrespective of the ruler and the regime. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) used democracy as a legitimate basis to overthrow the Kuomintang(KMT) Regime before 1949. Mao Zedong, top leader of the CCP, even wrote a pamphlet entitled "New Democracy". It was still one of most resounding slogans after the CCP came to power in 1949 and even during the "cultural revolution". China's politics and economy have undergone fundamental changes since the reform and opening up in 1978, so that all the old political terms except "democracy" are no longer popular. There is no doubt that both the Chinese understanding and practice of democracy are undergoing great changes although the term remains.

2. Chinese concepts of Democracy during the Mao Zedong Era

In Mao's era, as with other political terms "democracy" was not open to discussion and was used exclusively by the authorities in a specific way. The only official view on democracy in that context was as follows: democracy is the superstructure based upon the economic base; in the final analysis, it is not the ultimate value and goal but a means to achieve the economic goal and serves economic development; any democracy in human history is class democracy in nature and there is no classless democracy. So far, there have existed only two types of democracies, socialist and capitalist; the socialist democracy is the highest form of democracy while the capitalist one is false; democracy and dictatorship are complementary so that democracy for the proletariat and dictatorship for the bourgeoisie are two sides of the same coin. As Mao wrote, "The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the

¹Li Shenzhi, "Neither Democracy Nor Science in Traditional Chinese Culture," SELECTIONS ON LIBERATION(1978-1998), ed. by Qiushi, Economic Daily Press, 1998. p.1118.

people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the people's democratic dictatorship"². Democracy and centralization are united as "democratic centralism", that is, centralization based on democracy, and democracy under centralized guidance. Such a "democratic centralism" has been one principle of both the Constitution of the Chinese Communist Party and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China³.

There are many defects in such a view on democracy. First of all, it is an instrumentalist view that regards democracy as a means to attain the economic goal, not as one of human ultimate value, so as to devalue democracy simply as an instrument for human beings. As a result, democracy becomes something not essential in practical politics. Furthermore, according to this instrumentalist view, democracy for the people and, dictatorship over the enemy, are indivisible. But there are no laws to differentiate between the people and the enemy. Under these circumstances, the judgment of the people and the enemy depends on the will of the leaders without objective criteria. As a result, those who fall under the category of people in the eyes of the leaders would have democratic rights and those who are not people would not enjoy democratic rights. This was the case in the Mao Zedong's era. The scope of democracy was reduced while the scope of dictatorship was broadened due to the "magnification of class struggle". The object of dictatorship, at first, was identical with the "object of revolution" such as the landlords, capitalists, old bureaucrats, warlords, KMT reactionaries and criminals. Then, the Rightist intellectuals, dissidents, ordinary citizens and even the cadres of the Party and government became gradually the object of dictatorship. The instrumentalist theory actually emphasizes centralization instead of democracy. Mao Zedong thought that democracy only functions as a foundation for centralization. Who should have such final centralized power? It was not the people. As Mr. Deng Xiaoping criticizes, "inappropriate and indiscriminate concentration of the power of the Party committee is often in the hands of a few secretaries, especially the first secretaries, who direct and decide everything"⁴. Lastly, the instrumentalist view on democracy overlooks citizen's economic democratic rights. This democracy claims a "command" economy under which workers and peasants did not own their productive means because these belonged to the state or the collective. Ordinary citizens did not have independent power over production, for example, peasants even did not have the right to decide what and how to plant in the fields, and left such a right to the cadres of the people's

²Mao Zedong, "On the People's Democratic Dictatorship," SELECTED WORKS OF MAO ZEDONG, Vol. III, People's Publishing House, 1991, p.1475.

³The General Provisions of THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY stipulate that "we should abide by the democratic centralism. It is the integration of centralization on the basis of democracy and democracy under centralized guidance." Article 3 of the General Provisions of the CONSTITUTION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA stipulates that "the state organs of the People's Republic of China should exercise the democratic centralism."

⁴Deng Xiaoping, "On the Reform of the System of Party and State Leadership," SELECTED WORKS OF DENG XIAOPING, People's Publishing House, 1983, p.329.

communes.

Perhaps ironically, the worst outcome of the instrumentalist democracy was "ten-years chaos" of the "cultural revolution". During the "cultural revolution", "democracy" became undisguisedly a tool which some politicians like the Gang of Four used to suppress their opponents. Ordinary citizens' rights were not guaranteed under the so-called grand democracy of "speaking out freely, airing views fully, holding great debates and writing big-character posters". For example, even the President of the State and the Minister of Defense were arrested and persecuted to death without any trial. Obviously, Chinese politics could hardly progress without abandoning this instrumentalist democracy that necessarily leads to political disaster in actual life. Therefore, it became an urgent demand for most Chinese people and CCP members to abandon the legitimacy of Mao's democracy after his death.

3. Deng Xiaoping's perspective on Democracy

The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee in December 1978 is usually regarded as a milestone of China's reform and opening up. The plenary session made decisions to put an end to the "cultural revolution", to shift the principal work of the Party from class struggle onto economic development and to elect Mr. Deng Xiaoping as the top leader of the Party and the state. The basic reason why the Session made so many important decisions for five days, according to some specialists on the history of the CCP, is that before the Session a 36-day working conference was held, at which participants had reached great consensus on important issues after heated argument and intense conflict. The Session did approve the decisions of the working conference and, Mr. Deng Xiaoping's key speech at the working conference was acknowledged officially as "the main speech of the Third Plenary Session"⁵. As Mr. Yu Guangyuan, an authoritative theoretician of the CCP who attended both the Session and the working conference, said, it was one of the main topics of the working conference to promote and discuss democracy. He says that almost all top leaders of the Party talked about democracy. All participants were deeply impressed by both Deng Xiaoping and Ye Jianying's remarks on democracy, and so were all cadres and the masses who read their remarks⁶.

Now, it is clear, that Deng intentionally initiated a revision on Mao's view of democracy in his speech to the working conference. He particularly dwelled on democracy in his famous speech entitled "Emancipate the Mind; Seek Truth from Facts, and Unite as One to Look to the Future". Almost all points on democracy in his

⁵The Editorial Committee for Party Literature under the CC of the CCP, "notes," SELECTED WORKS OF DENG XIAOPING, Vol.2, People's Publishing House, p140.

⁶Yu Guangyuan, THE GREAT HISTORICAL SHIFT I EXPERIENCED: THE CONTEXT OF THE THIRD PLENARY SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE, Central Translation and Compilation Press, 1998, p.353.

speech were designed to oppose and ingeniously revise Mao's view on democracy. First, he talked about the relationship between democracy and centralism and thought that the Party leaders laid undue stress on centralism while "At present, we must lay particular stress on democracy because for quite a long time democratic centralism was not genuinely practised: Centralism was divorced from democracy and there was little democracy."⁷ Second, he advocated economic democracy and producers' economic right to produce and manage. "We should take realistic measures to guarantee the individual democratic rights of workers and peasants, including democratic election, democratic management and democratic supervision". Lastly, Deng laid emphasis on democratic institutionalization. He pointed out that "democracy is gradually institutionalized and codified so that such institutions and laws will not change with changes in the leadership or changes in the views or focus of attention of any leader"⁸. Afterwards, Deng expounded his view on democracy and made a crucial revision to Mao's theory on democracy, that is, he no longer regarded democracy simply as an instrument, but acknowledged "democracy is our goal"⁹.

Deng's theory on democracy is important because it has been written into both the Party Constitution and the Constitution of the People's Republic of China as the guiding ideology which Chinese citizens and CCP members must follow and as principles to guide China's political reform. Generally speaking, Deng's theory on democracy consists of four aspects: 1) Democracy is one of the basic goals for China's political reform. He stated that democracy is a goal of the CCP and there is no socialism without democracy. He summarized his most important policies: "one is to develop democracy and, the other is, to carry out reform in the economy and other social fields"¹⁰. 2) China never practises Western democracy. He held that Western democracy featuring the multi-party and representative system, the balance and check of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary is a democracy of the monopoly capitalist class. Chinese democracy is only the system of people's congresses. 3) Democracy must be combined with law. China would get nowhere without extensive democracy and sound laws. 4) Democracy must be practiced under the leadership of the CCP and must presuppose political stability. China would be in great chaos, according to his logic, if democracy is not put under the leadership of the CCP and there would be no democracy if there is political instability.

In essence, Deng's theory on democracy accords with Mao's one. Both of them lay particular stress on the class nature of democracy, reject the Western multi-party

⁷Deng Xiaoping, "Emancipate the Mind; Seek Truth from Facts, and Uniting as One in Looking to the Future." *SELECTED WORKS OF DENG XIAOPING*, People's Publishing House, 1983, pp. 144, 145 and 146.

⁸Deng Xiaoping, *ibid.*

⁹Deng Xiaoping, "Stability Overrides All," *ibid.* p. 285.

¹⁰Deng Xiaoping, "Develop Politically Democracy and Carry Out Economically Reforms ", *ibid.* p. 116.

system and advocate the sole leadership of the CCP and the system of people's congresses under the leadership of the CCP. But Deng made a crucial revision of Mao's theory on democracy by regarding democracy as a goal of the CCP and stressing institutionalization of democracy, economic democracy and construction of law. So great changes took place in Chinese democracy, in theory and in practice, since the reform and opening up.

4. Democratization and Chinese Economic Growth

There is no doubt that the major result of reform has been rapid economic growth. The speed of China's economic development is so high that many people called it "a miracle". The yearly average growth rate of China's GDP in twenty years from 1978 to 1998 was over 9.8%. In 1998 China's GDP reached 7,955.3 billion RMB yuan up from 358.8 billion yuan in 1978. The rapid economic growth resulted in an enormous rise in the living standard of the Chinese people. The average per capita income of peasants increased from 133.6 yuan in 1978 to 2,160 yuan in 1998, 4.3 times as much as the 1978 figure. The average per capita income of urban residents in the cities amounted to 5,425 yuan in 1998, 3.5 times as much as the 1978 figure¹¹.

The rapid growth of China's economy is a direct outcome of economic pluralization which resulted from the reform of the traditional socialist economic system. First, China reformed the structure of ownership and introduced a diversified economy. The output value of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) occupied a dominant position in GNP till the 1980s, but nowadays the dominant position has been gradually giving way to the non-state ownership. Although the investment proportion of SOEs in the total fixed assets remains over 70%, 60% or more of increased GNP in recent years came from the non-state enterprises, because over 70% of the SOEs operate at a loss. Second, China reformed the management and operational system. In the countryside, the people's commune system no longer exists but was replaced by a variety of contract or subcontract systems; in the cities, the egalitarian productive and distributive systems were replaced by the new job responsibility with different payments. Third, the planned economy was replaced by the market system, and the centralized mandatory economic mechanism yielded to the market price mechanism. Besides, such important economic sectors as finance, insurance, distribution, employment, housing and so forth were greatly reformed and new systems put in place.

With regard to China's reform, many people acknowledge its economic achievements mentioned above. However, they said that while many things in China have made progress and changed greatly, politics is an exception. Some even attribute the success of China's economic reform to the policy of economic reform first and, then, political

¹¹See CHINA STATISTICS YEARBOOK FOR 1998, China Statistics Yearbook Publishing House of , 1999.

reform while they explain the failure of the former Soviet economic reform as a result of radical political changes. Indeed, this argument may be right in terms of Western standards of a multi-party system and the separation of powers: the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. However, it is not true in terms of Chinese political standards. For Chinese society, among three fundamental variables of politics, economy and culture, politics is always the most important and decisive in the final analysis. Mao Zedong expressed this when he said that politics is in command and the soul for all work, "especially in a transitional society"¹². In China, we can say there would be no social reform including an economic one without political reform. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee is a political reform to motivate economic transformation mentioned above. The process of China's economic pluralization was motivated by the political reform, which in turn accelerates the process of political changes.

In view of China's reform in the last two decades, political reform is both an independent variable and a dependent one. The political reform started the process of economic pluralisation that, in turn, speeded the political changes and brought about a process of relative political pluralisation. Therefore, I would like to characterize what happened in Chinese politics over the previous decades as a transition from absolute centralism to incremental democracy. By "Incremental Democracy", I mean the following. First, the collapse of the old centralist system is ongoing and a pluralization of political life is emerging. However, the political pluralization is conditional. In other words, China's politics is in transition from traditional totalism¹³ into a conditional democracy. Second, comparing economic and political liberalization, the extent and degree of the latter is much lower. In this author's view, such a process of relative or conditional pluralisation will be found in political changes described below.

4.1. Separating the Party from the State

It was an outstanding feature of traditional Chinese socialism to identify the Party with the State, which was acclaimed by Mao Zedong as the political system under the "absolute centralist leadership of the Party". It was a typical centralist political model under which the CCP as the only ruling party had monopolized all legislative, executive and judicial powers, even including all economic and ideological management power, central or local. The Party was regarded as the government, and vice versa. At the very beginning of the reform, the reformists inside the Party put the

¹²Mao Zedong, QUOTES FROM CHAIRMAN MAO, Capital Printing House, 1968, p118.

¹³The term "totalism" is different from "totalitarianism". It originally came from the American specialists on Chinese Studies like Professor Tang Tsou of Chicago University. It stands for a particular state whose essential feature is identification of the state with society. It has something to do with totalitarianism and authoritarianism on the one hand, and something different from them on the other hand.

separation of the Party and the State on the agenda of reform and even thought of it as a breakthrough in traditional politics. After 20 years, China has made significant progress in the separation of the Party and the State although the ideal of complete separation of the Party and the State has not yet been realized. In fact, this will be impossible to realize under the condition of the one-party system. Two aspects of this progress are worth mentioning. First of all, the CCP has announced for the first time that the Party cannot be above the law and has to act within the framework of the law, and acknowledged that "it is an extremely important principle that the new Party Constitution stipulates that 'all activities of the Party (be) within the framework of the law.'" All activities of the Party organizations and members from the central to the local cannot be against the State Constitution and laws, they have to abide by the Constitution and laws and never have privileges above the State Constitution and laws"¹⁴. Second, the Party cannot act directly as the government to exercise executive and administrative power. There is a special part in the Political Report of the Thirteenth National Party Congress on the separation of the Party and the government. The Party cannot replace the government to exercise the executive power and it is the key to political reform to separate the Party from the government and the function of the Party from the function of the government. "It is the Party that has led people to establish the State organs, mass associations and various economical and cultural organizations; and the Party should guarantee the State organs to exercise their functions fully and should respect these fully and not take on the work of mass organizations". This Political Report stressed that the leadership of the Party is not simply the administration and execution, but "the political leadership, i.e. leadership of the political principles, important decision-making and recommendation of cadres to the State organs"¹⁵.

4.2. Emergence of Civil Society

In Mao's era, there wasn't an independent civil society at all due to the high integration of the Party-State and society. It is only since the reform that a relatively independent civil society has been gradually emerging. The number and diversity of civil organizations has increased greatly while their legitimacy and autonomy have been much greater than before. Before the reform few mass and social organizations existed, such as, the trade unions, the Youth Leagues and women's federations. Strictly speaking, however, they were not civil society organizations because all of them actually belonged to the hierarchy of the Party and the government without any independence, and they were eventually the auxiliary departments of the Party-State.

¹⁴The CC of the CCP, "The Notice of the CC of the CCP about Safeguarding Socialist Law"(July 10, 1986), SELECTED DOCUMENTS OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S CONGRESS, ed. by the Research Office of the General Office of the Standing Committee of the NPC, China Democracy and Law Press, 1992, p.166.

¹⁵Zhao Zhiyang, "Marching along the Socialist Road with Chinese Characteristic"(October 25, 1987, the Political Report of the Thirteenth National Party Congress)," idid. p.185.

Rapid growth of civil society organizations (CSOs) increased with the start of market-orientated reforms. From the 1950s to the 1970s, there were only a few civil organisations, defined officially as “social associations” under the rigorous control of the Party-State. In the early 1950s, there were 44 national social associations and less than 100 in 1965, while there were 6,000 local social associations during this period. In 1989, national CSOs increased to over 1,600, and local ones increased to over 200,000. In 1997, CSOs at and above the county level throughout the country increased to 181,318. There are no accurate statistics of CSOs below the county level. According to conservative estimates, there are over 3 million¹⁶, 739,500 of them are villagers' committee for self-governance and 510,000 are local trade unions¹⁷. Besides the social associations, certain new CSOs emerged in the 1990s. Their official name is “civil non-enterprise units”. According to the estimates of the departments of civil affairs, there are about 700,000 civil non-enterprise units across the country.¹⁸ All these CSOs are functioning as the foundation of democracy and producing significant impact on democracy and good governance.¹⁹

4.3. Taking the Rule of Law as a Goal of China's Political Development

One of the major reasons why the great tragedy of the “cultural revolution” took place is that there existed no “rule of law” but the “rule of men”. Because of this, the new generation of leaders and intellectuals laid extreme emphasis on the “rule of law” as soon as the reform began and, came to accept the State where the “rule of law” prevails as an overarching goal. The Fifteenth National Party Congress held in September 1997 formally put “ruling the State by the rule of law” and constructing a State where the “rule of law” prevails into its Political Report as the Party's political goal. Afterwards, the National People's Congress revised the Constitution by adding “practising the rule of law in the State” and constructing a socialist State where the “rule of law” exists, so that “ruling the State by the rule of law” becomes a constitutional principle. It is estimated that the NPC and its Standing Committee adopted 351 laws and statutes, the State Council formulated 800 regulations and the local people's congresses made 6,000 local laws and statutes within the 20 years from 1979 to 1999.²⁰ From 1994 to 1996, the NPC and its Standing Committee formulated one law or statute every 13 days while the State Council made a regulation every 6 days. The authorities intend to establish a relatively complete system of Chinese laws by 2010 as one of the basic goals of constructing the rule of State by the “rule of

¹⁶ CHINA CIVIL AFFAIRS YEARBOOK FOR 1998, China Social Press, 1999.

¹⁷ CHINA STATISTICS YEARBOOK FOR 1998, China Statistics Publishing House.

¹⁸ CHINA CIVIL AFFAIRS YEARBOOK FOR 1998, China Social Press, 1999.

¹⁹ As for Chinese civil society and governance, see Yu Keping, “The Emerging of Civil Society and the Changes of Governance in Reform China”, SOCIAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY (Hong Kong), Autumn, 1999.

²⁰ PEOPLE'S DAILY, APRIL 14, 1999.

law”.²¹

4.4. Broadening the Scope of Direct Election and Local Self-governance

Deng Xiaoping and other post-Mao Chinese leaders paid particular attention to local democracy and encouraging grassroots democracy. In accordance with this democratic logic, the Election Law of the Representatives of the National People's Congress and the Local People's Congresses at All Levels, approved in July 1979, stipulates that all representatives at and below the county level must be elected directly by voters. Although all leading cadres of the Party and the government are appointed without direct election, in 1998 and 1999, there appeared an experiment of direct election for chiefs of township in Shichan Province and Shenzheng Special Economic Zone. With regard to grassroots democracy, the outstanding development is extensive villagers' self-governance. The Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees of the People's Republic of China adopted in December 1989 stipulates that the villagers' self-governance should proceed gradually across the country, that the government will cease running villagers' affairs, that the heads of villages and other cadres will not be appointed by the Party Committee and the government, but, will be elected directly and freely by villagers. By the end of 1997, there had been 60% of villages that began their self-governance and over 900,000 villagers' committees have been elected with 90% of voters. There are four elements of the villagers' self-governance. 1) Election of villagers. Heads of villages and members of the villagers' committee are to be elected by free, direct, secret vote. 2) Villagers' assembly. All major decisions, including plans and projects related to the development of the village's economy, public goods and other important things, should be approved and decided on by the villagers' assembly or representative assembly. 3) Publicity of the village's political and financial affairs. All matters involving the village's public interest must be made known to the villagers. 4) Village's rules and regulations. Village routine affairs are managed according to villagers' rules and regulations. The particular democratic implication of villagers' self-governance is immense because, among China's 1.3 billion population, there are over 800 million peasants.

4.5. Separating Government Functions from Enterprise Management

It is a feature of traditional socialism that the government directly owns and runs enterprises. Under this system, the State monopolized and managed all important enterprises. The directors of enterprises were appointed by the Party and the government, enterprises have their hierarchy similar to a bureaucracy, and the directors of enterprises had their official ranks. For example, a director of a

²¹Jiang Zeming, “Holding High the Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory and Push the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the 21st Century”, *SELECTED DOCUMENTS OF THE FIFTEENTH PARTY CONGRESS*, People's Publishing House, 1999, p. 33.

ministerial enterprise enjoys all privileges that only a minister can have. Integration of enterprises and government was a product of the planned and 'command' economy that do not conform to the modern enterprise system and market economy. The market economy requires all enterprises to operate as independent corporations. The process of 20 years of economic reform, in a sense, is a process of separating government functions from enterprise management. It has been regarded as one of the main reform tasks by Mao's successors so that the central topic of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Fifteenth Party Central Committee Congress, held in Beijing in 1997, was to deepen the reform of SOEs and to establish modern corporate structures. China has made much headway in this regard, although, it is a difficult process and China has a long way to go. So far, all enterprises, including SOEs, have been relatively separated from government and government does not run enterprises directly. SOEs, for the most part, are transforming their ownership and management. Meanwhile, the directors of SOEs no longer serve as officials of the Party and the government. The absolute centralist politics has been shaken fundamentally as its basis of unification of government and enterprises is gradually disappearing.

5. Recent Chinese Discourses on Democracy

One can find further evidence that the traditional absolute centralist politics is giving way to the incremental democracy from the changes of the relations between the central and the local, between the government and the citizen, the more liberal political climate and other political changes. The more liberal climate leads to a big discourse on democracy among Chinese intellectuals. In fact, free discussion of political issues, especially democracy, was never permitted and none dared to do so in Mao's era. Since the reform, political issues have still remained sensitive and even a little risky, but the climate is liberal so that fewer and fewer intellectuals who participate into discourse on democracy are subject to persecution. All issues are deliberately divided into two categories: first, the political ones, which could not be discussed freely and, second, the academic ones, which could be discussed freely. This thinking pattern has been attacked fiercely: "It is to deprive vast numbers of citizens from their rights for political participation and to enable a few people access to politics, if free speech is only limited within academic issues and not permitted involving political ones"²². It is under this more liberal political climate that Chinese intellectuals now dare to face the "sensitive" political issues: "The reform of socialist political system is a sensitive issue. Why is it sensitive? It is sensitive due to the interference from the 'Left' and the 'Right'. How can we solve the major problems and

²²Zhang Xianyang and Wang Guixiu, "On Free Speech," *READING*, No.9, 1979.

how can we advance on if we do not discuss and study these problems because of their sensitivity?"²³

Although there are still various pressures and obstructions, Chinese intellectuals have taken advantage of the relatively liberal climate to launch a major discourse on politics, especially democracy. Democracy has become a hot issue over the last twenty years. One can find a variety of views on democracy from many essays, books and articles about democracy published in the last two decades, which could be categorized as three streams: orthodox Marxism, Liberalism and Incremental Democracy.

5.1. Orthodox Marxism

Orthodox Marxism believes that democracy means people are the masters of their own country, which is the superstructure based upon and serving the economic foundation. Democracy has its distinctive class nature and there is no democracy beyond class: "it is the nature of democracy and of the state as well in history that the ruling class enjoys democratic rights while the ruled does not or only enjoys very few incomplete and formal democratic rights"²⁴. According to its logic, in human history, it is only socialist democracy that is the truest and highest democracy, serving most people while the capitalist one is a false democracy, serving very few people. Orthodox Marxism makes a natural conclusion from its theoretical logic: China can never practise Western democracy featuring multi-party system, separation of the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. Otherwise, in its advocates' eyes, Chinese history will return to the past. It is only the people's representative system that is suited to China's reality. It has priority over any capitalist democracy and is the only realistic way to democracy, for China, which "can guarantee that people rule the State by law and become the masters of the State."²⁵

5.2. Liberalism

²³Liu Ji, "Actively Explore Realistic Ways to Socialist Democracy," REPORTS OF PROBLEMS ABOUT CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM"(1978-1998), ed. Liu Zhifeng, Chinese Movies Publishing House, 1999, pp.1 -2

²⁴Feng Wenbin, "On Problems of Socialist Democracy," PRACTICAL SELECTIONS FOR THE 20 CENTURY CHINA, ed. by Li Bingqing, Chinese Peace Publishing House, 1998, p.61.

²⁵Du Gan, "An Analysis of Political Pluralization," SOCIAL SCIENCES STUDIES, No.2, 1992.

Liberalism emphasizes the universality of Western democracy. According to its theory, China is practising the market economy, which is a liberal economy and requires liberal politics. The elements of liberal democracy are representative democracy, multi-party system and separation of three powers of the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. So China must permit the existence of opposition parties to the CCP and all other parties must be given rights to be in power by the Constitution. Meanwhile, powers of the legislative, the executive and the judiciary must be separated. Chinese liberals hardly express their straightforward views on democracy because the Constitution stipulates that the CCP is the only ruling party in China as one of "four principles" against which one might suffer political risks. However, they praise bluntly the economic and political value of liberalism: "we are in transition to the market economy. The market economy must impel economic liberalism that is the basis of all other liberalism.....we are entering a global age. The market economy has become a global trend and liberty and liberalism are becoming increasingly a global value...after 300 years of comparison and choice in the world and especially after over 100 years of social experiments of the largest scale in China, we have obtained ample evidence that liberalism is the best and most universal value"²⁶.

The Chinese orthodox Marxism on democracy is reduced to exercise its impact on the actual political life because it puts undue stress on centralism rather than freedom, on the Chinese characteristics of democracy rather than its universality, and on its substantial importance rather than its procedural importance. Liberal views of democracy plays a poor role in a small intellectual circle due to its lack of a necessary legitimate basis and feasible conditions. Comparatively speaking, Incremental Democracy is exerting a great influence on China's political development since it reflects the reality of reform well.

5.3. Incremental Democracy

It is its realistic attitude that distinguishes Incremental Democracy from orthodox Marxism and liberalism. It puts emphasis on the effects of democracy rather than its theoretical system; it is not preoccupied with one theory or doctrine on democracy but embraces all useful elements from various theories and doctrines; it pays full attention to the universality of democracy with a good understanding of the particular Chinese situation and traditional culture; it doesn't concentrate on intellectuals but on people

²⁶Li Shenzhi, "Carry forward the Liberal Tradition of Peking University," TRADITIONS OF PEKING UNIVERSITY AND MODERN CHINA, China Personnel Publishing House, 1998, pp.4-5.

of all ranks and classes; it advocates full use of existing conditions to push Chinese democracy forward incrementally by path-dependence²⁷. Such an Incremental Democracy in China may boil down to the following aspects.

5.3.1. Highlighting Democratic Procedures and Institutions

Incremental Democracy holds that democracy, above all, is a set of institutions and procedures to guarantee citizen's freedom, equality and other political rights. The essence of democracy is people's political participation, and, a process of people's participation is a basic way to democracy. It is participation that is a manifestation of democratic rights. It is essential that there is a democratic constitution with people's sovereignty. Indeed, all modern states have their own "democratic" constitutions. However it would mean nothing for democracy if there is only a constitution on paper specifying citizen's rights but there is no practical measures and institutions to realize these rights. For actual democracy, those practical procedures to make constitutional democratic rights possible are no less important than for those articles of the constitution. It is critical for Chinese democracy, in the of Incremental Democracy, that there must be feasible procedures to enable citizens to determine final decision-making and political agenda. On the one hand, Chinese laws should be improved and on the other hand, even more importantly, citizens' legal rights provided by the constitution and laws must be guaranteed and realized²⁸.

5.3.2. Accepting Civil Society as a Precondition for Democracy

Incremental Democracy believes that civil society is an intermediate associational realm situated between the State on the one side and the basic building blocks of society on the other, inhabited by social and civil organizations named "the third sector", "NGO" and "Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)". CSOs are relatively separate from the State, enjoy some autonomy in relations with the State, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests, values or identities. The major reasons why civil society is essential for democracy are as follows : "in the first place, one of the main features of civil society is its autonomy which is one of the ultimate goals of democracy too. In this sense, a process of

²⁷The term "path-dependence" is borrowed by social scientists like famous American economist Ronald Coase from biology. It means that the social organism, like biological one, will cost too much if it changes so fundamentally as to deviate completely from its previous condition or its tradition.

²⁸See Yu Keping, "Substantial Democracy or Procedural Democracy," WAY, No.12, 1997.

developing democracy means a process of expanding civil society and withdrawing the State. In the second, the essential meaning of democracy is people's sovereignty. In all modern states, people's sovereignty is always indirect while governments directly exercise powers. Thus, from a perspective of feasibility and reality, the essential meaning of democracy is people's supervision and control of governments, which will be effective only if civil society is strong and powerful enough. In another words, people's supervision and control of governments would not be important without a strong civil society"²⁹.

5.3.3. *Esteem for the Rule of Law*

Incremental Democracy believes it is only by the “rule of law”, instead of the rule of man, that personal autocracy would be prevented and citizens' rights would be protected. There had been a tradition of the “rule of man” for thousands of years in China so that it is very difficult to carry out the “rule of law”. No democracy, no rule of law. The most important task for Chinese democracy is to transform the rule of man into the “rule of law” and to establish a State where the “rule of law” prevails. Progress in the “rule of law” even could be regarded as progress in democracy in China nowadays. China has declared its intention to establish a socialist State where there is “rule of law” as a goal and has formulated thousands of laws and statutes at both the central and local levels. A Chinese legal system centering on the Constitution enables Chinese political, economic and social life, to have a legal foundation. There is a long distance, however, to the State where there is “rule of law” and even a long way to go to the bare necessities of the “rule by law”. Greater numbers of officials and civil servants act according to policies rather than laws. "First, officials and civil servants often don't abide by the Constitution and laws, but implement policies. For the sake of their own local or departmental interests, some local or departmental authorities make a number of local or departmental policies in violation of laws and policies of the central government and take illegal actions to promote their private interests". As a jurist has said, "Second, many judges, procurators, policemen and lawyers do not abide by legal procedures and even abuse laws at will according to their own individual interests. Third, ordinary people do not have the sense of law but the traditional idea that 'handing legal affairs relies on personal connections'".³⁰

²⁹Yu Keping, "Socialist Civil Society: A New Subject," TIANJIN SOCIAL SCIENCES BIMONTHLY, No. 4, 1993.

³⁰Li Shuguang, "The Legal Orientation of Political Reform," POLITICAL CHINA, ed. By Dong Yuyu, Today's China Press, 1998, p.81.

5.3.4. *Affirming the Critical Role of Government in Promoting Democracy*

Incremental Democracy argues that East Asia's political and cultural traditions are different from those of the West, where the State or the government plays a much more important role in social development and civil life. In China, grassroots democracy and local self-government is motivated by government, civil society is led by government, and the market economy is initiated by the government. Furthermore, "the process of the rule of law is led by the government, not by citizen's spontaneous endeavors, which is proved by the campaign of government for popularization of laws"³¹. In accordance with this logic, Incremental Democracy doesn't agree with the libertarian claim to minimize the functions of the State and claims that strong or weak functions of government should depend on the concrete situation. Instead, it encourages government to play a more active initiating role in the development process of Chinese democracy. For "government will violate human rights if it did what it should not do, as well as, if it didn't do what it should do"³².

5.3.5. *Advocacy of Cooperative Democracy*

Incremental Democracy tries to build democracy on the basis of cooperation between the government and the citizen and to encourage a constructive collaboration of the government and the citizen in all aspects of political, economic and social life. In Mao's era, there prevailed a philosophy of struggle that urged people to clash and struggle against each other. It was against the democratic spirit that the model of political interaction between the government and the citizen was a zero-sum game, i.e. conflicting and fighting with each other, and, the main instruments used to resolve conflicts were institutions of coercion. On the contrary, more and more intellectuals want to develop "a democratic system of cooperation" which means "the government is subject to the democratic supervision by the people. The people handle their own affairs and the localities deal with their own affairs so that there will be cooperation between the government and the people and, between the central and the local authorities." To be specific, the democratic system of cooperation has three outstanding features: 1) "the pressure and motive force for local governments at all levels to promote economic development and social progress in their localities comes both from the government at the higher level and from the local people"; 2) "it is designed to appropriately divide work between the central and the local authorities

³¹ Li Shuguang, *ibid.* P.80.

³² Yu Keping, "What Government Should or Should Not Do," *POLITICAL SCIENCE STUDIES*, No.1, 1998.

and between political and economic organizations, define their responsibilities, rights and obligations and then create the conditions needed for their cooperation"; and 3) "all the participating parties share benefits from cooperation"³³.

6. Recent Chinese Discourses on Governance

The concepts of governance and good governance appeared in Chinese academic circles only in recent years thanks to the World Bank's Annual Report of 1992 which is entitled "Governance and Development". Since the report was translated into Chinese and published in China, a few Chinese economists and political scientists have begun to pay attention to governance and good governance. Around the mid-1990s, a few Chinese economists began to study corporate governance while some political scientists studied good governance in Chinese political life. Generally speaking, the concepts of "governance" and "good governance" are strange to Chinese scholars so that there has been no uniform Chinese version of these two concepts³⁴.

The terms of government and governance in China have been used alternately in the field of public management related to political affairs like in the context of the English speaking world. Since the 1990s as Western theories of governance and good governance have been introduced into China, some Chinese scholars have tried to distinguish governance from government in the way that they limit government within the activities of the central and the local authorities, while they refer governance to all public management activities, including corporate management. Views of some Western specialists and professional institutions on governance like N. N. Rosenau, R. Rhodes, Bob Jessop and the Commission of Global Governance seem to be particularly influential in China. Governance is regarded widely by Chinese scholars as governing without government; a process of interaction between the State and civil society; a new cooperation between the government and the civil, public and private sectors; a management and coordination mechanism with consensus and identity, a social self-organizational net, and so on.

Basically, governance stands for a synthesis of management of public and private affairs and a sustainable process of coordination to maximize public goods. It is

³³ Rong Jingben and others, REFORM OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AT THE COUNTY AND TOWNSHIP LEVELS, Central Compilation & Translation Press, 1998, pp.371-384.

³⁴ So far we can find four special articles on governance and good governance from political science in China. From 1997, six Chinese scholars and I have been engaged in a research project on "Civil Society and Governance in the Reform China," which will be finished at the end of this year.

beyond dichotomy of the State and civil society, the public and private, the government and non-government, coercion and voluntary. Like government, governance requires authority and power necessary for maintaining public order and maximizing common goods. However, governance must be distinguished from government, and, there are two differences. First, although both governance and government require authority, authority of governance is not necessarily based upon certain government departments while one of government is always based upon certain State apparatus. Therefore, the scope of governance is much broader than government. Governance, rather than government, is necessary for all communities from universities, corporations and interest groups to small clubs, schools and voluntary organizations so long as they work in order. Second, the operation of power is different. The power of government always operates from above to below mainly through orders, statutes, bureaucracy and coercion while power of governance operates mutually, interacting both from above to below and from below to above, mainly through collaboration, coordination, negotiation, social net, neighborhood, identity and consensus³⁵.

The concept of good government has been one element of traditional Chinese political culture, and good government has been ideal political model for thousands of years since government came into being in history. From the perspective of traditional Chinese political culture, among assessment criteria of good government are justice, high efficiency, honest officials, good service, and rule by law. These criteria, of course, are still available to evaluate any government and such a good government with these criteria is still the people's political anticipation so long as government exists in the world. The dominant conception of good government in Chinese political culture has been shaken and gradually given way to good governance since China has entered into the process of modernization especially in the global age. We are trying to develop a set of assessment criteria of good governance on the basis of the traditional good government as follows: 1) legitimacy; 2) transparency; 3) accountability; 4) the rule of law; 5) responsiveness; 6) effectiveness; 7) order; 8) stability (see the appendix for details)³⁶.

Essentially, good governance is a political model of the global age. It is the return of political power to society from the State and thus is a process of people's participation in political life. Good governance means a good cooperation between the State and

³⁵ Yu Keping, "Introduction to Governance and Good Governance," *MARXISM AND REALITY* (Bimonthly), No.5, 1999.

³⁶ See Yu Keping, "Good Governance: A Political Model in the Global Age," *WAY*, No.1, 1999.

civil society or between the government and the citizen. Good governance has something to do with the citizen rather than with the government in the sense that for certain small communities it is possible to operate without government but impossible without good public management. It could have good government but couldn't have good governance without citizens' active and voluntary participation and high identity to public authorities. In short, good governance is based upon the citizen or civil society, rather than the State or the government; there would not be good governance without a strong civil society.

Furthermore, it is critical for good governance that people have enough power and rights to participate in elections, decision-making and the supervision of government. Obviously, it is only under democracy that people can be entitled to such power and rights. Therefore, good governance and democracy come together at this point: there cannot be good governance without democracy, and, vice versa. There may be good government, at best, under an authoritarian regime, but, never good governance without a realistic democratic mechanism. We call such a scenario good governance on the basis of democratic governance which should be our goal of political development. Here we are trying to develop a set of analytical criteria and indicators of Chinese democratic governance according to a synthesis of universal principles of democracy and good governance, and the particular situation that exists in China. (See the appendix).

[Appendix]

Principal Assessment Criteria and Indicators
for Research on Chinese Democracy and Governance

Assessment Criteria	Specific Indicators or Areas of Concern
Rule of Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? status of laws and law-making ? officials and citizens' understanding of and respect for law ? actual role of law in reality ? autonomy and authority of legislative and judicial activities ? universal application of law across the country and different sections and departments
Political Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? election laws and regulations ? scope of direct election ? methods and measures of election ? access to secret vote ? way of choice of candidates ? proportion of candidates to the elected ? percentage of citizens registered to vote ? percentage of citizens voting ? extent of participation by socially disadvantaged groups
Plurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? extent of participation by women ? extent of participation by ethnic groups ? democratic parties' participation ? participation by private owners ? professional representation of the Party and the government officials ? regional representation of the Party and the government ? age of Party and government officials
Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? quantity and quality of political channels and media, including media restrictions and publications laws, independence of media, government censorship, acts of violence against journalists ? publicity of process of decision-making ? publicity of activities of government organs including the public security organs, procuratorial organs and people's courts

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? provision of information about official procedures ? publication of budgets and expenditure plans ? citizens' knowledge of political affairs ? citizens' rights of access to political information
Human rights and citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? constitutional provisions and laws concerning civil and political rights ? implementation of legal provisions related to civil rights ? respect for and protection of rights of minorities and dissentient by law and by the government ? citizen's consciousness of human rights ? official's consciousness of human rights ? citizen's capacity to protect own rights ? respect for and protection of rights of the disabled, the weakened and the poor
Supervision of the Party and of the Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? legal rights of citizens against injustice and improper behavior of government ? check and balance of powers ? citizen's check of government's power ? supervision of mass media against the Party and government ? role of public opinion in checking power of the Party and the government ? self-disciplinary regulations and practice of the Party and the government
Intra-Party democracy and co-operation between the CCP and the Democratic Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? election inside the Party ? procedure and mechanism of selecting the Party leaders at various levels ? institutions of decision-making of the Party Committees ? relation between the Party and the government ? relation between the Party and ordinary people ? relation between the CCP and the democratic parties
Grassroots Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? percentage of villagers' self-governance in the countryside ? percentage of inhabitants' self-governance in towns and cities ? self-governance of local communities ? people's participation in local government proceedings ? operation and role of labor representative assemblies ? extent of participation by trade unions ? extent of participation by women's federations ? direct election of leadership in township

Civil Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? number and diversity of civil society organizations ? involvement of membership in key decision of the government ? extent of participation by civil organizations ? impact on political, social and economic life ? legal, economic, political and cultural environments
Legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? fairness and regularity of government's behavior and policies ? citizen's identities to the Party and the government ? justice of authoritative allocation of social values ? extent of legitimization of the Party's activities ? percentage of corrupt officials ? access to legal system for wider constituencies
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? official's honesty ? responsibility of officials for their behaviors ? punishment of officials for their illegal action ? communication of officials and citizens ? respect for citizen's opinion by official ? official mechanism of accepting and dealing with public opinion ? frequency of election and alternation of officials ? highlighting incidence of corrupt practices ? public knowledge of government procedures and regulations
Responsiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? consultative mechanisms of the Party and the government ? mechanisms for redress against restrictive legislation, regulation, administration, judiciary, and other legal action. ? change to government policy as a result of citizen's advocacy ? initiatives of the Party and the government resulting from societal deliberation ? innovations of government ? use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms ? frequency of interaction between the government and the citizen ? governmental debates in the process of decision-making attended by the citizen ? extent of citizen involvement in the ruling groups of the Party and the government
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? costs of government ? frequency of government's policy failure ? efficiency of policy

Effectiveness (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? length of time of making a key decision ? government capacity to deal with eventualities ? satisfaction with the government's policies by the citizen ? quantity and quality of public goods provided by the government
Social Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? hierarchy of the Party and the government ? adaptability and authority of law ? authority of the Party and the government ? confidence to the government by the citizen ? sustainability of existing social norms ? political identity of the citizen ? challenges to the existing order
Social Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ? rate of crimes ? ethnic conflicts ? regional differentiation ? polarization of the poor and the rich ? relation between the central and the local ? relation between the cadre and the masses ? citizens' sensitivity to social crisis ? growth of anti-government activities such as petitions, protests, demonstrations, and others