

## Chinese Debates on the Democratization Process

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**Abstract:** The new economic importance of the Chinese economy has created Chinese expectations that the country will be able to regain a political and cultural position in the world in accordance with this economic status. But for China to become a respected member of world society, one of the most severe obstacles is its, from a western perspective, undemocratic political system. The article describes the lively debate going on among Chinese intellectuals of diverse political-ideological convictions about what kind of democracy should be the model for China's future political system. The liberally oriented intellectuals want a political system very much like American liberal constitutional democracy, while intellectuals on the left side of the political spectrum want a democracy with a clear socialist basis. Although Chinese intellectuals form a minority in society, these intellectual debates are sure to have influence on both public opinion and opinions and attitudes among political decision makers inside the Chinese Communist Party. Further investigations will have to establish to what degree the perceptions of China's political future and democratization are reflected in the political attitudes among the Chinese in general, and how they are perceived inside the confines of political decision making in the Chinese Communist Party. Only then will it be possible to answer the questions: "What kind of democracy do the Chinese want?" and "What kind of democracy are the Chinese going to get?"

### Introduction

China is rising - this is an indisputable fact. Economic development in China during the last thirty years has resulted in a fundamental change in the Chinese economy. China's economy has become the second largest in the world, and it seems inevitable that it, within the next decade, will become the world's largest economy. China will then have reclaimed the position in the global economy it possessed around the year of 1800. The new economic importance of the Chinese economy has created Chinese expectations that the country will be able to regain a political and cultural position in the world in accordance with this economic status. But for China to become a respected member of world society, one of the most severe obstacles is its, seen from a western perspective, undemocratic political system. Since the end of the Cold War the main contradiction in the world - according to the dominating western worldview - has changed from a contradiction between capitalist democracy and communist dictatorship into a more generalized contradiction between democracy and authoritarianism. Development from totalitarian/authoritarian government towards democratic government is seen as a universal law

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of history, making society increasingly free. Steps in this global development include the profound political changes in the southern part of Europe from fascist military dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece and communist one-party dictatorships in the USSR and Eastern Europe towards democratic societies. Recently the so-called “Jasmine Revolution” or “Arab Spring” has given further credibility to this concept as dictatorial regimes have been toppled in a number of North African states. This transformation from dictatorship to democracy paves the way for these countries to become respected members of a world system, dominated by the USA.

Bruce Gilley in his predictions on “China’s Democratic Future” (Gilley, 2004) states that the main reason for the West to wish for a democratization of China is the fact that this would diminish the danger of conflicts between China and the Western world; it is theoretically assumed that no democratic country will ever attack another democratic society. A democratic China would therefore not be a security risk for the Western world.

The book by Liu Jianfei, *Democracy and China*, has the explicit aim of removing the “undemocratic” label attached to China (Liu, 2011) in order to pave the way for China’s acceptance as a respected member of a world system dominated by the USA. The question is, however, if it will be possible for China to follow in the footsteps of this development without undertaking a fundamental change of its political system. Two incidents from China’s recent history stand in the way of a recognition of China as an authoritarian political system developing towards a democratic state: The massacre in Beijing in 1989 following students’ demonstrations demanding democracy. The sentencing of Liu Xiaobo to eleven years in prison in 2009 after the publication of “Charter 08”, a manifesto demanding a democratization of China’s political system and signed by thousands of Chinese citizens. These incidents have formed a perception in the West of a Chinese political elite using extremely violent means in their struggle against any democratic development challenging the authoritarian rule of the Communist Party of China. The political elite seems to be engaged in a life or death struggle with a number of dissidents representing the interests of the population in the building of a democratic society following the pattern of the western liberal democracy. This rather one-sided black and white picture of political developments in China based solidly on the grim shadow of the above mentioned incidents seems to block a global recognition of a China developing towards democracy.

The aim of the following article is to describe the discussions among Chinese intellectuals on different perceptions of China’s political development in the direction of democracy, a concept colored by the differences in political-ideological outlook among the debaters. To what degree these debates will influence the democratic development of Chinese society, and whether or not this development will satisfy western expectations and make it possible in the Western

world to accept China as an equal partner in the global society, would be a natural continuation of this line of thought, but falls outside the scope of this article.

In order to be able to decide whether China's political system is becoming more democratic or not, it will be necessary first to find out what western liberal democracy actually is, and if it is possible among western researchers of democracy to find a unitarian definition of this democracy. In the book *On Democracy*, one of the most famous theoreticians on democracy, Robert A. Dahl, defines democracy as a political system providing opportunities for:

1. Effective participation
2. Equality in voting
3. Gaining enlightened understanding
4. Exercising final control over the agenda
5. Inclusion of adults

(Dahl, 1998: 37 )

Samuel P. Huntington, on the other hand, chooses a *procedural* definition of democracy: "The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern" (Huntington, 1991: 6). This definition of democracy was used by Andrew J. Nathan (Nathan, 2008) in an investigation of "...what influential actors and intellectuals in China think about the country's future" (Ibid.: 25). He arrives at the conclusion that: "Persons of influence in China who call for democracy are not advocating competitive elections for top posts" (Ibid., 39). Therefore:

...the Chinese actors who currently hold influence are not likely intentionally to steer their system toward what most in the West call democracy, for the simple reason that most of them do not believe in it. If democracy in the liberal, pluralistic sense is going to come to China, either the actors will have to change their minds or they will have to lose control over the process. (Ibid.: 39)

In this connection it seems obvious to ask first, whether western liberal democracy is the only perceivable form of democracy, and second, if it is possible to compress the essence of democracy into an operational parameter as "selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern" (Huntington, 1991: 6).

The discourse about democracy among western researchers seems to question this idea of democracy as being universal and optimal. Bruce Gilley and Liu Jiafei both describe the market as the democratic economic parallel to political democracy. The market, according to them,

represents the aspect of economic democracy in western liberal democracy. But contrary to this, Robert A. Dahl criticizes the narrowness of liberal democracy in limiting democratic decision-making to the political sphere of society. In the book, *A Preface to Economic Democracy* from 1985, he discusses the question whether the democratic ideal of political equality can be realized in a society with widespread economic inequality; Dahl states that economic inequality inevitably will lead to political inequality. Unequal access to economic resources means unequal access to political resources and this will undermine the political equality of citizens in society. When the first modern democracy was established in the USA, this was not a problem because farm land, at that time the most important source of economic wealth, was available in virtually unlimited quantities. With "...a modicum of guile, fraud, violence and blunder..." (Dahl, 1985: 71), land could be robbed from the original inhabitants, the Indians, and any settler would in principle be able to increase his economic resources for as long as he wished. The original settler society was thus characterized by a high degree of equality among white male settlers in an economic as well as political sense. But this historically unique situation disappeared when a new economic order, "corporate capitalism", replaced the original settler economy. In corporate capitalism wealth is not readily available for all citizens, and this economy inevitably creates inequality in the distribution of property and economic resources and thus also political inequality. A prerequisite for a true democracy in corporate capitalism is the extension of democracy to the economic sphere, and this means that there must be greater equality in the distribution of society's economic resources and democratic influence on the decisions taken within the private companies. According to Dahl, the solution cannot consist in building a "bureaucratic socialism" because this type of society also has a tendency to cause so much inequality in access to social and economic resources that it brings about "...violations of political equality and hence the democratic process." (Dahl, 1985: 60) What Dahl wants is an extension of the democratic process to include businesses. All the arguments justifying political democracy, i.e. leadership of the state, can, according to Dahl, just as well be used to argue for democracy in the management of individual companies. A state is a political system built around power relations between government and the governed (the citizens). Likewise, a company may be described as a political system where power relations between government (business administration) and the governed (company employees) exist. The political decisions taken by the management of a company are essential to and binding for the employees of the company, in the same sense as political decisions are binding for all individual citizens of the state. If the democratic process is a fundamental value to society, the members of any community, and this includes companies, should have the right to self-determination, i.e. the right to influence decisions that have an effect on their lives, through a democratic process.

Since the foundation of the United States of America, there has, according to Dahl, been two opposing answers to the question of what should be considered most important, private property or democracy, because these two are in obvious contradiction to one another. Proponents of the primacy of property believed that concern for political equality had to give way to the interests of private property. Supporters of democracy insisted that a person's right to self-determination was more basic than ownership. The protection of private property was introduced in the U.S. Constitution alongside a number of other fundamental rights. This was, according to Dahl, understandable in the original agricultural settler society, where the private property of each individual was closely connected to the ability to sustain life. But after the transition to corporate capitalism, the fundamental right to private property from the agricultural society was continued as the ideological justification of private ownership of capital. According to Dahl, one cannot, however, simply transfer the natural moral right to own, "... the shirt you wear on the body and the cash you have in your purse" (Dahl, 1985: 75) for the right to acquire shares in a company and thus achieve control of economic decisions.

Dahl argues that the democratic right to self-determination takes precedence over private property, and it must therefore be possible for members of a community and that community's political representatives to decide democratically how companies are to be owned and controlled to ensure values as "democracy, fairness, efficiency, the cultivation of desirable human qualities and an entitlement to such minimal personal resources as may be necessary to a good life" (Dahl, 1985: 83).

Just three years after the publication of Dahl's book, the Berlin Wall fell, and the world had changed. The Cold War world system was replaced by a new world system with only one superpower. Neoliberalism captured the global economic and political discourse and the image of the ideal democratic capitalist society was soon supplemented by theories of a new crisis-free capitalism. At the same time, the concept of socialism became synonymous with political dictatorship. Socialist ideas such as Dahl's notions of economic democracy were pushed into the darkness, and when political scientists since then have referred to his theories of democracy, they have overlooked the book from 1985. In China, however, this book and the viewpoints presented in it form important parts of the discussions on democracy.

When analyzing political developments in China, western researchers often use a distinction between reformers and conservatives as an analytical tool. This distinction is shaped by the political spectrum as manifested in the US political system, consisting of conservatives and liberals, but with no room left for socialist ideology of any kind. *Reformers* are intellectuals and politicians interested in reforming the economic and political system in China, while *conservatives* are defending the existing economic and political system. Sometimes this approach

results in the rather awkward pooling together of the entire Chinese left-wing with neoconservatives, forming a united conservative front against the reformists. In my opinion it is much more advisable to use the European political spectrum, reaching from left to right, from communism/socialism to the left and conservatism/fascism to the right. This is also the way most Chinese intellectuals perceive political differences of opinion, and the European concepts are broadly used in the identification and self-identification in the political discourse in China.

In China's academic circles, a political spectrum of political-ideological perceptions has developed since the middle part of the 1990s. The core of academic ideological discussions in the latter part of the last century was most outspokenly expressed in the debates between the Neoliberals and the New Left. Apart from these two major groups a number of perceptions distinctively different from these emerged, and political discussions in Chinese academic circles in the last decade have circulated around a spectrum of political-ideological perceptions/groups, presented along ideological lines in accordance with the political spectrum of Western European design from right to left: Neoconservatives, Neoliberals, Social Liberals, Social Democrats, The New Left, The Old Left. Outside of this European-style political spectrum one can find "Political Confucianism". The number among these public intellectuals who have spent years studying in the West is impressive, and explains the fact that almost all of them are very familiar with western political ideas and discussions.

These different groups of public intellectuals differ fundamentally in their views on the development of China and the economic, political and social aspects of this development. Not surprisingly, their perceptions of the present Chinese political system and interpretation of the necessity or possibility of democratization of this system are fundamentally different.

Among the neoconservatives, a certain skepticism about forced political reforms exists because it is feared that a hasty democratization would lead to a new weakening of state power. Many neoconservatives also believe that China is not yet ready for democracy.

Liberalists, Neoliberals, Social Liberals and Social Democrats, all advocate the establishment of a constitutional democracy. The different shades of liberalists furthermore oppose direct democracy, believing that it could lead to destabilizing mass demonstrations and unrest.

Intellectuals from The New Left emphasize the connection between political and economic democracy, and laud some of the experiences with political institutions from the Maoist past, the so-called "mass democracy" of the Cultural Revolution. The old left may be divided into two groups: Maoists and Orthodox Marxists. The Maoists oppose a bourgeois multi-party system and, like the New Left, support "mass democracy." Orthodox Marxists advocate a combination of economic and political democracy, and respect for the principles of the Paris Commune. Political Confucianism, as presented by Jiang Qing in the Appendix 2: Jiang Qing's Political

Confucianism, in *China's New Confucianism* by Daniel A. Bell, (Bell, 2008) advocates a tricameral system with an important element of meritocracy and conservatism. The ideas of Jiang Qing seems quite far removed from democracy.

Debates between public intellectuals representing these different political-ideological groups are easily followed in the Chinese media and Chinese blogs and websites on the internet. It is, however, frustrating that it is impossible to follow how this discussion is reflected in debates inside the Chinese Communist Party. This is a consequence of the principle of democratic centralism. According to this principle, which is the ruling principle of party conduct, discussions inside the Party are free and allow for differences of opinion among participants, but once a consensus has been arrived at, only this consensus is presented to the public, while disagreements are kept secret and only accessed by the public as rumors and speculations. Therefore, it is close to impossible to analyze discussions about political reforms and democratization in China inside the Party. It is only possible to analyze discussions among public intellectuals, and make the assumption that this discussion is actually reflected into and, at the same time, a reflection of disagreements inside the Party.

### **Discussions on Democracy Leading up to the 17th Party Congress**

If we turn our attention towards the 17th Party Congress convened in November 2007, we will notice a heated debate on the question of China's democratization performed by representatives of these different groups in the time leading up to the congress.

On March 4, 2006, a secret conference was held in the mountain village Xinglin west of Beijing. The conference was organized by the China Society of Economic Reform (CSER), a think tank under the State Council, with the purpose of discussing the topic: "China's macro economy and progress of reforms", but the discussions also touched upon the perspectives for political reform in China.

40 high-level experts - economists, lawyers and government advisers attended the conference, which was chaired by the President of CSER, Gao Shangquan. Also present at the conference were: Zhang Weiyang Professor of Economics, Beijing University, He Weifang, Professor of Law at Beijing University, Li Shuguang, Vice Dean of China Politics and Law University, Beijing, Xie Ping, official of the central banking system, Zhang Chunlin, restructuring expert at the World Bank, and former member of China's State Economic and Trade Commission, Zhang Shuguang, Beijing Economic Research Institute. In China, all of these intellectuals are known to be Neoliberals or Liberals.

The conference was held in secret, but one participant, Li Yang, wrote down comprehensive notes, which were later published. At the conference, participants according to Li

Yang's record, suggested that China should emulate Taiwan's political system, that the Communist Party of China should be divided into two factions, the military should be under state command; furthermore, neo-liberal participants at the conference allegedly complained that the ideology limited reformists, so they often had to pretend they were moving to the left, when they, in fact, were moving towards the right. At the meeting, it was also stated that the phase of "economic reform" was over, and that China should now move towards "political reform". When news about the conference was published, a number of critical comments emerged on the internet, accusing the participants of the conference of planning to undermine China's socialist system.

In October 2006, Yu Keping published an article, "Democracy is a Good Thing" (Minzhu shi ge hao dongxi) which attracted broad attention and also played a significant role in the discussions about democratization up to the 17th Party Congress. In the article, Yu Keping stressed the need for a democratization of the political system in China, but at the same time emphasized that the process should be gradual and based upon Chinese historical conditions. One concept coined in this article, "incremental democracy", has become central in the following discussions about democracy in China. The development of a democratic system must, according to Yu Keping, be gradual or incremental like the gradual implementation of the Chinese economic reforms, where the "shock"- strategy, recommended by some western economists, was avoided. In the same way, a "shock"-like reform of the political system would not be advisable, as it would challenge China's social stability.

During 2007 in the months leading up to the 17th Party Congress, the journal, *Study Times* (Xuexi Shibao), published by the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Beijing, brought a number of articles focusing on the gradual nature of democratization and stressing the link between market economy and political democracy (*Xuexi Shibao* (Study Times), 2007). The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics means, according to the articles, the development of an economic market and political democratization. These two goals and trends are logic and closely linked together. The fundamental relations of a market economy, i.e. contractual relations, are based on the freedom of choice of the market agents. In this sense the market economy realizes a form of economic democracy, and this economic democracy will inevitably require a corresponding political democracy. Socialist market economy actually constitutes the basis for the development of a socialist democracy. A market economy characterized by freedom, equality and competition may be regarded as a training ground, where people can learn about democracy and have the opportunity to develop democratic virtues and abilities. In order to create a socialist democracy, which is a more

comprehensive and true democracy than the capitalist democracy, it is, however, necessary to ensure that the socialist market economy becomes even more free, more just and more competitive than the capitalist market economy. The political system must be reformed gradually in the same way as the economy was developed, i.e. the democracy already established at village level should be strengthened within the Communist Party, and then gradually extended: from the periphery to the center, from the grassroots to the upper levels, from individual areas to the whole.

This view of democracy was, however, soon after countered both from the Right and from the Left in China. The Liberalist, Liu Junning (Liu, 2007) criticized the idea that democratization of China should be based on the development of internal democracy in the Communist Party. This would only lead the discussion on democratization astray. In his opinion, the effort should be directed towards replacing democratic centralism with a constitutional democracy where the separation of powers through the constitution is used to create a system of mutual control between the three instances of power. This kind of democracy should be the ultimate goal of political reform in China. Zhu Xiaopeng from the New Left attacked the very idea that market economy leads to democracy (Zhu, 2007). He stated that collective production is the true creator of the conditions for political democracy. Democratic leadership in accordance with the principle of one man one vote is a fundamental principle of modern cooperatives' guarantees that a vital economic democracy will exist within the company, and that this kind of company democracy can be extended to society as a whole. In modern western countries, factories and businesses are, in his opinion, totally lacking a political democratic process.

The most controversial proposal in the democracy debate leading up to the party congress, however, came from Professor Xie Tao. Xie Tao, who has been a member of the Chinese Communist Party since 1946, published an article called "Only democratic socialism can save China" (Xie, 2007) in the liberal journal, *Yuan Huang Chunqiu*. In this article, Xie Tao refers to the European social democracy as the only way forward for China, i.e. the establishment of a mixed economy with elements of both capitalism and socialism combined with a constitutional democracy. Xie Tao based his argument for the relevance of social democracy to China on an analysis of international developments since the Second World War. In the postwar period the world was characterized by peaceful rivalry between three types of society: the capitalist system represented by the United States, the communist system represented by the USSR and the socialist system represented by Sweden among other nations. Social democracy prevailed and thus changed both capitalism and communism. The social democratic parties in Europe have downgraded the criticism of capitalism and the bourgeoisie and created a peaceful transition to socialism. Thus, the Social Democrats not only revitalized socialism but also capitalism. A class

compromise between the bourgeoisie and the working class has enabled the creation of welfare capitalism. According to Xie Tao, the Soviet Union's collapse was due to the fact that the Soviet leadership did not follow this trend, but held on to the communist system, and if China wants to avoid a similar collapse, it is necessary to establish a democratic socialist system like the western system. The core of western democratic socialism, according to Xie Tao, is democracy, but it is also important that this system opens the possibility of social differences. Differences in the distribution of production function as an economic impetus in society. If social differences (Xie Tao specifically mentions the Gini coefficient as a measure of these social differences) are too small, society will lack dynamism, but if they are too large they could create social unrest.

Xie Tao's article was soon attacked by representatives from both the Old and the New Left, but also from a liberalist approach. In the article, "Democratic socialism, from a constitutional democratic point of view", (Xu, 2007) the liberalist, Xu Youyu, praises Xie Tao for advocating the introduction of a constitutional democracy, but in Xu Youyu's opinion, social democracy has not played any significant role in the development of constitutional democracy. Constitutional democracy on the contrary was a prerequisite for the emergence of social democracy, and the credit for this type of democracy must, in his opinion, be given to liberalism, which from the outset clearly has strengthened individual freedom and emphasized the need to control the state and make representatives accountable for their actions. The self-declared social democrat, Chen Ziming, expresses his conviction that there will be possibilities for future cooperation between the Chinese social democracy and the democratic-minded among the liberalists in an effort to establish a constitutional democracy in China (Chen, 2007). Zhang Qinde from the Old Left criticizes Xie Tao's "Democratic Socialism" (Zhang, 2007), which, in his view, would be tantamount to a complete restoration of capitalism with a "mixed economy" where private property is the basic form of ownership. Wang Shaoguang from the New Left (Wang, 2007) criticized Xie Tao for not distinguishing between "democratic socialism" and "social democracy". He agrees that socialism should be democratic and not autocratic, and democratic socialism is of course thus worth striving for, but Wang Shaoguang has a completely different understanding of democratic socialism. Xie Tao perceives social democracy as a capitalist society where raw capitalism is adjusted by social policy. For Wang Shaoguang, democratic socialism is primarily socialism, which requires common property, and not just redistribution of production. Social democracy guarantees the basic capitalist nature of society. A certain element of welfare policy is implemented, and in this way class differences are reduced but not eliminated, and the capitalist character of society based on exploitation of the workers will continue to exist. In Wang Shaoguang's view, Xie Tao does not understand the historical background of the emergence of social democracy in Northern Europe and liberal capitalism in

the United States, namely the existence of a rival communist system which made it impossible to maintain hard-nosed capitalism with the social consequences that this would lead to.

*Mingpao Monthly's* October issue brought an article reporting from a discussion meeting held in Hong Kong about the concept of democracy where the speakers were Gan Yang and Zhang Qinde both from The New Left and Xie Tao (*Mingpao Monthly*, 2007). Gan Yang found it difficult to understand Xie Tao, whose main views he summarizes as follows: Marxist orthodoxy is democratic socialism. After the end of the Cold War, Marxist orthodoxy - namely democratic socialism - was victorious all over the globe. Not only the whole of Europe became democratic socialist, but also the United States. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union as such fell apart because they did not follow the "road of democratic socialism." The Chinese Communist Party did not suffer the same fate as the Soviet and Eastern European countries, because Deng Xiaoping's reforms were in fact socialist reforms. It is, in Gan Yang's view (*Mingpao Monthly*, 2007), completely wrong to state that the Soviet Union fell because its leaders did not choose social democracy, since everyone knows that the slogan of Gorbachev's reforms were "democratic socialism" (social democracy), and at the same time Gan Yang emphasizes that Gorbachev's theory of "democratic socialism" was far more systematic and refined than Xie Tao's. The problem was that not even Gorbachev's "democratic socialism" could save the Soviet Union. To claim that Marxism is equal to Swedish social democracy, and that the U.S. political system is also democratic socialism, is, according to Gan Yang, something that no one can take seriously.

Zhang Qinde emphasizes that the core of the political reform should be a popular democracy, while elite democracy will destroy the grass-roots democracy. For democracy outside the party, Zhang Qinde emphasizes that the right to strike and the right of individuals to consult with the authorities should be reintroduced into the Constitution. As part of the development of the intra-party democracy, Zhang Qinde also suggests that the report for the 17th Party Congress should be sent out for discussion and commenting by all party members, and that all party members should report on their own and their family members' access to private companies and other sources of income.

Liu Yongji (Liu, 2007), who must also be counted as a member of the New Left, agrees with Zhang Qinde's critique of western "elite democracy" where the people elect representatives from the elite, and competition between the candidates largely has the form of a show in which participation of the people is limited to playing the role of spectators. In western democracies, the unequal distribution of resources also, in his opinion, necessarily implies that only the rich have the resources to stand as candidates, and also have the best opportunities to influence elections with their economic resources. According to Liu Yongji, American political science studies have

revealed that only between 3 and 10% of the voters have a real ideological or political belief, and the elective behavior of the rest is mainly affected by the sudden emergence of information and political individual cases. In a western market economy system, the economic power indirectly determines the outcome of elections through the mass media. In the United States there is a clear correlation between political candidates' financial resources and election results, and this system is not, according to Liu Yongji, a system which should be emulated in China.

Du Ping (Du, 2007), who also belongs to the New Left, criticizes the belief that globalization and foreign investment in China will lead to the democratization of the country. Foreign investors have no interest in the democratization of China. In a non-democratic China, the government will interfere in conflicts between the foreign company and its Chinese employees could to protect foreign capital, by deploying police or use other means of power. This means that foreign companies do not have to make compromises with their employees about wages and working conditions, and profit on their commitments to China will not be threatened by labor disputes. The problem is not, according to Du Ping, that China lacks capital; China lacks a democratic system that can act as a counterweight to the power of capital. "Democracy is not capital twin brother," writes You Ping, and, in his opinion, you cannot assume that capitalism will lead to political civilization and social progress.

The Chinese discussions up to the 17th Party Congress of democratization of the Chinese political system were not a discussion for or against the introduction of democracy. All the participating political groupings, from left to right, are supporters of democracy, but they do not agree on the democratic model or how democracy should be implemented.

### **Storm the Fortress**

Only a few months after the 17th Party congress, a comprehensive 30-year plan for gradual implementation of political reforms in China leading towards realization of a modern Chinese socialist democracy was published.

The plan was presented in a 366-page report: *Storm the Fortress. A Research report on Reform of China's Political System after the 17 Party Congress* (Zhou, Wang and Wang (eds.), 2008), published in January 2008. The report was prepared by a group of researchers affiliated with the Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in Beijing. It was actually already finished in October (2007) - immediately after the convening of the 17th Party Congress - but not publicly accessible on the Chinese book market until January 2008 - at first only within Communist Party communication channels, but later for sale in ordinary bookstores, and significant sections of the report were posted on the Communist Party's official website. The fact that the researchers behind the report are attached to the Communist Party

Central Party School may be seen as an indication that the plan was approved by the central leadership of the Communist Party, at least as a basis for discussion. One of the three editors of the report, Zhou Tianyong, stresses, in the first chapter of the report, that democratization of the political system should aim at limiting the political power of the Communist Party as a prerequisite for ensuring future political stability in China. Democratization should, according to the report, be phased in three stages, which together would extend more than 60 years. In the first phase, lasting from 1979 to 2001, the focus was primarily on economic reforms. In the second phase, which would cover the period from 2002 to 2020, China should establish a modern democratic political system and a comprehensive legal system. In the third phase, which is supposed to last from 2021 to 2040, the democratic and legal system will undergo further development. In Chapter 3 of the report, it is discussed how an effective system of balance and mutual control between power bodies of the political system may be established. As part of such a balance of power, it is proposed that the Chinese parliament, the National People's Congress, should have direct authority to draft the state budget and control government spending. Chapter 6 deals with the question of how the building of a harmonious society can benefit from popular and religious organizations and civil society development in general. The authors of the report also underline that there should be a law protecting journalists and putting an end to unconstitutional and unlawful interference in the media, in this way promoting real freedom of expression.

It is not the first time one of the leading political centers in China has presented plans on political reforms in the direction of democratization of the Chinese political system. In October 2005, the Information Office of the State Council (the Chinese government) published a White Paper called *Building a Political Democracy in China* (*Zhongguo de minzhu zhengzhi jianshe*, 2005). It is not surprising that the new plan originates from the Central Party School. As mentioned above, at the run-up to the Chinese Communist Party's 17th Congress, there was a lively debate in Chinese media on the democratization of Chinese society, and the initiative for this debate came from the magazine *Xuexi Shibao* (Study Journal) published by the Central Party School.

One might have expected that the 30-year plan would lead to a resumption of the debate on democratization in China, but in March 2008 riots broke out in Tibet and in May the Sichuan Province was hit by a massive earthquake. Later that same year, the Beijing Olympics attracted all media attention, so the democracy debate did not arise again until fall 2008, first with the publication of a book on democracy, "Four Lectures on Democracy", by New Leftist Wang Shaoguang, and then in December that same year with a dramatic initiative of the liberalist wing of the political spectrum, in form of the so-called "Charter 08", demanding democratic change in China.

Wang Shaoguang's "Four Lectures on Democracy" (Wang, 2008) is a comprehensive presentation of the history of democracy and a number of considerations about the democratic future of China. The contents of the book may be summarized in the following 4 points: First, Wang Shaoguang concludes from his analysis of the history of democracy that the bourgeois elite throughout history has seen democracy in its true essence as a "bad thing". "Good democracy" in a bourgeois sense is democracy where the people choose their masters. Second, he questions the perception prevalent in both China and the world in general of US democracy as the paragon of democracy. Actually, the democratic system in several European countries is much more democratic than US democracy. Third, he argues that because "choosing one's master" is not real democracy, representative democracy will not necessarily improve the living conditions of the broad population. Cross-national and historical comparative studies have shown that there is no necessary relationship between actually-existing democratic systems and economic growth, social justice, or human welfare. Fourth, in political systems where the population "chooses its masters" the vast majority of the population is reduced to participators in regular elections which are actually mainly shows, where people with resources are able to use these resources to gain political influence.

On December 10, 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, the dissidents, Liu Xiaobo and Xu Wenli, published a manifesto called "Charter 08". The name was obviously chosen to invoke memories of "Charter 77", in which a number of intellectuals in 1977 in the Czechoslovakia of that time demanded human rights and democracy in the Czech communist one-party state. The Chinese "Charter 08" was published on the internet and signed by 300 prominent Chinese, and in a short time, the number of signatures rose to more than 7000. "Charter 08" espouses a number of basic principles: freedom, human rights, equality, republicanism, democracy and constitutional government. Practical changes demanded by the manifesto included: a new constitution, separation of powers, democratic legislation, independent judiciary, public control of public servants, guarantee of human rights, democratic elections, equal rights for urban and rural areas, the right to form associations, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, civic education, protection of private property, reform of the financial system and the tax system, social security, environmental protection, a federal republic, redress to all victims of political persecution. These requirements provoked the Chinese authorities so severely that several of the initiators were picked up for questioning by the police, and the most prominent of its authors, Liu Xiaobo, was arrested and later sentenced to 11 years in prison.

The manifesto was supported by a number of liberalist intellectuals, e.g. Xu Youyu, but none of these received any form of punishment comparable to the sentencing of Liu Xiaobo.

Many of the demands in the manifesto coincide with the objectives outlined in *Storm The Fortress* from the Communist Party's Central Party School in Beijing. It is therefore still somewhat of a mystery why exactly Liu Xiaobo was to be punished so severely. A few years later, Liu Xiaobo, to the great annoyance of the Chinese leadership, received the Nobel Peace Prize.

### **Discussions Leading up to the 18th Party Congress**

During the year leading up to the 18th Party Congress, 2012, the political scene in China became totally dominated by the Bo Xilai scandal. Bo Xilai, the party secretary of Chongqing, was arrested and accused of a number of crimes. I am not going to describe this affair in details here. However, the Bo Xilai affair had a direct impact on the landscape of political discussions in China. Intellectuals from the New Left were accused of having close relations to Bo Xilai and even for having received financial support for their activities in the form of black money. As a consequence the most important website of the New Left, "Wuyouxiang" (Utopia) alongside many other minor websites and blogs were closed and investigated by the authorities. Of course this was a major setback for the left wing in Chinese politics so close to the 18th Party Congress, which was in fact postponed for a few weeks because of the Bo Xilai incident. The crackdown on the left wing, however, did not prevent two of its most prominent members, Wang Shaoguang and Han Yuhai, from publishing rather radical articles about China's democratic development.

In the article "Reflections on Democratic Systems" (Wang, 2012) Wang Shaoguang discusses alternatives to a representative democracy based on general elections which he describes as democracy where "the people chooses its masters". In order to establish a system where "the people are in charge to make decisions" he has four suggestions, which all aim at "expanding the political participation of the broad masses of the people". First, he proposes to replace elections with a lottery system, thereby strengthening public participation. This should eliminate the problems of differences in resources leading to differences in political influence. The second proposal is to strengthen consultations, and increasing the depth of political participation by deliberative or consultative democracy. According to Wang Shaoguang consultations and lotteries can be merged together. Wang Shaoguang's third proposal is to increase public participation through information technology, i.e. "electronic democracy" and public dissemination of information through electronic means. Fourth, in full accordance with the ideas by Robert A. Dahl presented above, Wang Shaoguang proposes to extend democracy "beyond the realm of politics into more areas of social life, particularly the economic sphere." (Wang, 2012)

In the article “Constitutional Rule and the Proletarian State” (Han, 2012), Han Yuhai presents his ideas about what he calls “proletarian constitutionalism”. Whereas he does not consider the bourgeois elite in China as capable of creating a constitutional democracy, he perceives the creation of a proletarian constitutionalism as a precondition for establishing a true democracy. According to Han Yuhai, China’s capitalist class can be divided into two fractions: on one hand the large bureaucratic and large comprador capitalist class intimately related to the regime, on the other, the private capitalist class engaged in private business. These two fractions of the capitalist class will never be able to establish the political unity necessary for establishing a bourgeois constitutional democracy, which, he fears, would degenerate into a military dictatorship. The proletariat, on the other hand, needs a constitutional rule, and Han Yuhai argues for this as follows:

The really-existing proletarian states have for the most part been established by a professional revolutionary organization that represents a relatively weak proletariat, leading the peasantry and other laboring masses (and taking them as their main force) in a revolution. This model of revolution is determined by the fact that these countries have not industrialized, and therefore the proletariat is relatively weak.

Political power in proletarian states is monopolized by the organization of professional revolutionaries, in what can be called a tyrannical proletarian role. ....as time passes, due to the lack of effective supervision by the proletariat and laborers, most of the professional revolutionaries are unavoidably corrupted by bourgeois rights, and end up transforming into a bureaucratic special interest group that rides on the backs of the masses. Further, the proletarian state changes into a hideous totalitarian state controlled by the new bourgeoisie.

.... the political power of the proletariat class must always be supervised and controlled by the class itself, thereby ensuring that its operation will be in the common interest of the class. Furthermore, the political power of the state must be enjoyed by the entire class, and not monopolized in a particular fraction. In other words, the proletariat must have its own ‘constitutionalism!’

....

The policy of ‘constitutionalism’ of course is in the service of the long-term and stable political power of the proletariat, but it also takes as its aims continual proletarian revolution, the gradual dissolution of the state, and the eradication of class. These struggles can only continue under the framework of ‘constitutionalism’.  
(Ibid.)

### **Political Reforms and Democratic Perspectives after the 18th Party Congress**

After the conclusion of the 18th Party Congress it has been discussed whether the new leadership of the Communist Party of China would implement reforms, either of an economic or a political character. It seems that the new leaders are keen on further reforming the economy, while

political reforms may be limited to crackdowns on corruption. The much published “China Dream” seems not to include serious political reforms, while “Lionomics”<sup>1</sup> seems to be the new catchword in China.

Maybe as a reaction to this perspective, a group of more than 70 Chinese intellectuals signed an open letter circulated on the internet by the end of 2012, calling for political reforms (*chinaworker.info*, 2013).

The open letter, “Proposal for a Consensus on Reform” warns of the dangers of not implementing political reforms. “If reforms of the system urgently needed by Chinese society keep being frustrated and stagnate,” it states, “then official corruption and dissatisfaction in society will boil up to a crisis point and China will once again miss the opportunity for peaceful reform, and slip into the turbulence and chaos of violent revolution.” The open letter does not demand the end of one-party rule, but instead advocates top-down and gradual “reform”, including calls for a free press and independent judiciary, very much in accordance with the perspectives outlined in 2008 by *Storm the Fortress*.

The demands from this open letter were echoed in the liberal magazine, *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, which in an editorial called for the protection of China’s constitution, and consequently was temporarily closed down on January 4 by propaganda officials in Beijing.

Soon after this event, the Guangdong based liberal newspaper *Southern Weekly* had its editorial rewritten by provincial propaganda boss Tuo Zhen, because it called for the realization of the “dream of constitutionalism in China”. This led to strikes among the paper’s journalists and massive public demonstrations on this crackdown by the authorities on freedom of the press.

It thus seems difficult to determine in what direction the Chinese leadership wants the political system in China to develop. Among public intellectuals and media workers the debate on the political future of China is heated, and lately some surveys on the public opinion on democracy give us some indications of what the broad population wants of the development.

### **What Kind of Democracy Do the Chinese Want?**

At the time of the CCP’s 18th Congress in November the results of a survey were published in the *Global Times*, a regime mouthpiece, showing that 81 % of respondents supported political reform.

At the beginning of May 2013, the results of a survey conducted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences were published in a report called “What kind of Democracy Do Chinese Want” (Zhang, 2013c).

The survey was undertaken by social scientist Zhang Mingshu and was a follow-up in a similar survey also undertaken by Zhang Mingshu in 1988 and resulting in the report “The Political Chinese” (Zhongguo Zhengzhiren) published in 1994.

The survey in 2012 was conducted among 1,750 adults in 4 towns (no interviews were undertaken in rural areas). The respondents were asked a number of questions about their political attitudes. Concerning the general political attitudes of the respondents the conclusion made by the report is: 38.1 % of the respondents are leaning to the left and critical of overall individualism. 8 % are leaning to the right, supporting more individual freedoms and a smaller government, and were more critical towards the Communist Party’s legacy. The rest could be called centrists, i.e. neither left nor right. For 15.3 % of those surveyed, the idea of democracy meant regular elections and selecting national leaders through multiparty competition. About 67 % said they had a positive attitude towards participating in politics. People beyond their 40s and 50s tended to lean more to the left than younger people, who tended to be at the center and the right. More educated people also tended to be more at the center and the right. It thus seems from the report that only a small minority, 15.3 % of the respondents, are in favor of liberal democracy (Zhang, 2013b).

Actually, this result stands in sharp contrast to a survey performed by PewResearch, where the respondents among other questions also were asked about their attitude towards American democracy (PewResearch, 2012). Between March 18 and April 15, 2012, PewResearch interviewed 3,177 Chinese respondents. Roughly half (52%) said they like American ideas about democracy; just 29% said they dislike these ideas. About seven-in-ten Chinese in the higher-income category have a positive opinion about American democratic ideals.

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### But Many Like American Ideas about Democracy

	<i>American ideas about democracy</i>		
	Like %	Dislike %	DK %
<b>Total</b>	52	29	18
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	59	28	13
30-49	55	29	16
50+	40	31	29
<b>Education</b>			
Some college +	65	24	11
High school or less	50	30	19
<b>Income</b>			
High	72	20	8
Middle	56	31	13
Low	45	33	22
<b>Urbanity</b>			
Urban	60	27	13
Rural	43	33	24

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Source: (PewResearch Global Attitudes Project, 2012: 4)

The outspoken difference between the results of these two surveys may be interpreted and explained in many different ways, something I am not going to do in this article. However, the fact that it is not possible to get a clear picture of attitudes to democracy in the Chinese population when comparing the results of these two surveys is disappointing.

### Conclusion

The intellectual debates in China on the democratic development of China's political system and the plans for political reforms drafted by Chinese think-tanks, like the Central Party School, seem to outline a number of differences in the perceptions of what direction this development should follow. All participants seem to agree that it is necessary to change the political system in a more democratic direction. There is also a general agreement that constitutionalism in some form ought to be the basis of this democratization, i.e. the political and social rights included in the Chinese constitution should be fully respected and form the basis of a future democratic China. On the other hand the debates also show that the interpretation of the concept constitutionalism differs among the politico-ideological groups. The liberal side of the spectrum seems to be in favor of a *liberal democracy* in the form of a constitutional democracy like the American political system, and thus not like the different European varieties of liberal democracy, whose institutional arrangements differ distinctively from the American model. Intellectuals on the left side of the

specter emphasize that constitutionalism may only be realized as what is called a “proletarian constitutionalism”, with characteristics widely different from American constitutionalism. Furthermore they outline a variety of possible alternative institutional forms in the future Chinese democracy, i.e. economic democracy, lottery instead of elections, development of deliberative and consultative forms of democratic participation, etc.

Although Chinese intellectuals form a minority in society, these intellectual debates are sure to have influence on both public opinion and opinions and attitudes among political decision makers inside the Chinese Communist Party. Further investigations will have to establish to what degree the perceptions of China’s political future and democratization are mirrored in the political attitudes among the Chinese in general, and how they are mirrored inside the confines of political decision making in the Chinese Communist Party. Only then will it be possible to answer the questions: “What kind of democracy do the Chinese want?” and “What kind of democracy are the Chinese going to get?”

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Lionomics: the economic ideas presented by the new Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.

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