INTRODUCTION

HISTORY HAS NO END

Pierre-Étienne Will

For the conscientious historian who wants to take his time in his research, working on the present raises a particular difficulty: to wit, that one is constantly falling behind events and trends. At first glance, many of the topics discussed in the present book, and indeed the questioning that lies at its origin, seem to perfectly illustrate the risks inherent in such a situation.\(^1\) Yet I believe this to be the case only to a very limited extent; and a brief review of the steps that led to this publication should show why this is so.

I have always been concerned (how could one not be?) with the connections between China’s historical experience—which is my field as a historian—and its present, as well as, by implication, its future, both short- and long-term. But between having an interest and attempting an in-depth, scholarly study of these connections (or the lack of them, which is the entire problem), there was a step I did not consider taking until quite late. The pretext for it was a series of lectures on “The origins of the modern Chinese state” given in November 1994 at the Collège de France by Philip Kuhn from Harvard University. Translating the texts of these lectures and preparing them for publication encouraged me to write a substantial introduction to them and to pursue my own inquiry as a sort of dialogue with Kuhn’s work.\(^2\)

The title of my introduction to Professor Kuhn’s book, “Between Present and Past,” summarizes my approach, which is indeed the same for all

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\(^1\) And doubly so in the case of the present English translation, published more than four years after the original French edition and for which only a limited amount of updating has been possible. However, as is stressed by the authors of the chapters dealing with the present situation, none of the conclusions presented in 2007—with the possible exception of Taiwan—seems to have been substantially invalidated by the latest developments.

historians: to get to the bottom of things in order to uncover the continu-
ities and developments—or discontinuities and lack of developments—
and try to account for them, rather than being satisfied with simple
echoes, superficial resemblances, or false differences, as is too often the
case with social scientists who want to give their work a veneer of
historico-cultural depth. Kuhn of course takes the same approach, but he
did not address (at least not directly) the issue of democracy properly
speaking, as I tried to do at the end of my introduction to his book and
as it is addressed, in a much more thorough and, especially, collective
fashion in the following chapters.

What lies at the heart of Kuhn’s book is the problem of the Chinese
state and of its transformations in the modern era. Kuhn perceives these
transformations as an organic development, and he analyzes them as an
effort at institutional adaptation that was pursued from the nineteenth-
century until the post-Maoist People’s Republic and aimed to implement
a “program of government,” or, in his words, a “constitutional program.”
Its basic goals did not vary, and they concerned two specific areas. The
first, though rather technical, largely determined the rest: it was the con-
struction of a fiscal base that was clear, easy to control, and apt to produce
increased returns. The second, resulting from the first, was the strengthen-
ing of central government power, but with a constraint particular to
modern China: the necessity that was felt to combine such strengthening
with more comprehensive political participation and access to power—a
process always viewed with diffidence by those who already possess such
access, to be sure, but which was clamored for by an ever increasing num-
ber of people in the name of both efficiency and national interest.

The broader participation being demanded did not necessarily amount
to a “democratization” of public life in the way this is normally under-
stood—not even after the turn of the twentieth century, when the issue
was no longer limited to associating more closely the intellectual elite
with a government whose legitimacy was not yet being challenged, but
was to mobilize the entire nation in the struggle for survival. Yet in the
end, strengthening both the state and citizen participation clearly raises
the problem of democracy, whatever its definition. Hence the issue under-
lying this book, which may thus be phrased: do Chinese culture in general
and the Chinese political tradition in particular (taken in its historical
dimension and understood in its broadest sense) include elements capable
of agreeing with the values and practices of modern democratic liberalism
offered to China for more than a century as examples to follow—and if
so, to what extent? And if such is not the case, do the historical failures
that have marked that century mean that future changes can only take a different direction?

This question has been asked numerous times during the last century, and the Chinese themselves have been the first to do so. Moreover, when I began to take an interest in the subject, and in the years that followed, the issue could still be considered topical. It seemed clear then—about a decade after the fall of the Berlin wall—that the few surviving people's democracies were doomed to disappear, and in everyone's understanding they would sooner or later become democracies pure and simple—that is, liberal democracies. The perspectives for the political transformation of China—the main socialist regime still in existence—were being discussed everywhere, and not only outside China; and the leaders of the “free world” kept pressuring the Chinese leaders to concern themselves more actively with political change, even though the latter hardly concealed their total lack of intent to democratize the country any time soon—that is to say, to endow it with a democratic constitution that would put an end to the Communist party's political monopoly, therefore opening it up to losing power through free elections. Here is one single example—one that I found striking at the time. Just before his visit to the United Nations for the “millennium session” in September 2000, Jiang Zemin, the then Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretary general, granted a long interview to Mike Wallace, a star of American television journalism. As images of the 1989 Tiananmen Square repression played in the background, Wallace challenged Jiang to explain his reticence to democratize China as quickly as possible, while Jiang defended himself clumsily, repeating the standard arguments (which I discuss below) of cultural exception and economic backwardness.3

It is hard to imagine today even as colorless a leader as Hu Jintao (Jiang’s successor) allowing himself to be badgered by an American journalist. Much more than at the time of the millennium session, China is feared and respected economically and, increasingly, militarily. Everyone is aware of the global implications of its diplomatic, strategic, monetary,  

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3 Channel CBS, “60 minutes,” aired September 3, 2000 (recorded in Beidaihe two weeks prior). In fact, this program was quite controversial at the time. Some assert that Jiang Zemin, who had requested the interview himself as a public relations stunt, dominated Wallace despite the latter's seemingly uncompromising questions. My own impression watching the show was that his conciliatory attitude and artful evading of issues notwithstanding, Jiang truly seemed ill at ease and answered vaguely whenever he was in trouble.
and other decisions and watches them uneasily; the massive investment it has made in science and technology begins to bear fruit; it has become a major creditor nation on the financial markets; and it has been highly successful in reaping the symbolic benefits of the 2008 Olympic Games, the organization of which has been hailed as flawless. Indeed, not only is China no longer isolated, it has become a key partner in world politics. The two crucial events in this respect have been, first, its joining the alliance against international terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, and second—exactly three months later—its accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), which seems to have opened every market to it, even though the Chinese still are very skilled at protecting their own economic space.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, China recently ratified several international instruments.\textsuperscript{5} In short, the regime, whose spectacular return to the international scene and its implications for the purposes of this book are examined in detail in several of the following chapters, seems more solidly installed than ever and shows no intention of programming its own end as a one-party regime—which truly would be a case of masochistic idealism, insofar as the CCP’s political monopoly does not seem in much danger of being seriously challenged by the increasingly numerous sectors of society that benefit from economic growth and take pride in the country’s new international stature.

The result is that, today, very few people speak of China’s transformation into a democracy as an urgent task—or even as being perhaps a long way off, but in any case inevitable—as an “end of history” that simply needs to be hurried up, even at the price of some compromises. Other than the increasingly infrequent and ritualistic reminders with respect to human rights, western statesmen visiting Beijing have ceased to express disapproval of the authoritarian aspects of the regime and of its obvious refusal to bring about any changes other than purely technical.\textsuperscript{6}

In such a context, issues that were much debated in the mid- to late 1990s, such as the conditions for a democratic transformation deemed inevitable in the more or less long term—essentially, whether or not the level of economic development attained by China and China’s “culture” constitute serious or even prohibitory obstacles to a rapid political

\textsuperscript{4} On China and the WTO, see Leïla Choukroune, chapter 15 in this volume.

\textsuperscript{5} On the process of the internationalization of Chinese law, see Mireille Delmas-Marty, chapter 13 below.

\textsuperscript{6} An exception must be made in favor of former President Bush during his visit to China in November 2005.
aggiornamento—seem to have somehow faded into the background. Yet these were the issues discussed at the seminar organized at the Collège de France in 2002 and 2003 under the general title “Chinese tradition and the problem of democracy” that gave rise to this volume.⁷

Does this mean this book comes too late? I do not think it does. As I hope to show, most of the issues in question continue to be important and indeed topical ones as long as they are considered in a historical perspective—a perspective that is challenged neither by the new assurance of China on the international scene nor by the apparent consolidation of the current regime. The conflicting discourses one hears on the future, and on the very possibility of a democratic transition in China, have in fact periodically resurfaced over the last century, and in the most diverse forms; and one can under no circumstances consider the case closed. Even if the internal situation and political balance today seem to offer few opportunities for serious institutional transformation of the power structure, many things are changing, or trying to change. Such is the case in the legal area (to which this volume dedicates substantial space), whose institutional and political implications are obvious. In short, too many variables are at play, and no one can say what tomorrow will bring.

**Definitions**

It may be useful at this point to briefly recall the extreme variability of the concept of “democracy.” The problem is that in today’s debates—whether they concern China or any other country “to be democratized”—the dominant standard remains the liberal, Anglo-American model in which the state’s power and influence must be limited as much as possible, not only for the benefit of “civil society” and individual liberties, but also, and

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⁷ Convened by Pierre-Étienne Will in 2002, the seminar was conducted by both Will and Mireille Delmas-Marty in 2003 and concentrated more specifically on the problem of law and legality. Some of the seminar contributions published in the book have been considerably rewritten. Three essays were added at the time of publication, corresponding to chapters 1, 8 and 17 in the present English edition. Three chapters in the 2007 French edition (by Zhang Ning, Delmas-Marty, and Zhang Lun) have been omitted in the present translation because they seemed either redundant or too removed from the book’s main argument. Chapters 10, 11 and 14 have been somewhat rewritten by their authors for the present edition.
especially, to favor unhindered economic liberalism. This was clear—to remain with China—in a speech given at Harvard University in September 2001 by Taiwan’s then Minister of foreign affairs, Hung-mao Tien, a well-known political scientist and author of several books. The rallying cry is “democracy and free markets”: “These are the values that we now have built into our national identity,” Tien said, specifying that “the democratization of the Republic of China has followed and been built upon its economic liberalization,” and adding, “we cherish our own hard-fought democracy and human rights, and we participate enthusiastically in the global marketplace, not only of goods and services, but increasingly also of ideas.” Taiwan thus resolutely placed itself in the camp of liberty understood this way, and it is worth noting that in the same speech Hung-mao Tien spoke of continental China as if it were a foreign country.9

Apart from the fact that it can be seen in the history of recent democracies that the maximalist, all-or-nothing attitude implied by this approach quite often leads to an impasse, one does not see why a more relativistic attitude should not be accepted as equally legitimate intellectually. After all, the notion of a genuine democracy going hand in hand with at least partially controlled markets is not absurd; nor is the idea of a free market operating briskly under the protection of an authoritarian regime (as Tien admitted, citing several Asian examples).10 And beyond that, one can only acknowledge the considerable variations that exist even among the western, industrialized democracies that claim to have adopted the same model, or rather to be the model: there are differences in election

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8 It has not gone unnoticed that the model the United States considers to be universal is very historically situated, even in American history. See the observations of historian Eric Foner, “Not All Freedom Is Made in America,” The New York Times, April 13, 2003 (esp. with respect to the “prevailing ideology of global free enterprise”).

9 Speech delivered September 6, 2001; text distributed by the Office of representation of Taipei in Paris, also available at http://info.gio.gov.tw/ct.asp?xItem=18704&ctNode=2501&mp=4. Mr. Tien was a member of the Chen Shui-bian administration. Chen’s election as president in 2000 marked, in a way, the advent of “adversarial” democracy in Taiwan: for the first time in the history of the Republic of China, the government had to reckon with a parliament dominated by the opposition. (The history of the young Taiwanese democracy is discussed in detail by Fiorella Allio in chapter 18 of this volume.) Chen Shui-bian’s Democratic Progressive Party, which leans strongly towards independence, was Beijing’s bête noire during his presidency: my impression is that by proclaiming to an American public its adherence to the type of democracy celebrated in this speech, Hung-mao Tien was seeking to place the regime he was serving under at least the moral protection of the United States.

10 This is also what happened on Taiwan from the 1950s onward under the dictatorical Chiang Kai-shek regime, as recalled by Fiorella Allio in chapter 18 below.
methods, in the distribution of power between elected citizens and the state bureaucracy, in the role of money, and in many other things, including traits and behaviors that can certainly be called “cultural.” Moreover, for reasons that may or may not be cultural or related to tradition, many regimes—sometimes dubbed “illiberal democracies”—more or less convincingly combine undeniably democratic institutions (beginning with regular elections and the theoretical, or even real, possibility of alternating governance) with habits, practices and a conception of rights so far removed from the liberal model they seem closer to the military dictatorships or former Soviet republics these regimes have often succeeded.

It is therefore not easy to decide what an “authentic” democracy is—in other words, what might possibly be dreamed for China’s future. Without venturing any complicated definitions, I would nonetheless suggest, intuitively as it were, the following minimum criteria (in no particular order): free elections, universal suffrage, and political pluralism; government accountability to the elected representatives of the people, themselves required to regularly and frequently submit their mandate to the voters’ verdict; separation of powers allowing for the rule of law, i.e., review of the legality of governmental acts, judicial guarantee, and the protection of fundamental rights.  

Democracy Criticized

But the issue goes deeper than the existence of many local varieties of democracy and many ways of conceiving the balance between the various types of fundamental rights (essentially, political and socio-economic). In fact, though correct thinking has it that the liberal, industrialized democracies of the western hemisphere embody an unsurpassable ideal to which all nations that have not yet attained it should strive, such regimes are often bitterly criticized from within; and, ironically enough, it is not

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11 On the notion of the rule of law, see in particular Mireille Delmas-Marty’s observations in chapter 13 of this book. Fundamental rights (or should one say, basic liberties?), coincide more or less with the “human rights” discussed at length in chapter 9 below. There is of course disagreement on the precise list of individual rights considered to be essential to a definition of democracy. On this point, see the brief discussion in the introduction to Démocraties d’ailleurs, ed. Christophe Jaffrelot (Paris: Karthala, 2000), esp. pp. 10–12.
unusual for this criticism to be echoed by the less disinterested censure coming from holders of authoritarian power who might feel threatened.

Such criticism includes the rule of money (the general cost of politics, the size of the war chests of parties and individual candidates, not to mention outright electoral corruption), the risk of demagoguery and promises certain not to be kept, the fact that important decisions having long-term consequences may be subject to short-term electoral constraints (especially in countries such as the United States, where campaigning is almost ceaseless), the poor decisions likely to be taken by governments paralyzed by the influence of lobbies or minority voting blocks, and so forth. This is not to say, of course, that authoritarian regimes, past and present, escape these malfunctions: much to the contrary, money and lobbying, courting popular favor, propaganda, policies determined by internal power struggles, even the demands of popularity (or at least, popular resignation), if not the timing of elections, are factors as important as elsewhere. Still, what is interesting here is that the defects inherent in genuine parliamentary regimes fuel the reasoning of those who refuse in principle any kind of democratic reform.

In China, this type of criticism appeared fairly early, and occasionally with telling arguments. Thus, during the so-called Hundred-Days Reform in 1898, Emperor Guangxu decided to solicit the opinion of high metropolitan officials on some texts written by Feng Guifen (1809–1874), a well-known reformist scholar who had died a quarter century earlier. The reactions of a number of conservative dignitaries have been traced in the Qing archives, and they are extremely interesting. Kuhn cites in particular those aroused by Feng’s unquestionably audacious suggestion that the designation of high officials be subject to the vote of low-ranking officials. Feng was probably influenced by the western institutions he became familiar with after he took refuge in Shanghai to flee the invasion of his native Suzhou by the Taiping rebels. At least, this is how some of his contemporaries, who did not hesitate to speak of “foreign (literally, barbarian) methods” (yifa), saw it. In fact, Feng was suggesting a sort of democratization of the evaluation of candidates for the most important functions: rather than letting a few of their peers choose them in the secret of their offices, the entire civil service would be invited to “nominate” candidates

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12 See Kuhn, Origins of the Modern Chinese State, chapter 2. The texts in question were a collection of “essays of protest” (kangyi) composed in 1861 and published for the first time in 1885 under the title Jiaobinlu kangyi (Essays of Protest from the Jiaobin Studio).
and communicate their suggestions to the Ministry of Personnel; then “votes” would be counted in order to establish a promotion table. The aim was to combat clientelism and, somehow, make officials accountable to those who “voted” for them.

The reaction of the dignitaries consulted by Guangxu—who were far from being all of them xenophobic enemies of progress—was almost unanimously negative. The main argument was that such a system opened the door to influence trafficking, to the reign of special interests and factions, and to courting popularity rather than to the objectivity expected of high officials carefully selected for their virtue and experience. In short, things would be the same as in western democracies. Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), at the time the most famous Chinese statesman and a long-time supporter of modernizing the army and the economy, wrote that Feng's suggestion was “modeled on the system by which the American Congress selects officials, without understanding its evils. [In that system], those below seek their private advantage, those above protect their clients. At its worst, this system amounts to seeking office through bribery.” He even added that “perceptive people in that country are already well aware of this.” Another of Feng's ideas was to have local government officials elected by representatives of the people. One of Li's colleagues strongly criticized this idea, writing: “In western countries there are different religions and parties that frequently fight one another. When they kill kings and fathers, they do not regard it as perverse. When they oppress the people, they do not regard it as blameworthy. Is it not the result of the people's having seized power?”

These reactions were of course determined by the period: they testify at the same time to China’s extremely perilous situation at the very end of the nineteenth century and the fears of a small group of elite high officials who felt threatened. But they were even more determined by the traditional view that public interest (gongyi) could not possibly result from the sum of private interests (sili) or be entrusted to a numerical, abstract majority manipulated and governed by selfishness, opportunism and the power of money. It was similarly inconceivable, despite a certain tradition of cultural egalitarianism, at least within the educated elite, that one could grant the same weight to each vote, because men necessarily differed according to their knowledge and ethical qualifications. As Kuhn

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13 The same process would have local officials nominated by Confucian students and village elders. In another essay analyzed by Kuhn, Feng Guifen suggested having peasants elect rural leaders who would have a status of quasi-public officials.
underscores, this conservative approach has continued to dominate China’s modern history, including the most recent. Though formulated in different terms, the same arguments are still made against the democratic principle.

For those who posthumously criticized Feng Guifen in 1898, the education and virtue deemed essential to becoming a high official (and thus deemed to characterize all such officials) were the only possible guarantees of objectivity and impartiality in the defense of the superior interests of the state, and therefore of the people. This was an elitist vision, deeply rooted in a long tradition, and not likely to be called into question by the example of how western democracies operated—or what was known of it. And it is a vision that is clearly echoed in official circles in present-day China. It is probably not by accident—merely a detail, but one that speaks for itself—that the emperors and model officials of the Qing dynasty have benefited from such a favorable view in the People’s Republic during the past two decades, with the authorities’ obvious encouragement. Bookstores, even airport newsstands offer an abundance not only of more or less fictionalized histories featuring them, but also of scholarly anthologies of the texts that taught the Empire’s bureaucrats the principles of good government; and, strikingly, not a few prefaces to such publications state that their goal is to contribute to the state’s reform and modernization led under the Communist Party’s direction. The desire is obvious, it seems to me: to insist on how eminently appropriate to the Chinese people, both past and present, is an authoritarian government at the same time enlightened and virtuous, where power is entrusted to competent leaders exclusively devoted to the good of the country and guided by the highest principles, rather than being left to the uneducated or to businessmen, as in parliamentary democracies.

I should add, even though it is merely anecdotal, that this fascination with a management style that is competent, serious, attached to real problems and free of any political obstacles, may be found even among American critics not likely to be lukewarm when it comes to democracy. In 2005, the columnist Thomas L. Friedman published an essay in the New York Times entitled “Learning from Lance,” in which he celebrated the effort and long-term strategy of champion cyclist Lance Armstrong, who had just won the Tour de France for the seventh time. Friedman wrote:

I have been thinking about them [Armstrong and his teammates] lately because their abilities to meld strength and strategy—to thoughtfully plan ahead and to sacrifice today for a big gain tomorrow—seem to be such fading virtues in American life.
Sadly, those are the virtues we now associate with China, Chinese athletes and Chinese leaders. Talk to U.S. business executives and they’ll often comment on how many of China’s leaders are engineers, people who can talk to you about numbers, long-term problem-solving and the national interest—not a bunch of lawyers looking for a sound bite to get through the evening news. America’s most serious deficit today is a deficit of such leaders in politics and business.14

Democracy and Development

While it is true that many Chinese leaders have trained as engineers—though jurists are beginning to make a place for themselves15—do the supposed substitution of science for democracy and the primary role assigned an elite composed of enlightened technicians describe China’s political future? This certainly would agree with the so-called “developmentalist” theories defended since the 1980s by the CCP to justify deferring any serious overtures towards democracy and the guarantee of civil and political rights until an indefinite future.16 According to this conception, economic growth through market development is the absolute priority; and since political stability is essential to ensuring smooth growth (or “harmonious” growth, to use the term currently in fashion), if only because of the inevitable social tension caused by switching from a state-directed to a market economy, adopting a pluralist parliamentary system and implementing legislation protecting individual rights could only be destabilizing, and would therefore be premature. It would even be chaos, at least according to Jiang Zemin:

I lived for three-fourths of the last century, and I can tell you with certainty: should China apply the parliamentary democracy of the Western world, the only result will be that 1.2 billion Chinese people will not have enough food to eat. The result will be great chaos, and should that happen it will not be conducive to world peace and stability.17

15 As Stéphanie Balme notes in chapter 14 below.
17 The New York Times, August 10, 2001, p. A8. This interview was requested by the Chinese authorities one year after the interview with Mike Wallace discussed above. It was given in the same seaside residence in Beidaihe.
It is certainly a gross exaggeration to maintain that instituting parliamentary democracy would *ipso facto* starve 1.2 billion people; yet this type of argument carries a certain weight in China, where the current regime can be proud of having maintained growth at a rate in the two figures (or close) for many years, and promises to continue doing so if the situation remains “stable”—in other words, if the Party is allowed to remain in control. And it has even more weight since stability is in fact the first thing the Chinese desire: large sections of the population, particularly in the major cities, benefit greatly from this growth, as well as from the relative freedom granted people today in their daily lives—reminiscent of the “practical liberties” discussed by the nineteenth-century authors quoted below in chapter 1—while many still have vivid memories of the anarchic conditions that reigned during the Maoist era.

But why would adopting democratic institutions necessarily lead to chaos? According to the same argument, the reason is that western-style democracy can only function in a prosperous environment; that China is not yet economically developed enough; and that the educational level of its people is inadequate. As Jiang Zemin asserted in his interview for “60 Minutes,” “the quality of our people is too low.” The tropes of poverty and illiteracy have been repeated by all the Chinese advocates of the developmentalist theory, resolutely placing China among the backward nations on which the West presumes to impose its values and institutions—an imposition which can only compromise their development. There is a clear contradiction between such self-interested claims to wretchedness (to which it is often added that China is in any case too big, too populated, and too “complicated”) and the successes the regime rightly boasts of in the areas of education, public health, scientific research and, precisely, economic growth. There is in fact a very strong feeling today among those who benefit most from this growth that China is about to become a superpower—a superpower that could, in fact, dispense with copying foreign political models and serve, instead, as an example to a declining West.18

Or should we think, rather, that what the Chinese leadership fears most is the “immaturity” of a massive rural population that has been essentially left out of this much vaunted growth and may harbor a significant amount of resentment and frustration, even if violent demonstrations

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18 Indeed, ranking China among developing countries does not make sense any more since the 2008 global economic crisis, when China was looked up to as the key nation in a position to rescue the rest of the world.
have remained—so far—limited in scale and uncoordinated (and measures are taken to ensure things stay this way)?

Perhaps these people would indeed not be culturally “advanced” enough to vote correctly in a truly competitive election in which those who hold power currently might not be guaranteed to win. Whatever the case, it can be remarked in passing that opponents outside China have taken a certain pleasure in quoting the Communist press from the period of the “second united front” in the 1940s, when the Party held itself up as the champion of a “new democracy” against the authoritarianism of the Nationalist government. Thus, a 1946 article asked: “Is it fair to refuse to organize popular elections simply because the degree of literacy within the population is low? It is an old problem: some people opposed to democracy use it as an excuse to postpone its realization so they may continue to govern. Isn’t the ulterior motive obvious?”

These questions were aimed at Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government, and as a matter of fact the “old problem” had been very much debated by famous intellectuals between 1933 and 1935. The choice then was, more starkly, between democracy and dictatorship, and many were ready to resign themselves to the latter, not only because they felt it necessary to sacrifice human rights in order to save the nation (China was already in a virtual state of war with Japan), but also because they remembered the failures of China’s parliamentary regimes since 1911 and could contrast them with the apparent success of totalitarian regimes in Europe. But the argument of underdevelopment was also made, beginning with the problem of insufficient numbers of adequately educated and concerned citizens. Partisans of an “enlightened” Guomindang dictatorship considered that the significant proportion of illiterates among the Chinese population was incompatible with the functioning of a democracy; defenders of democracy, of which Hu Shi was the most well-known, tried—as would the communists in the 1940s—to show that this was not the real problem.

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19 Still, the last official report available acknowledged 74,000 violent incidents in 2004, and the trend does not seem to have abated since then.
20 See below, Michel Bonnin, chapter 12.
22 Perhaps higher, at least in some regions, than it was at the end of the imperial period. I allude to this problem in chapter 1.
23 Li YongYan, “China Ready for Democracy in 1940s,” mentions another article in the Communist press dating from 1944 that enthusiastically describes illiterate peasants
In any event, the reasoning that links democratization to economic development also has its supporters in developed countries today, in particular in economic circles, where this argument supports doing business with China without worrying too much about human rights. The claim is that economic modernization—that is, the advances made by a liberal economy and the values it conveys—necessarily fosters political liberalization, and thus the emergence of democracy. Yet the most recent changes in China, where market development and the commercialization of daily life have progressed at a strikingly fast pace, while the regime only seems intent on tightening its control, make it harder to justify such optimism than in the years immediately following the 1989 Tiananmen events.

And finally, let us not forget that in the end the “economic theory” in political science that tries to correlate economic and educational indicators with the emergence of democracy has failed in the face of realities. This is especially true in Asia, where a rich, developed country—Singapore—is still living under an authoritarian regime, while a country with considerably less revenue per capita—India—is undeniably a democracy, and has been so for decades.

“Confucianism” and the “Slave Mentality”

More important for our present purpose are what may be called “cultural” considerations, if only because they relate more directly to history. Without going into more detail than is necessary, let me recall that the authoritarian regimes which assert today that poverty is an obstacle to instituting liberal democracy and that collective, economic and social rights must be given priority over individual political rights, are also resorting to cultural arguments (sometimes combined with aggressive nationalism) whenever electing their leaders by putting a white or black bean in the “ballot box.” Similarly, Hu Shi and others asserted in 1933 that democracy begins with practicing it and that even such rudimentary methods contribute to raising the people’s political consciousness and give the government constitutional legitimacy. On the 1933–1935 debates, see Marina Svensson, Debating Human Rights in China: A Conceptual and Political History (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pp. 179–180; and especially Edmund S.K. Fung, In Search of Chinese Democracy: Civil Opposition in Nationalist China 1929–1949 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 114–143.

24 On this problem see Leïla Choukroune’s analyses in chapter 15 of this book.
they insist on the “difference” of the societies they hold sway over and on the incompatibility of their customs and ways of operating with those of the lesson-teaching West. Such views—the so-called “Asian values” paradigm—were defended, in particular, in the 1992 Bangkok Declaration signed by China, Singapore and Malaysia.

This relativist theme also has more “philosophical” variations, developed by intellectuals rather than politicians (even if the latter adroitly borrow from the former), in which “Asian values” are essentially subsumed under the notion of Confucianism. Briefly, the argument is twofold. First, the so-called Confucian values (the primacy of family, group mentality, hard work, thrift, reciprocity, respect for hierarchy, and so on) are said to largely explain the economic successes of the countries on China’s periphery—Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong—and, more recently, the spectacular rise of China itself since it started liquidating its revolutionary heritage. Second, the ethical and relational principles of Confucianism should enable China to invent a participative, communitarian, sui generis democracy and evolve an approach to human rights distinct from the individualistic and competitive conceptions of the West, which is in any case deep in the throws of a moral crisis and looking for new models.26

This positive evaluation of the philosophy supposed to be the dominant tradition in China—or even the very essence of its culture—is in total contradiction with the negative interpretations of Confucianism and of its social, political, and even mental effects which dominated the “iconoclast” movement of May 4, 1919 (or May Fourth Movement), and which have regularly resurfaced since then. Unlike the “new Confucians,” who seek to dissociate Confucianism’s eternal truths from the vicissitudes of China’s political history and even claim they have universal value, the most radical critics of Confucianism consider that the ideology fostered by the Chinese state for more than two millennia is inseparable from the autocratic institutions of the Empire and of its modern avatars. This perspective explains some of the harshest—and sometimes most desperate—considerations regarding the “character,” or even “nature,” of the Chinese people, and of their inability to free themselves from a long history of subjugation and

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26 On all these points, see Anne Cheng’s considerations in chapter 2 below on the recent Confucian revival and its exploitation by the present government: adopting western democracy would be a cultural intrusion and China does not need it to become a prosperous and respected nation.
at last take control of their affairs and entrust them to a state founded on democracy and human rights. Such considerations (or rather, accusations) are found in abundance, and they warrant examination; but some distinctions are in order, beginning with that between statements by outsiders—that is, by westerners—and the judgments, sometimes bordering on masochism, that come from the Chinese themselves.

With relatively few exceptions, the observations of western authors on the Chinese “character” and its incompatibility with the development of a modern democracy are not genetic (or racial) in nature, but cultural, and the same is true of Chinese authors. What is spoken of is a mentality formed by family and state institutions dating back thousands of years and characterized by submission to all forms of authority, as well as an obsession with preserving harmony in social relations resulting in a propensity to avoid or at least hide conflicts. None of these features would seem to be helpful to the practice of democracy—at least not as it is commonly understood in the West, namely, as a system designed to publicly manage conflicts between divergent interests and limit state power.

Among academic examples of this approach, which I think can be called “culturalist,” I should mention in particular a number of sociological studies (primarily American) that date from the 1970s and 1980s, and are devoted to China’s “political culture.” Their authors insist above all on the impact of educational and socialization processes in Chinese civilization, which according to them encourage the respect for authority, the primacy of collective interests over those of the individual and his development, the importance of unity, the hiding of conflicts, and so on—all qualities deemed to characterize the Chinese. In sum, conformity and docility are instilled at the most tender age, and this explains the ease with which authoritarian regimes have maintained themselves in China, in the past as in the present.

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27 And characteristic of certain well-defined historical periods. I cite some nineteenth-century examples in chapter 1 below.

28 As a matter of fact, Father Du Halde and his Jesuit informants had already seen it all in the eighteenth century: “profound veneration” and “complete submission” to parents, they said, explain submission to the autocrat and his mandarins. See Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l’empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise (The Hague: Henri Scheurleer, 1736), vol. 2, p. 35.
This type of approach raises many issues. As I have shown elsewhere,\(^\text{29}\) the analysis of this educational determinism rooted in a timeless and, of course, Confucian tradition, as well as of the political consequences that supposedly result from it, is most often based on an essentialization of Chinese culture that fosters easy generalizations and largely ignores history: the past is used to explain the present without reference to any particular time periods and is examined through the lens of only a few institutions, philosophical notions, or customs. In reality, if one truly intends to study contemporary political problems from the perspective of “tradition,” then it is necessary to take into account history’s vast repertory of institutions, practices and ideas in its entirety; similarly, history must be examined through the debates, conflicts and transformations that drive it along, produce sharply contrasting phases and constantly redefine that same repertory. In contrast to the generalizations just mentioned, I can only refer to my discussion in chapter 3 on political life during the last decades of the Ming Dynasty: it was distinguished by lack of consensus, lively public controversies, widespread aggressiveness within the bureaucracy, and much disrespect for the powers-that-be.\(^\text{30}\) This is probably an extreme example, but there are others of the same sort; and these episodes of public, organized dissent must be set against periods dominated by stifling conformism, such as during a good part of the Qing Dynasty. It was, in fact, in reaction against the conformism and timidity imposed by the first Manchu emperors that the nineteenth-century literati discussed by Kuhn advocated enlarged participation in public affairs, the nationalists and revolutionaries who succeeded them being even more radical in their attacks against Manchu authoritarianism.

On a less political and more societal level, a quantity of sources, including official handbooks and judicial materials,\(^\text{31}\) make one harbor the most serious doubts as to the passion for harmony and avoidance of conflict

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\(^\text{29}\) For more details and some citations, see Pierre-Étienne Will, introduction to Kuhn, *Les origines de l’État chinois moderne*, pp. 17–30.

\(^\text{30}\) See chapter 3 in this book. As I suggested in my introduction to Kuhn’s *Les origines de l’État chinois moderne*, p. 56, “political life in the Late Ming… constitutes a fairly good laboratory for the potential for debate, open political alignment, public expression of opposition to the powers-that-be, and commitment of the political class under late-imperial China’s reputedly autocratic regimes.”

\(^\text{31}\) In particular the large collections of judicial decisions by local magistrates acting as “justices of the peace” published in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
supposed to characterize Chinese society, not to mention Chinese families. Historians have long recognized how litigious the Chinese were in imperial times—since at least the Song—and how quick to take their disputes to court, even though the administration of justice in imperial China was not known to be friendly to litigants, to say the least. One is occasionally reminded of the mania for litigation in the United States today, not to speak of the army of lawyers who benefit from it—not unlike the much-reviled “masters of complaints” (songshi) of Ming and Qing China.

The idea that education and tradition produce some kind of Chinese “essence” that explains the profoundly antidemocratic nature of China’s culture and government also appears in a somewhat strange book published about two decades ago by W.J.F. Jenner. The book was rather well received in some circles at the time, and its author enjoys a deserved reputation as a Chinese scholar. The title, *The Tyranny of History*, speaks for itself: according to Jenner, the Chinese are slaves to their own past, and this past is nothing but the same story of the tyrannical organization of power repeated over and over. The only glimmer of hope, and a feeble one at that, is for a civil society to emerge. Beyond that, China has no democratic future, especially not—since the Chinese love consensus and harmony so much—in the litigious, even contentious form the author sees as inseparable from healthy democratic practice. In fact, Jenner would have us believe that everything in traditional China is contrary to democracy: its economic organization, legal practices, family and religious systems, institutions and political life, and especially its elite, whose sole purpose is and always has been to participate in this tyrannical power and thereby gain influence and other advantages.

While it would be pointless to discuss at length a book rich in rhetorical flourishes, with frequent overgeneralizations and occasional contradictions, Jenner’s discussion of the government and politics in imperial China is not devoid of interest, if only because he systematically goes

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33 Discussed by Jérôme Bourgon in chapter 5 of this volume.

against all that has been written by so many authors, both Chinese and non-Chinese, to prove that China’s traditional political culture contained what has sometimes been called “sprouts of democracy,” or at least elements that were not incompatible with the invention of a future democracy. While these “sprouts” and what is to be thought of them will be discussed at length throughout this volume, I think it worth at this point to summarize Jenner’s systematically inverted catalogue.

Thus, according to The Tyranny of History, the literati publicly opposing the emperor and his administration never challenged autocracy itself, only its abuses, and the same holds true for such institutional safeguards against despotism as the Censorate and the right of remonstrance accorded certain officials. Forming pressure groups or political parties to compete for power was held to be reprehensible and illegitimate. The “myth of popular sovereignty,” according to which the people have the right to overturn a regime they no longer approve of, was essentially theoretical and applied only in the most extreme cases—it was, indeed, a myth. In addition, public opinion was ignored and people in power avoided contact with the populace. There was no public discourse on current issues worthy of the name; the culture did not foster civic-mindedness and a spontaneous concern for the public good; horizontal communication that was not controlled by the central government was discouraged or thwarted; and in general, public debate on controversial issues was disapproved of because people loathed diversity, division and conflict. And finally, the notion of equality (in particular as a basis for voting procedures) did not exist, even in institutions pertaining to popular culture, and what determined everything was family hierarchy. In short, since from time immemorial everything in the social and cultural fabric has encouraged conformity and obedience, it is hardly surprising the Chinese have difficulty conceiving of an alternative to tyranny.

Without dwelling on the fact that almost all of these assertions are biased or partial, when not plain wrong, what I find interesting is the extent to which they coincide with a certain kind of discourse that has been recurring in China itself since the beginning of modernization and can also be called “culturalist.” This discourse acquired particular strength toward the end of the nineteenth century, when social Darwinism became popular among Chinese intellectuals and they started thinking of history in terms of a competition between civilizations, of a struggle for survival won by the fittest—and when it indeed seemed to some that in this competition the Chinese nation was quite simply threatened with extinction. If I have used the term “masochism,” it is because some authors express in
their statements something that seems close to disgust at being Chinese: Jiang Zemin’s remark quoted above, to the effect that “the quality of our people is too low,” sounds quite benign in comparison.

Much more strikingly than in the analyses by “political culture” specialists, this discourse conveys the idea of a “national character” fashioned by two thousand years of despotism and maintained by a type of family and school education calculated to shape minds to fit the “Confucian” mold and subjugate even the most recalcitrant. Time and again this acquired (or imposed) character has been denounced as the most basic—because it is the most internalized—obstacle to the emergence of a modern, democratic culture, and therefore as the primary reason for the preservation of what is sometimes called, with respect to the current regime, a “feudal autocracy.” Its essential feature is submission to all forms of authority and to group interests; and among the resulting characteristics, those most often deplored are hypocrisy, dissimulation and the selfish pursuit of private interests—or lack of civic-mindedness if one prefers. And the phrase that sums it all up is “slave mentality.”

There have been many variations. Perhaps the initiators of the notion in the history of modern China, even if they did not necessarily use the same terms, were the great mid-seventeenth century thinkers who were spurred by the collapse of the Ming Dynasty and the Manchu conquest to critically reexamine the culture and institutions of China and whose voices, which had been muffled for generations by the Qing regime, resurfaced with much force when the same regime was challenged by a revolutionary and anti-dynastic opposition during its last years of existence. Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692) developed a related motif that was enthusiastically taken up by the anti-Manchu opposition some two centuries after his death: the moral abasement of the Chinese nation whenever it is under the yoke of a Barbarian regime (which happened quite often throughout its history). For Wang Fuzhi, the inhabitants of the steppes and prairies north of China were radically different from the Chinese: they were lower down on the scale of civilization (which he explains, in a quasi-anthropological manner, by environmental factors), and the Chinese should therefore avoid all contact and especially intermarriage with them. Wang in fact seeks to show how the dynasties they founded in China encouraged the basest tendencies in their new subjects—those indeed that traditional ritualism and moralism were designed specifically to keep in check: a propensity to

35 See Yves Chevrier, chapter 10 below, for the example of Zhang Binglin (1869–1936).
greed and the search for individual advantage, spinelessness and submission to raw power, and a total absence of devotion to the public good.\footnote{On all these themes, see Jacques Gernet, \textit{La raison des choses. Essai sur la philosophie de Wang Fuzhi} (1619–1692) (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), pp. 371–389.} One might say that, in this approach, the “slave mentality” results from slave conditions.

While with Wang Fuzhi this corrupting influence is attributed above all to the subjection of the Chinese to inferior races, it is somewhat different with Huang Zongxi (1610–1695), who was hailed as a sort of proto-democrat by the opposition at the end of the Qing and again in the 1980s\footnote{See Zhang Lun, “L'intellectuel, le pouvoir et l'idée de démocratie après Mao: discours et pratiques,” in Delmas-Marty and Will, \textit{La Chine et la démocratie}, p. 519.}—a quality assuredly more difficult to grant Wang Fuzhi, who has rather been held up as the first theoretician of Chinese nationalism.\footnote{Jacques Gernet, \textit{L'intelligence de la Chine. Le social et le mental} (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 314.} As I recall in my conclusion to chapter 3, Huang Zongxi, in terms similar to those used by several Ming politicians two or three generations earlier, attributed the abuse and disorder in the political system of his time not to foreign invaders, but to the institutions the First Emperor, Qin Shihuangdi, instituted in China when he unified the Empire in 221 B.C., which were devoted exclusively to serving the interests of the autocrat and his entourage. Huang asserts that in pre-imperial times the people were the masters (or owners, \textit{zhu}) of the Empire, but that later they became the slaves (literally, the “tenants,” \textit{ke}) of their own sovereign, that they could be exploited at will, and that this reality determined their worldview and behavior, at the same time filling them—if one is to believe him—with hatred of the despot who had seized the Empire and its resources.

Needless to say, neither Wang Fuzhi nor Huang Zongxi intended (how could they have simply imagined it?) to free the Chinese from their own culture, so they could accede to a different world governed by new principles. As iconoclastic as they were, and above all as critical (especially Huang Zongxi) of the power structure in their own time and of its effects on both culture and behavior (on “customs”), what they were pursuing, like all mainstream Chinese thinkers before the twentieth century and many thereafter, was a sort of national essence—at once political, ethical and social—that had been lost since an improbable Antiquity but was virtually present in the Classics and, if revitalized, would save China from the social and moral crisis the Ming had just succumbed to.
While they felt very much in sympathy with the views of the great seventeenth-century dissenters, whom they had helped restore to honor, the Chinese nationalists and revolutionaries of the last years of the empire were above all subjected to the massive influence of new ideas imported from the West; and needless to say, they were much more radical in their denunciation of the imperial system than their early-Qing predecessors. Interestingly, some of them ascribed just the same kind of dictatorial behavior, resulting in the same deprivation of liberties and submissiveness of the people, to all dynasties, be they Barbarian (as had Wang Fuzhi) or Chinese (as had Huang Zongxi).39 Liang Qichao (1873–1929), for example, wrote in 1901 that the Chinese are slaves four times over—to the Ancients, to customs, to circumstances, and to their passions—and concluded they do not have the “virtue of liberty” (ziyou de), are therefore not really men and, by implication, would be unable within an authentic democracy to exercise a freedom they do not possess.40

But it was the “new culture” iconoclastic movement, which was born in 1915 and literally exploded with the May Fourth Movement of 1919,41 that brought together a group of intellectuals sharing both western ideologies and the advanced classical training all educated Chinese received at the time. They proclaimed that for science and democracy to free Chinese society from its long history of authoritarianism, a radical change in the very culture of the Chinese and in their national character was also needed. It was then that Confucianism was denounced as the source of all society’s ills, beginning with that “slave mentality” that barred China’s way to progress: if the Chinese behaved like slaves, it was because the cardinal hierarchies founding Confucian morality—between sovereign and subject, father and son, husband and wife—and the “inhuman” (feiren) society resting on those hierarchies had transformed them this way. The submission of the “Confucian subjects” that composed such a society was the opposite of the condition of the free and equal individuals participating in a modern democracy, such as the citizens of western nations and Japan enjoyed. But the arrangements concluded in the Treaty of Versailles, which were the immediate cause of the May Fourth Movement, showed

39 See e.g. the remarks, dating from 1903, of Zou Rong (a rabid anti-Manchu revolutionary) and Liang Qichao (at that time a constitutional monarchist) quoted by Kuhn, Origins of the Modern Chinese State, pp. 124–25.
40 Quoted by Joël Thoraval, chapter 6 below.
41 The iconoclast movement is analyzed in depth by Yves Chevrier, chapters 10 and 11 in this volume.
that those nations continued to dominate a nation—China—where the first attempt at founding a republic had been a failure and which had become prey to a reactionary and destructive form of militarism.42

The call for the Chinese to free themselves from their “slave mentality” was made again a little later by human rights activists struggling against the Nationalist Party dictatorship in the 1930s and 1940s, many of whom had been participants in the May Fourth Movement.43 But above all it was some forty years later, under the Communist regime, that the same doubts resurfaced, and in a very striking way, about the “nature” of the Chinese and, more particularly, about the historical and environmental fatality of which they seemed to be the victims. The wave of what was then called “cultural fever” (wenhua re), which culminated in the second half of the 1980s, arrived after three decades of monopolistic domination by Maoist thinking—even longer if one takes into account the red bases (principally Yan’an) where Maoism had been forming since the 1930s. It hit just a few years after the democratic movement of 1978, famous for its “democracy walls” covered with dazibao in Beijing and elsewhere and for its blossoming of oppositional journals, had been reduced to silence and its main militants had been thrown in jail—marking the limits of what was permissible, even under a regime of reform; and it climaxed in the demonstrations of May–June 1989 in Tiananmen Square and their brutal repression.

The decade separating the two major episodes of pro-democratic dissent in China’s recent history is remarkable in many ways. Intellectual circles benefited then, indirectly, from the economic reforms and from Deng Xiaoping’s policy of “opening up” (gaige kaifang), which meant the abandonment of old dogmas and a degree of freedom in using language—the latter with a particularly spectacular impact on the literary sphere. Authors discovered modern western thought other than Marxist, thanks to the translations that began to multiply—of Freud, Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Karl Popper and many others; Chinese traditional (and more recent) learning also resurfaced after the protracted ice age of the Cultural Revolution, and was the subject of intense study. Colloquia, study groups and “salons” began proliferating in late 1984, and for several years Chinese

42 Besides Chevrier’s chapters in this volume, see the brief but very clear general presentation of the May Fourth cultural movement in Wang Zheng, Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 9–12. The book is devoted to the feminist component of the movement.

43 I am discussing these human rights activists in chapter 9 below.
culture and the “character of the people” (guominxing) were subjected to a form of unflinching criticism that has really had no equivalent since and which almost always took the West’s culture and “values” as a benchmark. The boldest intellectuals made use of the western social sciences, which were also being rediscovered during this period, to bring out the deepest structural problems of Chinese civilization. All of this took place in a spirit reminiscent in many ways of the May Fourth Movement, which in fact was constantly referred to, the movement of the 1980s being often dubbed the “New Enlightenment” or “second New Culture” movement and its militants claiming to take up the torch of their illustrious predecessors of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{44}

The most spectacular manifestation of “cultural fever” occurred in the summer of 1988, at a time when the more intellectual phase of the movement was losing steam because the authorities were getting irritated and had started taking action against “bourgeois liberalism,” and also as a result of the dismissal of First Secretary Hu Yaobang. This was the airing by the Central Television channel of the documentary series “River Elegy” (Heshang), which took up the themes of cultural critique with much virulence and was extraordinarily popular with the public. The Yellow River served as a metaphor for an unchanging, agrarian China closed off behind its Great Wall and subject to the despotism of its emperors, including—though this was not said explicitly—its Communist emperors. This China was systematically set against a conquering and trading West, turned towards the high seas (and thus symbolized by the color blue) and guided by science and democracy. The message was entirely pessimistic, and the program was highly criticized for that, including, after the fact, by the directors themselves, who all had to go into exile after the June 1989 repression. As for the implicit recommendation to forget about the glories and symbols of the past and have China imitate the western countries, it partakes of the radicalism of the most advanced intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement more than sixty years before.

While Heshang dealt in myths on a grand scale, the same nagging questions about why China was held up in its development and why its glorious civilization had been reduced since the nineteenth century to a humiliatingly inferior position in relation to the modern West, were raised

in a more direct fashion in a 1985 book by Bo Yang (1920–2008) that dealt with the Chinese person as such. Not surprisingly, the book created a scandal as soon as it was published in Taiwan, and shortly thereafter when it began to be widely circulated throughout China, where cultural fever was running high. The title, Choulou de Zhongguoren, or The Ugly Chinaman, left little to the imagination. Bo Yang describes the degeneracy of Chinese culture in incredibly scathing terms, asserting that “[a]ges ago, all the ethical tendencies and native wisdom of the Chinese people were crushed by the destructive elements of Confucian culture and despotic government.” In fact, just as Huang Zongxi in the seventeenth century, Bo Yang considers that the Qin imperial unification was the beginning of the end. And like other authors he writes abundantly of all the reasons why the Chinese have been maintaining a “slave mentality” for centuries, with all the detestable and inhuman forms of behavior implied, and why they have been incapable of developing a democratic society.

When recalling today these extraordinarily rich, lively and audacious years during which Chinese intellectuals rediscovered with much excitation the freedom and creativity from which they had been severed for close to half a century, many veterans of the 1980s admit that the reason why the movement did not survive the Tiananmen events is not so much the ensuing political repression, which fairly quickly returned to a “normal” level, as the renewal of generations and economic globalization. The proportion of young intellectuals for whom the Maoist era’s misfortunes are ancient history keeps increasing, and some “old timers” have nostalgically compared the “cultural fever” of twenty years before with the new “consumerist cultural fever” (wenhua xiaofei re). Indeed, while China in the early twenty-first century is courted by all its partners and is happy to flaunt at them its urban prosperity, commercial power and international prestige, the 1980s’ somber ruminations on the inability of China and the Chinese to enter into modernity appear rather outmoded.

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45 The English version appeared in a journal the same year as the Chinese edition, and later as a separate volume: see Bo Yang, The Ugly Chinaman and the Crisis of Chinese Culture, trans. and ed. Don J. Cohn and Jing Qing (North Sidney: Allen and Unwin, 1992). An extremely prolific poet and essayist, Bo Yang took refuge on Taiwan in 1949. He spent ten years in prison there from 1968 to 1977 for having satirized Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo. The book comprises various discussions and interviews, followed by a selection of critiques by other authors; the English version is a rearranged selection of the original text.

46 Preface to the English translation, p. ix.

47 The tables and shelves in major bookstores suggest that “consumerism” may also apply to the intellectual sphere.
Yet a minority of critical and pessimistic intellectuals still exists (though their numbers are difficult to ascertain); but they are in large part found at the political and geographical margins of Chinese society. Ian Buruma’s remarkable 1996–2001 investigation of every possible variety of political dissidence, among exiles as well as in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and overseas communities, uncovered many people who were disillusioned not only as to any future democratic movement in China, but also—and this was offered as a partial explanation—as to the Chinese character. Such discouragement and self-deprecation were especially hard for them to live with because all, or almost all, were still convinced of Chinese civilization’s greatness and proud of how ancient is China’s history. Buruma, in fact, speaks of “disappointed cultural chauvinism.”

Take Liu Binyan (1925–2005), a journalist who had been a loyal Communist despite the problems this caused him, as well as one of the important “cultural fever” authors, and who ended up in exile in Princeton: in his interview with Buruma, Liu assigned responsibility for the disputes between exiled democrats to “Han culture,” to the hypocrisy generated by Confucianism, and to the selfishness and cruelty ensuing from what he claimed had been a thousand-year-old struggle for survival. In short, he said, “we have inherited our problems. They are in our Chinese blood.”

For his part, Li Lu, a student leader at the time of the Tiananmen demonstrations, explained these same disagreements between rival factions by a Chinese culture that according to him produces either a “slave mentality” or “extreme individualism”: those who refuse to be slaves become “fighters,” he said, and “the first to rebel expect to be leaders.”

Most strikingly, many of those who try to persevere—or at least keep faith in China’s political advancement, even though they have abandoned combat—turn to either science, as did their May Fourth predecessors, or Christianity, as did numerous progressive intellectuals during the republican era. In other words, they seem to be more or less consciously trying to

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49 Id., p. 23.
50 Id., p. 88.
51 Some of them, who contributed directly or indirectly to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are featured in chapter 9 in this volume. The Chinese political exile who is the most fervent supporter of the scientific mind and of the adoption of western values is the astrophysicist Fang Lizhi (see Buruma, Bad Elements, pp. 68–76). The conversion of a great number of dissidents to Christianity (in whatever form) is one of the most remarkable facts brought to light by Buruma’s study. On the same topic, see also the same author’s “Christ in China,” Prospect, no. 42 (June 1999).
break with the aspects of their culture they regard—rightly or wrongly—as the most negative and the most contrary to the transformation of China which they sincerely call for.

Inventories and Reinterpretations

Rightly or wrongly, indeed: the pessimistic considerations just recorded do not, of course, resolve the issue of “Chinese tradition” vs. “democracy.” As I mentioned, recent history provides too many counterexamples to establish as a rule that an insufficient level of socio-economic development is a definitive obstacle to developing a democratic polity. In exactly the same way, arguments based on the supposed specificities of the Chinese culture and mentality—especially when these are presented as a sort of timeless essence—give no clue as to whether the transformation of the current regime into a democracy that accepts, at a minimum, alternating power and offering citizens genuine constitutional guarantees is conceivable, and desirable; or whether the Chinese are more comfortable with a “communitarian” system paternalistically overseen by an enlightened authoritarian power.

What seems therefore necessary—and is the primary goal of this book—is to make a critical assessment of all the state or civil institutions, practices, debates, and experiments likely to influence in one way or another China’s encounter with the different forms of political modernity; or to phrase it differently, to evaluate the repertory of “Chinese society’s inherent political resources.” This is an important task, if only because the tumultuous history of the last century shows that in times of either crisis or opening up, the Chinese themselves are prone to make use of this repertory, in terms that may be both positive and negative.

Making such an assessment may seem to bring us back to the “sprouts of democracy” approach: as we saw, for authors like Jenner and others who hold a negative approach of China’s past, there was no such thing, whereas others have sought to show that, on the contrary, China is as much entitled as any European nation to claim a historical heritage that includes elements conducive to the development of modern democratic institutions. In fact, this type of research into antecedents—as opposed

52 Xiaohong Xiao-Planes’s words, see chapter 7 below.
to “resources”—is of only limited heuristic usefulness: it concentrates on details rather than structural changes, and in general the temptation to draw analogies and find resemblances, or even to play with words, is too strong.

Thus—to give but one example—certain traditionally-oriented Chinese historians and essayists have claimed to see a quasi-equivalent of democracy in the control maintained by the bureaucracy over the emperor’s actions and in the moral and intellectual authority enjoyed by scholars. In one of his famous 1952 lectures on the “advantages and disadvantages” of imperial China’s successive systems of government, the renowned historian Qian Mu (1895–1990) began by asserting that pure democracy (i.e., power exercised by all the people) being an unattainable ideal, the government is always delegated to a specific group of people (such as the bourgeoisie, intellectuals, the proletariat, etc.). And at this point he did not hesitate to suggest that the recruitment of civil servants through competitive examinations in imperial China and electing deputies in democratic countries are functional equivalents, since in both cases the goal is to select the candidates best suited to run the government: just like elected officials in western countries, for Qian the scholars (dushuren) of imperial China “represented” (daibiao) the entire population, whose opinions (yijian) they were able to express perfectly thanks to their advanced academic and moral training and the fact that the best of them were selected on the basis of merit and competence; to which one might add, following the same line, that this system was all the more “democratic” since anyone could take the examinations.

To argue that selecting officials through competitive examinations was not just a “sprout,” but in fact an authentic form of representative

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53 Just like that concerning “sprouts of capitalism” (zibenzhuyi mengya), which was very fashionable in China in the 1950s and 1960s.
54 See Qian Mu, Zhongguo lidai zhengzhi deshi (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1988), pp. 132–133. Also Ch’ien Mu, Traditional Government in imperial China: A Critical Analysis, trans. Chün-tu Hsüeh and George O. Totten (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press/ New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), p. 125. Unfortunately, this translation is deliberately approximate and, on the pretext of improving the text’s readability, introduces notions that do not appear in the original text. Here and there Qian Mu insists on the fact that the Qing ruined this admirable system by defending only their own “tribal” interests: similar to many other nationalist historians, the Manchus are Qian’s bête noire. The Manchu’s negative role in this line of thinking is not unlike that of nineteenth-century European imperialism for those who maintain that, without it, an endogenous Chinese capitalism would have developed from the “sprouts” that appeared from the sixteenth century, if not earlier.
government, is certainly a delusion. More generally, it should go without saying that all the basic components of a political system that meets the minimal criteria necessary to qualify as “democratic” were missing from the Chinese political tradition (and indeed from most other political traditions). Not only was there no universal suffrage in imperial China, but no official was designated through any kind of “election”—as we saw earlier, the very idea of counting votes seemed shocking to traditionalist high officials in 1898; nor did the procedures for collective recommendation encouraged in some rare circumstances involve any voting. The imperial government could not be toppled other than by violent rebellion, and even when confrontation among several political factions led to what would be the equivalent of a “change of majority,” that change was entirely the result of bureaucratic maneuvering, not of the expression of public opinion, at least as we understand that notion. Moreover, the very notion of political “rights”—to freedom of opinion, expression, association, and so forth—did not feature in any text, even though some members of the sociopolitical elite sometimes claimed a sort of moral right to express themselves in public, and ordinary citizens occasionally claimed for themselves the right to collectively demonstrate against their local officials.

That being said, the fact that these concepts or institutions do not exist in a historical tradition as they are defined in modern legal terms does not in any way mean that this tradition (or culture) is fundamentally incompatible with the adoption of modern democratic procedures, or that the price for it would be a complete denial of its very essence or falling into a state of severe malfunction. Historically, the example of the Meiji reforms in Japan in the late nineteenth century demonstrates that even radical political modernization does not necessarily affect the foundations of culture and identity—and this example had a major impact on China in the late Qing. Inasmuch as Chinese civilization has always been centered on a strong political tradition that is also highly varied and commands a vast

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55 Notwithstanding the claims of a few nineteenth-century “China experts,” whom I discuss in chapter 1.
56 Even though the “right to rebel,” the Canonic expression of which can be found in the philosophy of Mencius (fourth century B.C.), was considered by many defenders of Chinese tradition as another “sprout” of democracy.
57 I elaborate on this in my discussion of the late Ming Dynasty in chapter 3.
58 See chapter 3.
intellectual and institutional repertory, it seems conceivable and useful to look among this variety and repertory for concepts and practices which, far from being in contradiction with a democratic transition, might actually contribute to it (if not found it), provided they were more or less drastically reinterpreted.

The results of this critical inventory are discussed in the first four parts of this volume, dedicated respectively to tradition and its reconstruction, to certain imperial institutions, to the intellectual and institutional transitions of the late imperial and Republican periods, and to some of the uses to which the idea of democracy was put in the twentieth century. To give a more concrete idea of this approach—and without anticipating—let me mention here two aspects of the Chinese imperial politico-administrative culture as examples of what is meant by “resources” in this context, or (to return to agricultural metaphors) as examples of the “soil” that existed prior to the first attempts to transform China’s institutions in any depth.

The first is the deeply internalized principle of egalitarianism one finds in numerous public and private institutions under the last imperial dynasties. I do not think that this principle, which probably predated the legalist policies that presided over the Empire’s unification, is contradicted by either the distortions it has often suffered, primarily for political reasons, or the limitations imposed on it by institutional and social realities. Egalitarianism informed the principle of social mobility ingrained in the examination system that provided access to public service and was in principle open to all “free men” (liangmin), to the exclusion of a small number of categories of inferior persons who made up an insignificant proportion of the population. In practice, of course, and for obvious socio-cultural reasons, only a tiny fraction of the latter at any one time could effectively benefit from such opportunities. There were other areas, however, in which all Chinese was treated equally, at least in theory—but this was a

59 One cannot speak of a monolithic, immutable and unchanged political tradition in China. While there are undeniably elements that never changed, China’s political tradition is an ideological reconstruction based, in large part, on the continuity of language and literary forms.

60 The quasi-universal access to examinations, provided one could acquire the necessary knowledge, is frequently singled out by both Chinese and non-Chinese believers in a traditional, Chinese-style “democracy.” What is less often mentioned, though it was very important during the Qing Dynasty, is access to public office by purchase, which introduced another type of egalitarianism by bypassing the effects of “distinction” based on cultural capital. See Pierre-Étienne Will, “La distinction chez les mandarins,” in La liberté par la connaissance. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), ed. Jacques Bouveresse and Daniel Roche (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2004), pp. 215–232.
strongly defended theory. As discussed by Jérôme Bourgon in chapter 4, for example, though the Penal Code was filled with hierarchical distinctions based on family structure, social status, academic status, and so on, the law applied to everyone with the utmost precision and the utmost foreseeability, and everyone had access to it. It is also well known that the transition from Ming to Qing brought a move towards egalitarianism in the fiscal area, to the extent the Qing abolished part of the sometimes exorbitant privileges granted by the Ming to the families belonging to the academic elite. At least in principle—and the principle was always there despite countless distortions—all landowners were equal regarding tax. All of this concerns the relationship of imperial subjects to the state, and it should also be recalled that egalitarianism is not the same as equality. Nonetheless, Chinese society at the end of the Empire was anything but a society of orders.

Beyond the relation between state and citizen, the principle of equality governed the workings of a quantity of civil organizations based on voluntarism, such as professional guilds, regional associations, and especially charities, all of which frequently overlapped in various ways. Even more interesting, positions of responsibility within these groups were almost always held on a rotating basis, and in a number of cases the group leaders chosen by their colleagues were elected by ballot. Likewise, it seems that, quite often, important decisions were taken collectively after open debate among all group members had produced a majority. As shown by Xiaohong Xiao-Planes in chapter 7, the election procedures that gradually became a general practice in the professional and militant associations of Shanghai and Jiangsu during the first decade of the twentieth century involved the principles of limited mandate and accountability, and they were inspired by a tradition of collective civic service that, in the case of philanthropic associations, went back to at least the late sixteenth century. They were naturally adopted by the local and provincial assemblies elected in the final years of the Qing, which marked the beginning of the first experiment in political democracy in China.

The second aspect I would like to mention is the existence of a well-established (and well-documented) tradition of popular opposition to bureaucratic abuses of power. This was not an institutionalized form of opposition, nor was it necessarily violent (though it often was); but people knew how to express themselves and make themselves heard—by putting up posters, petitioning, or holding demonstrations—and the government was seriously concerned about such actions and took account of them. It was not simply a question of maintaining public order: local officials
were acutely aware that the "people's sentiment" (mingqing) was a measure of their own legitimacy. In fact, not a few among them were preoccupied with their popularity, and sources show that some were not above flattering the citizenry, just as candidates for election do in democratic countries. The difference, of course, is that politicians seek to please electors to win their vote, whereas Chinese magistrates and prefects sought to increase their chances of promotion by impressing their superiors with their constituents' demonstrations of love for them—there is no want of anecdotes showing the extremities to which certain officials could go to display their popularity.

Whatever the case may have been, the Chinese people's awareness of the possibility—perhaps even, obscurely, of the right—they had to influence the government by showing their discontent means that the masses did hold a certain amount of power, at least potentially. Institutionalizing that power would certainly not upset the inclination to docility and obedience so often attributed to the Chinese. Incidentally, it is no accident that this way of expressing popular opposition (in contrast to the internal debates among the literati and official elite) has also been seen by certain nineteenth-century observers as the manifestation of a sort of democratic disposition among the Empire's subjects. In a similar vein, some of the same observers have marveled at the extreme interest that even people living in the most remote villages could show for ordinary political events—such as, typically, examination results. In sum, this all seemed to contradict the pessimistic view of an amorphous and indifferent mass, excluded from politics, and entirely subjugated by a power that ruthlessly repressed the slightest manifestation of indocility.

But here again, features such as these—as well as others that will be mentioned throughout this book—did not constitute any type of proto-democracy: they occurred naturally in the environment of the Chinese imperial monarchy, were indeed parts of the repertory characteristic of this system, and in no way undermined its theoretical foundations. What is important here is that they could (and for some, still can) be reused and reinterpreted to serve another purpose, drawing at the same time

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61 For examples of this view, see chapter 1 below.
62 Xiaohong Xiao-Planes shows in chapter 8 how elements (or “resources”) such as “the attachment of the Chinese to written provisions and their referential and symbolic values” and the importance afforded “the legitimating authority of symbols and words” were mobilized to draft constitutions in the twentieth century.
great legitimacy from their traditional pedigree. The beginnings of the modern press in China provide a perfect example of this. The first newspapers printed in Chinese were published in the foreign concessions in the 1870s, their owners often being foreigners. Their Chinese publishers cleverly drew on the venerable notions (sanctioned by traditional political theory) of the “right of remonstrance” and of the necessary communication between the people and the throne to justify their desire for true freedom of the press; in other words, the right to discuss public affairs, to solicit opinions, and to encourage society’s modernization without going through the authorized bureaucratic channels. As a recent study devoted to the most famous of these newspapers, the Shanghai Shenbao, asserts, “The issue is not the question of how far a tradition evoking newspaper communication had existed and whether it was identical or compatible with the new medium, but, rather, how such a tradition was constructed as a cultural resource for legitimizing the new endeavor”.

To sum up, tradition may be adapted after the event, and it can even be “invented” to acculturate concepts and processes that are new or imported: its elements are, so to speak, called upon to support what is undeniably a modern program. Seen this way, no culture is prisoner to tradition and the “tyranny of history” does not exist.

Experiments and Trajectories

Yet in other words: the political resources, both discursive and concrete, that developed within Chinese culture prior to its encounter with modern western political systems may very well—at least some of them—be accommodated, transmuted, even reimagined in the framework and in support of a democratic, liberal experiment, even if the original inspiration and institutional forms of that experiment have been imported from outside. To be sure, China’s post-imperial history offers few examples of this. In fact, the only one that can be cited (regarding mainland China) is most of the time buried in memory or regarded as insignificant: this is

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63 See Natascha Vittinghoff, “Readers, publishers and officials in the contest for a public voice and the rise of a modern press in late Qing China (1860–1880),” *T'oung Pao*, vol. 87, no. 4–5 (2001), pp. 393–455, esp. pp. 399–403. On the “right of remonstrance” see chapter 3 below. The Shenbao journalists (who were educated people and had received traditional training) justified themselves by comparing their efforts to those of the censors in the traditional system, and the Shenbao was nicknamed “the Shanghai Censorate.”
the parliamentary republic inaugurated in 1912 and hijacked by the police and armed forces of President Yuan Shikai as early as the second half of 1913 in Beijing and early 1914 in the provinces.\textsuperscript{64}

While I cannot go into detail here on the many causes, both endogenous and exogenous, of this first experiment’s failure,\textsuperscript{65} it seems to me more important to stress the enthusiasm and public-spiritedness with which large sectors of the socio-economic elite followed the new course of things in most of the provinces—even though they had already experienced the “local autonomy” (\textit{difang zizhi}) movement that started in 1905 and the democratic institutions (still limited and based on a much narrower electoral body) locally conceded by the Qing Dynasty in 1909.\textsuperscript{66}

The fall of the imperial system in 1911 had been preceded by the drastic reforms launched by the Qing during the previous decade, which affected even the most venerable institutions of the Empire, such as the examination system, abolished in 1905. It was accepted as the most natural thing by much of the citizenry in a country which by then had already become a nation in the modern meaning of the term, and they adapted without difficulty to the new democratic institutions put to the test. The competition between the parties and other political groupings that multiplied at this time is one of the most spectacular manifestations of this adaptation (political parties had been prohibited under the Ancien Régime). For specialists of the period, the elections held during the 1912–13 winter—which were free, relatively honest, and largely commented on in a press that was

\textsuperscript{64} Yuan’s destruction of the Republic began with the assassination, in March 1913, of Song Jiaoren (head of the new Guomindang party, which had won the elections at the end of 1912) shortly before the new Parliament was inaugurated. The expulsion of the national Parliament’s Guomindang majority came in November of the same year, following Yuan Shikai’s military victory over the “second revolution,” which he faced in the summer of 1913 in the southern provinces. The national, provincial and local assemblies were then dissolved in the first months of 1914.

\textsuperscript{65} John Fincher, one of the main (and relatively few) historians of this period, insists in particular on two factors. The first is the sheer numerical mass of the Chinese body politic, more specifically its very rapid growth, explained in part by the spread of new communication technologies available since the late nineteenth century: this quantitative factor, according to him, made the organization of parliamentary democracy difficult both for the Qing autocratic power at the time of the reforms of the last years of the dynasty and for the new republican power. The second factor is the threat of imperialist aggression brandished by President Yuan Shikai to justify militarizing the regime and quickly suppressing democratic institutions. See John H. Fincher, introduction to \textit{Chinese Democracy: Statist Reform, the Self-Government and Republican Revolution} (Tokyo: Gaigokugo daigaku, 1989).

\textsuperscript{66} In 1909, roughly two million voters were mobilized to vote for provincial assembly members; in 1912–13, some forty million were involved in the elections for the various local and provincial assemblies and for the national parliament.
also free—were the most intense moment in a liberal democratic episode that was all too short, but certainly very effervescent. This enthusiasm and effervescence, which only amplified a movement begun in the final years of the Qing, are most in evidence in Xiaohong Xiao-Planes’ study of the years 1908–14 in Jiangsu province—certainly the most advanced region in China in this regard (see chapter 7 below).

These events warrant emphasis, because the failure of the 1912 parliamentary republic is sometimes cited in China as proof of the incompatibility between a western parliamentary system and Chinese specificities. For example, the 2005 “White Paper” entitled Building of Political Democracy in China asserts that:

…the bourgeois republic, including the parliamentarism and multi-party system that were subsequently established after the Revolution of 1911 in imitation of the mode of Western democracy, did not fulfill the fervent desire of the Chinese people for independence and democracy. The new republic soon collapsed under the onslaught of domestic and foreign reactionary forces.

Briefly, the “white paper” explains that democracy is indeed what all people desire, but that to be legitimate, it must develop from within, not be imposed from outside. Such is the case, fortunately, of the “socialist democracy” with “Chinese characteristics” that the Chinese have developed under the Communist Party’s guidance (“the Chinese people became the real masters of their country, society and their own fate”) and which continues to be perfected under the same auspices. The text skips directly from the Ancien Régime to the present, dismissing as illegitimate everything that took place in between: “[t]he establishment of New China marked a great leap from the 2,000-year-old autocratic feudal political

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system and the unsuccessful trials in contemporary China imitating the mode of western democratic political systems to the new people’s democratic political system.”

Clearly, this fairly verbose document, which contains more incantation than analysis, and which one is surprised to learn required (according to the press releases) more than a year’s work and the help of more than one hundred experts to draft, is aimed at getting the discussion under control. While detailing at great length, and with many numbers to back them up, the considerable improvements of which the Chinese have benefited in their material life thanks to the regime in power since 1949, and especially during the last quarter century, the White Paper admits the need for future progress, such as developing local elections, strengthening citizens’ review of the work of administrators and the latter’s accountability, and so on. But these fall entirely within the framework of the democratic centralism already in place, and the leading, even constitutional (figuratively and literally) role of the Communist party is not to be challenged in the slightest, despite a brief allusion to the small democratic parties that have provided a pluralist alibi since the People’s Republic was founded.

Just what are these “Chinese characteristics” to which “socialist democracy” is so successfully adapted? The White Paper remains vague on this point:

The socialist political democracy of China is rooted in the vast land of fertile soil on which the Chinese nation has depended for its subsistence and development over thousands of years. It grew out of the experience of the CCP and the Chinese people in their great practice of striving for national independence, liberation of the people and prosperity of the country. It is the apt choice suited to China’s conditions and meeting the requirement of social progress.

And further down:

China has a history of 5,000 years of civilization. Boasting a splendid civilization in the same league as those of ancient Egypt, India and Babylon, China has contributed greatly to the development and progress of mankind. The Chinese people are industrious, courageous and full of wisdom. It is generally acknowledged in the world that the Chinese nation has a long, uninterrupted history and a rich cultural heritage.

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79 No significant progress appears to have occurred in the area of local elections since Gunter Schubert’s 2002 original study: see below chapter 17, note 1.
Less vague, however, is the insistence on the capacity of the system thus promoted to guarantee stable development—and from now on not only stable, but “harmonious” as well.

Harmony (hexie)—social, developmental, international, or whatever—is the catchword First Secretary and President of the Republic Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the pair scheduled to make way for new leaders in 2012, have contributed to the regime’s conceptual edifice. Interestingly, if party insiders are to be believed, this notion is supposed to represent a “neo-Confucian” way of thinking among party leaders. Traditionally, in other words, even if much reinvented, serving in this case to fulfill the function of mediation (or arbitration) usually assigned to democratic institutions: “to take care of disadvantaged sectors and resolve disputes between power blocs and interest groups.”

Though there is no point in quoting Building of Political Democracy in China at length, it is nevertheless worth pointing out that the document is fairly insistent regarding developments in the last twenty years in the areas of law and legality, as well as China’s adhesion to numerous international instruments. China’s signing of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is duly mentioned, as is its ratification of the companion Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights—rights which the regime makes a great show of protecting under the general heading of “right to subsistence and development.” Regarding Civil and Political Rights—about which it is simply said that “the Chinese Constitution and laws protect the rights of citizens to freedom of religion, expression, press and association”—the ratification of the Covenant is said to be still under study by the appropriate departments.

Given the political closure (even greater in the speech of the current leaders than in the era of Jiang Zemin) that prevails in the areas of democracy and human rights, as those terms are understood in the West and by the principal international organizations—or, to express it differently, given its persistent refusal of “political globalization,” the most interesting developments in China today are undoubtedly occurring in the area of economic and legal internationalization, as well as in the related changes in the law and its practice and in the perception citizens may have of the relationship between legality and the exercise of power. These subjects are discussed in depth by several authors in Part 5 of this volume.

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revealing the interrelationship and extreme complexity of the problems at hand. Importantly, they also show how the new factor of “globalization”—which is not the same thing as westernization—has brought new resources to the trajectory of state construction in twentieth-century China, as Yves Chevrier had already suggested. But is this to continue to be, as Chevrier seems to believe, without reorientation of the trajectory itself? After all, the twenty-first century has only just begun.

In any case, the ideas of “resources” and “trajectory” may well be what emerge most significantly—even when it is by implication—from the chapters that compose this book. As I have suggested above, making an inventory of “resources” of any sort allows us to go far back into China’s historical experience—into what is called, for ease of language, its “tradition.” As for the idea of trajectory, Charles Tilly has showed in an ingenious essay the extent to which the historical (and, by extension, potential) trajectories leading to the different varieties of democracy in existence today (or likely to exist in the future) are contrasted with one another, as are their end results. Importantly, Tilly underscores the differential impact of the historical trajectories followed by state forms and citizenship. The weight of state forms in China is sufficiently well known not to need elaboration; but citizenship—defined by Tilly as the way in which citizens are linked to the state by a set of mutual rights and obligations—raises more questions. Indeed, much research remains to be done to gain a finer understanding of the citizen-state relationship in China: in its representations, in legal and constitutional theory, and in practice, all the way from the founding texts of Antiquity to the “intercontextualized” approaches of modern times (see Chevrier’s chapters below), and taking into account all the mutations that occurred in imperial society in between. Pending this, the experience of the first parliamentary republic, discussed here, is assuredly an important milestone on the “trajectory of citizenship,” as is the Taiwanese democratic experiment which is the subject of the final chapter in this volume.

Is the “socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics” celebrated in the 2005 White Paper the end point of China’s trajectory? The sponsors of

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that document clearly want to believe they have reached the end of history, or at least that they know what it will be. But nothing is less certain: apart from the fact that for the historian there is no such thing as the end of history, it has yet to be established that China’s present combination of authoritarianism, strong economic growth, and centralized democracy under the aegis of a single party can be maintained forever, or even for very long.