Outline for Comprehensive Area
"Democracy in China"

Question: Can China achieve the greater democracy which its people appear to want, a valid, indigenous variety which the Chinese themselves will define? What might it look like? How might it be brought into being? What factors visible in contemporary Chinese society might be leading in this direction?

In this comprehensive area, I will deal with the issue of democracy in China from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. In the first section, I will examine the frameworks within which contemporary scholars, both western and Chinese, have attempted to place the question of whether democratic structures and processes are emerging or may in future emerge in China. In the second section, I will consider concrete areas of society in which scholars see (or fail to see) "democratic shoots" beginning to flourish.

Because this comprehensive area is very broad, there are certain arguments in which I have chosen not to engage: I will not, for example, spend much time with the question of how to define democracy. Also, in considering public sphere - civil society arguments as they relate to democracy in China, I will not deal with the Western European origins of the concepts. Instead, I will ally myself with those scholars who hold that these constructs have a significant contribution to make to our understanding of democracy in China, regardless of the fact that they are tied to a specific period and developments in European history. I have also chosen to view questions of dissidents and human rights in China as lying outside the scope of this discussion, and to deal only peripherally with the 1989 democracy movement, the literature on that topic alone being considerable.

In the balance between theoretical and practical perspectives, my interest in this comprehensive area lies heavily on the side of the practical. Hence, I have been ruthless in selecting theoretical frameworks that, in my view, have real application to the question of how democratic development might occur in China. In addition, I have accorded especial importance to the works of Chinese scholars, in view of their intimate knowledge of Chinese institutions and aspirations.

Theoretical Frameworks

The 'Mass Line'

Mao Zedong's concept of the "mass line" has had so much influence on my thinking about democracy in China over the years that it seemed appropriate as a starting point for this exploration. However, in considering recent work by authors such as Mark Selden and Pauline Keating as well as my own reflections, I am forced to conclude that, while theoretically sound, in application the "mass line" was probably less democratic and participatory than I had previously thought. Keating contrasts two counties within one revolutionary base area and shows what differing local conditions made possible in each place, arguing very convincing for the necessity of 'state-building', and the extent to which the Party was operating under strong pressures of various kinds. Selden contends that solving people's economic problems was the basis of the CCP's success in appealing to the people - land re-division, or when that seemed too radical, other more moderate measures (tax reform, rent and interest reduction, mutual aid). Both authors feel that, given the wartime conditions, it would hardly be reasonable to expect too much in terms of democracy during the revolutionary base period, while continuing to support the democratic potential of the theory.

Chinese Exceptionalism

There is a pervasive argument within the field for and against taking China as a special case. Lei Guang, for example, emphasizes the "culturally embedded" characteristics of Chinese democracy (Lei Guang, 1996: 441) and Elizabeth Perry holds that there should be theories about China that are not borrowed or imported, while Li and O'Brian urge the merits of detailed, local analyis. It is obviously possible to go too far along this road, but it is a view with which I have sympathy.

State Versus Society

Some authors argue that the clear distinction between state and society that characterizes western political theory does not apply appropriately to the Chinese reality. (This issue usually, though not always, arises in the context of civil society discussions.) Elizabeth Perry, for example, in an excellent review of recent literature, suggests that terms such as "state" and "society" are too gross to capture the enormous differences between regions or levels of government in China. Political scientists should look instead, she suggests, for "intra-state" and "intra-societal" variation using newly available local materials (Perry, 1994: 709).

Public Sphere - Civil Society

The public sphere/civil society debate among sinologists was pursued with great vigour between 1991 and 1994, prompted by *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and by 'Beijing Spring' and the 'Beijing Massacre' of 1989. A further reason for

the debate occurring at this particular time is thought to have be the 1989 translation into English of Jurgen Habermas' *The Structural Transformation ofen the Public Sphere.* At the time, historians were prompted to re-examine Ming-Qing and Republican history, some (Huang, 1991: 303) wondering whether in view of dynamic change and substantial commercialization in the late Ming and Qing dynasties, the period might not be designated 'early modern', with all that implied in terms of parallels with Western European development. Others (Wakeman, 1993: 131) argued that a case could not be made for the autonomous local management of public sphere activities characterizing Western development since, in every instance, there is "...evidence of top-down, official sponsorship..." The same issues were discussed for the contemporary period: was it or was it not appropriate to consider the 1989 democracy movement and developments before and after as indications of a burgeoning civil society in China? Interest in the questions raised was widespread, and resulted in various excellent articles and books. Eventually, the weight of opinion came down on the side of viewing the exercise as illegitimate - on the grounds that these were fundamentally western concepts and should not be applied to China - and the debate ended.

In the meantime, however, word of the controversy had belatedly reached China, and Chinese historians had become intrigued. More recently, western sinologists have also taken up the issue once again. As two of them remarked, they were not attempting to define a unified model of civil society, but rather "to think about China." That being the case, it seemed perfectly acceptable to identify useful strands of the concept in lieu of the whole thing (Brook and Frolic, 1997: 6 - 7).

Rudolf Wagner's very interesting article describes the international community in Shanghai as having been an important element in forming a Chinese public sphere. Wagner, however sees public sphere analyses as being necessarily based on an absolute separation between state and society. Richard Madsen, on the other hand, argues for "a public sphere with a distinctly Asian cultural style" not requiring the abolition of state authority to achieve civil society and democracy (Madsen, 1993: 187). Heath Chamberlain also holds that it is mistaken to define civil society in terms that place it in opposition to the state. In his view, civil society is "as much a creature of the *state* as it is of society (Chamberlain, 1993: 204)." More recently, Brook and Frolic's volume on civil society in China attempts to work towards "new paradigms of state-society interaction that better accommodate the circumstances of Chinese life" (Brook and Frolic, 1997: 6). The authors also conclude that greater attention must be paid to the state and accommodations with the state rather than resistance to it.

Among Chinese writers, Shu-yun Ma has written an interesting survey article outlining the positions of the Chinese contributors - intellectuals in China and "intellectuals in exile" - to the domestic civil society discussion. X.L. Ding's book is a fascinating study of elites in China, in which he refutes the possibility of a Chinese civil society and offers instead an alternative route to institutional change that he calls "institutional parasitism".

Chinese Views of Democracy in China

Lei Guang's article places the concept of democracy in a thoroughly Chinese context. Using the Chinese term 'minzhu' rather than 'democracy', the author follows the "historical trajectory" through which that term has acquired its distinctive meaning. According to Lei, the Chinese term is derived from a traditional view that connected the welfare of the common people to the wealth and power of the polity, as well as embodying centrally important and uniquely Chinese notions of nationalism and morality (Lei Guang, 1996: 419 - 421). He Baogang's work is invaluable for its detailed analysis of the ideas and people making up the democracy movement in China since the late 1960s. Its perspective, however, is too heavily influenced by western political science for my liking.

Nathan's book 'China's Transition' I place here only for its seventh chapter, a description of Taiwan's gradual evolution toward democracy. It seems fitting to do so, as Taiwan is a Chinese model demonstrating the possibility of democratic change within a Chinese tradition and involving Chinese institutions.

Practical Perspectives

Several works deal with **the role of intellectuals.** These are relevant due to the crucial leadership role traditionally and currently held by Chinese intellectuals. Merle Goldman's article suggests that the Deng - Jiang era marked a new relaxation of Party control over intellectuals and "opened up public spaces into which spilled informal intellectual networks, salons, study groups and non-official journals and think-tanks" (Goldman, 1994: 36 - 37). In her book, which covers the period 1978 to 1989, she argues that a group of intellectuals forming a network around Hu Yaobang shared the conviction that the power of the Party should be limited and elements of democracy should be introduced into Marxism-Leninism. Shiping Hua's article differentiates the roles of "establishment" and "nonestablishment" intellectuals in the post-Mao era and describes the tensions involved for the former in trying to serve both the state and society. Bonnin and Chevrier describe Deng's reforms as permitting intellectuals to enjoy more autonomy in organizing associations and articulating new ideas. Though this new autonomy was conditional on its not being mixed with politics, it would, in their view, inevitably have

political implications. X. L. Ding's book is the most detailed study I have found on the intricate web of unofficial relationships between intellectuals and government cadres and the power this gives to intellectuals to effect change.

O'Brian and Li's article suggests that there are the beginnings of democracy in the **countryside**, even if that democracy lies only in making leadership more accountable. A second O'Brian article describes the work of delegates to local levels of **the NPC**. Unger's article on **associations** argues that there may be less democracy and more top-down control in these groupings than sometimes thought, but also that the degree of control varies greatly among organizations. Solinger's article on **transients** views them as being a debilitating and undermining force vis a vis the state on the one hand but on the other, according to the perspective she favours, fulfilling vital functions without which the state could not survive. Yang describes the changing world of **factory workers**, for whom life in the reform period offers more complexity and concurrently a greater range of opportunities. Shi Tianjin's work on **political participation** in Beijing is richly informative as regards the varied channels used by ordinary citizens to communicate with, seek help from, and influence the actions of government officials.

Conclusion

What I seek to explore within this topic is evidently complex and scattered. It is my contention that the cause of democracy is being advanced on two fronts in China: first, by the Chinese government itself, however slowly, and second, in a myriad of areas lying outside the purview of government. However, the greatest activity, and that most likely to result in profound social and political change tending towards democratization is, in my view, taking place as a result of the increasing social diversity created by a market economy.

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