

DEMOCRACY AND CHINA

Liu Jianfei



**Removing the “undemocratic” label attached to China
Presenting the achievements in construction of democratic
politics of socialism with Chinese characteristics**



NEW WORLD PRESS

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First Edition 2011

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Cover Designed by Zhaoyuan Book Design Studio

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ISBN 978-7-5104-1224-0

Published by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Tel: 86-10-68995968

Fax: 86-10-68998705

Website: www.newworld-press.com

E-mail: frank@nwp.com.cn

Printed in the People's Republic of China

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Democratic China and the World: China's Construction of Democratic Politics and Its International Strategic Significance

1.1 Globalization and the Third Wave of Democratization

Since the beginning of the 20th century, “democratization” has been one of the major trends in the world. So far, democracy in most countries has been of the Western model, and this is what Western scholars mean by “democracy.” However, the evolution from a feudal autocracy into a democracy is historical progress after all.

Samuel P. Huntington, late professor of government at Harvard University, named the worldwide democratic movement since 1974—when the dictatorship was overthrown in Portugal—the “Third Wave of Democratization.” According to Huntington, the rise of the “Third Wave” was caused by five main factors: the universal acceptance of democratic values; global economic growth; support of democracy by the Catholic Church; efforts to promote democracy by the European Community, the United States and the Gorbachov regime of the former Soviet Union; and the exemplary effect of democracies.

I think these are the immediate causes of the formation and development of the “Third Wave,” while the root is globalization.

The above conclusion is based on the judgment that the ideological foundation of democratic politics is liberalism, and the evolution of liberalism chronically keeps pace with globalization.

Globalization is primarily globalization of the economy. Economic globalization has been accompanied by the advancement of science and technology as well as the emergence of a global marketplace, which has laid substantial groundwork for disseminating democratic values throughout the world. Globalization has prompted transportation and communication tools to be upgraded faster and contact among countries to be more frequent. International travelers, as well as mass media like television, radio, the Internet, newspapers and books, have all become vehicles for disseminating democratic values. Meanwhile,

the integration of the advanced communication technology with the prominent Western languages has put the Western developed countries in a pole position in information dissemination.

Globalization has promoted global economic development, which in turn has accelerated the transformation of the social structure, expanded and strengthened the middle class, and improved education, thus preparing the social basis for the gestation of democratic ideology. From the perspective of the development of democracy, the professional characteristics of the middle class determine a higher degree of independence of its members. Meanwhile, since the middle class leads a relatively well-off life without being weighed down with work for survival, more often than not, its members tend to exercise their democratic rights seriously and responsibly. In addition, intellectuals as a significant component of the middle class usually have a strong sense of mission and responsibility, as they are more concerned about the future of their nation and people.

The other three causes of the “Third Wave” presented by Huntington are also related to globalization, and dissemination of democratic values and global economic development under the influence of globalization. With the spread of democratic values, the Catholic Church may lose its position in the world, and its influence may drop if it insists on an anti-democratic stand. Success in social and economic development in developed Western democratic countries has influenced other countries, helping them to learn from the West, including its democratic system in order to achieve their own prosperity. That the European countries and the United States could carry out their policy of advancing democracy worldwide is mainly attributed to their power because the rules, systems and values of the world powers tend to be more easily embraced by other countries. The reason the Gorbachov reform of the former Soviet Union had a great impact upon Eastern Europe, to a large extent, was that the Soviet Union was a superpower, and the direction of its reform was democratization.

1.2 Influence of Democracy on International Relations

In terms of world development, democratic politics impact relations among traditional countries and have profound and complicated influences on international relations.

After the Cold War, more and more countries established constitutional democratic regimes, and democratic countries tended to ally with each other in the “Third Wave of Democratization.” The Warsaw Declaration and the Inter-

American Democratic Charter show that democracy has been the system and values held by most countries, and international organizations safeguarding and promoting democracy regionally and globally have emerged and played their roles. It is noteworthy that a cosmopolitan “Community of Democracies” has survived and continued developing as well. Democracy influences not only the relations of member states in the “Community,” but also the operation and development of some organizations of the United Nations.

Correspondingly, democracy has become an important issue affecting the foreign policies of great powers, including the United States, Japan, India and EU members. They all have adopted promoting democracy as the object of their foreign policies. Take the European Union as an example. The object of promoting democracy is shown not only in its policy documents but also in its concrete policies for specific countries.

Democracy is playing a double role as both a scale of values and a means in international relations. As a scale, democratic values strengthen the affinity among democratic countries. The existence of Euro-American and Japan-American alliances is related to such “common values” as “freedom,” “democracy,” “rule of law,” and “human rights.” In addition, using democracy as a scale, international society is invisibly divided into two fronts, namely “democratic countries” and “undemocratic countries.” “Democratic countries” are extremely dominant in terms of strength and morality, and “undemocratic countries” are relatively passive.

After the Cold War, the democratic peace theory became important in the foreign policies of Western countries because it catered to an international society concerned about democracy and the potential value judgments behind democratic peace theory. According to the logic of the democratic peace theory, the world can be divided into democratic and undemocratic parts, and only the democratic countries may not fight one another. Within this semantic context, democracy’s expansion in the world means expansion of zones of peace. The democratic peace theory has become the important theoretical basis for countries and state blocs such as the United States and the European Union to formulate their foreign policies.

Besides as a value scale, democracy has often been used as a means to materialize a country’s foreign policy. It has multiple functions as a means. It is a link to maintain alliances, a weapon to suppress competitors and a tool to affect Western public opinion. During the Cold War, the alliance of Western European countries and the United States was no doubt under the consideration for resisting the threat of the Soviet Union and defending Western Europe;

however, the common values were also the important link to maintain their alliance. After the Cold War, the disappearance of the Soviet threat made the Western countries lose their most important alliance-driven force, and the relations among developed countries in the West were not so close as before, because economic competition between the United States and Europe increased. However, common values provide a new link in the Euro-American alliance. Even though the 2003 Iraq War created a gap between Europe and the United States, the divergence between France and Germany and the United States lay in the specific methods employed instead of promoting democracy, which was the prime objective. France and Germany did not oppose overthrowing Saddam's regime but the unilateral role of the United States without regard to Europe.

1.3 China as an Advocate and Builder of Democracy

Since the May 4th Movement, China has followed the world trend of democracy. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese people have been active in promoting the construction of a socialist political democracy with Chinese characteristics and exploring the road to democratic development and the model of democratic politics suitable for China's actual conditions. Both in theory and in practice, China is not the enemy of democracy but is the advocate and builder of democracy.

Theoretically, the Communist Party of China adopted Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics as its guiding ideology, and its theory of democratic politics falls into a Marxist theoretical system. Marxism in essence advocates democratic theory and opposes feudalism. Due to the many problems arising in such countries as the former Soviet Union in democratic practice for a long time, Marxism and the political system exemplified by the "Soviet Model" are often regarded by the West as against democracy, which reflects the prejudice of the West on the issue of democracy.

The Communist Party of China has upheld the banner of democracy since its founding. Its Second Congress in 1922 established the objective of China's revolution: "unifying China Proper (including Manchuria) into a real democratic republic" and "Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang can exercise the power of ethnic autonomy and become democratic autonomous regions." During the period in Yan'an, the government of the border area under the leadership of the Communist Party of China was called the democratic government, and the democracy of the border area was recognized by people of insight at home and

abroad. On the eve of victory in the Anti-Japanese War, Mao Zedong pointed out at the historically significant Seventh National Congress of the Communist Party of China that “Democracy is the mainstream of the present world trend, and a reaction against democracy is a reverse flow.” During the period of the democratic revolution, the Communist Party of China carried out democracy in social management as well as in party activities. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Communist Party of China defined the country as a “people’s democratic dictatorship.” It inherited the thoughts of Marx and Lenin completely on the issue of democracy.

In terms of specific practice, after its founding, new China held the first general election on an unprecedented scale in 1953. People elected their deputies and exercised their rights to be masters of their country, and they held bottom-up people’s congresses at different levels. After the reform and opening up, the Communist Party of China wrote the goal of “struggling for establishing China into a rich, democratic and civilized modern socialist country” into the Party Constitution. Of course, it cannot be negated that the Party took a round-about course in its construction of democratic politics, particularly in its practice of “extensive democracy” during the period of the Cultural Revolution, which not only damaged the stability of social politics and affected economic and social development, but also failed to promote democracy. There even occurred the phenomenon of the personal cult.

1.4 Three Types of Political Democracy in China

The reform and opening up provided a good chance for China to construct democratic politics, which has developed by leaps and bounds. China has made great progress not only in economic democracy and social democracy, which are the foundations of political democracy, but also in political democracy itself.

A market economy is the most important mark of economic democracy and the most important basis of political democracy. China has established a socialist market economy in the nearly 30 years following the reform and opening up. With the establishment of the market economy, social democracy has developed to a large degree. The existence of non-governmental organizations (voluntary organizations) is one of the important manifestations of social democracy. China has had many non-governmental and non-enterprise research institutions, media and associations since the reform and opening up.

In terms of political democracy, China has explored actively and made great achievements for decades. China’s political democracy can be divided

into three parts: constitutional democracy, grassroots democracy and inner-party democracy.

So-called constitutional democracy means democratic systems related to state power as stipulated in the constitutional framework. It is embodied in the system of the people's congress in China, which can be divided into five levels: national, provincial (of the municipality directly under the central government or the autonomous region), municipal, county (of the county-level city or the district directly under the municipality), and township (town and neighborhood offices). Deputies to the people's congresses at the county and township levels are elected directly. People who have the right to vote and to be elected at these two levels consist of over 99% of citizens over 18 years old, and voting participation has been around 90% for many years. The people's congress has four main functions: legislation, supervision, appointment and dismissal, and decision-making on important events. In the process of legislation, China attaches great importance to democracy. In recent years, the drafting of nearly every bill has followed the advice of experts through forums and meetings to assess its feasibility.

Certainly, some problems exist in the development of the system of the people's congress. The most prominent issue is that it is difficult for members to fulfill their functions fully when the people's congress is in recess. They cannot carry out their duties through more effective channels than the annual people's congress. Some regions have tried reform in recent years. The typical reform is the system of the home of deputies to the people's congress tried by Hangzhou Municipality in Zhejiang Province. In this system deputies periodically meet with voters when the people's congress is in recess and listen to their opinions and suggestions periodically at fixed activity sites. Hangzhou Municipality has actively explored this practice and made obvious achievements.

Grassroots democracy means that rural and urban residential areas and enterprises can set up democratic self-governing organizations, including rural villagers' committees, urban neighborhood committees and employees' conferences. According to the Constitution, these are grassroots mass autonomous organizations rather than one-level power organs. Grassroots democracy has four aspects: democratic elections, decision making, management, and supervision, in which elections are the most fundamental. In terms of actual conditions, villagers participate in elections enthusiastically. In Xingyi Municipality of Buyi and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in the southwest of Guizhou Province in 2005 the voter participation reached 89%, and the success of the elections reached 99%. Meanwhile, the elected members of villagers' committees were generally

of comparatively high quality. In developed coastal areas, some villagers trading and working in other places will put off work and hurry back to participate in the general election. Moreover, some villages adopt innovative methods in democratic management and supervision, such as the “Democratic Supervision Committee” of Dazai Village of Xiyang County in Shanxi Province.

China’s party system and the governance of the Communist Party of China provide special significance for inner-party democracy in the construction of democratic politics in China. Multiparty cooperation and political consultation led by the Communist Party are part of the basic political system of modern China. In the practice of governance for more than 60 years, the party has formed a series of ideas of its own for democratic governance and established systems and institutions for it. The party is actively exploring new approaches and methods for democratic governance. Besides reforming leadership and work systems, the most important way for the party to carry out the concept of democratic governance is to develop inner-party democracy, which means establishing a system to guarantee the democratic rights of party members, improving the party’s congress system, giving full play to the function of plenary party committee sessions, reforming the inner-party election system, and improving the inner-party supervision system. Of them, perfecting the congress system receives the most attention. The Communist Party of China establishes congress systems in organizations at levels of county or above, and a party congress is held once every five years. The Party Constitution stipulates that congresses at all levels and the corresponding committees elected by them are the leading bodies of the party. When a congress is in session, it usually serves as a leading body; when it is in recess, committees at all levels exercise leadership functions. Deputies to a party congress at all levels can play their roles when the congress is in session but not during recess. To deal with this, the party has experimented with a permanent system of party congresses and made significant achievements in 12 municipalities, counties and districts of five provinces since the late 1980s. Jiaojiang District of Taizhou Municipality in Zhejiang Province shows typical significance in carrying out the permanent system of its party congress. The expression of “expanding experimental units of the permanent system of the party congress in municipalities and counties and exploring ways to maintain the function of deputies when the party congress is in recess” was written into the political report at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2002. After the 16th National Congress, all parts of the country initiated this reform.

Besides the reform practice in constitutional democracy, grassroots

democracy and inner-party democracy, which are more institutionalized, some regions have established new democratic forms including the influential “democratic consultation” of Wenling Municipality of Zhejiang Province. All towns hold conferences of “democratic consultation” periodically, and participants are representatives of the people’s congress, the Chinese people’s political consultative conference, party affairs, administration and village committee, and so on, and they communicate and negotiate about relevant questions. Democratic consultation has become the comprehensive method to express popular will as well as a necessary procedure of decision making.

1.5 Challenges to Democracy in China

Although China’s construction of democratic politics has made certain achievements, it has many problems. It faces arduous tasks because it is a completely new model and has no recorded experience to learn from. Moreover, China must maintain social and political stability in the process of promoting the construction of democratic politics.

Historical experiences and lessons show that China’s construction of democratic politics shall be promoted step by step in an evolutionary way through top-down reform. On the issue of the construction of democratic politics, internal society has two opinions: One is realizing constitutional democracy before advancing social and economic development; the other is giving priority to advancing social and economic development and creating conditions for constitutional democracy, and realizing it after conditions permit. I think that China is on a third road: On the one hand, it gives priority to economic and social development and lays the foundation for political democracy; on the other hand, it explores various forms of political democracy and promotes it steadily.

Conditions for realizing constitutional democracy include economy, culture and society. Although China possesses some basic conditions, it is still weak in some aspects of these conditions. The first is the economic condition. On the one hand, the level of economic development has obviously elevated, and the system of market economy has been established in the initial stage in China, which creates a favorable environment for the construction of democratic politics and puts higher requirements on it. On the other hand, China’s economic development is not balanced, and sustainable development faces many challenges. The second is the cultural condition, mainly political culture. On the issue of democratic politics, political culture mainly involves the extent of acceptance and belief in democratic values in a country, nation and society.

China has made great progress in this aspect but still is confronted with serious problems. China's traditional political culture forms an important component of its current political culture. Confucianism, which is the core content of traditional culture, certainly has factors detrimental to democracy. For some Chinese people, Confucian political culture still influences their ideology directly and imperceptibly. The last is the social condition, including social structure and environment. In terms of social structure, China's civil society is comparatively weak due to various reasons. Because a powerful civil society may limit national power, it will be resisted by state power, which increases difficulties in constructing civil society.

The prospects for China's construction of democratic politics mainly depend on the cultivation of economic, cultural and social conditions. At present, economic conditions are very mature, but still need to be consolidated and strengthened. Cultural and social conditions are comparatively weak, and cultivating them will be a long process.

1.6 Democracy and Sino-American Relations

Construction of democratic politics is a requirement of China's self-development and also has important international strategic significance. China's promotion of the construction of democratic politics is beneficial to its relations with great powers in the West, especially the United States. However, the gap between the development of democratic politics in China and its understanding by the United States is still a big obstruction to the development of Sino-American relations.

It has always been an important objective of the American foreign policy to promote the Western model of democracy worldwide. After the Cold War, both the Republican and Democratic administrations attached great importance to democratic factors in foreign policy and promoted democracy as a strategic target. The George H.W. Bush administration linked the "promotion of democracy" with "the United States leading the world" and required that governments of all the countries carry out policies of democracy, tolerance and economic freedom internally, and promise to solve inevitable disputes by peaceful methods externally. The Clinton administration clarified that promoting democracy is one of the three goals for American national security strategies in parallel with maintaining security and expanding the economy. Practically, the Clinton administration carried out the strategic concept of promoting democracy in deed. On the one hand, it attacked "undemocratic" countries. For example,

it applied sanctions against Cuba, fought with Iraq, scolded Burma's military regime and criticized China on the issue of human rights. On the other hand, it supported the internal democratic forces of those countries on the way to democracy, such as Russia and Yugoslavia. After the George W. Bush administration came into power, it did not give up the target of "promoting democracy," although the foreign policies of the Republicans attached more importance to actual interests such as security and economy. Particularly, the second term of the Bush administration put promoting democracy in a very prominent position in its foreign policies. This was embodied in supporting the "color revolution," in its relations with Russia and India, and in NATO's eastward expansion. Even though the Obama administration has not stressed democracy as much as the Bush administration, it still gives a top priority to American relations with Western democratic countries, and promoting democracy still exists in its foreign policy.

"Promoting democracy" will be the cornerstone of the American global strategy in the 21st century. The research report on the *Princeton Project*, aiming to guide the American global strategy in the 21st century, suggested promoting democracy in three respects. The first is to encourage popular, accountable, and rights-regarding government worldwide; the second is to build a liberal order; and the third is to appropriately apply force in international affairs. As for how to establish a free international order, the report presented five measures: reforming the United Nations, establishing the "Concert of Democracies," promoting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, governing globalization, and establishing a network order. As compared with the previous American national security strategy reports, the innovation of the *Princeton Project* is to establish the "Concert of Democracies."

"Promoting democracy" is one of the important objectives of the American global strategy, and the issue of democracy becomes one of the key factors affecting the American foreign policy toward China.

In the period of the Cold War the United States regarded the Soviet Union as the main enemy of democracy, and the policy toward China was subject to the policy toward the Soviets. When China allied with the Soviet Union, the United States regarded China as its enemy; after the Sino-Soviet split and confrontation, the United States allied with China to contain the Soviet Union. Although the United States thought that China was undemocratic, it adopted the strategy of allying with "undemocratic" China temporarily in order to oppose the Soviet Union, which was the chief "enemy of democracy."

With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the arch "enemy of

democracy” and “strategic competitor” after the Cold War, the United States began to seek new competitors. Japan, Russia and the Islamic states have all been considered as objects. However, China, as the largest socialist country under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, has naturally become the reasonable target of the United States. Correspondingly, issues of democracy in China have also naturally become an important concern of the United States.

After China carried out the policy of reform and opening up, the United States once hoped to support it and accelerate China’s realization of Western democracy. However, the political disturbance in 1989 destroyed this illusion. After 1992 China witnessed another substantial increase in its economy, and the United States saw that China was not only uninvolved in the democratic wave caused by the radical change of the Soviet Union and East Europe, but also stood out against joint sanctions of the West. China’s economy developed further and politics became more stable. Therefore, the “China threat theory” came out in the United States and caused a great clamor.

The American reaction to the fast development of China’s economy was rather complex. On the one hand, the United States was somewhat disappointed and felt that the scheme of “using pressure to accelerate transformation” failed; on the other hand, it raised its hopes for the “peaceful evolution” of China. Moreover, as far as the United States is concerned, the rapid development of China’s economy created another effect, that is, some American strategists began to have doubts and uncertainty about China’s future orientation. From their point of view, the reason that China’s developmental orientation was uncertain lay in China’s social system and ideology. If a more powerful China gives up its communist ideology, it will not cause a global disorder; if China insists on its communist ideology after it becomes powerful—even “commercial communism”—it will cause a “global disorder” and threaten American interests.

As a value consensus, promoting democracy becomes the common position of both engagement and containment advocates of American policy toward China. Containment advocates think that China will become a threat to the “democratic world,” so the United States will carry out a “containment policy” toward China as it did against the Soviet Union earlier. Engagement supporters think that only engagement can promote democracy in China and make it assimilate into the “democratic world.” Both sides will maintain and promote democracy, but with different policies toward China.

As far as the American government is concerned, promoting the democratization of China through engagement is the same policy of the White House, the Capitol, and the two political parties. Although the two parties have many