What part does democracy play in the future of China?
Matthew Hall

Abstract

This paper is concerned with the progression of democratic values in China. It will be argued that despite much publication of elite government suppression of social movement and political despotism, liberalisation of authority through greater rule of law, dispersion of power and human rights are developing. In 1980 China saw major reform, opening up the state from a planned to a socialist-market economy, allowing liberalism in consumer behaviour. In 1989 China saw the social uprising of its young and affluent populations in Tiananmen Square, demanding political change. After the authoritarian response to that demonstration and the repression of movements that have followed, politically unreformed China has been a pressure cooker for intensifying tensions in all levels of society, a pressure that is being felt politically with growing demands for a loosening of the strangle-hold of authority. With the upcoming decennial transfer of political leadership to a new administration, prominent questions are being asked about its direction for the country. As party elders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) wane with age, along with their control, the new generation of the party are the catalyst for the first serious debate in 20 years over what is required of the political system to govern modern China (Anderlini 2011a: 1). Through the exploration of events leading to this transition; this paper starts by deciphering the various demands of the general population, using the examples in public activity to make sense of what is necessary for accord and relating that to democratic values which they encompass. After which, I will investigate the posture of the government, discerning its receptivity to democratic values through its bureaucratic activity. This culminates in an understanding of what is to be expected for democracy in the up-coming administration handover of the People’s Republic of China.

Keywords: China, Democracy, Chinese Communist Party, Political Transition, Liberalisation
1. Introduction: What Makes China, and its Association with Democracy?

China is the oldest continuous civilisation in the world today. All others worthy of comparison; such as Ancient Egypt, the Mayan Empire, Byzantium and Ancient Greece all died out hundreds or thousands of years ago. The only existing civilian structures which rival China in longevity are the Catholic Church and England, both of which are about one fourth of the age of China. Such a feat resonates in Chinese society, recognising a strong sense of continuity of the state and its system (Hays 2009a). With this in mind I see it as vital to first introduce the key aspects of Chinese history that influence the current state; starting with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), before moving on to the vitally important reforms of Deng Xiaoping, changes which resonate in contemporary issues which will be discussed. This leads finally to the vital understanding of what democratic values I wish to address in this paper, discussing their various confluences with Chinese cultural norms and their differences.

The introduction of these aspects will be vital for later understanding the predicament in China over what direction the nation is heading in, and why I believe and will be arguing that this will be a direction of further accountability of government and more respect for the individual and his or her rights. It is also important to address China’s history in order to understand why the democratic milestones that I perceive China to be achieving are different from Western understandings of democratic norms, as they must be “Sino-ised” and adapted to cooperate with the widely accepted norms that characterise this ancient state. With this in mind I will begin with the most defining dimension of the modern Chinese state – the Chinese Communist Party and its role since taking power in 1949.

To understand the importance of the CCP one has to understand the importance bestowed in authority, as envisioned for the Chinese people by Confucius. He claimed that one had the right of rule on the basis of superior wisdom; this was indoctrinated with civil servants, who would claim the right to rule on the basis of superior technical knowledge. This invokes a widely accepted ‘Paternalistic’ nature of government, a format of elitism that has lasted from the sage-rule of the Warring States period to Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and the leaders today. Accrediting rulers with an uncanny ability to fathom what is in the best interests of society (Peerenboom 2006: 61). But, just as there is a right to encapsulate the best interests of the people, it carries a curse that can be seen in the turmoil of state deficiency. Thus, one can illustrate China as a state with a ‘history that has been characterized by the rise and fall of dynasties...following a fairly consistent pattern: the creation of a dynasty, unification and the
restoration of order under the dynasty, a period of prosperity followed by the decay and collapse of the dynasty, and the eventual re-creation of the kingdom under a new dynasty’ (Hays 2009a). This cyclical nature of autocratic rule in China, as well as the belief in a strong leadership defining the way of life of the people as a form of rite of passage, best encompasses the reality of the Chinese Communist Party – ‘Power remains in the hands of hardliners who want to maintain the status quo...to secure the party’s grip on power’ (Anderlini 2011a: 2). Such an ethos resulted in the government making many of life’s decisions for you; when and how many children to have, what jobs to take, what food you eat, and ultimately how you think as a person (Hays 2008a). This is the legacy of the immortalised hero of the Communist Party, Mao Zedong.

Mao Zedong is infamous for his central role in undertaking two horrific incidents in China’s history – “the Great Leap Forward” and “the Cultural Revolution”, the results of which are attributed with the massacre of tens of millions of his own people. One would think this would have a negative effect on the interpretation of his leadership, however, with these struggles his popularity grew, and in blood his legacy was immortalised (Ferguson 2012). The epic mantra for the founding father of the People’s Republic of China resonates to this day amongst the people, despite these epic disasters. One would logically ask why, and the most profound conclusion in answering this is grounded in the nature of rule in China’s history previously referred to; an overriding belief in the higher powers and what they envision for the country and what is best for the people, as guided by Confucian thought. Not to mention Mao’s introduction of an unwavering ethos of conformity, that going against the popular norm is a crushing insult. One of the worst fears of many Chinese is to be excluded from the group. “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down” is a famous and widely popularised expression in China (Hays 2008a).

However, as previously mentioned, there is a cyclical nature to this power and the CCP are aware of it and fear losing its grip on it above all else. This is why social stability and unanimity is vital, and a guiding ideological component of the success of communism, as well as a defining factor to the triumphant legacy of Mao Zedong (Peerenboom 2006). This creation of a hybrid between communist communitarianism and Confucian obedience to authority wasn’t modified for over 30 years. It wasn’t until the arrival of the next iconic leader that China truly “woke up” and “shook the world” as Napoleon had prophesised centuries before (Hays 2008f). It was the arrival and subtle economic revolution of Deng
Xiaoping. ‘If Chairman Mao was the architect of an assertive, socialist China, Deng pulled off the even tougher feat of reversing most of what Mao had done and calling it “socialism” (The Economist 2011a: 100). Deng Xiaoping introduced capitalist principles through economic reform in the late 1970s. These principles changed the status quo from state planning to state direction. For example, the “within and without” production plan allowed businesses to pursue their own aims after they met their state-set quotas. It encouraged enterprise and factories to keep profits, use merit pay and offer bonuses and other incentives (Hays 2008b). Such economic liberalisations resulted in Deng’s era being labelled the “Period of Opening Up”, a time where the people were invited to a world of opportunity and diversity never before seen (He 2010). How Deng managed to apply these reforms is not clear, but what is obvious is why he applied them; there was growing civil unrest in China with a stagnant economy and after the passing of Mao’s rule, people were beginning to be disillusioned with the CCP. This brings forward a defining pillar of modern state China; that these reforms were made to liberalise consumer behaviour in exchange for leaving politics to the Communist party (Anderlini 2011a). It was the only way Deng could have put through such anti-communist, anti-Maoist policies successfully past the hard-liners of the party. He himself even remarks that without such reforms, the CCP would have been toppled (Hays 2008b). Thus, a new social contract was drawn where the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party was based less upon ideological “correctness”, and more upon economic performance (Weiss 2003: 39).

With a combination of mixed ownership, basic property rights, and heavy government intervention, the new contract has brought China to the world economically, with great domestic benefit to the party and its people. China possesses an economy that has grown at a rate of nearly ten percent a year, and a per-capita GDP twelve times greater than it was three decades ago (Yao 2010). Such a period of great prosperity brings us to contemporary China. After 30 years of rapid growth, the export-led, investment-driven model is running out of steam; the workforce is ageing, land and labour costs are soaring which is losing global competitive advantage in manufacturing, and there is a looming recession within the trade environment - ‘Days of ever-growing exports are nearly over’ (Anderlini 2011a: 1). After such a prosperous period in Chinese history, the CCP and the general public are beginning to unearth problems; there is a rising domestic expectation for the legal system to protect individual rights, particularly property rights (Peerenboom 2006: 59), a problem which is in
direct relation to the next quandary, corruption. Not only has corruption linking senior CCP officials with businessmen running the privatised economy damaged the party’s standing, but high levels of corruption have eroded state capacity in terms of the government’s ability to provide basic services to its population (Pei 2008). For example, inadequate compensation following land confiscation often occurs because reparations are swallowed by corrupt village, township or county government officials (Government Office for Science 2011), reflecting the ‘local governments that increasingly ignore central policies and laws in their hell-bent pursuit of economic growth’ (Peerenboom 2006: 59). In the past, a response to such a situation would be one of submission to the higher authority, following the Confucian-Maoist tradition. However, the economic growth from Deng Xiaoping’s reforms has given rise to a class of citizen that is less likely to tolerate corruption and inefficiency and more likely to voice grievances. This newly emerging area of society has also highlighted another problem in that of equality, which inevitably antagonises social relations especially in a socialist state. The income disparity between urban-rural dwellers is as high as 350 per cent, and China has one of the highest Gini coefficients in Asia (Lum 2006: 10), making it a burdening issue for the CCP and the public.

These contemporary issues have inspired my interest in the subject and my personal belief in the importance for the discussion of a renewed social contract between the CCP and the people of China, which will involve democratic values both socially and politically. This leads to the necessary illustration of exactly what sort of democratic norms I am looking to display evidence of and why they are relevant in China. Before going into that though, it must first be understood that China is no stranger to democracy and its norms; at the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912, China prescribed the power gap with their interpretation of numerous democratic systems - the presidential system, the parliamentary system, federalism, and constitutional monarchy (He & Feng 2008: 142). However, none of them worked because intentions were misguided - the interests of the state were placed above individual liberties. However, along with the economic reforms led by Deng Xiaoping since 1978, the Chinese people, especially the intellectuals, started to reconsider democracy and democratic institutions for China. With decreasing external threats in the 1980s, with the demise of the Soviet Union, the Chinese people turned their attention to state building and the relations between society and state. Although economic reforms brought rapid economic growth and improved living standards, they also produced many political and social problems, rooted
mainly in the political system (He & Feng 2008: 143). This culminated in the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, where students protested against the authoritarian rule and their lack of appreciation of individual rights. The plea was brutally quashed but its affects were symbolic. The incident highlights a theoretical relation between political development and economic development, as described by Chu Jianguo, who emphasises historical evidence showing the direct correlation between economic development and political advancement (1996), ruling that economic development invokes modernisation; which brings industrialisation, urbanisation, education, communication, migration and increased income levels (He 2010: 59-60). The combination of these factors provides the material and technological foundation for political development and transformation (Kong 1996). But a “political change” does not necessarily mean a move to liberal democracy (despite the efforts of developed Western states). So the appropriate question would be - what features within China show tendency to democratic transformation and in what form would they be expected to manifest themselves? To answer this it must first be made clear what democracy is, and what its traits are.

In a literal sense democracy means “rule by the people”. A Chinese scholarly interpretation from Gu Su sees empirical traits of democracy embedded in regular, competitive elections and a fair and equal voting system (Su 2010: 37). However, this naively only describes the principles of electoral democracy and its focus on political liberty. Often, the more important and in this case most relevant transition is to the principles of liberal democracy – focussed around rule of law, the dispersion of authority, and the protection of individual liberties (Zakaria 1997). It is in these three areas that I wish to focus the discussion of this paper. Firstly looking at the desires for individual liberties in Chinese society and discerning its legitimacy as a movement towards democratic norms. This discussion is well summarised by a graduate student who was interviewed by The Guardian saying, “Chinese people don't hope to go the western way but hope for a powerful government to restore social justice.” (Branigan 2009). Embodying a necessary discussion about what the Chinese understanding of democracy is; even Chinese who advocate political reform may have a different definition of democracy than is common in the West. Many Chinese favour a freer press, a more effective legal system, and a somewhat more active legislature, but are uncertain about the desirability of truly competitive elections and independent political organization (Harding 1998). In this sense I have tried my utmost to gain sources of local perspective rather than foreign observers, giving my argument leverage due to the unique understanding of issues that only Chinese
scholars have with their upbringing and restricted environments of ethical thought. I will also be looking at how grass-root activity affects their relationship with the higher authority, leading to my next argument – the progressions of the CCP in developing democratic norms.

I will be looking deep into the intricacies of the CCP, deciphering its reciprocity to the democratic ideas of the rule of law, dispersion of authority, and its interpretation of demand for human rights, especially after the Tiananmen incident and the democratic ideas that this event embedded in the minds of Chinese people (He & Feng 2008: 143). The motion I will be proposing is Pan Wei’s rule-of-law regime theory, a concept he shares with a group of similar minded Chinese intellectuals who desire political freedom but not multi-party-based democratization (Zhao 2003), the idea that democratic values are desired and coherent with the CCP’s authority, but avoid the more sensitive area of democratic elections. The study will then culminate in an evaluation of the up-coming power transfer to the new administration of cadres known as “the Princelings”. Deciphering what policies are to be expected based on their pasts and what influence democracy may have on them in shaping China’s future.

2. Liberal Movements in Chinese Society

As identified in the introduction through Confucian values and the CCP, there is a general level of subordination and obedience to the status quo of authoritarian rule in Chinese society. This is a model I see as being challenged in modern China; with a growingly frustrated working class and a newly emerging middle class. I will be using examples of activity in both these areas of society to portray an overall representation of the state of societal affairs, observing a convergence towards desires for human rights, and the people’s recognition that installation of democratic norms is the best way to achieve that i.e. rule of law, dispersion of authority and the respect for human rights. To convey this argument I will be seeking evidence in societal activity; starting with the internet and the immeasurable effect it has had on connecting the Chinese people and their ideas. I will then move on to the impacts of a developing civil society away from the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), where people are instead looking to address issues as individuals in a community. The final area of discussion collates these two progressions of Chinese society into a single tool of opposition to the status quo and its authority - civil unrest and rioting. These three areas of the argument will not display a coincidental outcry by Chinese society for democratic norms,
but a growing understanding of such principles and how their instigation could benefit their livelihoods. This culminates in an evident emergence of the people thinking not just for the state, but themselves as well. Before exploring this initiative, however, it must first be understood where these areas of Chinese society have emerged from and why they are displeased with the direction of the CCP. To this point I begin with the working class and their societal struggles, for they represent the most economically disadvantaged social class under tight control of the CCP.

The working class were the primary victims of China’s economic reforms because of economic reconstruction; workers are the first to be laid off, the first to suffer skyrocketing prices and a collapsing social welfare system, and are sure to be first hit if the Chinese stock market falls’ (He & Feng 2008: 150). Their issues include labour grievances, taxation, land confiscation, and pollution (Keidal 2006: 1). All issues of state-led initiatives. It is important to note that this class in society represents a vital portion of the population who often define the direction of a state; as seen in Western Europe where after the industrial revolution, the working class fought for universal suffrage resulting in the inculcation of progressive liberal values (Bellin 2000). It is also relevant that the working class of Europe fought over many of the same grievances that the Chinese equivalent are feeling today. This historical correlation gives some added weight to the notion of the Chinese working class playing a pivotal role in defining the future of China.

The other important class of citizen, and also a historically relevant emergence in society correlating towards progression of democratic norms is the affluent middle class or bourgeoisie. This is a body of people that is new to Chinese society, as China has never possessed this class of people for more than 25 years and this will be the first emergence of such a body since the conception of the CCP. Yet, it is the largest growing group in Chinese society; at the moment with roughly 100 million making up the middle class (with a salary of over US $10,000), yet to increase to 600 million by 2020 (Lum 2006: 2). And with the swell of the economy as GDP increases and people are granted expendable income, expenditure will increase. As much is seen with predicted consumption figures; where the middles class’s disposable income and consumption rates are expected to grow by 18% per annum, in comparison to just 2% in the United States (Hays 2008c). It is when this euphoria of opportunity and expendable income becomes an accepted norm that this increasingly important class in Chinese society will look for new ways to expand their worth, unearthing a
desire for a China in their image (He & Feng 2008). This can already be seen with the surge of home ownership in China; having traditionally been somewhat of a novelty and rarity, urban ownership of homes by individuals in Shanghai, in 2007 was up to 80% (Hays 2008c). This will be largely made up of the money invested by the emerging middle class. Another vital aspect of this newly formed branch of society is their awareness and openness to labelling themselves as “middle class”. This is a far cry from the past when being labelled bourgeois was one of the worst things that someone could be called (Hays 2008c).

With these two defining factions of Chinese society we have slightly different areas of concern; where the working class are looking more to human rights in the work place, the affluent middle class are looking to play a more prominent part in defining policy to enhance their personal wealth. Both, however, convene in mutuality over the problem of corruption, an issue which inflames frustration to the level of anger and unrest, a concern which has been described as “social pollution” (Keidal 2006: 3). This factor unifies the people in animosity towards the CCP and its credibility, as it weakens China’s economic modernization. And Beijing’s apparent leniency toward corruption undercuts China’s own constitutional guarantees (Keidal 2006: 6). This unity can be seen in a recent study by Zhenxu Wang showing that 90% of Chinese citizens believe that having political freedom and other democratic rights is a good thing (2007: 567). These facts are coherent with modernisation theory put forward by Robert Dahl; the higher the socioeconomic level of a country, the more likely that it would be a democracy (Dahl 1971: 65). With these overviews in place, I wish to introduce a vital tool through which the middle and working class express and mobilise this liberal opposition to the CCP - the internet.

The spread of the internet has been an epidemic in China; from 2000 to 2010 internet users have gone up from 22.5m to 420m. In terms of the fraction of the population, it has increased from 1.7% in 2000 to 31.6% in 2010 (Miniwatts Marketing Group 2010). That means on average there were over 100,000 Chinese citizens joining the internet world each day, for the past ten years.

So what does this mean for the people? In the words of Guobin Yang, the internet ‘provides a new medium for citizens to speak up, link up, and act up against power, corruption, and social injustice’ (2006: 196). To be clear, this does not imply that 420m Chinese people are speaking up against the CCP. However, it does show that they are capable of doing so, and that it is a growingly popular means to do so. Mr Yang shows this when explaining that
China’s internet users rely heavily on the service for information, personal expression, and interpersonal communication as displayed by numerous China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) survey reports: July 1999, July 2000, July 2001, July 2002 and January 2003 (Yang 2006: 199). This displays a flourishing online liberal environment, with “netizens” utilising the less confrontational format it offers to express disagreements, transcending the Chinese cultural taboo of difference and personal expression on sensitive issues.

Another interesting aspect to the online environment in China is the combination of high internet control from the government and the high internet activism (Yang 2006: 200). There are numerous examples of such occurrences. For example, in May 2000 an online protest for the murder of a Beijing University student known as “Beida” was blocked in posts. To get round this people used punctuation within posts to beat it – “Bei.Da” (Yang 2006: 201). This displays the people’s willingness to do online what cannot be done on the streets i.e. repression from authorities is far less intimidating when you are simply typing words onto a screen with an alias of your choice. It allows normal citizens to be whoever they want to be, and from the evidence below, I will continue to show this online Chinese persona as one desiring rights of free speech, even when the government tries to keep control.

In July 2001, 81 miners died in a work related accident. Local government and mining authorities covered up the incident for about half a month. Amid threats, journalists from the state-run newspaper People’s Daily responded to this travesty by leaking the story to the internet, leading to a full investigation of the disaster and the conviction of local government officials and mine owners involved in the government (Zheng 2003). This shows that even within the very loyal, hard-line media world there are those that oppose the authorities and their neglect of human rights and just law being enacted against wrong doing. In a similar vein we can look to the example of Wu Ying’s death sentence just this year, for fraud and illegal fundraising. This aroused a 500m strong online partition (local and foreign) against her death sentence, such a large body of people against someone who conned so many is only tangible when considering the many State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) who enact similar protocol with no trial or death sentence. Such expression of so many suddenly emerges as not only an opposition against the death penalty and the rights of individuals in society to live, but also an opposition to corruption within the system and the belief in a valued rule of law, stopping harsh sentences being carried out against private citizens, and lax ones on errant officials (The Economist 2012a). My final example of Chinese civil union for liberal ideals
online is in the very contemporary scandal of Wang Lijun; who is Chongqing’s famous deputy mayor who worked with Bo Xilai to cull criminal gangs over recent years. Wang Lijun entered the U.S embassy in February, 2012, before many hours later being arrested upon his exit. Such a scandal, as noted by the Economist, is one which would traditionally have passed by with little disturbance. However, with the coming of the internet age and civil activism online, ‘rumours, scurrilous or not, are not so much whispered as bruited by megaphone by Chinese citizens themselves, via websites and micro blogs’. The story was known to all and therefore the government was made accountable to the slip, again portraying a government that is required to respond to its people, gradually reducing it from its imperious pedestal as all-righteous usurper - ‘the Chinese government is being dragged, click by click, out of its cone of silence’ (The Economist 2012b).

These cases give a microcosm into the macro effects of the appropriately named internet revolution on Chinese society, and the upward pressure they’re applying to the government to be more accountable and respectful of their stand-points, inclining towards more democratic and civilised norms. The utilisation of these capabilities is best put by another writer from the Economist who, when talking about blogging, identifies that ‘you only need to move your lips to start a rumour, but you need to run until your legs are broken to refute one’ (The Economist 2012c). Displaying a never before seen power by the people over the authority of the CCP.

In concordance with the “linking up” affects of the internet I will now move on to the more physical development of civil society in China, showing a further gain in social capital; a commodity which according to social capital theory is a decisive factor in making democracy work, as it represents the ability of the people to collaborate and act in unison (Putnam 1993).

Civil society is showing a gain in such capital through several contemporary developments; (1) existing forms of social organisations have undergone change, new associational forms have appeared, and social organisations in general have proliferated (Davis, Kraus, Naughton, Perry 1995). (2) Both social organisations and individual citizens enjoy more autonomy from state power than in the pre-reform decades (Wang 1995). (3) Changing functions of the media and the increase in spaces for public discussion have formed a public sphere of dialogue (Calhoun 1998).
These three factors show a move away from the traditional control of civil society by state authorities, a past where such groups would have no say if they were not directed by state organisers. The emergence of a middle class correlates with this development as they provide expendable income and direction, allowing the groups to be self-funded and therefore self-directed (He 2010: 64), showing an increased social autonomy. Proof of this can be seen in the rise of county level autonomous civic organisations, from 180,000 in 1997, to 700,000 in 1998 (Ministry of Civil Affairs 2000). Such a rise continues at a steadier pace in the current environment. But it continues to show the people’s growing understanding of their potential role in society, that they are not merely followers but leaders and that they don’t have to be in the Standing Committee of the Politburo to be one. The wave of volunteerism after the Sichuan earthquake in 2008 shows this willingness to press the government for civic responsibility and further dispersion of authority. One analyst told Time magazine, “It’s a major leap forward in the formation of China’s civil society, which is vital for China’s democratization process” (Hays 2008d).

The development of both an online civil society and a physical one has culminated in a level of social capital where the people feel they have the right to voice opinions on government policies, to be informed of issues affecting their livelihoods, to freely organise themselves and their interests, and to publicly challenge the authorities and their social injustices (Yang 2006: 214). Such a level of coherence, mobility and confidence to challenge the status quo and incur more democratic norms is evident in, what the CCP call “mass disturbances”, otherwise known as riots.

China itself is no stranger to civil unrest, representing a constant feature of the extraordinary social flux of a vast, cosmopolitan nation (Li 2008). However, the figures released by China’s Ministry of Public Security (what are likely to be figures biased to a conservative estimation) report “mass disturbances” to be up from 8,700 in 1993, to 84,000 in 2005. This level of unrest per million persons of national population is equivalent to one “mass disturbance” every day of the year in each state of the United States’. Disturbances in 2004 alone accounted for activity by 3.67 million people. Of course, China’s population is far larger than the United States but the important factor here is the rate at which the unrest has risen; on average an increase of 17 civil disturbances a day. A rate of increase that is dangerous to the established authorities and their legitimacy, as Keidal noted on this information, discerning that ‘officials with access to classified information describe China’s social unrest as serious
and worsening’ (2006: 2). With this in mind I will show examples of civil disturbances covering a league of disputes which correlate with the concept of a population becoming increasingly receptive to human rights infringements, also linking in the previously described positive effects of social capital gains.

The first is in the awareness of people of their environmental concerns and how that impacts on their individual lifestyles, a concern which came to head in the southern city of Xiamen in 2007; where the authorities drew plans to build a factory using toxic petrochemicals, a proposal that caved under the pressure of tens of thousands of protesting citizens, resulting in the factory being located elsewhere safely away from the local population. This great success of mobile civil society in China led to the event being labelled ‘one of the first and most dramatic displays of a growing willingness of urban Chinese to confront officials over environmental issues’ (The Economist 2011c). Since then, riots concerning issues on pollution and its impact on society have continued. For example; August 2011 in Dalian, Liaoning province, a storm crashed through the protective wall of a paraxylene factory (a chemical synonymous with toxicity) resulting in a leaking of the substance into water systems killing animal and plant life, not to mention damaging the local water source. As a result – 12,000 people were unified in demanding the plants closure, a wish that was later granted due to unwavering pressure (The Economist 2011c). This shows a continued trend toward growing accountability by the government for the needs of the population.

Coinciding with this, corruption plays as a focal point in the inception of riots. As has been mentioned - ‘official corruption and the lack of political power among average citizens further stokes the anger of the aggrieved’ (Lum 2006: 6). When this is combined with a growing awareness of legal rights, a growing expectation by society for the authorities to honour their proclaimed legal reforms (Lum 2006: 11), and an increasingly organised civil society as a result of growing social capital, we see incidents such as those in Liaoyang, March 2002. In this instance, 30,000 workers from 20 factories across the province coordinated a joint protest in front of city offices, complaining of unpaid wages, living allowances and pensions due to government corruption and unwarranted arrests of civil labour activists (Lum 2006: 6).

Again, this is one of the many examples that could be portrayed to encapsulate these societal motions to activism based on democratic principles. And to prove further that this is a people’s desire trending towards rule of law, dispersion of authority and human rights; one
only has to look towards the increased utilisation of courts, petitions, and informal appeals against officials. In 2004, PRC sources reported a sharp rise in labour disputes. During that year, labour dispute arbitration committees reportedly accepted 226,000 cases involving 800,000 employees, a year on-year increase of 22.8%. Further to this dramatic increase, between 1999 and 2004, civil cases in China grew by 30%, reaching 4.3 million (Kahn 2005:14). These figures show that public outcry is increasingly coherent with democratic norms, and it is the lack of appreciation of these individual desires that is leading to the cultivating mantra in active Chinese civil society that is: “Causing a big disturbance gets you a big solution; a little disturbance gets you a little solution; and no disturbance gets you no solution.” (Tanner 2005: 8).

This section of the overriding movement towards democratic norms in China shows a population who, with better education, more material wealth and a heightened connectivity have made it increasingly difficult for the state to orchestrate structural changes in their desires to retain growth, as communities are increasingly inclined to respond to and oppose developmental pressures of the state (Government Office for Science 2011). There are still many questions about the authenticity of such a liberal movement: how can grass-root efforts be elevated to higher authorities? Will the leadership have the wisdom and courage to move forward with such an agenda? (Branigan 2009) Are these democratic demands strong enough to stand up to and mould the hegemonic autocracy of the CCP? Is it an aligned movement? But with the examples shown above, I believe we are seeing a positive movement towards an active civil society with a growing understanding of democratic values.

3. Political Transition

The previous chapter shows the growing middle and working class’s concordance over the necessity of democratic norms in China. In this chapter I wish to discern the government’s response to this; deciding just how much democratic progression there has been from a political perspective, and how much has simply been discussed. In answering this question I begin by looking at the isle of Taiwan – with its Han Chinese origins it provides an appropriate microcosm to show the affects of democracy in a Sino environment. Taiwan used democracy to unify cultural cleavages that emerged with the arrival of the Kuomintang (KMT) loyalists from the mainland after communist takeover in the late 1940s. The KMT
only represented 13% of the population when landing on the island, yet they formed a
government whose closest challenger has never held more than 40% of seats in parliament
(Friedman 2006: 108). This shows a comparative democratic Chinese model to the more
autocratic method of management endorsed on the mainland. The importance of this lies in
the CCP’s interpretation of Taiwan and its democracy; with strong economic ties through
trade, investment and tourism, not to mention claiming it still as a “Special Administrative
Region” (SAR) of China itself. This compares to the ever-present darker interpretation of
Taiwan by the CCP, detesting the democratic government as “trouble makers” (Friedman
2006: 108). There are obvious reasons for this sentiment; desires for independence, ridicule
of lack of human rights development in the mainland, ocean rights etc... But above all else, I
believe it illustrates the struggle internally in China between accepting Chinese
democratisation and holding a harder, traditional, non-progressive line. This introduces an
overriding dimension to the political situation in China; between the traditionalists and the
progressivists, between crushing democrats and co-opting them with reform (Friedman
2006: 91). There is argument on both sides, which will be discussed, but what is important (as
mentioned in the introduction) is that I will not be arguing for the progression to multi-party
democracy in this text. Instead we look at the progression of liberal democratic norms within
the CCP; identifying the scale of development in rule of law, dispersion of authority and
acceptance of human rights norms. With this in mind I wish to refer to the prescribed
dilemma in Chinese politics, between the traditionalists and the progressivists.

The discrepancies over policies purposed by these two sides in government are made very
inconspicuous, especially after the Tiananmen incident in 1989; where there was publicised
misalignment within the CCP, catalysing the outburst of public sentiment. Chinese politics is
now characterised by backroom deals, alliance building, manoeuvring against rivals, and
compromises among enemies. Much of what goes on is murky and occurs behind the scenes.
This makes it rather difficult to point out internal differences. However, there are signs; as
seen in March 2006 where Premier Wen Jiabao spoke with a conciliatory tone over the
oppression of farmers and a denial of their property rights. This conflicted with President Hu
Jintao’s stronger line on the issue, believing in a more animated crack down on large public
demonstrations (Lum 2006: 9). Further evidence of this internal bipolarity is in the coining by
Hu Jintao of “socialist democracy” as China’s development model, where he considers
allowing more public debate on certain limited topics without challenging the mandate of the
CCP and its rule over government institutions (Hays 2008d). In February 2011, Hu told the Washington Post, “we will define the institutions, standards and procedures for socialist democracy, expand people’s ordinary participation in political affairs at each level and in every field, mobilize and organize the people as extensively as possible…and strive for continued progress in building socialist political civilization.” (Richburg 2011). The words “we will define” and “expand people’s ordinary participation” shows what may look like juxtaposition of “you will” and “you can” but it cleverly encapsulates a movement in Chinese politics away from the traditional to the progressive. As previously mentioned, this paper does not profess any movement towards electoral democracy, therefore maintaining the CCP at the helm. This quote, however, does show that the CCP has numerous goals of democratic progression – giving more political power to the people (dispersion of authority), thereby making the party more accountable (rule of law). But how well are these progressive notions being enacted?

“China's philosophy is to do things gradually because they don't like dramatic change,” says Li Jie, head of the Reserves Research Institute at the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing (Hays 2008e). Such modesty is a blessing by making the changes seem organic, however also a curse, as officials can become disillusioned with not what but why policies are being instigated. This has led to instances of ‘break down’ in the chain of command from the CCP to its spokes, as agencies become ‘increasingly assertive in pursuing their own agendas’ (Peerenboom 2006: 59), endorsing the perfect environment for corruption; an issue which is now unquestionably endemic in China’s political circles (as shown in society in the previous chapter). With this scenario in mind I will first address the hindrances to democratic progression in the CCP; unearthing the clear, bitter, toxicity of corruption and the effect it is having on the resurgence of traditional hard-line values. After discussing this reality I will look to its counter; displaying the CCP’s combat of the infection that is corruption, as well as its growing interpretation of the needs of its people, displaying the inevitability of progressivist ideals in China. Values which are shared by a growing study of “political civilisation” among domestic scholars (He 2010: 50), who see an introduction of rule of law in China, leading to a system of checks and balances defining the CCP’s role singularly as the executive leadership, thereby addressing the ‘rising domestic demand by citizens who increasingly expect the legal system to protect their rights’ (Peerenboom 2006: 58-9). Leading to a conclusion that, as in most areas of China, modernisation is on the
horizon and the political system will not escape that. However, I begin by looking into the corrosive traditions of Chinese politics and how they’ve destabilised the government’s ambitions for modernising legal systems and dispersing authority across a wider spectrum of party members.

Guobin Yang identifies this notion – describing a Chinese government that ‘may have been building a legal system for decades, yet the system lacks transparency, accountability, and due process’ (2006: 196). This is seconded by Pan Wei who sees a common thread – ‘ignorance to the population’s rising social welfare, religious tolerance and development of civil society. Instead, focussing on political agitations, money politics and personal slanders’ (Friedman 2006: 105). This shows maintenance of the traditional status quo of alienating the higher authorities from the people, with a strong conservative stance. Mind, both these scholars lean strongly towards democratic reform in China. So what are the origins of this sentiment? An increasing normalisation of corruption in the CCP; it is the often customary acceptance of vice that hinders the development of a culture of legality, with few exceptions. For example, when the Administration Litigation Law was implemented in 1990 almost half of officials rejected it on the premise that it would “decrease administrative efficiency” (Zhao 2003: 334) when really it was because the idea of being hauled into courts to account for actions was perceived to be both threatening and demeaning. This attitude is common amongst CCP members and its regional authorities; an air of superiority to the system, as shown by such representatives refusal when summoned to appear in court, ignoring complaints and obstructing justice by not providing evidence or complying with court decisions. Some even fabricate or destroy evidence (Peerenboom 2006: 67), showing a general crisis of values that leads to the impression of officials as more concerned with the survival of their privileged positions, than with maintaining the well-being of the people, efficiency of the government and overall stability of the nation (Friedman 2006: 95). Such a lack of balancing power or democratic accountability has led to officials using ever cruder methods to deal with civil disputes.

At the scene of many conflicts of interest between the state and its people; the police tend to be out in force as an instrument of state rather than of social protection, resulting in numerous incidents of police brutality towards protest (Li 2008). Such a bias to authority over protection of human rights and democratic principles can be seen in China’s budget for the Peoples’ Armed Police i.e. its riot control force - it costs the state 3% of central expenditures,
in comparison to the 1% dedicated to the development of courts, prosecutors and other areas of the judicial system (Keidal 2006: 6). This gives notion to a government where traditional necessities of an archaic system of governance are still vital and not progressive to democratic norms, justifying repression on the basis of national unity and economic imperatives.

In response to these inherent issues of corruption and party negligence I will now look into the state’s efforts to rectify such endemic problems, discussing how these efforts have not only borne fruit but showed the CCP’s understanding, appreciation and enactment of policies based on democratic norms of dispersing authority, enacting a rule of law and appreciation of human rights. Firstly, it is important to understand that (as described in the previous chapter) the people are aware of the infection of corruption and its source in the CCP, they are becoming significantly more attentive of the bigger picture and better educated to address the issues they see. And there is widespread discontent over judicial fraud, bias and incompetence (Peerenboom 2006: 73). Groups in society have demanded in public for it to be eradicated. This undermines both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the legal system and the party. It is therefore in the authority’s interest to solve these problems. Such ill-management is not politically or socially sustainable for the government, and I wish to show the awareness and responsiveness of these issues by the CCP. But it must be appreciated that the economic reforms of Deng in the early 1980s were far easier to implement than the contemporary political restructuring underway, as it changes the roles of the leaders; asking them to disseminate power that has been held since the inception of the Communist party 63 years ago (Hu 2010: 105). It is therefore understandable that the process is slow, satisfying the proverb invoked by Deng Xiaoping when discussing his changes – “we must feel the rocks as we cross the river”. With this in mind I wish to identify the concrete political trends towards democratic norms identified by Zhou Guanghui, progressions that have been in action since the “opening up” reforms of Deng Xiaoping over 30 years ago: (1) Power structure is moving from strong central to integration of more local government. (2) Humanisation of authority, no longer “divine”, introducing more political scrutiny and evaluation of performance. (3) More methodical in large-scale policy, using systematic analysis, dispersing decision-making to a wider audience through consultancy of experts. (4) Societal governance moved from administrative to legislative. (5) Systematic regulation has taken prominence over moral
autonomy of higher powers. (6) More gradual course of political progress now. (7) Isolationism has given way to openness and greater transparency (Zhou 1998: 29).

These notions from a Head of Political Science at a state-run university in north-eastern China enhances the legitimacy of many signs of democratic progression; from dispersion of authority (1 and 3) to enhanced rule of law (2, 4, 5, 7). Such egalitarianism which identifies a recognition from the authorities that the cause of instability is not simply those rioting, but those causing the riots; that insecurity is an institutional problem, not just a social one (Li 2008). In this light we can see proof of such activity in the collapse of the brigade system in the 1982 Constitution, Clause 111; enacting village committees as a ratified, fundamental grass-root organisation of village self-rule. These committees took on roles of social, political, economic and cultural issues, acting as a mediator between state officials and individuals (Bai 2010: 164), showing the government’s desire to give more control to the people; disseminating power. Further to this point, upon the law being enacted, it was labelled “the organic law” (Bai 2010: 184), incurring the notion it was a natural progression of society and desire of the state. He Feng similarly believes the village self-government law shows ‘the new generation in the CCP is more inclined toward political reform and openness’, and illustrates ‘the seed of democratic political culture has been planted’, especially as 90% of villagers participated in their village elections in 2008, allowing lower levels of Chinese society to vent their anger and be heard; a sign of greater participation and human rights (2008a: 158). And despite much talk of the CCP’s ignorance towards these problems, current President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao have stated that they are “indefinitely preoccupied with the problem of rural unrest” (Kahn 2006). Premier Wen, in March 2006, furthered such claims by remarking the need to protect the “democratic rights” of farmers, a statement which reportedly bolstered the spirits of rural protesters (Lum 2006: 6).

President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao’s motion towards democratic norms is based on the ever present spectre within the CCP – legitimacy. Their predecessor Jiang Zemin accomplished this through embellishing China with a new capitalist class and social elites. Whereas Hu and Wen have focussed on a foundation far broader than the elite – instead focussing on policies to do with inequality, welfare, education, unemployment, and above all else – corruption. This portfolio of policies displays evolution towards a mandate far more reflexive of a liberal democratic state; improving governance and promoting intra-party democracy. And it has borne physical results, as seen with the removal of several high-
ranking officials on corruption charges (He & Feng 2008: 156), ‘a sincere effort to clean up
government and address ordinary people’s serious concerns about governance’(He & Feng
2008: 160). In June 2005, we can see an act of the CCP’s newly discovered legitimating
process; when, just outside Beijing, farmers camped on disputed land in revolt against the
local government, as it planned to use the plot to build a power plant. The farmers protested
over lack of proper compensation. In response to this, the corrupt local authorities hired 300
thugs to “disseminate” the opposition which resulted in six farmers being killed, all of which
was caught on video and shared across the internet. Upon discovering this, higher authorities
fired the local party chief and mayor and returned the farmland (Pan 2005). It also triggered
the central government to enact a string of reforms later that year, aimed specifically at rural
unrest; including better management of land use, strengthening the legal system, protecting
farmers’ land, increasing social spending on health care and education, and abolishing the
national tax on farmers (Lum 2006: 6). As a result, Chinese researchers reported that protests
over rural taxation have greatly diminished. Cuts in fees and taxes have left some local
governments short of revenue, hastening long overdue personnel reforms that have cut some
local political payrolls in half. Other cost-saving fiscal reforms have increased transfers to
poor areas and sidestepped corrupt officials by instituting direct bank transfers for salary
payments to teachers and other critical public employees (Keidal 2006: 6). This presents
further evidence of central government restructuring various branches, ensuring better
accountability for actions. Not to mention addressing the human rights of those that were
losing them.

Another example of the CCP’s capability to address these localised issues of corruption, and
the resultant implication of rule of law, dispersion of authority and human rights; can be seen
in 2008 with the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs revision of the Organic Law of Village
Committees, clarifying a definition for all forms of voting and penalties for vote-lobbyists
and bribe-receivers (He & Feng 2008: 146). This change was implemented to protect
villagers’ political rights and ensure fair elections. Further to this, the Chinese government
has started township elections in some areas based on the nationwide practices of village
elections in the late 1990s. Kai He and Huiyun Feng sees these processes, despite struggling
administrative organisation, as proof of successful movement towards political reform of
other levels of government control in China (2008: 164).
Examples of egalitarian policies under the current administration increase almost as quickly as references to democracy by the elite. In the People’s Daily from 2003 to 2007 – democracy went from 5000 references to 40,000. Another phrase which has grown in popularity, and is relevant to the internal momentums between traditionalists and progressivists argued, is the frequency of “intra-party democracy” in public discussion (He & Feng 2008: 162). And it is in mentioning this phrase that I move the discussion. Evidence shows that the political ideas and strategies of the National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, in the CCP, have played an instrumental part in expanding the role of the people’s congress system. This means diffusing influence from the traditional notion that the Standing Committee hegemonically decided on all major decisions for China. Such a change gives greater bureaucratic oversight of laws and policymaking agendas to a greater conglomerate of the CCP (Weiss 2003: 44).

Proof of such momentum can be seen in July 2008, as the Central Committee issued new rules to expand the role of party deputies, away from the leaders. The new regulation, known as the Provisional Statute on the Tenure of Deputies to National and Local Congresses of the Communist Party of China, details the rights of party deputies to supervise activities of the party committee at the same level during the intervals between congresses. This move shows the Party leadership are addressing the issue of regional corruption by introducing oversight, and in turn, ‘promoting democracy for the whole nation’ (He & Feng 2008: 161). It may only show a minor dissemination of power (to a second member), but it is at least a step in the right direction. And with the Chinese Communist Party’s associations with change, one must be patient - by feeling the rocks as they cross the river.

Despite their tentative pace, they are however still progressions towards democratic norms in the political theatre. Through my examples I have shown that village elections and township elections, intra-party democratisation and an overall combating of internal corruption are elements of a movement towards a rule of law, dispersion of authority and acceptance of human rights. And importantly, my examples of the governments legitimisation through addressing corruption shows its reinforcing effect of what is usually seen as a hindrance to democratic progression. However, it is important to note that in no way is the CCP well on its way to democracy. Beijing still needs to discipline local governments, strengthen dispute mechanisms, and improve policy transparency to allow a rule of law to truly flourish (Keidal 2006: 6). But what is important is something I mentioned previously, but is well encapsulated
by Jessica Chen Weiss, ‘the government recognizes that it is steadily losing ground in the political arena -- it can have control or legitimacy, but not both’ (Weiss 2003: 42), putting forward the idea that the government is aware of this problem and is consciously trying to solve it, but it must be allowed its space -feeling the rocks as it crosses the river. There is still evidence that the traditionalists hold sway in the central government, but I believe there are clear signals showing momentum to be swaying in the direction of progressivists, and the gentle, slow wave of democratic reform in Chinese politics.

To conclude, Deng Xiaoping was quoted as saying in 1987, that there would be national elections in 50 years – 2037 (Hays 2008d). This appears a long shot, but it makes the progressions proposed in this essay – rule of law, dispersion of authority and acceptance human rights, seem far more reasonable at a time of a truly “great” leap forward for China.

4. Conclusion: China’s New Administration, an Heir of Change

Having looked into the activities of the Chinese public and the Communist Party in the previous two chapters, I have identified and shown that democratic values are present in China. As seen with the growing interconnectivity of people and their ideas with the internet age, unearthing a more outspoken public on issues consistent with democratic progression. This is also evident with the development of independent civil society, showing traits more towards individual liberties and greater accountability from the government. Both of these factors have been shown to culminate as a catalyst for growing civil unrest with issues encompassing the rule of law, dispersion of authority and human rights. In comparison to these societal developments, the CCP has shown growing reciprocity, granting greater liberties to its citizens as well as developing democratic values internally; as shown with the revision of the Organic Law of Village Committees in an attempt to oust corruption over voting, and the dispersion of authority to deputies through the Provisional Statute on the Tenure of Deputies to National and Local Congresses of the Communist Party of China. These examples show an internal progression away from the traditionalist faction in Chinese politics towards a more progressive statute, which have shown evidence of an understanding that the best way for the CCP to legitimise its authority is through granting democratic values to its people; implying a greater rule of law, more dispersion of authority and a greater respect for human rights. From this argument, it is also evident that corruption has been a catalyst in hastening the rate of democratic understanding amongst the general public and
within the CCP as it offers an effective and plausible method to address this state-wide issue, incurring the introduction of a stronger legal system, better accountability and more receptive structures to public grievances. This understanding of what is needed for the future brings me to my final point of discussion in this paper – the upcoming administrational change and what is to be expected from it in terms of democratic progression. In the introduction I identified the importance of the government and its authority in defining the direction of China, scholars He and Feng share this interpretation and believe ‘the key to China’s future democratisation depends on political elites who can promote democratic reform’ (2008a: 159). This adds value to just how imperative the upcoming transition is in defining a democratic future for China and its people.

By the end of this year, virtually all of China’s top leaders, including President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, will step down from their party posts after a decade of rule. Critics have evaluated this approaching changeover to being as defining as Deng Xiaoping’s in 1980, particularly because ‘political overhaul is seen as the only way to head off the threat of serious social upheaval’ (Anderlini 2011a: 1-2). This implies the necessity of political reform as prescribed in the previous chapter. However, as stated; political elites will define this transition (He & Feng 2008: 159); therefore I will look into the nature of the prospective leaders to illustrate the level of warmth China is expected to show towards democratic norms in the future.

The only positions that appear to be settled are that of president and premier – with Vice-President Xi Jinping very likely to succeed Hu Jintao and Vice-Premier Li Keqiang expected to fill Wen Jiabao’s shoes. Little is known of these two leaders who will be critical in the next administration; this is purposely done by the party as little wants to be revealed for sake of scrutiny by the public. But what is understood is that they are expected to have a better understanding of the West and its ways (The Economist 2012d), something their forefathers lacked, thus implying a better understanding of democratic values. Such a recognition can be implied in Xi Jinping, whose father was a revolutionary in government, bringing forward liberal values in alignment with Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s (Anderlini 2011b). Xi also follows American basketball on TV, and has fond memories of his stay with an American family in Iowa as part of his degree, not to mention the daughter he has studying at Harvard. Also, when recently visiting the United States on a political venture, he responded to America’s “sermon” on human right with less hostility than usually anticipated from Chinese
leaders, instead stating that China was “open to discussions” (The Economist 2011d). When you combine this with similar liberal sentiment expressed by Li Keqiang; who at university helped translate Lord Denning’s *Due Process of Law*, the popularised paper standing for the responsibility of law in defending the individual (Anderlini 2011b), we can see a leadership with at least elements of appreciation for, and perhaps even desire for more liberty and democratic rights in China. This may be a relatively thin tangent, and it remains hard to conceive exactly what the direction of the CCP will be under their guidance. But I do believe there is a stronger indicator of state direction for the upcoming transition in the competition between Bo Xilai and Wang Yang for a position in the Standing Committee.

Bo Xilai is representative of a more traditionalist approach to governance; as seen with his heavy-handed crackdown on organised crime, suspiciously unearthing links to officials of whom many were his political opponents (The Economist 2012e: 13). In a similarly traditional vein he is a leading figure in the reignition of Mao-era nationalism; launching a red campaign with large banners and a channel wholly dedicated to songs praising the communist way and Mao’s excellence (Anderlini 2011b). With his backing for the importance of State-Owned Enterprises, he encompasses a radical left-wing upsurge that he coins the “Chongqing Model”, demanding that other provinces follow this mould which rejects the idea of the “universal” principles of democracy, instead upholding a “democracy of the masses” (New Tang Dynasty 2012).

In opposition to this we have the ideas of a more progressive approach manifested in Wang Yang, the leader of the southern province of Guangdong. There he has led and developed the “Guangdong Model”, focussing on greater liberalisation economically as well as politically, adopting the concept of an egg and its yolk; with the CCP as the yolk, he explains that changes to party rules can be made without damaging the legitimacy and monopoly of the CCP’s power (The Economist 2011d: 71). Examples of such liberal changes can be seen in his loosening of control by authorities over trade unions, encouraging collective bargaining by non-political members. Also his greater leeway for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), giving fewer hoops to jump through in registration, allowing them to prosper in the region. Not to mention his openness in sharing government spending information. In Guangzhou (the capital of Guangdong), he famously became the first leader to release the city’s budgets in 2009 (The Economist 2011d: 72).
These contrasting leaders and their competing models for position in the Standing Committee can be perceived to define a struggle as to what direction the state is heading in; will the state adopt a traditionalist, Bo Xilai “Chongqing model”, leading the state to a more conservative future, evident in its past? Or will the state see merit in Wang Yang and his more progressive “Guangdong Model” encompassing a greater appreciation of democratic norms and values, optimising the need for political reform to legitimise the CCP in China’s future? The answer to this, through the prism of the development of democratic norms in China, is evident in the recent removal of Bo Xilai and his titles in the CCP on March 15th, 2012. His step down from power on the basis of corruption charges in association with Wang Lijun and his visit to the U.S embassy (as described in Chapter II), shows a shift in impetus towards the more progressive notion purposed by Wang Yang who is now likely to fill the seat that was destined for Bo Xilai on the Standing Committee (The Economist 2012e: 13).

This provides an element of rational progress for the state position in the future; firstly, that handling corruption through illegal channels to achieve personal gain will not be as acceptable in the new administration. Secondly, left-wing radicalism is moving out of favour, and the direction for the state needs to encompass more democratic values shown by Wang Yang and his “Guangdong Model”. Leading to a final point encompassed by Wang Yang, and purposed by Caixin Media (a daring liberal Beijing magazine), “it is time for gradual but firm political reform” (2012). I believe such a strong and very public condemnation of traditional values, through the disbandment of Bo Xilai and his ethos, best unifies this argument as to the direction of China; with a past that has shown a slow development towards elements of democracy that I have prescribed, by “feeling the rocks as they cross the river”, the country has been shown to be increasingly aware of the rule of law, dispersion of authority and human rights development, both in its politics and in society. And I believe the next administration is hastening its understanding and interpretation of such values and seeing the benefit of it in maintaining its legitimacy and hold on power, as seen in the Bo Xilai incident.

However, it must be remembered that Chinese patriotism has defeated Chinese forces of democracy and liberty since the late 1930s, therefore making it naive to believe that democracy can easily win in China (Friedman 2006: 110). And also it is not simply the government that is slow in its progressivist notions, but also the people. I have proclaimed throughout this paper that the Chinese public are increasingly active in defiance of the current
system and its cumbersome development to address their liberal needs. Yet Chinese culture is still viscous, it will take time to bring forward the influence of democratic norms such as legality, checks and balances and liberal human rights, especially when you consider the huge multiplicity of cultural norms in a country embodying well over one billion people. This point is coherent with Fukuyama and Marwah’s “Political Transition Zone” theory, where democratisation occurs in middle-income authoritarian regimes whose per capita GDP ranges from US $5000 to US $6000 (Fukuyama & Marwah 2000: 83). So when China’s per capita GDP is still only US $2034, it is clear that it still has some way to go yet (He & Feng 2008: 168).

However, despite the lethargy of democracy and its values in China, this paper has shown evidence of a nation, through its social activity, political progressions and the upcoming leadership change, moving towards a greater acceptance and application of the rule of law, dispersion of authority and appreciation of human rights norms, as reiterated throughout. Providing an element of inevitability in the notion that democracy has a prominent part to play in China’s future (The Economist 2011a: 101; He & Feng 2008: 166; Friedman 2006: 109; Hu 2010: 97).

References


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