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**NATION BUILDING, STATE BUILDING, AND THE ROAD TO
DEMOCRACY: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN 60 YEARS OF
THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC**

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Executive Summary

1. As China celebrates the 60th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic, its history has been preoccupied by two major tasks: nation-building and state-building. The next national challenge is to bring China into democracy.
2. The success of the Communist Movement lay largely in its ability to offer a credible plan to the Chinese public for a new China, a China with independent nationhood, that delivered for its citizens their full right to sovereignty, as well as high standards of living.
3. To build a "strong nation" had been a universal demand in China since the imperial decay of the Late Qing period. The attacks and challenges from the West from the 1840s onward presented for the Chinese the horrifying prospect of national disintegration and colonization.
4. Therefore, the first major task of the People's Republic of China was nation building. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and his revolutionary colleagues, this project had its economic, social, and international dimensions.
5. China's "strong nation" ambition was met with a mixed record during Mao's time. After 1978, new policies resulted in rapid economic development. By 2009, China had become one of the world's largest economies and an influential power in world politics.
6. Economic development and modernization exposed the deficiencies of the government system. Into the 21st Century, China is increasingly haunted by crises of governance exemplified by environmental pollution, industrial accidents, and public protests.
7. The challenges to build an effective state for China's modern society and economy will dominate its political agenda in the years to come. China needs to build an effective regulatory state for its modern economy.
8. It also needs to build a welfare state to provide social security and healthcare to its 1.3-billion citizens. It needs to institutionalize transparency, accountability, and openness in governance.

9. In the early 21st century, democracy is only making its first timid steps in China. Following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, political reform and democracy were removed from the national agenda.
10. The state's capacity to control civil disobedience seems sufficiently strong. It also spares no effort in controlling the Internet as a platform of political mobilization.
11. But international experience shows that a high living standard almost inevitably leads to demands for political opening. The probability of China making a transition to democracy will therefore keep rising as its economy grows.
12. The Party has nominally accepted democracy as the goal for political development. But in the years to come, it will try every means to delay the introduction of multi-party elections.
13. It is highly likely China will make strides toward democracy in the following 10-30 years. The regime will find workable ways to recognize the independence of civil society.
14. Intra-party democracy will take the lead. Intra-party contests and internal methods of supervision will be institutionalized. Party secretaries at the sub-provincial levels may be elected by committees, for example.
15. Local elections will become progressively freer, and the practice will spread upwards. Township councils and township chiefs are likely to be openly elected. It may take up to 15 years for elections to become free and open at county level.
16. But nevertheless, once free elections are installed and consolidated at the county level, the road to a full democracy will have been paved.
17. Given these trends, between 2010 and 2020, China is likely to turn into a "semi-democracy", and by 2030-50, into a full democracy.

Nation Building, State Building, and the Road to Democracy: Political Development in 60 Years of the People's Republic

Zhengxu Wang*

Nation-Building, from Revolution through the Maoist Era

1.1 The success of the Communist Movement in China, since its origin in the 1910s and 1920s, lay largely in its ability to offer a creditable plan to the Chinese public to build a new China -- an ability its competitor the Nationalists (the KMT) lacked.¹ The decades-long struggle between two rivals attempting to offer the same social contract to the Chinese population resolved itself in the victory of the Communists in 1949. The Communists, with their better grasp of Chinese social realities and superior organizational strengths, were taken by the Chinese public as the better choice.

1.2 The vision of the new China centered on the "nation problem": independent nationhood, the livelihood of the people, and the right to sovereignty for its citizens. The KMT referred to this problem as the struggle for the "Three People's Principles": national independence (*minzu*), people's sovereignty (*minquan*), and people's livelihood (*minsheng*).² The Communists referred to the nation problem as the overthrowing of the "Three Big Mountains": imperialist infringements of China (*diguozhuyi*), the suppression of peasants by the landlord class (*fengjianzhuyi*), and control of the economy by bureaucrat-capitalists (*guanliao ziben zhuyi*).

1.3 To build a "strong nation" had been the universal demand in China since the imperial decay of the Late Qing period. The attacks and challenges from the West from the 1840s onwards presented for Chinese people the horrifying prospects of national disintegration and colonization. The Late Qing's "Self-Strengthening" Movement, the 100-Day Restoration Movement of 1898, and the May Fourth "New Culture" and "Science and Democracy" Movements of 1919 were all responding to this national

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¹ Lucien Bianco, *Origins of the Chinese Revolution, 1915-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

² which guided the Republican Revolution founded by Dr. Sun Yet-sen and inherited by the KMT

crisis. “Wealthy Nation, Strong Army” dominated all intellectual and political debates. Cast in the global wave of rising modern nation states, and dominated by the strong nations of the West, China was not searching for a “modern” state, but a “strong nation” (*qianguo*).³

1.4 Therefore, the first major task of the People’s Republic of China was nation building.

Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and his revolutionary colleagues, this project had its economic, social, and international dimensions. Economically, this meant fast industrial development and achieving the status of an industrial power in the global community. Socially, it meant the reform of class structure, the improvement of the public entitlement to food, basic education, and healthcare. Internationally, it meant the safeguarding of sovereignty, international recognition, and enhanced global power status.

1.5 Economic independence became the central element of nation building in the Mao era.

In the longer run, in fact, economic preeminence among nations was the ambition of the new state. This impelled the new state to choose an economic strategy dominated by heavy industries and “big-push” industrialization. Supported by the Soviet Union at first, this economic strategy also determined structures and policies in other arenas: population planning, urban-rural division, foreign trade, and higher and technical education, among others. Amidst a Cold-War international environment that was later exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet split, China entered a long period of self-dependent indigenous industrialization.

1.6 Despite significant achievements,⁴ this development model’s enormous social, economic and human costs are now clear. With a large pool of low-skilled labor and terrible scarcities in capital and technology, China’s emphasis on heavy industries meant it was going diagonally against its comparative advantages. A complete ban on private enterprise, ill-informed plans such as the Great Leap Forward and the Three Front Project that located and re-located major plants into the western mountainous regions only made things worse, in fact disastrous.

³ Yale Professor Jonathan D. Spence characterized China’s history since the Late Qing period as a “search for modern China”. Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, 1999).

⁴ By various accounts, China’s economy grew on about an average of 4-6% from 1953 to 1978. This is deemed as a respectable growth rate but far lower than China’s potential growth rate. See, for example, Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

1.7 By the end of the 1970s, despite significant gains in provision of basic food, education, and public health,⁵ the Chinese economy was hopelessly inefficient and extremely wasteful. Industrial output was low and consumer goods few. Although slightly freed from hunger, the majority of Chinese people still enjoyed a living standard that was barely above poverty.⁶ What was more, the political turmoil during the heyday of Maoism, the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward, produced terrible famines, brutal violence, and chaos. The death of Mao in 1976 finally drew the era to a close. Two years later a dramatic shift took place.

From Reform to the Economic Miracle

2.1 Deng Xiaopeng's policy shift was based on the belief that China's economic strategy was not working. The post-1978 releasing of rural energy through de-collectivization, the gradual lifting of the ban on private business, the opening of Special Economic Zones and later coastal cities to the international economy, and the shift toward light industries and consumer goods, constituted a coherent change of economic development strategy.⁷ This new strategy worked amazingly well resulting in a rapid economic take-off. In due course, a "China miracle" was made.⁸

2.2 An economic strategy it was, but it could only be understood within China and the State's nation-building project. In the early 1980s, all national policies, including economic development, were encapsulated in the "Four Modernizations" concept. The Party first announced the "Four Modernizations" as a long-term national goal in the 1960s, and re-iterated it as it faced internal difficulties toward the end of the Cultural Revolution. As a slogan it served to rally the whole population around the Party in the national effort to build a strong nation.⁹

⁵ For the year between 1949 and 1978, China is generally believed to be an over-achiever in improving the population's literacy level and health standards. See Ibid.

⁶ Using World Bank standards, in the late 1970s, 64% of Chinese population lived under the international poverty line.

⁷ Barry Naughton, *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform 1978-1993* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁸ Justin Yifu Lin, Fang Cai, and Zhoi Li, *The China Miracle: Development Strategy and Economic Reform* (Hong Kong The Chinese University Press of Hong Kong, 1996).

⁹ "The Four Modernizations" (agricultural, industrial, military, and science and technology modernizations) was first announced at the Third National People's Congress in December 1964, by

- 2.3 The Four Modernizations were again trumpeted as Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues steered China onto a new economic path. Economic reform and rapid growth were to push China to become a powerful industrial nation. The Three-Step Strategy offered by the Deng leadership included: 1) doubling China's 1980 per capita GDP, 2) doubling per capita GDP again, by the year 2000, to US\$1000, and 3) quadrupling per capita GDP during the first half of the 21st century so that by 2030-2050 it would reach US\$4000.¹⁰
- 2.4 The first step would complete the mission to move the Chinese nation out of poverty, the final resolution of the *wen* and *bao* problems.¹¹ The second step would see China becoming a well-off (*xiaokang*) nation. When the third step was achieved, as Deng and the successive cohorts of leaders envisioned, China would by then be a "mid-level developed nation."
- 2.5 These national goals were subsequently refined and revised. But two things were constant. First, China's achievements would be measured against other nations—what levels of GDP per capita would put China in the league of which nations. China in this process would always look at itself as engaged in a race with other nations in the world. In the Great Leap Forward era (1959-1961), the slogan was to surpass the UK and catch up with the US (*chaoying ganmei*). Into the 21st century, China's mainstream media would carefully note its GDP surpassing the G-7 nations one by one, save the US.¹²
- 2.6 Second, the time periods these staggered goals were set against were aligned with the period of governance of the regime. Around 100 years since the founding of the

Premier Zhou Enlai. At the Fourth National People's Congress toward the end of Mao and Zhou's life, in 1975, it was stated again as the nation's development goal.

¹⁰ Deng Xiaoping's thinking of the development goals evolved since 1978. The formulation cited here was considered the final version, which he explained to the visiting Vice Prime Minister of Spain on 30 April 1987. See *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3)

¹¹ *Wen* literally means warmth. It refers to having sufficient clothes to wear. *Bao* literally means belly-full. It refers to having sufficient food to eat.

¹² By 2001, China's GDP ranked at about No. 7 in the world, ahead of Canada but slightly trailing behind Italy. Between 2004 and 2005, China surpassed Italy, France, and the UK, becoming the fourth largest economy in the world. In 2007, China surpassed Germany, and in 2009, China surpassed Japan. See **Shujie** YAO and Minjia CHEN, "Chinese Economy 2008: A Turbulent Year amid the World Financial Crisis". Nottingham, UK: China Policy Institute (2009).

Party (around 2020¹³) was set to be the time a major development level would be reached. And 100 years since the regime came to power (around the mid-21st century) was chosen as another important point of reference: it would be the time China arrives as a “mid-level developed nation.”

2.7 Taken together, these two constant emphases imply the ‘strong nation’ idea as the main component of the social contract between the regime and the people. The regime’s legitimacy relies on its ability to bring China on the journey toward a strong nation. With such a sense of mission, the Party continues to call itself the vanguard of the nation and into the 21st century defines itself as representing the “most advanced social productive forces, the most advanced culture, and the interests of the largest majority of the nation.”¹⁴

The Hundred-Year Old Dream

3.1 The post-1978 nation-building has seen major successes in the economic arena. By around 2000, China had emerged as a global economic powerhouse. The specter of hunger that had haunted China for thousands of years seemed to have been banished. Households in urban areas are increasingly enjoying middle class living standards. Problems such as social inequality, unemployment, corruption, and environmental damage notwithstanding, overall a well-off society was on the horizon. .¹⁵

3.2 Nevertheless, the State continued to renew the nation-building discourse, putting one new project after another onto the national agenda. The industrial strengths of the nation remained rallying points for national attention. The Party invested tremendous resources into a space program, for example. From the launch of an unmanned vessel in 1999, to the first manned mission in 2003 and the first space walk in 2008, the Shenzhou (“divine vessel”) Project served well to boost national confidence. The next goal is to land Chinese “taikonauts” on the moon.

¹³ The Party was founded in 1921, Shanghai. So one hundred years from its founding would be 2021.

¹⁴ This is the Party’s “Three Represents” Theory that was enshrined in the Party Constitution in 2002.

¹⁵ The political reports on both the 16th (2002) and the 17th (2007) Party Congresses still called upon the Party to struggle for the victory of building a “Well-Off Society.”

- 3.3 Next on the list, building aircraft carriers and a blue-water navy, building the world's largest and fastest high-speed railway, building jumbo jets, and building the world's largest airport and longest bridge all speak to the State's "Strong Nation" project. One has to wonder, what will the Party have to offer when such goals are exhausted and China becomes the largest economy in the world?
- 3.4 The obsession with an independent and strong nation has also dominated China's foreign policy, from the Maoist period up until today. The "leaning toward" the Soviet Camp in the 1950s was simply because the latter promised recognition, protection, and support for China's independent nationhood. From then on, the new state's foreign behavior was characterized by both a sense of victimhood from the Western dominance of the past, and a continued sense of threatened nationhood. Together, they resulted in a desperate quest for big power status.
- 3.5 An urgent sense of threatened national independence and integrity first led to the war against the US on the Korean Peninsula, the legacy of which still defines today's regional and global politics.¹⁶ The perceived threats to independent nationhood and sovereignty then led to the decisive split with the Soviet Union, a split that would heighten security threats in the years to come, including those from the Soviet Union to the north and its allies to the south. Meanwhile, to dispel such a sense of insecurity and pursue the status of a great power, in the 1950s and 1960s, the State committed itself to a highly taxing nuclear weapons program, even when the nation was suffering economic collapse and political turmoil.
- 3.6 It was only after the 1990s that the sense of insecurity started to recede, and China gradually became a more 'normal' actor in global politics. With its newly-gained confidence, China began to engage more actively in regional and global institutions and frameworks. Nevertheless, a sense of insecurity and threatened national integrity can still haunt Beijing, and when it does, highly defensive actions are often the result. By now the West must have learnt to appreciate this, as it did in relation to the Tibet issue.¹⁷

¹⁶ Consequently, into the 21st Century, it was only when China gained the confidence that its nationhood was not in peril that it started to work with the US and other parties to resolve the North Korea problem.

¹⁷ In late 2008, feeling that the European Union was flirting with The Dalai Lama and supporting his "Independent Tibet" line, when then President of the EU Nicolas Sarkozy received The Dalai Lama, China abruptly cancelled a China--EU summit, resulting in a nose-dive for Sino-EU relations.

- 3.7 Only with full confidence in its nationhood does China start to actively participate in cooperation on problems of global governance. To enlist China to tackle global warming, energy security, financial stability, and non-proliferation, international society needs to reassure China that its status and interests are respected. A “Chimerica” co-governance of the world may be exaggerating China’s strengths, but a stronger willingness by the US to let China play a significant role will help.¹⁸
- 3.8 The pursuit of strong nationhood was also preeminent in the sports arena. From the 1950s, the state committed itself to winning medals in international games, and every victory was hailed as dispelling the “Sick Man of Asia” complex. The first Chinese to have won a world championship, the first woman world champion, and the first Chinese to have broken a world record, were all noted in the public memory and official histories.¹⁹ It was as if victories on the track and field, the uneven bars, in the diving pool, and over the ping-pong table were sufficient to establish China as a strong nation.²⁰
- 3.9 This continued into post-reform China. The women’s volleyball team’s championships in the early 1980s, Team China’s overtaking of Japan as the winner at the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi, and Team China’s Olympic debut in Los Angeles in 1984 all added tonic to a nation that was still dealing with the national humiliation of the past. On the other hand, the men’s football team’s defeat by Hong Kong in 1985, disqualifying itself from the Mexico World Cup of the following year, led to riots in cities.
- 3.10 Following the post-Los Angeles euphoria, the disappointing performance of Team China in the 1988 Seoul Olympics led to a national outcry of “defeat.”²¹ The wounds

¹⁸ As of the time of writing, news had just broken that a China-US-Australia military exercise was in planning. Such gestures from Western countries will significantly enhance China’s trust, and make it more forthcoming in playing an active role in global issues. See “Military exercises with Australia, US still on table.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sep.4, 2009

¹⁹ They were, respectively, Rong Guotuan of table tennis (1959), Qiu Zhonghui, women’s table tennis (1961), and Chen Jingkai, weight lifting (1956).

²⁰ While almost all countries in the world enjoy victories in international sport competitions, only China and its socialist colleagues such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, Cuba, and the North Korea, among others, pursued these victories through a heavy-handed state system. The Soviet Union was of course the inventor of this sport-state model, and the others took it over full-scale.

²¹ A well known sports writer, Zhao Yu, had two books examining Chinese public’s “strong nation complex” in sports, *The Strong-Nation Dream (Qiangguo Meng)*, and *Defeat in Seoul (Bing Bai Hancheng)* that were highly popular.

caused by the loss to Sydney of the right to host the 2000 Olympics were only gradually healed as Team China moved itself up the medal table at the Olympics in the following years.²² All of these were only drawn to a close after the Beijing Olympics in 2008 were universally deemed a great success. As the grand ceremony opened on the evening of 08-08-2008, at 8:08pm (the number eight being the most propitious number in Chinese culture), the Chinese media exalted: "a one-hundred-year-old national dream is finally realized."

State-Building in the 21st Century

- 4.1 At 60, China's "nation problem" seems to have resolved itself. China is now a world economic power, and is acknowledged as a major player on many issues of global importance. The Taiwan Issue is yet unresolved, and the construction of national identity among ethnic groups in Xinjiang and Tibet may still pose challenges.²³ But overall, China's independent nationhood appears firmly established, and its "strong nation" status internationally accepted.
- 4.2 But just as China made big strides in its nation project, the problem of state-building has now surfaced. "State-building" involves development of effective governance institutions to serve the society's developmental, social, and political needs. Despite its many faults, the Maoist state was well equipped to the main tasks it was entrusted to: an urban-biased heavy industrial development strategy, social penetration and control, and national defense. For a while, the Leninist party-state could even claim many admirers.²⁴
- 4.3 Post 1978, while "failed states" were widespread around the world, and many developing countries struggled to build "state capacity" under the tutelage of their Western donors, the Chinese state proved itself amazingly capable of generating

²² Team China's position at the Olympics measured by the number of gold medals moved from the 11th (1988, Seoul), to the 4th (1992, Barcelona and 1996, Atlanta), the 3rd (2000, Sydney), the 2nd (2004, Athens), and the 1st (2008, Beijing).

²³ In March 2008 and July 2009, respectively, riots broke out in Tibet and Xinjiang due to sustained ethnic tensions in the two regions.

²⁴ Many third-world countries in the 1960s and 1970s looked to China as an alternative model for national independence and industrial development. Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington in his earlier years gave high esteem to the Leninist system. See his seminar work, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

economic growth and moving its population out of poverty. It appeared that its government structure and institutions were highly conducive to economic development.²⁵ Not only was the political economy able to diffuse pressure for democratization,²⁶ it even gave rise to a "China Model" claim that flew in the face of the "Washington Consensus."²⁷

4.4 But the weaknesses and deficiencies of this system were soon exposed. In fact, the problems in governance were created by China's own successes. Two decades of economic expansion, marketization, and urbanization brought in a society and an economy that began to overwhelm the existing state institutions. By the late 1990s, crises of governance loomed over the sky of Zhongnanhai.²⁸ Starting from worker protests caused by the restructuring of state-owned enterprises around 1998-99, in a short period of time, many social, economic, industrial, environmental, and public health crises escalated.²⁹

4.5 The challenges of building an effective state for China's modern society and economy, "remaking the Leviathan",³⁰ will dominate the China political agenda in the years to come. China needs to build an effective regulatory state that can govern food and drug production, workplace safety and environmental protection, among others. It needs to build a market governance system that can supervise but not interfere in the financial and industrial sectors. It also needs to build a welfare state to provide social security and healthcare to its 1.3-billion citizens.

4.6 To institutionalize transparency, accountability, and openness, the Party has announced that China would build a law-based government (*fazhizhengfu*). The

²⁵ Gabriella R. Montinola, Yingyi Qian, and Barry R. Weingast, "Federalism, Chinese Style: The Political Basis for Economic Success in China," *World Politics* 48 (1995); Jean C. Oi, "Fiscal Reform and the Economic Foundations of Local State Corporatism in China," *World Politics* 45, no. 1 (1992).

²⁶ Mary E. Gallagher, "'Reform and Openness': Why China's Economic Reforms Have Delayed Democracy," *World Politics* 54, no. 3 (2002).

²⁷ Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).

²⁸ Zhongnanhai is the name of the compound near Tiananmen where China's top government offices are housed. For "crises of governance", see Minxin Pei, "China's Governance Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 5 (2002).

²⁹ The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic in early 2003 was a notable case of crisis management. In the single year of 2002, industrial accidents (coal mine collapses and factory explosions, for example) resulted in 14,924 deaths. In 2005 alone, there were 69 coalmine accidents, resulting in a total death toll of 2,671. In 2003, there were 379 cases of food poisoning, involving 12,876, with 323 deaths.

³⁰ Dali Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan: Market Transition and the Politics of Governance in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

impersonal and generalist rule of law should replace the case-by-case handling of corruption or ideological campaigns, two methods that the Party has heavily relied upon until now. In early 2004, the government issued a blueprint for building a "government based on the rule of law".

4.7 In these government documents, lofty goals such as constitutionality, due process, and openness were duely put forward. The real challenge now is whether and how they will be realized. A limited and rule-based but at the same time effective and service-oriented government is the ideal, but whether the one-party political system can succeed remains a big question.

"Democracy is a Good Thing"

5.1 If the state-building project is already underway, the democracy project is only making its first timid steps. China's emergence from the Cultural Revolution was followed by a brief period of liberalism in the early 1980s. But that early spring of openness and pluralism was quickly terminated by the crackdown that ended the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement. In the two decades that followed, political reform and democracy were largely removed from the national agenda. Democracy was told to wait.³¹

5.2 Furthermore, the state's ability to control civil disobedience seemed sufficiently strong. Since the late 1990s, every year tens of thousands of mass protests have broken out across the country, but they have all been effectively dealt with by the government and have seldom had impact beyond their own localities. The State spares no effort in controlling the Internet as a platform of political mobilization. Overall, this coercive and highly rigid method for maintaining stability, although high costly, still works.³²

5.3 But nevertheless, international experience and global research have shown that a high living standard almost inevitably leads to demands for political opening. Furthermore, the expansion of affluence in a society means the citizens will gradually refuse or at

³¹ Democracy was told to wait, ironically, for the nation building project to complete first: It was painted to have the ability to disrupt economic development and the growing of national power.

³² For the concept of "Rigid Stability", see Jianrong Yu, "Rigid Stability: An Explanatory Framework for China's Social Situation," *China Elections and Governance* (2009).
<http://en.chinaelections.org/newsinfo.asp?newsid=20245>.

least turn indifferent towards economic achievement as a basis for regime legitimacy.³³ One study found that at China's current income level, the probability of it making a transition into democracy in any given year was close to 10%. And this probability would keep rising with the increase in China's per capita GDP.³⁴

5.4 In fact, the transformation of China's socio-political structure as an outcome of 30 years of rapid economic development requires a reconfiguration of the state structure. Under the current one-party system, the large and rapidly growing urban middle class is seriously under-represented. State corporatism has failed to include diverse social interests. Huge numbers of civil society organizations have formed, overwhelming the state's ability to monitor them, let alone control them. According to various studies, the 390,000 NGOs formerly registered with the Chinese government account for probably only 10-20 percent of the total.

5.5 Furthermore, despite great efforts by the State to control them, the media, especially the Internet, are finding an independent and critical voice, bringing about a "quiet revolution."³⁵ The Internet is playing a powerful role in facilitating political liberalization and the empowerment of society.³⁶ The intellectuals are overwhelmingly pro-democratic. In seminars and classrooms, and at dinner tables, "democracy" and political reforms are vividly debated. Liberal scholars within the Party are now openly proclaiming: "Democracy is a good thing!"³⁷

5.6 The Party has nominally accepted democracy as the goal for political development. Its vision of democracy, however, is anchored in its one-party dominance structure. It openly endorses intra-party democracy and popular elections at the grassroots level,

³³ This has been proved repeatedly around the world. For the example in Korea during the 1980s, see Chong-Min Park, "Authoritarian Rule in South Korea: Political Support and Governmental Performance," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 8 (1991).

³⁴ Globally, excluding former Soviet Union Republics and oil producing countries, when a country's GDP per capita increases from \$1000 to \$12,000, the probabilities of it make a transition into democracy in any given year increases from 6% to 33%. See Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55, no. 3 (2003).

³⁵ Richard Baum, "Political Implications of China's Information Revolution: The Media, the Minders, and Their Message," in *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Cheng Li (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2008).

³⁶ John Wong and Yongnian Zheng, eds., *China's Post-Jiang Leadership Succession* (Singapore: World Scientific and National University Press, 2002); Yongnian Zheng, *Technological Empowerment: The Internet, State, and Society in China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007); Yongnian Zheng and Guoguang Wu, "Information Technology, Public Space, and Collective Action in China," *Comparative Political Studies* 38, no. 5 (2005).

³⁷ Keping Yu, *Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

and pays enough lip service to building institutions of “democratic decision-making, democratic election, and democratic supervision.” But in the years to come, it will try every means to delay the introduction of multi-party elections.

The Way Forward

- 6.1 For the years to come, this paper offers the following scenario as the most likely evolutionary path for China towards a democracy. First, the regime will find workable ways to recognize the independence of civil society. As non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are growing beyond the State’s capacity to control and monitor them, the State has to move to a rule-based regulatory framework. The state will have to withdraw its direct control over, and intervention in, the activities of civil society organizations.
- 6.2 Second, intra-party democracy will take the lead. New institutions within the Party will formalize intra-party contests and enforce internal supervision. Party secretaries at the sub-provincial levels may be elected by Party committees, or at least be subjected to a ballot confirmation by such committees. Important appointments will also be subjected to a confirmation by ballots. The internal disciplinary system of the Party will be overhauled.³⁸
- 6.3 Third, local elections will become progressively freer and the practice will spread upwards. Township councils and township chiefs are likely to be freely and openly elected. All such reforms will have to progress slowly, first starting from pilot sites, before formal implementation in a larger number of localities. It may take up to 15 years for elections to be free and open at county level—election of county magistrates or representatives to a more powerful county council. But nevertheless, once free elections are installed and consolidated at the county level, the road to a full democracy will have been paved.
- 6.4 Future historians with the advantage of hindsight will see that, from 1949 to 2049, the first 100 years of the People’s Republic can be demarcated into three non-

³⁸ At the time of writing, a new yearly Plenum of the Party’s Central Committee was to meet in Beijing. Designing intra-party democracy institutions and their installation is reported to be at the top of its agenda.

exclusive phases. In the first 60 years, China was preoccupied with the establishment of its independent nationhood. Especially from 1980 onwards, it made big strides toward nation-building, and emerged as a strong nation with one of the world's largest economies. As the People's Republic stood at its 60th year, besides a strong economic base, it had achieved significant global influence. Having arrived at a *xiaokang* (basically well-off) society, its people had secured their basic socio-economic rights.

6.5 The second stage is likely to run from around 2000 to around 2030, in which the main preoccupation is building a modern state: a rule-based, transparent, accountable, and limited but effective government. By around 2030, China needs to have an effective state, and a vibrant civil society. A certain degree of rule of law will have been put in place, so that citizen rights are effectively protected. In many regards, this state-building process also involves the building of democratic elements into the political and government systems.

6.6 In fact, a prominent political thinker within the Party has stated that by 2020, China will have a "democratic platform."³⁹ Chinese thinking aims at combining good governance with democracy in their political reforms.⁴⁰ Hence, from around 2000, the state-building efforts in China have included democratic elements such as expanding participation and representation. Between 2010 and 2030, China's main political task will be to build institutions that will provide good governance but also prepare a strong state for its democratic future.⁴¹

³⁹ Zhou Tianyong, an adviser to the Communist Party's Central Committee and one of its most liberal voices, told the *Daily Telegraph* that "by 2020, China will basically finish its political and institutional reforms." *Daily Telegraph*, 14 Oct 2008.

⁴⁰ One of the most prominent thinkers of democracy and political reform in China is Yu Keping, a professor at Peking University and Deputy Director of the Party's Central Translation Bureau. He has openly called democracy a "good thing". His concept of democracy has included many elements that Western scholarship would put within the "good governance" concept. See Keping Yu, "Toward an Incremental Democracy and Governance: Chinese Theories and Assessment Criteria," *New Political Science* 24, no. 2 (2002); Yu, *Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China*; Keping Yu, "Ideological Change and Incremental Democracy in Reform-Era China," in *China's Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Cheng Li (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Political scientists believe that without a modern and effective state in place first, a well functioning democracy will not take root. Francis Fukuyama, *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Profile Books, 2004); Richard Rose and Doh Chull Shin, "Democratization Backwards: The Problem of Third-Wave Democracies," *British Journal of Political Science* 31 (2001).

- 6.7 With a relatively effective and well-functioning state, which will include limited democratic institutions such as free local elections and an independent civil society, China will likely enter Freedom House's "Partly Free" category around 2020 (between 2015-2025, that is). This will qualify China as a "semi-democracy."⁴² In fact, an article in *Journal of Democracy* has predicted China will turn "Partly Free" (semi-democracy) around 2015. And a cross-national study shows that this will occur between 2010 and 2015.⁴³
- 6.8 From 2020 onwards, China will enter its final drive toward a modern liberal democracy. This process may take a long time, but it can also acquire rapid and unstoppable momentum. If county-level elections can be held around 2020, and provincial elections can be held around 2030, then it is safe to predict that by 2040-2050, national office is also likely to be subjected to some kind of electoral contests.
- 6.9 From the perspective of 2009, in the next 10 years China is likely to become a semi-democracy, and in another 20-30 years, a full democracy. Hence, by mid-century, roughly one hundred years since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, China will have arrived at what the Party has prescribed itself to achieve: a wealthy and strong (*fuqiang*), democratic (*minzhu*), and civilized (*wenming*) nation.⁴⁴ That will be the true realization of China's one-hundred-year dream.

⁴² Freedom House is an independent organization that rates each country in the world into one of three categories according to its level of "democraticness": Free (full democracy), Partly Free (semi-democracy), and Not Free (non-democracy). See www.freedomhouse.org.

⁴³ Henry S. Rowen, "When Will the Chinese People Be Free?," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 3 (2007); Zhengxu Wang, "Changing Social Values and Democratization in China and East Asia: The Self-Expression Phenomenon and Citizen Politics in Six Confucian Societies, 1981-2001" (Dissertation, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2005); Zhengxu Wang, *Democratization in Confucian East Asia: Citizen Politics in China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam* (Youngstown, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ These goals were first stated on the 12th Party Congress of 1982, and adopted in the Party Constitution, as the Party's "General Guidelines" (*zongluxian*) during the "primary stage of socialism".