This is the published version


Available from Deakin Research Online

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30000874

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner

Copyright: 2006, Taylor and Francis
The Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) is a gigantic body, the largest political party in the world with a membership of 66 million, out of which there are about 45 million rank-and-file members. It is a puzzling political phenomenon, which repeatedly surprises many commentators. After the events of 1989 it was predicted that the CCP would collapse in three years. When this did not happen the prediction was revised to nine years, but this too proved to be wrong. The Party not only survived but it also expanded its power by establishing Party branches in newly established residential buildings and privately owned factories. At the national level, the politburo and central party organization controls 42 giant corporations. In the 1980s the overriding political reform principle was the separation of the Party from government. Today, however, the Party controls all governmental organizations. Local Party secretaries tend to hold concurrently the post of chairperson of the local People’s Congress. No doubt, the Party is enjoying increasingly more absolute power, but this growth in absolute power is accompanied by another puzzling phenomenon, in that there has been a marked improvement in China’s place on Transparency International’s index of corruption. It seems paradoxical that an increase in the absolute power of the Party should be accompanied by a decline in the level of corruption. One possible explanation for this apparent paradox is an enhanced level of local and intra-party democracy.

China has experienced several mini-waves of local democratization. The first wave was the introduction of village elections in the 1980s and the institutionalization of competitive elections in the 1990s. The second wave saw open nominations and elections for township heads in the 1990s. Urban participatory and deliberative institutions can be seen as the third wave, while the fourth wave is characterized by the introduction of intra-party democracy.

Just as price reform was the key for Chinese economic reforms, so intra-party democracy is the most significant part of political reform. In the 16th Party Congress, one major issue was to improve and reform the Party’s leadership and rules of governance. On the agenda was the improvement of existing election and monitoring institutions and the protection and
expansion of the right of Party members to access information, and participate in political processes. It was regarded as essential to make the Party more democratic, and make Party democracy more concrete, truthful and meaningful.

Serious reservations about the soundness of intra-party democracy are often raised, the most significant of which is the question of how a Leninist party can contribute to the democratization of itself. There seems little hope for the achievement of intra-party democracy in Beijing. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the top and bottom organizations of the CCP and, horizontally, divisions exist among party organizations. Internal regime change from below is a source of democratic transition. From below there is a progressive force to promote internal party democracy, push the limits of change, and generate innovative solutions. There are comparative precedents in that the Communist Party in Hungary did introduce intra-party democracy, and the South African Communist Party managed to transform itself into a democratic party, while the Swedish Social Democracy Party (Svenska arbetarepartiet) which ruled Sweden in the 1930s–70s, revitalized itself to regain political power from 1990s up to now.

The aim of this chapter is to develop a revisionist view of the CCP through a study of the discourse of intra-party democracy, grass-root changes in villages, the capitalist components of the Party, the changing nature of Party representation in practice, and the experiment of the Permanent System of Party Representatives (PSPR). It calls for a new thinking about the unthinkable – about the prospect of intra-party democracy – urging us to reflect upon and criticize our own liberal presuppositions about the CCP.

The chapter focuses on the experiment of intra-party democracy in Ya’An and Jiaojiang cities. It draws on my extensive fieldwork and interviews in Beijing, Shanghai and Hanzhou in 2002; Ya’An and Wuhan in 2003; and Beijing, Hangzhou, Wenzin and Jiaojiang in 2004. Of course, Ya’An and Jiaojiang don’t reflect the national trend, and there are regional variations and differences. Indeed, the democratic wave flattens in some areas, but continues to swell in other areas.

It should be noted that some experiments in intra-party democracy escape the attention of the media or of Western scholars. This is because maintaining a low public profile is a characteristic of China’s political experiments in developing intra-party democracy. It has not adopted the traditional May Fourth way of intellectual debates and advocacy. Instead, these political experiments have been carried out with very little or no debate in the public forum.

**The advocacy of intra-party democracy**

The CCP has undergone an interesting and surprising shift from the separation discourse of the 1980s to the unity discourse, advocating that all
key political organizations should be unified under the Party’s leadership in the 1990s. Despite the fact that the Party seems more comprehensively in command since the 1990s, however, the idea of intra-party democracy has nevertheless gained ground. This situation is not as surprising as it may first appear. In fact, it is to be expected, because it can be seen as a partial response to the increasingly absolute power of the Party. It can be seen as a balance mechanism of the political machine, and a critical component of the mixed regime.

Intra-party democracy is seen as enhancing political rights – an institution whereby all Party members can participate in Party affairs directly or indirectly on an equal basis. All Party members are equal, and enjoy the rights protected by the Party constitution. In parallel with village level reforms, it is now advocated that the Party secretary and other members in the same Party committee should be equal and that the principle of one member, one vote should be implemented in intra-party elections.

It has been advocated and was experimentally implemented in some places that multiple-candidate elections replace single-candidate elections for Party Congress delegates. In some places such as Ya’an a multiple-candidate election for Party secretary at the township level and above will be carried out. It is further suggested that the General Party Secretary should be elected by the Central Committee or even by the Party Congress, which, in turn, should become the most important body in determining crucial issues.

It is proposed that in order to create checks and balances within the Party, its power should be divided among Party committees, executive committees, and Party discipline inspection commissions, with each being independently responsible to Party Congresses. Essential to intra-party democracy is the idea of three divisions of power within the Party. Liao Gailong was the early campaigner for this idea, and Professor Wang Guixiong from the Central Party School endorsed and advocated it. According to the proposal, legislative power lies in the Party Representative Congress; executive power is created by converting the general Party committee into an executive agency; and the judicial power belongs to the Party disciplinary committee and the monitoring committee from the Party Representative Congress. It is argued that the system is a unifying force that is able to keep the different power divisions under the Party leadership, and the source of all power comes from the Party Congress.

There is a zigzag route toward Western style democracy in the proposal for three divisions of power. The Chinese official ideology has been opposed to the three divisions of power as a Western institution that does not apply to China. To get around this ideological obstacle Chinese intellectuals advocated three divisions of power within the government in Sheng Zhen in 2002, then within the Party in 2003. This seems to be a Chinese path toward the three divisions of power. Whether this can be seen as an ideological breakthrough remains to be seen, as in 2004 when the Party ordered that this issue should not be discussed.
Chinese understanding of internal party democracy shares with international advocates of intra-party democracy in stressing the principles of participation and inclusiveness, accountability and transparency, and representation. The Chinese idea of intra-party democracy, however, does not emphasize gender equality, fair primary elections that produce a party-list of candidates, or democratic control of Party funding. Moreover, Chinese intra-party democracy is not based on factions within the Party. (Of course, others advocate plural factions within the party and suggest that the CCP should learn from the LDP in Japan where party pluralism contains one party plus factions, or parties within the Party.) It is not oriented toward individual liberty, rather than toward collective solidarity. It maintains one-party rule rather than seeking to create a multi-party system. It wants the rule of law but under the leadership of the CCP. It aims to improve the Party’s congress system, not to adopt referenda or general elections. It stresses the importance of a checking and monitoring role for journalists rather than absolute freedom of the press. These aspects of intra-party democracy are contrary to a liberal understanding of party, but consistent with the Chinese collective concept of the Party (see Table 10.1).

From the above conceptual comparison three things are clear. Patently the CCP is not a “normal” party in the liberal definition of party, and the concept of party in China is different from that of liberalism. Additionally, Chinese internal party democracy is quite different from that of liberal democracy. If we apply a liberal framework then it is clear that a full and genuine Chinese democracy cannot coexist with the domination of the CCP. As Bruce Dickson argues, “if the country [China] does become democratic, it will be essentially at the expense of the CCP.” If, however, we take these different conceptions seriously it is possible for us to entertain the Chinese idea of intra-party democracy. If we follow a Chinese conception of the Party and internal party democracy, we will appreciate and validate the possibility of plural paths towards democracy including a Chinese way. If we adopt a process perspective, the Party has a crucial role to play in obstructing or, alternatively, promoting Chinese democratization.

To understand any new development of the Party and the idea of intra-party democracy, it is important for us to question whether our thinking and assumptions about the party in general are problematic in understanding China’s Party. In particular, we should question whether a liberal theory of party illustrated by Sartori is applicable to China. To understand the CCP, it is best to begin with its concept of the party and to find out whether there is conceptual innovation.

**People’s Party at village level?**

Village elections have increased the CCP’s confidence in democratic transition and developed a non-zero-sum game. Initially, the CCP was greatly concerned at the prospect of declining Party influence in village elections.
Table 10.1 Comparing two concepts of party

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sartori’s liberal concept of party</th>
<th>Chinese understanding of party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individualism is the foundation of party. Individuals form parties to advance their private individual interests.</td>
<td>At a normative level, Party (Dang) is a collective concept excluding private interest. Party is for the promotion of collective and public interests such as community and nation-state beyond private ones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The origin of the modern party system has developed from “parts” (section of society) to party. Party is “part,” not “whole”; no single party can claim “the whole,” therefore a multiple party system is needed. Because party is “part” or “faction” on an individual basis, factions within a party are allowed to articulate the interests of different parts.</td>
<td>The Party is, or represents, the whole, the CCP represents all peoples in China and is equivalent to Chinese nation. Party = state = government = people. The concept of party does not contain the idea that part becomes a party. Because the Party is, and represents, the whole on a collective basis, factions within the Party are denied in terms of moral principles, unity and solidarity. In real party life, factions do exist but the Party suppresses them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple parties compete for political power through elections. This is a link between party and democracy.</td>
<td>CCP monopolizes political power in the name of providing national security, unity and social control. This is a link between one-party domination and denial of liberal democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement produces a modern party; dissent is a virtue of party politics. Plural parties are able to establish and maintain one polity through constitution and consensus.</td>
<td>Dissent is an enemy of the Party; and discipline is a key to maintaining the unity of the Party. The Party believes that plural parties will lead to disintegration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It controlled the whole process, speed and direction of elections. After some experiments, the Party was able to co-opt non-party members and minimize the cost of village elections. It discovered that elected village committee members or chiefs are capable of maintaining local order even though some of them are non-party members. It also found that electoral contests for the position of village Party secretary are highly effective in renewing the Party’s power in rural society.

As a consequence the village Party secretary is increasingly elected by villagers. The new rich, including private entrepreneurs, are recruited into the Party; the village Party organization is regularly monitored by the village representative assembly; the Party secretary has to share power with elected village committee heads and the VRA, which is increasingly becoming a final decision-making institution. All of these new developments signal a significant change in the CCP’s ruling principles and
Intra-party democracy

Institutions. Its source and operation of power have changed and are evolving in a democratic direction.

In 2001–2, many localities adopted Party elections in Zhejiang. In Linhai, anyone who failed to get more than 50 percent of the villagers’ votes could not be the candidate for the village Party secretary. In 2002, the Party mandated that all who want to be village Party secretaries must first stand for election to the village committee. It seems that the Party has discovered party elections as a new solution that “may [reconcile] the requirements of village self-government and the survival of the Party.”

The sequence of elections is an interesting issue. The common practice has been to let the election of village Party secretaries precede the election of the village committee. Now in the Shanxi model, the village election precedes the Party election, and in the Guangdong model, those who are elected as village chiefs automatically become Party secretaries in a joint election. Such a practice embodies the democratic principle of allowing the populace to have the final say. More importantly, Party elections raise an interesting question. If villagers are involved in electing Party secretaries, to what degree, in the long term, will the Party branch change into a genuine “people’s party?” At the risk of some exaggeration, the CCP appears to already have developed into two parties: a villagers’ party where diverse interests are represented and negotiated and where political power is shared and checked; and a national party where social interests are not properly represented, and which still monopolizes and refuses to share power.

Capitalist component within the Party

The growth of private economy, private ownership, and rural and urban industrialization, all pose challenges to the Party. As a response, the criteria to join the CCP have changed and the CCP has admitted capitalists and private entrepreneurs into the Party. In the past, class background and class consciousness were the main criteria. Today, these are no longer crucial. One township Party secretary suggested three requirements necessary for Party admission: to take the lead in becoming rich; to carry out [the Party’s] policy (i.e., to obey Party discipline and the law), and to be young with a good educational background. A millionaire who ran a private enterprise hiring large numbers of workers was admitted into the Party.

According to the Almanac of Private Economy in China 2000, 4.3 million or 19.8 percent of private entrepreneurs were Party members in 1999. In one township in 1996, 20 percent of village Party secretaries were private entrepreneurs; and in four districts in Shanghai in 1998, 13 percent of the private entrepreneurs were Party members.

The percentage of private entrepreneurs in Party membership goes up in scholarly surveys. Forty percent of all responding entrepreneurs were Party members in Bruce Dickson’s survey of 500 private entrepreneurs in
1997 and 1999. Strikingly, the result of David Goodman’s interviews with 239 leading business people in Shanxi Province during 1996–8 shows that 77 percent of rural entrepreneurs, 56 private entrepreneurs, 73 joint venture managers, 66 private enterprise managers were CCP members.

Many members of the new class have been invited to join the Party, or to become deputies of local People’s Congresses through elections. By 1995, at the national level, 5,401 private entrepreneurs had become deputies of People’s Congresses at and above the county level; 8,558 were committee members of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference; 1,357 were committee members of the Communist Youth League; and 1,430 were committee members of the Women’s Federation. In Shimen County in Hunan Province, for example, 198 private entrepreneurs have become local leaders; among them, 86 are village leaders, and 67 are the secretaries of village Party organizations. In Baodin, 94 percent of private entrepreneurs joined various social organizations. Eighty-two percent of the entrepreneurs who owned more than one million yuan were elected deputies of People’s Congresses at and above the county level, or were committee members of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference.

With wealth and money private entrepreneurs attempt to buy political power, while at the same time political power holders want to get rich through regulation and control of license. The combination of wealth and power inevitably leads to intricate corruption. In order to combat corruption, many advocate democratic mechanisms. Simultaneously entrepreneurs began to demand more free space and greater social liberalization which are in keeping with their interests. They no longer willingly accepted conditions imposed on them; instead, they wanted a share in decision-making and the formulation of policies related to their interests. They consider election to be a way to have a say in the Party decision-making process.

It should be noted that these private entrepreneurs participate in local politics merely as individuals or as interest groups, not as a politically mobilized “class” in the political sense as in the European context. This is because any class-based political mobilization and campaigning is prohibited by the party-state, which clamps down on anything that is perceived as attempting to stir up class conflicts.

Three represents

All round the world political parties are losing linkage with society and the issue of true representation is a serious problem. The CCP is not exceptional, but it has worked hard to address the representation issue. The discourse of “three represents” aims to achieve maximal inclusiveness and representation.

In February 2000 in Guangdong, Jiang Zemin proposed the concept of “three represents” (san ge dai biao), that is, the CCP represents the “most
advanced mode of production, the most advanced culture, and the interests of the majority of the population." Jiang Zemin seems to realize that the CCP has to reposition itself to be representative of the whole nation instead of just being the vanguard of the working class. One township Party secretary commented that the best way of transforming the CCP is through the new private entrepreneur class, and that this is the essence of Jiang Zemin’s three represents.21

Given that the new private entrepreneur class forms a large part of “the most advanced mode of production,” Jiang Zemin proposed that the Party should recruit more members from this new class. The proposal was adopted in the 16th Party Congress marking a significant change in the nature of the CCP, and radically transforming it from being representative of the working class and peasants to being representative of all social classes including the new entrepreneur class. Now in Ya’An, the Party branch in each village is required to recruit between two and five private entrepreneurs into the Party each year. At the same time, the Party branch is obliged to help Party members to be rich through supporting his/her business.

It should be noted that while the concept of three represents aims to further increase the percentage of the private entrepreneur class in the Party so as to enlarge the social basis of the CCP, it cannot be understood as only the representation of the new rich class. Jiang’s emphasis on the CCP’s representation of the interests of the majority of the population can be seen as an attempt to rebuild the Party as a “national party” (minzu dang). This seems to return to Song Ping’s earlier call in 1990 for nationalizing the CCP into an “all-people party” (quanmin dang).22 There is an internal contradiction, however, between the interests of people such as workers and the interests of the rich. It is precisely this contradiction that justifies the Party’s intervention and its role of coordination in dealing with the conflict of interests.

Whose interests does the party-state represent?

The emergence of the new private entrepreneur class raises the question of the nature of the party-state. With more and more officials entering systematic alliances with business figures, selling political access as a commodity and enriching both themselves and their business cronies, the question of economics invading politics inevitably arises. Local officials of the party-state have become more dependent on the new private entrepreneurs than on the workers. Some local officials have been known to borrow money from private entrepreneurs to pay their workers who work in the unprofitable state-owned enterprises. Others rely on the business of private entrepreneurs to solve the problem of unemployment.

Will the noble idea of “a government for the people” be narrowed down to one of “a government for the rich”? Does the party-state now represent the interests of capital, or is Party membership merely used as an instrument
He Baogang

to develop capital? There are signs to suggest that subtle changes are already taking shape in the relations between the party-state, the new private entrepreneur class and the working class. Bao Tong, who was the personal advisor to the former Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang, asserted, "it [the three representative doctrine] implies that it is now time for the party to admit the unspoken truth and formally declare that it has become China's party for the rich and the powerful."²³

Can the party-state maintain its neutrality and make policies that go beyond class relations? The central leadership of the party-state seems to adopt a neutral position, in conflicts involving workers and entrepreneurs. The central government has restricted the inclusion of the new private entrepreneur class into national politics on the one hand, and suppressed underground labor movements on the other. Also, the party-state has seemingly attempted to protect the interest of workers through the introduction of several laws. The 1992 Trade Union Law requires that waged laborers be given the right to form or join unions, and to participate in democratic management and supervision. Further, the 1994 Labor Law guarantees minimum wages and restricts overtime work. Fully implementing these laws, however, can be very difficult. For example, when 62 state-owned or collective enterprises were sold to private business people in Ninghai county of Zhejiang Province, all its trade unions were closed down or simply lost their function.²⁴

Permanent system of Party's representatives

Together with the three represents discourse and the changing nature of the party-state's representation is a slow and quite institutional change, the formation of the PSPR. The PSPR was originally proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1956. In the 13th Party Congress, Zhao Ziyang's team proposed that a PSPR be established. Gao Fang raised the issue in an inner circle group. In 1988, the central Party organization approved 12 experimental sites for this: among them were Jiaojiang and Shaoxing. Before the 16th Party Congress, seven out of twelve sites stopped their experiments. The system was improved in Ya'An, however, in August 2002. In 2003, more experiments were carried out in 17 cities of Meishan and Zhigong in Sichuang; in the Baoan district of Sheng Zhen, Huizhou city, Yangdong county in Guangzhou, Chengbei district in Nanning city, and Yichang city.

In the past, Party Congress was held every five years, and Party representatives elect Party committee members who, in turn, elect Party secretaries. Now Party Congress will be held every year. In Ya'An, Party representatives hold quarterly meetings each year. In the past, the Party Representative Congress was a consulting body, but now it is deemed as a decision-making institution and the source of final authority.²⁵

In the past, Party election was only a formality. However, in Yinjin county, Ya'An city, Party representatives were competitively elected in
2003. Among the 5,800 Party members, 736 (that is 12.7 percent of Party membership) participated in running for election, 241 were decided as final candidates and 166 were elected as Party representatives in August 2003. During the election process, 17 Party leaders at township level lost their positions.

In the PSPR, Party representatives are *permanent* positions for the period of the Party Congress. They are "permanent" in the sense that Party representatives exercise their daily rights and powers. Party representatives are granted five basic rights – the right to election; the right to discuss major policies; the right to evaluate Party leaders; the right to monitor; and the right to propose a motion. Ten or 20 permanent Party representatives can put forward a motion in the Party Congress. The relevant Party or government organization must answer an inquiry made by any permanent Party representative within three to six months. Moreover, in exercising these rights, Party representatives are protected by state laws and the Party disciplinary committee. The Party secretaries have no right to arbitrarily remove Party representatives.

Several initiatives were taken so that a Party Representative Congress can be held more frequently and more efficiently. The size of the constituency of Party representatives was reduced so that one representative is able to make close contact with, and represent, about 100 Party members; the standing committee and the alternate member system were abolished to make the Party Representative Congress a decision-making body. Ya’An has also set up a new institution for Party representatives called the “Party representative liaison office.”

Significant is the initiative of democratic evaluation within the Party. In 2003 in Ya’An city, in an annual Party Congress, all major leaders were evaluated by Party representatives, 40 percent of whom had to be ordinary members. Crucially, if any leader does not gain a confidence vote of over 70 percent, a dismissal process will begin automatically against him/her. In practice, a first no-confidence vote will result in such a leader being given a warning and one year to improve their work. Dismissal only occurs after a second non-confidence vote. There are several limits to this evaluation. In Jiaojiang city, Zhejiang, the Party organization stopped the evaluation practice in 1991 because the Party secretary lost face when he received far fewer confidence votes than his colleagues. Nevertheless, it reintroduced the evaluation in 2003. In Zhejiang, the Party secretary Zhang Dejiang did not endorse the idea of citizen evaluation, and did not approve the proposal for the evaluation of all major leaders by citizens. Only deputy leaders of governmental departments were allowed to be evaluated by 21 leaders in 2002–3.

There are, however, some problems with the PSPR. First, this is a bureaucratic expansion of the Party, illustrated by the fact that five staff members for a representative office were added in Ya’An. Additionally, there is a representatives’ monitoring committee that checks the disciplinary
committee. Second, there is uncertainty about the relationship between the Party Representative Congress and the People’s Congress. In taking over the role of People’s Congress, the Party Representative Congress will be held first, followed by the People’s Congress which is supposed to endorse the decisions made by the Party Representative Congress.

**Limits**

Obviously there are very many limitations to intra-party democracy as discussed above. Here I would like to say more about these limitations. Most new experiments took place at township or county level. Very little progress has been made at the central level. The changes are minimal, marginal and deceptive in the sense that they aim to delay rapid democratization. As Gang Lin points out, “Beijing’s major goal is to perpetuate the CCP’s ruling legitimacy by developing intra-party democracy.”

Intra-party democracy does not represent a radical departure. Its inherent limitations include continuing Party domination, limited roles for active civil society, a failure to fully protect civic rights, and a lack of transparency and openness. An external mechanism to monitor Party elections is absent. If internal democracy is not open to outside scrutiny, how can it push societal democracy, or encourage pluralism and competition among parties?

The whole problem is that the CCP still controls state power. Intra-party democracy is under the control of the Party organization, in particular, the Party’s “four submissions” discipline. Intra-party democracy can be seen as a revised form of democratic centralism. Jiaojing city made little process when the Party Representative system challenged the exiting power structure.

Even if there is democracy, it is elite democracy, exclusive to people and other parties. It is not liberal or social democracy, nor is it the constitutional reform that China urgently needs. Without pressure from society and NGOs, internal party democracy is limited. The limits of intra-party democracy can be seen in Table 10.2.

There are external and internal constraints on internal party democracy. Primary elections create division and factions within the Party, and excessive intra-party democracy is seen to weaken the discipline and solidarity.

| **Table 10.2** The limit of one-party democracy in a comparative context |
|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| **One-party democracy** | **Two-party democracy** | **Three-party democracy** |
| Election by party members | Elections decide ruling party | More choices |
| Party monopoly | Power turnover between two parties | The third party alternative |
that are required to compete for power and votes. From the perspective of the CCP, therefore, internal party democracy must be limited, to such a degree that it will not weaken the Party. There is a trade-off between discipline (competitiveness) and democracy.

Normally, state democracy precedes party democracy. It is thought that it is only after a country consolidates state democracy that intra-party democracy becomes an issue. This is because freedom and democratization in civil society encourages and allows ordinary Party members to challenge Party leaders. Given the lack of state democracy in China, it is thought doubtful that China can develop a meaningful party democracy. As Gang Lin points out, “in the absence of meaningful restraints on the Party’s monopoly of power and the consequent blurring of lines between Party and state authority, China’s institutional building is likely to be incomplete and fraught with theoretical inconsistency and strategic ambiguity.”

It is commonly asked whether it is possible for China to achieve internal party democracy before it achieves state democratization but this sequential thinking is mistaken. It is mistaken to say that there is no need for state democracy if the CCP has internal party democracy. In reality, local Party officials emphasize the interactive relationship and mutual influence between party democracy and people’s democracy.

Thinking on the unthinkable

The changes discussed above require a revisionist view of the Party. Without revision, our expectations will meet unpredictable outcomes, and our predictions of the demise of the CCP will fail again. Western liberals should have the courage to adapt their principles to the Chinese reality. Western liberal presuppositions about the Party prevent us from looking objectively at the Chinese path toward local democracy, the liberal political paradigm distracts us from paying sufficient attention to the mixed regime that China has developed, and the focus on democratization strategies for civil society handicaps our enquiries into other paths toward democracy.

One special issue of The Journal of Democracy was devoted to the question of whether the Party is able to renew itself or whether it is likely to suffer further decay. Critics such as Qinglian He hold the view that the CCP is morally and politically so corrupt and bankrupt that it cannot renew itself, let alone undertake the democratization of China. Nevertheless, beyond a simple dichotomy between renewal and decay, one needs to ask deeper questions and think the unthinkable.

Viewing the Party with a fresh eye

The Party is still Leninist in the sense that “Leninist organizational principles prohibit the formation of competing organizations that could challenge the CCP, and the Party enforces this prohibition strictly.” Beyond that,
however, the Leninist framework is inappropriate to fully apprehend the significant developments at the local level and is unable to help us understand the complex reality of party politics in China.

The conventional view in the West is that the presence of the Party constitutes an obstacle to Chinese democracy, and that the CCP is expected to collapse as did its counterpart in the USSR. In reality, however, the ideology of communism is gone, the Party ideology has been "secularized" from a principle-oriented party to a utilitarian party. That the CCP does not have a strong commitment to "ism" means that it is flexible enough to make substantial change for its survival. Indeed, the membership of the Party is changing in favor of the rich, the unchallenged domination of the Party has been weakened, and the Party has gradually learnt to share power with elected village committees and representative assemblies, while increasingly adopting elections as an institutionalized measure to reinforce its legitimacy.

We have to ask whether the Nomenklatura appointment system has changed at local level. Now, the local party organization appoints cadres outside the Party, open nomination and elections play some roles in appointing local cadres, and the local party, in particular, village Party secretaries, have to share powers with elected village chiefs. In these ways, the power of the Party's organization has been slightly reduced and restricted, the sources of local power are being redefined and elections and deliberation are increasingly becoming a new source of authority and legitimacy.

The CCP has undergone a transition from an overwhelmingly peasant-based Party to one that attempts to represent all sectors of society, and from opposition to private ownership to support for privatization and the capitalist line. The CCP has recruited entrepreneurs and the new rich. The CCP has also transformed itself from a revolutionary party to a conservative ruling party as was proposed in 1991 by Tai zi dang. The move towards a conservative ruling party has been taken as follows: to abandon the communist goals and to adopt new nationalist and patriotic goals; to restore the traditional Chinese culture to discipline the masses and to unite all the Chinese people; to give up radicalism and political romanticism and to emphasize gradualism and realism.

In urban cities, local parties at the level of residential committee sometimes function like charity organizations; the local party boss develops a charity plan and persuades local business people to help the poor. During traditional Chinese festival periods, the poorest people may receive up to 2,000 yuan. Urban residential communities also provide welfare services by registering the jobless and poor and helping them to find jobs.

The idea that the Party is a rational actor helps us to understand its choice of seeking to foster intra-party democracy under certain circumstances. In the long term, if these developments continue, the Party's principles will be redefined and its nature changed, so that these elements will eventually open a path for a quiet and peaceful change in the Chinese authoritarian system.
Creating a Chinese model of democratization?

China’s path toward democracy must be unique in human history not only because of the size of China’s population and its long history of civilization, but also because of the Chinese experience of economic reform. China has experienced more than 20 years of economic reforms and has developed its own pattern and model. Due to the success of these economic reforms, the Chinese are becoming more confident in creating their own model, and they do not want to simply copy models such as the KMT in Taiwan, the PAP in Singapore and the LDP in Japan.

Will the CCP adopt a multi-party system? This seems to be a misleading and unproductive question in the current situation; instead it is better for us to fully understand the historical and conceptual restrictions on the development of a multi-party system in China. An historical perspective on the multi-party system is very enlightening. In the latter Qing, there was strong opposition to the formation of the Party because according to Confucian ethics, the Western style of party was regarded as a group of people who pursue private interests (*pengdang*). Gradually, the notion of party was accepted and China witnessed a variety of political parties. Despite the existence of plural parties, one party tended to regard itself as the only legitimate one and did not respect other parties. In the end, the CCP monopolized all power and controlled state, society and the army. Despite the separation discourse, since the 1990s the CCP now firmly holds to the unity discourse that all key political organizations should be unified under the Party’s leadership. Clearly, all these historical events demonstrate continuation of the Chinese tradition of so-called “Great Unity.” The centralization of power through one party has been regarded as an effective way to maintain national unity. The holistic concept of party as a whole was entrenched in the Chinese mindset and political institutions. This is a significant historical constraint on the development of a multi-party system in China.

Another constraint on the development of a multi-party system in China is cognitive. It is really difficult for China to break the holistic tradition to endorse an individualistic concept of the party. In the history of well-developed democracies, different parties represent the different interests of social classes, which constitute a basis for a multi-party system. Of course, in the post-modern society, class representation has been weakened in the politics of party. In China, the CCP claims it represents the advanced culture, the advanced classes, and the whole people. Its representation is beyond the division of social classes. The idea of the party does not contain the idea of representing diverse interests through a plural party system (see Table 10.1). It is unlikely that China will replicate a European model of multi-parties backed by conflicting social classes. The CCP deals with class conflicts through the means of technocracy – capitalists sharing power with technocrats – and three represents. At the same time the Party adopts tough measures to suppress any political group that aims to mobilize social
The Chinese idea of party does not imply sharing power and the turnover of power between two parties. It can claim its legitimacy as long as it maintains control. It justifies one-party domination in terms of economic growth, that is, one-party domination provides the stability and the environment that rapid economic development needs.

Given the above cognitive and historical conditions, one might think a realistic and productive question about a Chinese form of a multi-party system. It is important to ask whether the current one party plus multi-party cooperation system will develop into a functional equivalent of a multi-party system. In the system of one-party domination and multi-party cooperation, the CCP shares its power with other democratic parties in a limited way. Political consultation with democratic parties is made before making a decision, democratic parties are informed before announcing major decisions, the support from democratic parties is garnered after announcing major decisions and some deputy posts are allocated to democratic party leaders. It seems that the CCP is the head of the coalition with other parties.

China is developing a mixed regime in which different ingredients such as the traditional Mandarin rule, one-party domination, the form of people’s party, functional factions representing different interest groups, and democratic elections and monitoring are combined. The idea of the mixed regime provides a better framework for exploring new developments and examining the potential of intra-party democracy. Through mixing these ingredients, China is in the process of creating its own model of political rule and democratization in the twenty-first century. It will be interesting to see whether the three divisions of power within the Party is the first step towards three divisions of power in the state.

At the same time, China is attempting to combat the real and potential corruption of absolute power in a one party-dominated system through the introduction and development of intra-party democracy. Nowadays, it is extremely difficult for local officials to commit serious corruption. There are several checks against any potential evil-doer. The Party discipline committee has more power than before; and the Party secretary no longer controls the same level’s Party discipline committee. The monitoring committee comprising permanent Party representatives constitutes another important check mechanism. There are two important institutional safeguards against corruption – the annual Party democratic evaluation meetings in which any Party leader who does not gain above 70 percent of evaluative votes will face internal Party disciplinary warning and punishment, and Party elections where officials are likely to lose their position in the internal party election if they have a bad name for corrupt behavior.

Concluding remarks

While I concur with many of the criticisms of intra-party democracy, I would like to stress that intra-party democracy is a much more important
Intra-party democracy and significant institutional development than that of village or township elections. Just imagine that 66 million Party members, five percent of China’s population, will go to vote for their Party representatives! If the proposal of intra-party democracy were realized, the Party itself would change into something new, the current nature of the CCP would be sacrificed, and the CCP would become more powerful but also more legitimate. Even if a majority of Chinese people would still be deprived of democratic processes, intra-party democracy would, nevertheless, still constitute a big step. Intra-party democracy will improve the quality of one-party domination and prevent it from becoming an absolutely corrupt and tyrannical party.

The end result of intra-party democracy might be the legitimization of factions within the party, like that of the LDP in Japan, and the creation of two or more functional “parties” within the CCP. It might also lead to a fundamental change in the state–party relationship. If the Party were democratized, the state would have been democratized too because of the nature of the Chinese party-state. It would also pave the way for a rapid transformation to state democracy and strengthen reformers within the Party. From intra-party democracy, one may look to the prospect of inter-party democracy, and the democratization of the relationship between the Party and the state. While the CCP cannot afford to miss this historical opportunity, Western observers and China watchers need to think of all the possibilities for the future of the CCP.

Notes
1 A residential community usually has 1,000 households or more. Each has a general branch of the Chinese Communist Party with more than 200 members. Each general branch of the Party has subdivisions, going down to sub-branches in each residential building.
3 According to Transparency International, China was the third most corrupt country with a score of 2.16 in 1995, but ranked 59 with a score of 3.5 in 2002, and 66 with a score of 3.4 in 2003. See http://www.transparency.de.


18 See Deng Liqun, Yingxiang woguo guojia anquan de lougan yinsu” (Some Factors that Affect Our National Security), a report submitted to the Central Party, unpublished but widely distributed privately among intellectuals towards the end of 1995, p. 7.

19 See Li Qiang, Dangdai, p. 331.

20 For example, Wan Ruinan, a former director of the Stone Company, was an active advocate of privatization, and vigorously defended the Stone enterprise as having been from the start a vehicle for political action.

Intra-party democracy 209

24 See *The Front Line Magazine* (published in Hong Kong), No. 11, 2000, p. 12.
26 Gang Lin, “Ideology and Political Institutions for a New Era,” p. 64.
32 “Sulian jubian zhongguo de xianshi yingdui yu zhanlue xuanzhe” (China’s Realistic Countermeasures and Strategic Choices after the Dramatic Changes in the Soviet Union), an internal document printed and circulated by Zhongguo Qingnian Baoshe in September 1991.
36 Chen Wenbin (eds), *Zhongguo gongchandang xinglian fanfulu* (A Record of the Chinese Communist Party’s Struggle against Corruption) (Beijing: Xiyuan chubanshe, 1993).