

# The Chinese Liberal Camp in Post-June 4th China

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This paper is an assessment of Chinese liberal intellectuals in the two decades following June 4th. It provides an analysis of the intellectual development of Chinese liberal intellectuals; their attitudes toward the party-state, economic reform, and globalisation; their political endeavours; and their contributions to the project of constitutional democracy in China.

Liberals in contemporary China understand liberalism in the classical sense as a political philosophy that considers individual liberty as the most important political goal and upholds principles such as legal protection of individual rights, the rule of law, and limitations on government power. For them, liberalism takes the form of political liberalism for the support of liberal democracy over dictatorship, economic liberalism for the support of private property over government control, and social liberalism for the support of equality over privilege. China's liberals not only strive for individual freedom and seek to replace the despotism of the Leninist party-state with liberal democracy, but also stand at the front-line in the fight against social inequality, and champion the cause of the working class in the quest for a better life.

The June 4th massacre was a major setback for the democratisation project in China, but the discourse on democracy has continued to flourish in defiance of the party-state. The massacre not only hurt Chinese intellectuals deeply, but also compelled some of them to reconsider the trajectory of China's political development and strategies for achieving the goal of democracy. It is in the process of this intense reflection that a number of Chinese intellectuals have achieved an intellectual breakthrough to fully embrace liberalism since the 1990s. This paper is an assessment of the thoughts and activities of Chinese liberals in the two decades after June 4th. It will provide an analysis on the emergence of the Chinese liberal camp, the latest intellectual developments among Chinese liberals, and their contributions to the quest for constitutional democracy in China. <sup>(1)</sup>

## The formation of the Chinese liberal camp under "Market-Leninism"

China's "reform era" was divided into two different phases by the June 4th massacre in 1989, which brought a premature

end to the healthy trend of political liberalisation inspired by democratic aspiration. Following the massacre, and in the wake of the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) led by Deng Xiaoping took two resolute measures for survival: a ruthless purge of democratic forces in society and within the CCP on the one hand, and the introduction of "market economy" on the other. With the tremendous aid of capital, technology, and consumer markets facilitated by globalisation, the post-totalitarian regime in China rapidly evolved into a new order of "Market-Leninism," a useful term coined by *New York Times* correspondent Nicholas Kristof that refers to a Leninist party-state sustained by a combination of relatively free-market economics and autocratic one-party rule. <sup>(2)</sup> In other words, it is an astonishing paradox that combines previously incompatible elements of capitalism and Communism, which by definition aims at eliminating capitalism.

To the surprise of many throughout the world, this strange hybrid has produced an economic miracle parasitic on exceptionally low-cost production factors, the expanding global market, and imported technologies and expertise. The enormous wealth generated by this new prosperity has provided a much greater incentive for Chinese Communist power-holders to retain power, and more resources for them to co-opt other social groups and repress the opposition. The result has

1. In the context of contemporary China, the terms "constitutional democracy" (*xianzheng minzhu*) and "liberal democracy" (*ziyouzhuyi minzhu*) are interchangeable, though the latter is rarely used. Since the term "democracy" has been widely abused and even used to justify one-party dictatorship, for the purpose of clarity Chinese liberals deliberately choose the term constitutional democracy, referring to liberal democracy with not only regular multiparty elections but also separation of powers and the protection of individual rights provided by the constitution and other laws. "Constitutional democracy" is often substituted with the term constitutionalism (*xianzheng*) as a short-hand, a common practice that originated in modern China and was especially prevalent during the Constitutional Democracy Movement (*xianzheng yundong*) in the 1940s.
2. Nicholas D. Kristof, "China Sees 'Market-Leninism' as Way to Future," *The New York Times*, 6 September 1993.

been a transition to and consolidation of “power elite capitalism” (*quanguo zibenzhuyi*), in which the development of the cruellest version of capitalism is dominated by the Communist bureaucracy, leading to phenomenal economic growth on the one hand and endemic corruption, striking social inequalities, ecological degeneration, and skilful political oppression on the other. This unexpected outcome has disheartened many democracy supporters, who worry that China’s transition is “trapped” in a “resilient authoritarianism” that can be maintained for the foreseeable future.<sup>(3)</sup> However, because it has produced unmanageably acute social tensions and new social and political forces that challenge the one-party dictatorship, Market-Leninism is not actually that resilient. In particular, social tensions have given rise to an amorphous but increasingly forceful wave of “rights defence movements” (*weiquan yundong*).<sup>(4)</sup> The most promising new political force engendered by Market-Leninism in China has been the formation of a liberal camp in the late 1990s, consisting of at least six vaguely distinctive but to some extent overlapping categories: liberal intellectuals, liberals within the CCP, Christian liberals, democracy activists, human rights lawyers, and grassroots rights activists. These six groups have advocated liberalism in their own perspectives through publications and speeches, have taken part in a variety of social and political activities for the cause of democracy, have expressed mutual support for each other when persecuted by the party-state, and have occasionally united to issue joint petitions or open letters on the Internet to express their shared concerns or demands for democratic change.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Liberal intellectuals and liberals within the CCP

The majority of intellectuals in China today are at least semi-liberals in the sense that they share beliefs in market economy, individual rights, and to a lesser extent, liberal democracy, although only a tiny minority of them hold these liberal ideals profoundly enough to express them in a systematic way or are brave enough to put their beliefs into practice by actively confronting the party-state.<sup>(6)</sup> A claim of a “rebirth” or “resurfacing” of liberalism in China was made by Chinese liberals themselves in the late 1990s. According to some leading Chinese liberal intellectuals, one of the most important events in intellectual circles in China in 1998 was the “open discourse” of liberalism after 50 years of silence.<sup>(7)</sup> Several factors contributed to this new development of liberalism in China, including expectations of change after Deng Xiaoping’s death, the Asian financial crisis rooted in authoritarianism, the perception

that economic development necessitated further reforms, the provocative attacks on liberalism by the new left, awareness of the accelerating pace of globalisation, and the posture of Jiang Zemin’s leadership in respect to human rights and rule of law, as shown by the political report of the Fifteenth Party Congress and the signing of the “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” and the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”<sup>(8)</sup>

The core of the emerging liberal camp is a group of middle-age scholars who can be largely identified as members of the “Cultural Revolution Generation,” including Zhu Xueqin, Xu Youyu, Qin Hui, He Weifang, Liu Junning, Zhang Boshu, Sun Liping, Zhou Qiren, Wang Dingding and Zhang Weiyang. Their conversion to liberalism is rooted in their own political experience as well as their exposure to liberal theories. While their experience of and reflections on totalitarian rule during the Cultural Revolution provided strong stimuli for them to search for a new political belief, in the 1970s they were intoxicated with the “heresy” of humanism of different sources, and since the 1980s they had been attracted to the liberal thinking of both Western sources and the liberal tradition of modern China. They have published their ideas in monographs, theoretical journals such as *Dong Fang* (Orient) and *Kaifang Shidai* (Open Times), newspapers such as *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) and *Nanfang Dushibao* (Southern Metropolitan Daily), and more conveniently, on the Internet. The post-totalitarian

3. Andrew Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience,” *Journal of Democracy*, 14, no. 1, 2003, pp. 6–17; Pei Minxin, *China’s Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*, Harvard University Press, 2006.
4. Wang Yi, “2003: ‘Xin minquan yundong’ de faren he caolian” (2003: The origins and practices of the “new civil rights movement”), *Guangcha* (Observation), 19 December 2003; He Weihua, “2006 nian weiquan yundong de fansi” (Reflections on the rights defence movement in 2006), <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/pubvp/2007/01/200701180425.shtml>; Teng Biao, “Zhongguo weiquan yundong xiang hechu qu?” (Whither the rights defence movement in China?), <http://www.peacehall.com/news/gb/pubvp/200610172340.shtml>.
5. Due to length constraints and division of labour, this article focuses on liberal intellectuals and to a lesser extent on liberals within the CCP and Christian liberals. Analysis of democracy activists, rights lawyers, and grassroots activists is provided in other articles in this issue of the journal.
6. The term “liberals” in this article refers to those absolute liberals who have established firm belief in philosophical, economic, and political liberalism and openly defend their beliefs in practice.
7. Zhu Xueqin, “1998: Ziyoushuyi xueli de yanshuo” (Discourse on liberalism in China in 1998), *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), 25 December 1998; Liu Junning, “Ziyoushuyi: Jiushi niandaide ‘busuzhike’” (Liberalism: An “unexpected guest” of the 1990s), *Nanfang zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), 29 May 1999; Xu Youyu, “Ziyoushuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo” (Liberalism and contemporary China), *Kaifang shidai* (Open Times), no. 128, May/June 1999.
8. For the impact of human rights discourse on China, see Merle Goldman, *From Comrade to Citizen: The Struggle for Political Rights in China*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2005; also Michael C. Davis (ed.), *Human Rights and Chinese Values: Legal, Philosophical and Political Perspectives*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Xu Youyu

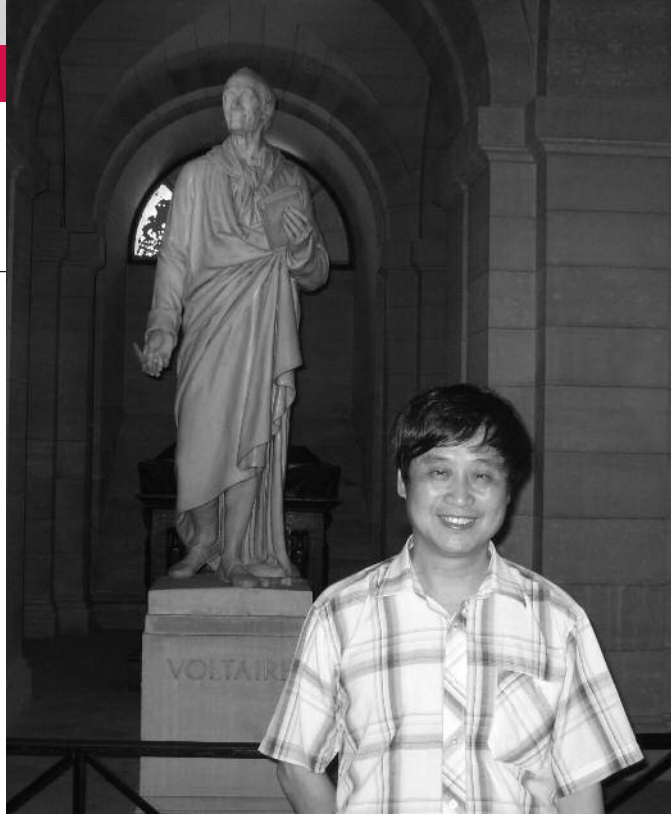
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regime has prevented them from forming an organisation for their political endeavour, but they have managed to get together regularly at informal occasions and at conferences organised by liberal colleagues.<sup>(9)</sup>

Zhu Xueqin, born in 1952, is a leading historian and public intellectual based at Shanghai University. He established his belief in liberalism through a thorough examination of the French Enlightenment in his PhD thesis and became a major exponent of contemporary Chinese liberalism.<sup>(10)</sup> Xu Youyu, born in 1947, is a philosopher and public intellectual based at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Apart from his promotion of liberalism, Xu is also an expert on Western social theories, including Marxism and the Frankfurt School, and is a well-known historian of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>(11)</sup>

Qin Hui, born in 1953, is a historian and public intellectual based at Tsinghua University. Within the liberal camp, Qin stands out particularly for his advocacy of privatisation under strict conditions of democratic openness, the supremacy of social justice, and institutions of social democracy.<sup>(12)</sup> Wu Guoguang, born in 1958, is a political scientist and public intellectual currently based at the University of Victoria after receiving his PhD from Princeton University and working at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for many years. Wu's earlier experience as an editor for *People's Daily* and a member of the Political System Reform Research Office serving then-Party Secretary Zhao Ziyang provided him with special insights into Chinese politics.<sup>(13)</sup> He Weifang, born in 1960, is a professor of law and public intellectual based at Peking University, who rigorously advocates judicial independence and modernisation of the entire Chinese judicial system in accordance with the principles of the rule of law.<sup>(14)</sup> Liu Junning, born in 1961, is a political scientist and public intellectual currently based at the Institute of Chinese Cultural Studies after he was dismissed from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences due to his expression of liberal views. Liu has played a leading role in spreading the concept of constitutional government and in organising several liberal journals and book series such as *Gonggong Luncong* (Res Publica) and *Minzhu Yicong* (Translated Works on Democracy).<sup>(15)</sup> Zhang Boshu, born in 1955, is a philosopher and public intellectual based at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Among liberal intellectuals in China today, Zhang goes the farthest in directly confronting the Communist autocracy and promoting liberal-democratic alternatives in a systematic way.<sup>(16)</sup> Sun Liping, born in 1955, is a sociologist and public intellectual based at Tsinghua University. Sun is well known for his criticism of



the divisions in the current social system and his advocacy of transformation into an open and liberal society.<sup>(17)</sup> Zhou Qiren (born in 1950), Wang Dingding (born in 1953), and Zhang Weiying (born in 1959) are like-minded economists and public intellectuals based at Peking University, sharing an emphasis on private property rights.<sup>(18)</sup>

9. The first exclusive conference for Chinese liberals was organised by Feng Chongyi at University of Technology, Sydney, on Constitutional Government and China, January 2003, leading to the publication of the book series *Zhongguo ziyoushuji luncong* (Chinese Liberalism Series).
10. For Zhu's liberal ideas see Zhu Xueqin, *Daode lixiang guo de fumi* (Downfall of the moral utopia), Shanghai, Sanlian, 2004; and Zhu Xueqin, *Shuzhaili de geming* (The revolution in the study), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999.
11. For Xu's liberal ideas see Xu Youyu, *Ziyou de yanshuo* (Discourse on liberalism), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999.
12. For Qin's liberal ideas, see Qin Hui, *Wenti yu zhuyi* (Issues and -isms), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999; and Qin Hui, *Shijian ziyou* (Practising liberalism), Hangzhou, Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 2004.
13. For Wu's liberal ideas, see Wu Guoguang, *Ziyouhua, zhiduhua he minzhuhua* (Liberalization, institutionalization, and democratisation), Taipei, Storm Forum Press, 1997; Wu Guoguang, *The Anatomy of Political Power in China*, Singapore, Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005.
14. For He's liberal ideas, see He Weifang, *Sifa de linian yu zhidu* (The judicial ideals and institutions), Beijing, Chinese University of Political Science and Law Publishing House, 1998; and He Weifang, *Yunsong zhengyi de fangshi* (The ways to carry justice), Shanghai, Sanlian Books, 2003.
15. For Liu's liberal ideas, see Liu Junning, *Minzhu, gonghe xianzheng: Ziyoushuji sixiang yanjiu* (Democracy, republicanism, and constitutional government: A study on liberalism), Shanghai, Sanlian Books, 1998.
16. For Zhang's liberal ideas, see Zhang Boshu, *Zhongguo xianzheng gaige kexingxing yanjiu baogao* (A study of the feasibility of constitutional democracy reform in China), Hong Kong, Chenzhong Books, 2008; and Zhang Boshu, *Cong wusi dao liusi: 20 shiji zhongguo zhuanzhizhuyi pipan* (From May 4 to June 4: Criticism on Chinese despotism in the twentieth century), Hong Kong, Chenzhong Books, 2008.
17. For Sun's liberal ideas, see Sun Liping, *Boyi: Duanlie shehui de liyi chongtu yu hexie* (Contestations: Conflict of interests and social harmony in a divided society), Beijing, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2006.
18. For their liberal ideas, see Zhou Qiren, *Chanquan yu zhidu bianqian* (Property rights and institutional change), Beijing, Peking University Press 2005; Wang Dingding, *Yongyuan de paihuai* (Wavering forever), Beijing, Social Sciences Academic Press, 2002; and Zhang Weiying, *Qiyelun yu zhongguo qiye gaige* (Enterprise theory and enterprise reform in China), Beijing, Peking University Press, 1999, p.33.



Liberal intellectuals have forged close alliances with liberals within the CCP, usually known as “*dangnei minzhupai*” (democrats within the CCP).<sup>(19)</sup> Liberals within the CCP usually choose to speak to the top party leadership in a coded language familiar to the Communist bureaucracy. They also have special outlets for publishing their ideas, such as *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Chronicles of China), *Tongzhou gongjin* (Advance in the same boat), and *Zhongguo shichang jingji luntan wengao* (Chinese market economy forum drafts), the journals under their control. Most active members of this group are retired officials, including Du Daozheng, director of *Yanhuang chunqiu*, former director of the State Press Bureau and former chief editor of *Guangming Daily*; Du Guang, former director of the Research Office and the Librarian at the CCP’s Central Party School; He Jiadong (1923-2006), former deputy director of Workers’ Press; Hu Jiwei, former chief editor and director of *People’s Daily*; Jiang Ping, former president of the Chinese University of Political Science and Law; Li Rui, vice-minister of the Ministry of Water Conservancy in the 1950s and deputy chief of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee in the 1980s; Li Shenzhi (1923-2003), former vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Ren Zhongyi (1914-2005), former Party Secretary of Guangdong Province; Wu Jinglian, senior research fellow at the Development Research Centre of the State Council; Xie Tao, former vice-president of Renmin University; Yang Jisheng, deputy director of *Yanhuang chunqiu* and former senior journalist of Xinhua News Agency and chief editor of *Chinese Market*; and Zhu Houze, former Party Secretary of Guizhou Province and chief of the Propaganda Department of the CCP Central Committee. Indeed, liberals within the CCP have used their positions to create space for discourse on liberalism, and played a key role in the resurgence of liberalism in China in the late 1990s.

## Christian liberals

The emergence of Christian liberals is a new phenomenon in the social and political landscape of China in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The journey from politics to Christianity among Chinese democracy activists started with Yuan Zhiming, who gained renown as one of the three authors of the influential political television series *River Elegy*, aired in 1988. As a PhD candidate in philosophy at Renmin University, Yuan escaped to the United States in 1989 after the June 4th massacre, and following profound

disappointment with the failure of the Chinese democracy movement and the endless infighting among its leaders in exile, he was converted to Christianity in 1991 while a visiting scholar at Princeton University. With his 12-part VCD *Why Do I Believe in Jesus Christ* circulating widely in China at the time, Yuan’s conversion sent shock waves among his colleagues in the Chinese democracy movement.

Equally influential was the conversion of Yang Xiaokai (1948-2004), a forerunner of the Chinese democracy movement who was well known during the Cultural Revolution for his profound big-character poster *Zhongguo xiang hechu qu* (Whither China), circulated in 1968 when he was 19 years old. Yang earned his PhD in economics from Princeton University in 1988, became a well-known neoclassical economist at Monash University, and was twice nominated for the Nobel Prize in Economics (in 2002 and 2003). For his Chinese audience, Yang is of particular significance in promoting *xianzheng jingjixue* (constitutional economics), which champions the views that constitutional democracy provides the best foundation for economic development.<sup>(20)</sup>

In the last few years, many liberal intellectuals have converted to Christianity and become leaders in the fast expanding “house church” (*jiating jiaohui*) movement, which has an estimated membership of 50-80 million.<sup>(21)</sup> Chinese “house churches,” also known as the “underground” church or the “unofficial” church (although they do not belong to a single denomination but operate separately), are assemblies of unregistered Chinese Christians independent of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the government-run Christian

19. See Feng Chongyi, “Li Shenzhi he zhonggong dangnei ziyou minzhu pai” (Li Shenzhi and liberal democrats within the Chinese Communist Party), in Feng Chongyi (ed.), *Li Shenzhi yu ziyouzhuuyi zai zhongguo de mingyun* (Li Shenzhi and the fate of liberalism in China), Hong Kong Press for Social Sciences, 2004, pp. 121-146; and Feng Chongyi, “Democrats within the Chinese Communist Party Since 1989,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 17, no. 57, November 2008, pp. 673-688.
20. Yang Xiaokai, “Jingji gaige yu xianzheng zhuanxing” (Economic reform and transformation to constitutional democracy), <http://www.tech.cn/data/08/07/2004>.
21. Yu Jianrong, “Jidujiao de fazhan yu zhongguo shehui wending” (Development of Christianity and social stability in China), <http://bbs.okhere.net/thread-928875-1-1.html>; Yu Jie, “Zhongguo dangdai zhishifenzi de guixin licheng” (The conversion of intellectuals to Christians in contemporary China), in Yu Jie, *Bai zhou jiangjin* (Daylight approaching), Hong Kong, Chenzhong Books, 2008, pp. 241-249.

organisation.<sup>(22)</sup> “House churches” operate outside of government regulations and restrictions, but they are not officially outlawed. Their leaders and members are often harassed by government officials, mainly for fear of popular mobilisation outside of government control.

Active Christian liberals include Yu Jie (born in 1973), one of China’s most independent and outspoken writers and social critics, who earned his MA in Chinese literature from Peking University in 2000 after publishing six books, served as Secretary General of the Independent Chinese Pen Center for one term, and has published more than 20 books on Chinese political, social, and cultural issues; Ai Xiaoming (born in 1953), a professor in Chinese literature, well-known feminist, and public intellectual based at Zhongshan University; Wang Yi (born in 1973), a lecturer in law at Chengdu University, who earned his undergraduate degree in law from Sichuan University and has become one of the most influential Chinese public intellectuals with expertise in legal studies; Fan Yafeng (born in 1969), a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, where he earned his PhD in Law; Wang Dongcheng, a professor in Chinese Literature at Chinese Youth Political College; Fu Guoyong (born in 1967), a freelance writer and public intellectual who was imprisoned five times for his political commentaries during 1989-1998; Qi Yanchen, another freelance writer and public intellectual who was imprisoned for four years for his political commentaries; Ren Bumei (born in 1967), a freelance writer who was probably the first to argue the case for “theological liberalism” in contemporary China; Wang Guangze (born in 1972), a freelance writer who earned his first degree in law from Henan University and an MA in Philosophy from Renmin University, but lost his positions, one after another, as editor and journalist at *Xinyang Daily*, *Legal Daily*, *21st Century Economic Herald*, and *Phoenix Weekly* due to his dissenting views; and Zan Aizong (born 1969), a freelance writer who was dismissed by *Chinese Ocean Daily* in August 2006 after reporting on the case of police demolishing a four-storey “house church” in Xiaoshan, Zhejiang Province on 29 July 2006. These Christian liberals publish journals such as *Fangzhou* (Ark) and *Lingshan* (Holy Mountain), which discuss religion-related political issues as well as Christian beliefs.

## The theoretical sophistication of Chinese liberalism

The comprehensive purge of “bourgeois liberal elements” by the hard-line CCP leadership after 1986, and particularly in

the wake of the June 4th massacre, meant that liberal elements became weaker in the establishment in the early 1990s. However, the loss has been compensated by the greater depth of liberal beliefs, the sophistication of liberal theory, and the expansion of liberalism into the greater society since the mid-1990s. Six theoretical breakthroughs in Chinese liberalism can be readily identified: abandoning Marxism and embracing liberalism as the guiding ideology; refuting Chinese despotism as embodied by the communist party-state; replacing rule by law ( ) with rule of law ( ); addressing issues of social justice; formulating liberal ideas into concrete programs for democratisation; and transcending nationalism.<sup>(23)</sup>

## Abandoning Marxism and embracing liberalism as the guiding ideology

The open break with the Marxist framework and embrace of liberalism in China is quite an achievement. We know that Chinese “liberal elements” in the 1980s, including profound thinkers such as Wang Ruoshui, Su Shaozhi, and Yan Jiaqi, were confined to the Marxist framework in their quest for democracy, typically expressed as “socialist democracy and legality.” This limitation has been overcome by Chinese liberals since the late 1990s, when Li Shenzhi, a senior Communist expert on international affairs and former vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a vice-ministerial rank, solemnly averred:

*After 300 years of comparison and selection in the whole world since the age of industrialization, and particularly after more than 100 years of Chinese experimentation, the largest in scale in human history, there is sufficient evidence to prove that liberalism is the best and universal value. Today’s revival of the liberal tradition stemming from Peking University will*

22. The organisation was founded in the early 1950s by a group of government officials and church leaders who were sympathetic to the new Communist regime. It took its name from the principles of self-government, self-propagation, and self-support, which foreign missionaries years before had set forth as goals for the Chinese Church. Thousands of Chinese Christians refused to join the government-run organisation, precisely because they wanted to maintain their independence and the principles of self-government, self-propagation, and self-support. After 1955 these independent Christians were either killed or jailed by the government. The first Chinese “house church” was founded by a senior priest, Yuan Xiangchen, in Beijing in 1980, when he was released after 21 years of imprisonment.
23. Feng Chongyi, “The Return of Liberalism and Social Democracy: Breaking through the Barriers of State Socialism, Nationalism, and Cynicism in Contemporary China,” *Issues & Studies*, 39:3 (September 2003), pp. 1-31; Feng Chongyi, “Democrats within the Chinese Communist Party Since 1989,” *op. cit.*

*beyond doubt guarantee the emergence of a liberal China in the world of globalization.*<sup>(24)</sup>

In official publications, this was the first time in the history of the People's Republic of China that an ideological system of liberalism was asserted as the guiding ideology for China, notably by a high-ranking CCP official, although many concepts of liberalism, freedom of speech in particular, had been advocated by pioneers of the Chinese democracy movement such as Chen Ziming, Hu Ping, and Chen Kuide since the turn of 1980s.<sup>(25)</sup> After the publication of this declaration, Li Shenzhi quickly emerged as an opinion leader and mentor of Chinese liberals, who rapidly surfaced as a visible force in the intellectual and political arena.<sup>(26)</sup> Zhu Xueqin summarised the propositions of Chinese liberalism as follows:

*Empiricism is its philosophy, as opposed to apriorism; the evolutionary theory based on the process of trial and error is its concept of history, as opposed to any kind of historicism; gradualism is its strategy for change and development, as opposed to radicalism; it supports the market mechanism in economics, as opposed to a planned economy; it demands representative democracy, constitutional government, and the rule of law in politics, as opposed to mass dictatorship by the majority in the name of "general will" or dictatorship by one man or oligarchy; in ethics it demands protection of individuals, holding that an individual cannot be further reduced to anything else and cannot be sacrificed for any abstract goals.*<sup>(27)</sup>

## Rejecting Chinese despotism as embodied by CCP rule

Their conversion to liberalism also means that Chinese liberals are no longer confined to so-called "socialist democracy" guaranteeing the leading role of the CCP. The experience of the June 4th crackdown and the collapse of Communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe provided an opportunity for Chinese liberals to deeply reflect on the illusion of "socialist democracy," and they awakened to the fact that the party-state had been deceiving itself and others in claiming Communist one-party rule as a higher form of "democracy." They sharply pointed out that the CCP under Mao's leadership overthrew the Nationalist dictatorship only to supplant it with the CCP's dictatorship, and Mao's successors, the post-Tiananmen leadership, had maintained the despotic system and become

even more corrupt. Since the 1990s, based on their new-found conviction that one-party dictatorship and democracy are incompatible, Chinese liberals have categorically abandoned one-party rule for constitutional democracy with all its standard features, including multi-party elections, legal safeguards for human rights by limiting the power of the government, and a system of checks and balances between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.<sup>(28)</sup>

The achievement and consensus resulting from the theoretical exploration of Chinese liberalism during the last two decades is summarised in Charter 08 (*08 Xianzhang*) which has been signed by more than 8,000 Chinese citizens of all walks since its publication on the Internet on 10 December 2008. It calls on Chinese to "embrace universal human values, join the mainstream of civilized nations, and build a democratic system" as an alternative to one-party dictatorship; it provides succinct exposition of six basic liberal values and concepts: freedom, human rights, equality, republicanism, democracy, and constitutional rule; and it sets forth liberal positions on 19 major issues for political reform: a new constitution, separation of powers, legislative democracy, an

24. Li Shenzhi, "Hongyang Beida de ziyoushui chuantong" (Promoting and developing the liberal tradition of Peking University), in Liu Junning (ed.), *Ziyoushui de xiansheng: Beida chuantong yu jinxiandai Zhongguo* (The harbinger of liberalism: The tradition of Peking University and modern China), Beijing, Zhongguo renshi chubanshe, 1998, 1-5. Similar ideas had been put forward by others earlier, albeit with much less impact. For example, see Xu Liangying, "Renquan guannian he xiandai minzhu lilun" (The concept of human rights and modern theory of democracy), *Tanshuo* (Exploration), August 1993; also in Xu Liangying, *Kexue minzhu lixing: Xu Liangying wenji* (Science, democracy, and reason: Selected works of Xu Liangying), New York, Mirror Books, 2001, pp. 258-276.
25. Chen Ziming, "Zouxiang xianzheng minzhu: Yige 'siwu ren' de xinlu licheng" (Advancing toward constitutional democracy: Mental development of a member of the "April 4th" generation), in Chen Zihua, et al., *Yuhuo chongsheng: Tiananmen heishou beiwanglu* (Rebirth: Memorandum of Tiananmen blackhands), New York, Mirror Books, 2004, pp. 58-93; Hu Ping, "Lun yanlun ziyou" (On freedom of speech), *Qishi niandai* (The 1970s), no. 3-6, 1981; Chen Kuide, *Xin Ziyou* (New liberalism), Huadong Chemical Industry Institute Publishing House, 1988.
26. See Zhu Xueqin, "1998: Ziyoushui xueli de yanshuo" (Discourse on liberalism in 1998), in Zhu Xueqin, *Shuzai li de geming* (A revolution in the study), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 380-398. Originally published in *Nanfeng Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), 25 December 1998.
27. Zhu Xueqin, "1998: Ziyoushui xueli de yanshuo" (Discourse on liberalism in 1998), *op. cit.*, p. 381.
28. Hu Jiwei, "Xin chun fang yan: yige lao gongchandang yuan de shensi" (Unrestrained comments at new spring: Reflections by a senior member of the CCP), *Beijing zhi chun* (Beijing Spring), no. 34, March 1996, pp. 6-14; Hu Jiwei, "Mingbian xingshuai zhilu, huainian Hu Zhao xin zheng" (Understanding the causes of the rise and decline in commemoration of new undertakings by Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang), <http://www.ncn.org/asp/zgwjinfo/12/1/2005>; Li Rui, "Yingjie xin siji yao sijiang" (Four stresses to usher in the new century), *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Chronicles of China), no. 12, 1999, p. 5; Li Shenzhi, "Fifty years of storms and disturbance," *China Perspectives*, no. 32 (November-December 2000), pp. 5-12; Guan Shan, "Ren Zhongyi tan Deng Xiaoping yu Guangdong gaige kaifang" (Ren Zhongyi's talks on Deng Xiaoping and the reform and opening in Guangdong), *Tongzhou Gongjin* (Advance in the same boat), no. 8, 2004, pp. 6-14; Xie Tao, "Minzhu shehui zhuyi moshi yu zhongguo qiantu" (The model of democratic socialism and the future of China), *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Chronicles of China), no. 2, 2007, pp. 1-8.

independent judiciary, public control of public servants and separation of the military from political parties, guarantees of human rights, election of public officials, rural-urban equality, freedom of association, freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, civic education, protection of private property, financial and tax reform, social security, protection of the environment, a federated republic, and truth and reconciliation.<sup>(29)</sup>

### Replacing rule by law with rule of law

Debate arose between “rule of law” and “rule of man” (*renzhi*) in China in the late 1970s, when intellectuals in general and the ruling elite in particular wanted to put an end to the sufferings caused by Mao’s personal dictatorship and the lawless practices of the Cultural Revolution. The result was “socialist legality,” under which dozens of laws were enacted and a court system was rebuilt. The 1990s witnessed a new debate between “rule of law” and “rule by law.” According to Chinese liberals, so-called “socialist legality” is at best “rule by law,” in which the law is used by the party-state as an instrument to control society, while the Party itself exercises its power above the law and is not subject to the law. Since then, tremendous efforts have been made by Chinese liberals to promote the concept of “rule of law,” in which everyone, the government in particular, is subject to the law, and government power is limited by law, with the result that individual rights are effectively protected by the law against the abuse of the government in particular.<sup>(30)</sup> Due to the efforts of Chinese liberals and other legal scholars, the CCP leadership has also abandoned the concept of “rule by law” for the concept of “rule of law” since 1997.<sup>(31)</sup> It is in the process of this debate that the concept of constitutional government (*xianzheng*) has been revived and incorporated into the common vocabulary of formal publications in China. In 2003, when the Chinese constitution was undergoing a major revision, participants in both official and unofficial conferences on constitutional revision called for replacing the concept of *renmin minzhu zhuanzheng* (people’s democratic dictatorship) in the constitution with the concept of *renmin minzhu xianzheng* (people’s democratic constitutional rule).<sup>(32)</sup>

### Addressing issues of social justice

The Chinese new left have labelled Chinese liberals as “neo-liberals,” causing grave confusion and misunderstanding.<sup>(33)</sup> Even some China scholars in the West assume as a

matter of course that the cause of social justice is championed by China’s new left and neglected by Chinese liberals. The Chinese new left actually includes three groups of people: nationalists, populists, and neo-Marxists/post-modernists. The nationalist group can be further broken down into two subgroups: xenophobes, who borrow theoretical weapons from postcolonial criticism and blame the invasion of Western goods, Western capital, and Western values for the escalation, if not creation, of inequalities and other vices in contemporary China;<sup>(34)</sup> and statist, who argue for an agenda of “state capacity,” and who not only regard China’s national pride and sovereign state power as being sacrificed in an economy increasingly dependent on world capitalism, but also perceive dangers posed by the process of economic decentralisation undermining the fiscal, economic, and political power of the central government in addressing inequalities in Chinese society and in maintaining national unity.<sup>(35)</sup> The populist group, mainly literary critics, spares no effort in exposing the “social polarisation” (*liangji fenhua*), “inequalities” (*shehui bujun*), and “spiritual degeneration” (*jingshen duoluo*) brought about by market reforms and capitalist

29. See “China’s Charter 08,” translated from the Chinese by Perry Link, *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 56, No. 1, 15 January 2009.
30. See He Weifang, *Sifa de linian yu zhidu* (The judicial ideals and institutions), Beijing, Chinese University of Political Science and Law Publishing House, 1998; Liu Junning, *Minzhu, gonghe xianzheng: Ziyoushuixi sixiang yanjiu* (Democracy, republicanism, and constitutional government: A study on liberalism), Shanghai, Sanlian Books, 1998; Jiang Ping, *Wo suo neng zuo de shi nahan* (Crying out is what I can do), Beijing, China Law Publishing House, 2007; Wu Jinglian, *Huhuan fazhi de shichang jingji* (Calling for market economy under the rule of law), Beijing, Sanlian Books, 2007.
31. Li Buyun and Li Qing, “Cong ‘fazhi’ dao ‘fazhi’ ershi nian gai yi zi” (From “the rule by law” to “the rule of law”: Twenty years is taken to change one word), *Faxue* (Legal Studies), 1999, no. 7; Institute of Legal Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, (ed.), *Zhongguo fazhi 30 nian, 1978-2008* (The rule of law in China, 1978-2008), Beijing, Social Sciences Academic Press, pp. 59-70.
32. For the summary of an official conference held in Beijing on 5 June 2003, see Wu Jinglian, et al., “14 wei xuezhe guanyu xinjian de sikao” (Thoughts of fourteen scholars on constitution revision), <http://peacehall.com/news/gb/china/200307200115.shtml>; for the summary of an unofficial conference held in Qingdao on 18-19 June 2003, see Zhong Dajun, “Yushi jujin xiuxian, zouxian minzhu xianzheng” (Keeping pace with the times in constitution revision and advancing toward constitutional democracy), <http://www.dajun.com.cn/xiuxianwz.htm>.
33. For details see Feng Chongyi, “The Third Way: The Question of Equity as a Bone of Contention Between Intellectual Currents,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, 34:4, Summer 2003, pp. 75-93.
34. For the three most aggressive attacks, see Song Qiang, Zhang Zangzang, and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China can say no), Hong Kong, Mingpao Publishing, 1996; Li Xiguang et al., *Zai yaomohua Zhongguo de beihou* (Behind the scenes of demonizing China), Beijing, China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1996; and Fang Ning et al., *Quanjihua yinying xia de Zhongguo zhilu* (China’s road under the shadow of globalization) Beijing, China Social Sciences Publishing House, 1999. For a wider discussions on nationalism in China today, see also *Minzu zhuyi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun* (Nationalism and the fate of China in transition), Li Shitao (ed.), Changchun, Shidai Wenyi Publishing House, 2000.
35. See, for example, Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *Zhongguo guojia nengli baogao* (Report on China’s state capacity), Hong Kong, Oxford University Press, 1994.

modernity.<sup>(36)</sup> The neo-Marxist (or post-modernist) group is the most sophisticated of the three. Borrowing neo-Marxist, post-modernist, and post-colonial critique from the West, utilising class-based discourse, and raising the issues of social justice, class exploitation, and the hegemony of global (Western) capital, they have effectively problematised the Chinese quest for Enlightenment values (such as liberty and rationality), modernity, and globalisation. They fiercely attack liberalism as if it were the mainstream ideology responsible for social injustice and other evils.<sup>(37)</sup> These groups are labelled “the new left” mainly because they borrow theories and vocabulary almost exclusively from the new left in the West. However, while their patrons in the West perform a healthy function of social and cultural criticism to balance the excesses of neo-liberalism or market fundamentalism, the new left in China obscures China’s real problems by transplanting incongruous dogmas developed in a fundamentally different context.

Chinese liberals are, in fact, tackling China’s burning issues, including the problem of growing social inequality. Not only do Chinese liberals do their utmost to advocate market efficiency, liberty, democracy, and rule of law, they also began taking great pains to promote social justice, well before the new left took up the issue; not only do they advocate equality of opportunity and procedural justice, they also stand for distributive justice to a great extent.<sup>(38)</sup> The social democrat elements within the liberal camp in particular closely follow the tradition of utopian liberal political economy with great enthusiasm in the egalitarian mode of the welfare state. However, in tackling the issues of equity and inequality, Chinese liberals differ from both the Chinese old and new left in two fundamental ways. First, the liberals see the despotic political system, as well as the resulting marketisation of political power in the process of transition to the market economy (rather than the market economy per se), as the primary source of inequality, including unequal distribution of wealth. Based on the observation that power-holders have abused their power for “*yuanshi jilei*” (previous accumulation), He Qinglian came to the conclusion that unfair distribution in China today does not manifest itself in the distribution of national income (through wages or taxes), but mainly in the allocation and possession of resources through political power.<sup>(39)</sup>

Another liberal, Zhu Xueqin, argues:

*Current social evils in China cannot be simplified and equated with a “western disease” or “market disease.” They are a “Chinese disease” and a “power*

*disease” resulting from the peculiar circumstances where the market mechanism is parasitised, distorted, and even suppressed by an outmoded power mechanism. The liberals raised the issue of social justice long before the new left did, and they dug deeper to the root of the problem, pointing out that the problem already existed in the Mao era, such as in the plundering of private property, possession of public property, and suppression of dissenting political views by the privileged stratum. These social injustices took shape from the inception of that system, but had been covered up by Mao’s illusory ideology of egalitarianism. The power mechanism has not changed with the introduction of the market mechanism, but rather has increased its privileges and augmented the scope of rent-seeking. The result is structural corruption and social injustice at an unprecedented level.*<sup>(40)</sup>

Second, based on empirical evidence linking economic and political freedoms, and the experience of suffering inflicted by the Communist “command economy,” the liberals have not waged an all-out war against the market, capitalism, and the “middle class” as the left has, but rather firmly defend the market and the “middle class” while focusing their

36. For a typical example, see Han Yuhai, “Zai ziyouzhuoyi zitai de beihou” (Behind the liberal pose), *Tianya* (Frontiers), no. 5, 1998; Han Yuhai, “Women shifou yao jieshou yige tongzhihua shijie” (Do we need to accept the world of uniformity), *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-first Century), no. 54, August 1999; and Han Yuhai, “Ziyouzhuoyi de lilun pinfa” (Poverty of the liberalist theory), *Yazhou yuekan* (Asia Monthly), no. 1, 2000. See also Liang Xiaosheng, *Zhongguo shehui ge Jiecheng fenxi* (An analysis of social strata in China), Beijing, Economic Daily Publishing House, 1997.
37. Wang Hui, “Dangdai Zhongguo sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing” (The state of thought in contemporary China and modernity), *Tianya*, no. 5, 1997; Wang Hui, “Guanyu xiandaixing wenti dawen” (Questions and answers about modernity), *ibid.*, no. 1, 1999.
38. Qin Hui (Bian Wu), “Gongzheng zhishang lun” (On the supremacy of justice), *Dongfang* (Orient), 1994:6; Qin Hui (Bian Wu), “Zailun gongzheng zhishang: Qidian gongzheng ruhe keneng” (The second essay on the supremacy of justice: Possibility of justice at the starting point), *Dongfang* (Orient), 1995:2; Qin Hui (Bian Wu), “Gongzheng, jiazhi lixing yu fan fubai: Sanlun gongzheng zhishang” (Justice, value rationality and anti-corruption: The third essay on the supremacy of justice), *Dongfang* (Orient), 1995:6; Qin Hui (Bian Wu), “Gongzheng wei daode zhiji” (Justice as the foundation of morality: The fourth essay on the supremacy of justice), *Dongfang* (Orient), 1996:5; Qin Hui, “Shehui gongzheng yu zhongguo gaige de jingyan jiaoxun” (Social justice and the lessons of reform in China), in Qin Hui, *Wenti yu Zhuyi* (Issues and -isms), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 33-40; Xu Youyu, “Ziyouzhuoyi yu dangdai zhongguo” (Liberalism and contemporary China), *Kaifang Shidai* (Open times), 1999:3, pp. 43-51; Xu Youyu, “Ziyouzhuoyi, falankefu xuepai ji qita” (Liberalism, the Frankfurt School and others), in Xu Youyu, *Ziyoude Yanshuo* (Liberal discourse), Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 305-318; Zhu Xueqin, “1998: Ziyouzhuoyi xueli de yanshuo” (Discourse on liberalism in China in 1998), Zhu Xueqin, *Shuzai li de geming* (Revolution in the study), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 380-399.
39. He Qinglian, *Xiandaihuade Xianjing* (The pitfalls of modernisation), Beijing, China Today Publishing House, 1998, p. 4.
40. Zhu Xueqin, “Ziyouzhuoyi yu xin zuopai fenqi hezai” (What is the difference between the liberals and the new left), in Zhu Xueqin, *Shuzai li de geming* (Revolution in the study), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 419-420.

attacks on the unjust power structure of the Leninist party-state and the “upstarts” (*baofahu*) who profit from the abuse of political power. It is the belief of Chinese liberals that universal protection of rights, including property rights, is the foundation of social justice. Xu Youyu points out that “the new left pick up other people’s phrases to attack marketisation, ignoring the positive effect of marketisation in breaking down the oppressive old system.” According to him, what should be done is to protect the interests of working people against “bigwig privatisation” (*quanguo siyohua*) through the creation of a just legal framework to regulate the market and human behaviour.<sup>(41)</sup>

Qin Hui argues that since social injustice in China today is rooted in an unfair process of competition where some abuse political power to create and accumulate wealth while others lose out, “what is important is that there should be a simultaneous process of taking away both the constraints and the protections of the old system, thereby avoiding a situation in which some people continue to enjoy protection after removing constraints while others continue to suffer from the constraints after losing the protections, and in which opportunities are monopolised by the former while risks are taken by the latter, and the former take the ‘fruits’ while the latter pay the price.”<sup>(42)</sup>

Zhu Xueqin summarises the liberal solution to combating the social evil of inequality as follows:

*Liberalism aims to deepen market-oriented reform while opposing any attempt to plunder, in the name of economic reform, the social wealth accumulated from the contributions of the lower strata of society, and opposing any attempt to repeat the experience of Land Reform and Boxer-style bogus nationalism. The economic reform of the past 20 years has not been accompanied by corresponding political reform to balance power, hence the accumulation of social injustice. The only way out is to establish constitutional democracy and rule of law through political reform, rather than falling back into the trap of campaigns and mass movements as in the past.*<sup>(43)</sup>

## Formulating concrete programs for the transition to constitutional democracy

Chinese liberals within the CCP such as Shang Dewen, Fang Jue, Du Guang, and Li Rui have made heart-felt proposals to the Party leadership for a smooth political transition from within. The death of political strongman Deng

Xiaoping in early 1997 presented an opportunity for liberals to call for democratisation of the party-state. Shang Dewen is a senior professor in economics at Peking University, and also a “veteran revolutionary” (*laogeming*) who joined the People’s Liberation Army in the 1940s. In August 1997, when the 15th National Congress of the CCP was at the last stage of preparation, Shang Dewen sent the Central Committee of the CCP a proposal entitled *Some Issues of the Political Reforms in China and Main Strategies*. His proposals included revision of the constitution according to the demands of market economy, general elections and the establishment of parliamentary system, and checks and balances of powers – virtually the political system of liberal democracy as established in the West, which he regarded as “political civilisation” belonging to all humankind. In order to minimise resistance within the CCP, Shang Dewen promised that the backbone of the new political system would be the working class and the CCP. He also proposed allowing three years for preparation through consultation and discussion and another 12 years to complete the process of political transition to full democracy. Shang’s proposal was not accepted by the CCP leadership, but led to many interviews and reports by international media.<sup>(44)</sup>

When these calls for further political reform in the direction of democratisation fell on deaf ears among the “third generation of leadership” led by Jiang Zemin, democrats within the CCP turned their attention to the “fourth generation leadership” represented by Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, who became the General Secretary of the CCP and the Prime Minister of the PRC, respectively, in early 2003. Before Hu and Wen assumed power in late 2002, Du Guang widely circulated a pamphlet of over 100,000 words analysing the reality and causes of communist despotism in China and calling for reforms to return enterprises to workers, land to peasants, government to citizens, and culture to society. Concretely, he asked the CCP leadership to eliminate all Party institutions and functions that overlapped with those of

41. Xu Youyu, “Jiushi niandai de shehui sichao” (Intellectual trends in the 1990s), in Xu Youyu, *Ziyoude Yanshuo* (Liberal discourse), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 257, 260.
42. Qin Hui, “Shehui gongzheng yu xueshu liangxin” (Social justice and academic conscience), in Li Shitao (ed.), *Ziyouzhu yi zhizheng yu zhongguo sixiangjie de fenhua* (Debate on liberalism and the split in the Chinese world of thought), Shidai Wenyi Publishing House, 2000, pp. 395-396.
43. Zhu Xueqin, “1998 ziyouzhu yi xueli de yanshuo” (Discourse on liberalism in China in 1998), Zhu Xueqin, *Shuzai li de geming* (Revolution in the study), Changchun, Changchun Publishing House, 1999, pp. 389-390.
44. Shang Dewen, *Lun zhongguo de zhengzhi tizhi gaige* (On reform of the political system in China), Hong Kong, Zhonghua Guoji Publishing House, 2003.

the government, to deprive Party propaganda departments at all levels of censorship power, to abolish the power of the CCP to intervene in the internal affairs of “democratic parties,” to grant independence to the army by separating the Party from the army, to grant independence to “social organisations” (particular the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, Communist Youth League, and Federation of Women) by severing the Party’s administrative and financial ties, to allow genuine multi-candidate elections, to endow the National People’s Congress with genuine legislative power, to establish judicial independence, to guarantee freedom of speech and association, and to establish a new government structure.<sup>(45)</sup>

Following the same line of thinking, Li Rui introduced a proposal for comprehensive democratisation at the 16th National Congress of the CCP in November 2002. In his document, Li Rui divided his suggestions into “democratisation of the Party” and “democratisation of the state.” In the area of “democratisation of the Party,” Li asked for institutionalisation in strictly adhering to the rule of a maximum of two terms service for standing politburo members; multiple candidates for election to the Central Committee; competitive elections for politburo members, standing politburo members, and the general secretary; freedom of speech within the Party; major decision through votes; and submission of the Party to the state constitution. In the area of “democratisation of the state,” his requests included effective measures to guarantee the operation of the National People’s Congress as the most authoritative organ of state and legislation, establishment of a “constitutional court” to safeguard all the rights stipulated in the constitution, judicial independence, promulgation of a law of political parties to clearly demarcate the power and responsibilities of the ruling Communist Party and other parties, free elections for government at the township level, and restoration of peasant associations for rural residents to exercise equal citizens’ rights.<sup>(46)</sup>

## Transcending nationalism

Liberals in China today have achieved a much better understanding of the tension between liberalism and nationalism than their predecessors in modern China, prioritising human rights and individual freedom over national wealth and power (*guojia fuqiang*).<sup>(47)</sup> A complicated and delicate relationship had existed between nationalism and liberalism in China since modern times, largely due to the different logic of these two ideologies as well as the extraordinary intellec-

tual and political history of modern China in confronting the dual challenges of democratisation and national salvation. Most liberals in modern China were nationalists at the same time. In promoting China’s independence and modernisation, nationalism and liberalism were both utilised as part and parcel. When modern liberalism was first introduced to China, Yan Fu, father of Chinese liberalism, deliberately and masterfully transmuted it into statist programs, which were upheld by several generations of China liberals.<sup>(48)</sup> In a politically charged environment where nationalism has become the most important tool for legitimising the Leninist party-state, and where nationalist sentiment runs high among a population fed with highly selective information by the state propaganda apparatus, Chinese liberals warn against the potential dangers of nationalism in causing social disorder, in arousing xenophobia and chauvinism, in suppressing individual freedom and personal rights, and in sabotaging the project of democratisation and modernisation.<sup>(49)</sup> They stress that China’s modern nationalism has been informed by a backward Sino-centrism that has held China back from learning from other civilisations and making progress, and they call for an end to fanatical populist nationalism (leftist xenophobia), which rejects liberal values in the name of patriotism and breeds hatred and violence against other nations.

For liberals in contemporary China, the regime of the Leninist party-state has always been a combination of Communism and nationalism, in which national interests have been greatly distorted by vested interests, privilege, and the ruling ideology. Having established a firm belief in democracy and liberal values as the prerequisite for “rational nationalism,” they insist that no abstract “national interest” exists apart from the sum of individual interests of the members of a nation, and that this kind of “national interest” can only be legitimised through the democratic process. They argue for the superiority of universal values over nationalism

45. Du Guang, *Jianshi gaige de shehui zhuyi fangxiang* (Stick to the socialist direction of reforms), unpublished manuscript, 2002.
46. Li Rui, “Guanyu woguo zhengzhi tizhi gaige de jianyi” (A proposal for political reforms in our country), *Yanhuang chunqiu* (Chronicles of China), no. 1, 2003, pp. 2-3. This was actually a collective proposal because Li Rui drafted it through wide consultation and discussion with like-minded Party elders.
47. For more detailed analysis, see Feng Chongyi, “Nationalism and Democratisation in Contemporary China,” *Global Dialogue*, vol. 9, no. 1, Winter/Spring 2007, pp. 49-59.
48. Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*, Harvard University Press, 1964.
49. Li Shenzi, “Heping fendou xing zhongguo” (Rejuvenating China through peaceful efforts), in Li Shezhi, *Ershiyi shiji de yousi* (Concerns about the twenty-first century), Hong Kong, Mingpao Publishing house, 2003, pp. 30-41.

– peace, non-violence, democracy, rationality, freedom, and human rights in particular – and urge their compatriots to abide by these values when engaging in international relations.<sup>(50)</sup>

Liberals in China protest against the cynical manipulation of nationalism by the party-state, especially for the purpose of reinforcing the legitimacy of the outmoded party-state regime. In Sun Liping's words, "Nationalism has been pragmatically employed as an important resource for the formulation of state ideology during the era of transition."<sup>(51)</sup> This observation is echoed by Fan Baihua, who points to the Chinese Communist party-state's cynical and opportunistic use of nationalism to win the hearts of the people while the party-state assists foreigners in exploiting the Chinese people for enormous profits.<sup>(52)</sup> Xu Youyu has also acutely pointed out the distinct difference between Chinese nationalism in the 1990s and nationalism in modern Chinese history: the latter was a response to national crisis caused by foreign invasion, whereas the former resulted from efforts by the party-state to fill the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>(53)</sup>

Obviously, neither Chinese citizens nor Chinese "national interests" need to stand in opposition to the West. On the contrary, normal communication with the advanced West benefits the people and "national interests" of China in political, economic, and cultural development. It is the party-state that perceives a need to be an enemy of the liberal-democratic West, particularly when nationalism has become an ideological pillar maintaining the totalitarian regime at the expense of democratisation in China. Given that the statist tradition has dominated educated minds in China since the birth of state Confucianism, and given that since the nineteenth century several generations of Chinese liberals have fallen into the trap of nationalism and brought tragedy upon themselves by abandoning their belief in liberalism for the sake of national salvation or national construction, the gathering momentum of Chinese liberalism today may constitute the most profound change in Chinese intellectual development since the mid-nineteenth century, if not since the Spring-Autumn period.

## Conclusion

The emergence of the liberal camp in China since the June 4th massacre indicates an utter failure of the "anti-bourgeois liberalism campaign" launched by the Leninist party-state to root out the elements of liberalism. While Leninist hardliners in China have been moving backward since the June 4th,

Chinese political thought and society have been moving forward. For the first time in Chinese history, liberalism is fully understood and has become the dominant ideology (*zhuliu huayu*) among thinking Chinese, who with few exceptions regard liberal democracy with regular multiparty elections, rule of law, and protection of basic civil rights as a superior political system and an end goal for political development. Is the liberal camp capable of bringing down the Leninist party-state that stands in the way of China's transition to constitutional democracy? In the conventional sense it is not, simply because under the post-totalitarian conditions it lacks the opportunity to form a powerful party or other form of political organisation to effect social and political change. However, its rigorous intellectual campaigns have laid down a solid intellectual foundation for China's transition to constitutional democracy and have had an impact from the highest levels of the CCP to the bottom of Chinese society. The emerging rights defence movement is to a great extent the result of the propagation of liberalism and the expansion of rights consciousness in particular. The current CCP leaders, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, have accepted liberal values such as human rights and rule of law as "universal values," although they have taken a self-contradictory position of pursuing democracy and the Leninist one-party dictatorship at the same time. The very concept of "the state respecting and protecting human rights" has now been written into China's revised constitution. The new political philosophy adopted by Hu and Wen is best embodied in the slogan "people as the end" or "people first" (*yi ren wei ben*), compared to previous party lines that treated people as means for other ends, as expressed in the slogan "class struggle as the key link" (*yijieji douzheng wei gang*) or "development as the priority" (*fazhan shi ying daoli*). Subsequently, the idea of "putting people first" was further extended into and supplemented by the "scientific development concept"<sup>(54)</sup> and the theory of

50. Qin Hui, "Ziyoushuizhi yu minzuzhuizhi de qihedian zai nali?" (Where is the joining point of liberalism and nationalism?), in Li Shitao (ed.), *Minzuzhuizhi yu zhuanxing qi Zhongguo de mingyun* (Nationalism and the fate of transitional China), Changchun, Shidai Wenyi Publishing House, 2000, pp. 381-88; Sun Liping, "Huiru shijie zhuliu wenming" (Joining the mainstream civilization of the world), *ibid.*, pp. 372-80; and Li Shenzhi and He Jiadong, *Zhongguo de daolu* (The road for China), Guangzhou, Nanfang Daily Publishing House, 2000.
51. Sun Liping, "Huiru shijie zhuliu wenming: Minzuzhuizhi santi," *ibid.*
52. Fan Baihua, "Gongchandang liyong minzuzhuizhi de shoufa xiaojie" (A summary of how the Communist Party utilized nationalism), <http://peacehall.com/news/2005/04/19>.
53. Xu Youyu, "Minzuzhuizhi, quanqiu hua he gujia liyi" (Nationalism, globalisation, and national interests), <http://space.cenet.org.cn/2005/11/13>.
54. For details see Joseph Fewsmith, "Promoting the Development Concept," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 11.

“building harmonious society,” which lists “democracy and rule of law” as the top criteria.<sup>55</sup> At a press conference on 16 March 2007, Wen Jiabao declared, “I said democracy, the rule of law, freedom, human rights, equality, and fraternity are not something peculiar to capitalism. They are the joint achievements of civilization of the entire world during its long historical process and the common values pursued by mankind.”<sup>56</sup> The open discourse on liberalism is effectively disarming the Leninist party-state intellectually, ideologically, and morally, and may in the end subdue it without a physical fight, as preached in Daoist strategies. •

## Glossary

Ai Xiaoming 艾曉明 *baofahu* 暴發戶  
 Chen Kuide 陳奎德 *Chen Ziming* 陳子明  
*dangnei minzhupai* 黨內民主派 *Deng Xiaoping* 鄧小平  
 Dong Fang 東方 *Du Daozheng* 杜導正  
 Du Guang 杜光 *Du Runsheng* 杜潤生  
 Fan Baihua 樊百華 *Fan Yafeng* 范亞峰  
 Fang Jue 方覺 *Fang zhou* 方舟  
*fazhan shi ying daoli* 發展是硬道理  
 Feng Chongyi 馮崇義 *Fu Guoyong* 傅國涌  
*Gonggong Luncong* 公共論叢 *guojia fuqiang* 國家富強  
*jiating jiaohui* 家庭教會 *Jiang Ping* 江平  
 Jiang Zemin 江澤民 *jingshen duoluo* 精神墮落  
 He Jiadong 何家棟 *He Weifang* 賀衛方  
 Hu Jiwei 胡績偉 *Hu Jintao* 胡錦濤  
 Hu Ping 胡平 *Hu Yaobang* 胡耀邦  
*Kaifang Shidai* 開放時代  
*laogeming* 老革命 *Li Pu* 李普 *Li Rui* 李銳  
 Li Shen zhi 李慎之 *08 Xianzhang* 零八憲章  
*liangji fenhua* 兩極分化 *Lingshan* 靈山  
 Liu Junning 劉軍寧 *Minzhu Yicong* 民主譯叢  
*Nanfang Dushibao* 南方都市報  
*Nanfang Zhoumo* 南方周末 *Qi Yanchen* 綦彥臣  
 Qin Hui 秦暉 *quanguo siyoushua* 權貴私有化  
*quanguo zibenzhuyi* 權貴資本主義 *Ren Bumei* 任不寐  
 Ren Zhongyi 任仲夷  
*renmin minzhu zhuanzheng* 人民民主專政  
*renmin minzhu xianzheng* 人民民主憲政 *renzhi* 人治  
 Shang Dewen 商德文 *shehui bujun* 社會不均  
 Su Shaozhi 蘇紹智 *Sun Liping* 孫立平  
 Wang Dingding 汪丁丁 *Wang Dongcheng* 王東城  
 Wang Guangze 王光澤 *Wang Ruoshui* 王若水  
 Wang Yi 王怡 *weiquan yundong* 維權運動  
 Wen Jiabao 溫家寶 *Wu Guoguang* 吳國光  
 Wu Jinglian 吳敬璉 *Tongzhou gongjin* 同周共進  
*xianzheng* 憲政 *xianzheng jingjixue* 憲政經濟學  
*xianzheng minzhu* 憲政民主 *xianzheng yundong* 憲政運動  
 Xie Tao 謝韜 *Xu Liangying* 許良英  
 Xu Youyu 許友漁 *Yan Fu* 嚴復 *Yan Jiaqi* 嚴家其  
 Yanhuang chunqiu 炎黃春秋 *Yang Jisheng* 楊繼繩  
 Yang Xiaokai 楊小凱 *yi ren wei ben* 以人為本  
*yi jieji douzheng wei gang* 以階級鬥爭為綱 *Yu Jie* 余杰  
 Yuan Zhiming 遠志明 *Zan Aizong* 贊愛宗  
 Zhang Boshu 張博樹 *Zhang Weiying* 張維迎  
 Zhao Ziyang 趙紫陽 *zheng yefu* 鄭也夫  
*Zhongguo shichang jingji luntan wengao*  
 中國市場經濟論壇文稿  
*Zhongguo xiang hechu qu* 中國向何處去  
 Zhong Peizhang 鍾沛璋 *Zhou Qiren* 周其仁  
 Zhu Houze 朱厚澤 *Zhu Xueqin* 朱學勤  
*zhuliu huayu* 主流話語 *ziyou zhuyi minzhu* 自由主義民主

55. The idea of “building socialist harmonious society” was first put forward by Hu Jintao in a speech at a meeting with key officials at the provincial level in February 2005, and elevated in the *Resolution about Some Major Issues of Building Socialist Harmonious Society* at the 6th Plenary of the CCP National Congress in October 2006. The other five criteria are fairness and justice, honesty and fraternal love, full of vitality, stability and order, and harmony between humanity and Nature.

56. “Full text of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao’s news conference,” <http://www.chinaelections.org/en/17/03/2007>.