
Conditional Democracy

The Contemporary Debate on Political
Reform in Chinese Universities

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Selective Timeline of Major Historical Events

4 May 1919	Student demonstration against the Treaty of Versailles, leading to the landmark anti-imperialist cultural and political ‘May Fourth movement’.
October 1949	Proclamation of the People’s Republic of China.
1956–7	The ‘Hundred Flowers’ campaign misleads citizens, and especially intellectuals, to openly express their opinions about the communist regime.
1957–8	The ‘Anti-Rightist’ campaign is used by Mao to eliminate critical intellectuals.
1959–61	The ‘Great Leap Forward’, intended to modernise China’s economy, triggers the largest famine in human history, with an estimated 14–30 million casualties.
1966–76	The ‘Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution’ begins.
1970–6	Mao Zedong progressively disappears from public life due to health problems. The ‘Gang of Four’, including Mao’s wife Jiang Qing, tries to increase political influence by spearheading the Cultural Revolution.
September 1971	Lin Biao, Mao’s heir apparent, is killed in airplane crash while fleeing after an attempted military coup.
January 1976	Death of Premier Zhou Enlai.
September 1976	Chairman Mao Zedong dies at the age of 82. The ‘Gang of Four’ tries to get into power.
1977	Hua Guofeng begins the ‘Open Door’ policy.
1977	Deng Xiaoping wins the power struggle after Mao’s death; Gang of Four are arrested.
1977	After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the national unified entrance examination for universities is re-introduced.
1978–9	Deng Xiaoping introduces the ‘Open and Reform’ policy and stepwise economic reforms called ‘The Four Modernisations’.
1978–9	The ‘Democracy Wall’ in Beijing displays pro-democratic posters.
1980	Special Economic Zones are created in Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou (Guangdong), Xiamen (Fujian), and the entire province of Hainan.
1985–8	The ‘Cultural Fever’: Intellectuals identify China’s alleged feudal traditions as the cause of its backwardness.
1986	Students demonstrate all over China.

January 1987	The supposedly too-liberal General Secretary of China's Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, is forced to resign.
1989	Jiang Zemin replaces Zhao Ziyang as CCP General Secretary.
April 1989	Hu Yaobang dies.
4 June 1989	Military crackdown on Tiananmen Square demonstrations.
Jan–Feb 1992	Deng Xiaoping tours southern China and accelerates market reforms to establish a 'socialist market economy'.
February 1997	Death of Deng Xiaoping.
July 1997	Hong Kong's retrocession to China from UK control.
1998	Zhu Rongji replaces Li Peng as China's Premier.
1999	Cooling of US-China relations after NATO bombs Chinese embassy in Belgrade, former Yugoslavia.
April 2001	Major diplomatic crisis after US spy plane collides with Chinese fighter jet in mid-air and is forced to land.
November 2001	After years of negotiations, China becomes a member of the World Trade Organisation.
November 2002	Hu Jintao replaces Jiang Zemin as head of the Communist Party.
March 2003	Hu Jintao is elected President by National People's Congress and Wen Jintao becomes Premier. Hu–Wen administration promotes a 'harmonious society', a 'new socialist countryside' and more 'scientific development'.
Mar–Apr 2003	SARS virus outbreak.
August 2008	Beijing hosts Olympic Games.
July 2009	China demands that new personal computers come with filtering software 'Green Dam Youth Escort'.
October 2009	Mass celebrations to mark 60 years of Communist Party rule over China.
2010	The World Expo takes place in Shanghai.
2010	Xi Jinping is appointed vice-chairman of the party's Central Military Commission.
February 2011	China overtakes Japan to become the world's second-largest economy.
January 2012	Official figures suggest city dwellers outnumber China's rural population for the first time.
March 2012	Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai is dismissed on the eve of the Party's ten-yearly leadership change.
November 2012	Seventeenth Communist Party Congress, begins transfer of power to the sixth generation of leaders. Xi Jinping takes over as party chief.

- March 2013 Xi Jinping takes over as president. He launches an efficiency and anti-corruption drive.
- Sept–Oct 2014 Protests against Beijing’s plans to vet candidates for elections in 2017 erupt in Hong Kong.

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A note on Mandarin Chinese: I have used pinyin Romanisation, except where this wouldn't make any sense to the non-Chinese reader used to other spellings such as Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan), Tu Weiming (Du Weiming), Yü Yingshih (Yu Yingshi), Peking University (Beijing University) and Tsinghua University (Qinghua University).

For Chinese names, the family name-given name order has been preserved, except for scholars long implanted in foreign countries, like Cheng Li from the Brookings Institution.

Émilie Frenkiel,
March 2015

Introduction

Since the new generation of Chinese leaders came to power in November 2012, speculation about the policy Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang are most likely to follow has proliferated. Only a few weeks before the power transition, the *New York Times* article revealing the exceptional wealth of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's family and the spectacular eviction of Bo Xilai – who was one of the most prominent candidates for a seat on the Political Bureau's Standing Committee – shocked both the Chinese and the world. There have been mixed assessments of Hu and Wen's record – including disappointment as regards their unfulfilled promises of a more harmonious society, better social policy, fighting corruption and rationalising and democratising governance – and these dramatic developments and the tensions within the highest Party spheres that they have disclosed are a strong incentive for the new team of leaders to make a clean break from their predecessors' policy. This break can only be formal and predictable, however, since Xi has put himself forward as a consensual leader, the son of communist veteran Xi Zhongxun, with Party apparatchik Li by his side. However, the President's manifestly strong confidence, opinions and political base lead us to think that he could, nevertheless push for a new direction. And the precise content of the reforms to be implemented by the fifth-generation leaders is, to date, hard to anticipate, except that their primary objective is bound to be to further cement the Party's hold on power.

To get an insight into the experience, worldviews and potential agenda of the fifth generation of Chinese leaders, in this book I have chosen to investigate the way in which major Chinese public intellectuals conceive democracy. It is indeed quite remarkable that most of the politically committed academics I have studied in this research belong to exactly the same generation as the current leaders: the generation whose education was upset by the Cultural Revolution. The community of experience between these famous scholars and the current leaders is all the more striking as the latter's education, training and occupations are clearly distinct from those of previous generations of leaders, which might considerably affect the nature of the policies they could implement.¹ Many of the leaders from the fifth generation studied social sciences, political science, economics or law in the same universities at the same period, whereas former leaders were all engineers. So the fifth generation of leaders may want to make their mark on these fields and discuss social and political reform in a meaningful way. In addition, the scholars approached in this work give us an insight into how this new political elite apprehends China's

1. See Li, C. 'The Chinese Communist Party: recruiting and controlling the new elites', *Journal Of Current Chinese Affairs* 2009, 38(3), available online at <http://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jcca/article/view/59> (last accessed 14 November 2014), p. 19; Vilfredo Pareto, *The Rise and Fall of the Elites: An application of theoretical sociology*, Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press, 1968; and Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Study of Political Elites*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968.

political future. As a result, the first objective of this book is to grasp how political reform has been approached since 1989: who takes part in discussions on that issue and makes proposals, from what point of view and with what impact?

Within the boundaries dictated by (self-)censorship, the debate on political reform in Chinese universities reveals the great diversity of the academic elites' aspirations for change. Therefore, mapping this debate enables us to understand the various conceptions of the current regime held by academics throughout China, to identify the fault lines that have materialised since the Tiananmen Square repression and to comprehend these academics' disagreements. Analysing these scholars' discussions, which have an impact on political elites and public opinion and which reflect their respective yearnings and fears even if in a distorted manner, is also an engaging angle from which to appreciate the diversity of approaches to the issue of China's democratisation.

This book focuses on the debate about political reform since the beginning of the 1990s. This date is important for two main reasons. First, it is necessary to understand the resilience of the regime, which seemed unthinkable in the wake of the Tiananmen Square repression and the collapse of the Soviet Union.² And it is all the more urgent as few studies have been devoted to the political reform (*zhengzhi tizhi gaige*) announced as early as 1986 by Deng Xiaoping.³ Analysts tend to deplore its absence and to downplay the significance of reforms that are officially designed to modernise and strengthen the legitimacy of the one-party system.⁴ These certainly imply no devolution of power to social groups and so far have not been accompanied by any significant calls for the active political participation of social groups. Nonetheless, the regime evolves, notably through measures supposed to boost its efficiency and accountability and introduce new forms of social control; this may help explain why various studies have shown that the regime has managed to become more legitimate to the Chinese people.⁵ Chinese scholars deplore the sterility of some of the concepts and standards that have become widely accepted, such as the opposition between democracy and authoritarianism, which they consider to be a critical impediment to understanding the current regime and its evolution. This research takes these criticisms into account and explores the perspectives offered by Gunter Schubert, Thomas Heberer and Andrew Nathan, by examining the question of political reform from a different angle, namely, the discourse on the issue of the Chinese themselves.⁶

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2. Nathan, A. 'Authoritarian resilience', *Journal of Democracy* 2003, 14(1), pp. 6–17.
 3. Wong, Y.-C. *From Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin: Two decades of political reform in the People's Republic of China*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005, p. 10.
 4. Wong, Y. C. *From Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin*; Dittmer, L. and Liu, G. (eds), *China's Deep Reform: Domestic politics in transition*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006; Perry, E. and Goldman, M. (eds) *Grassroots Political Reform in China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007.
 5. See Tang, W. especially *Public Opinion and Political Change in China*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
 6. See Heberer, T. and Schubert, G. 'Political reform and regime legitimacy in contemporary China', *Asien* 99, April 2006, pp. 9–28; Nathan, A. 'China's political trajectory: what are the Chinese saying?', in Li, C (ed.) *China's Changing Political Landscape*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008.

Chapter One

Horses in a Pen? The Situation of Chinese Academics

For a few years, humanities and social sciences departments in the three most prestigious universities in China – that is, Peking University, Tsinghua (Beijing) and Fudan University (Shanghai) – have been ranked among the top 50 in international rankings like Times Higher Education-QS World University. However, while these long-neglected and even censored disciplines are in the process of being normalised, the international media coverage of the more or less intense pressures academics have faced in these last few years reminds us that their working conditions differ radically from those of their European and North American counterparts. This chapter makes an assessment of their situation. It aims to understand the status currently granted to Chinese academics. In that perspective, I will rely on the example of academics engaged in political science and reflection on political change in government studies, public administration, international relations and history departments; in particular, I will focus on the trajectories of 20 or so influential academics who push for political reform proposals through their research and publications. Scrutinising the Chinese academics dedicated to such a ‘sensitive’ subject as political reform has the advantage of uncovering the contradictions with which they struggle while conducting their research. They are indeed torn between constraints on academic freedom, official demands, professionalisation, internationalisation, opening to the market, patriotism and political commitment.

Reopening humanities departments: ‘The great leap forward’ (1978–2010)

Since the reforms Deng Xiaoping launched in the wake of the Eleventh Party Congress of August 1977, the Chinese government has repeatedly underlined the importance of knowledge and expertise as the foundation of political decision-making. As a result, official hostility towards law and political science studies has gradually receded. These disciplines have become truly indispensable to the juridical reforms that have been undertaken, which are themselves vital to the opening up of the market economy. Social sciences were also publicly recognised again. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the highest institution in academic research in the field of philosophy and the social sciences, was founded in 1977, to allow the government to meet the objectives established by the Four Modernisations policy.¹

1. Sleeboom-Faulkner, M. *The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences: Shaping the reforms, academia and China (1997–2003)*, Leiden: Brill, 2007.

The reorganisation of departments led to the creation of 18 research institutes – in philosophy, economics, industrial and agricultural economics, finance and trade, world economics, law, literature, linguistics, history, modern history, world history, archaeology, world religion, ethnology, journalism and information. The application of social science knowledge to the setting up of policies and social programmes intensified. New disciplines such as international relations, demography, law, sociology, anthropology and political science emerged and the work of academics from these fields was encouraged: through sending academics for studying and training abroad; publishing translations of major reference books and giving academics new responsibilities. Simultaneously with the Open and Reform policy, a true charm offensive has been launched towards intellectual professions for the last 30 years. The income of academics has been increased considerably and they have recovered the prestigious status they lost during the Cultural Revolution, when Red Guards called them the ‘stinking ninth category’ (*chou lao jiu*), stigmatising them as of low status and their contribution to the advancement of society as insignificant. As for teachers, academics were promoted to the rank of ‘soul engineers’, equal to workers and peasants. Their salaries have risen and their living conditions improved, with better access to accommodation, schools for their children and the reorganisation of unions.

Consequences of the Open and Reform policy for higher education

In April 1978, a conference on national education discarded the priority given to class struggle and replaced it with modernisation as the ultimate aim of education. This decision was passed simultaneously with the return of the university entrance examination and signalled the beginning of higher education’s rapid expansion. This new era was stamped by the idea, which Hu Yaobang notably emphasised, that the Four Modernisations (of agriculture, industry, national defence and science and technology) could not be achieved without the help of a large contingent of scientists and experts. Science and technology have been closely associated with China’s modernisation because they are vital to the Four Modernisations and the improvement of the population’s living conditions. As a result, new departments have been opened to train new scientists and technocrats.² People debate the inconvenience of academic politicisation in a non-democratic context, since academic freedom relies on a democratic system. As early as 1979, Li Shu wrote in an article published in *Historical Research* that an ‘environment where a scientist can work without fearing and dare express his opinions’ is the prior condition for the development of science and culture. He added that academic work couldn’t be limited to explaining policies. Intellectuals must be allowed to make proposals and

2. Mathur, N. *Educational Reform in Post-Mao China*, New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2007, pp. 152–3. At that time, there were 404 universities in China. Each decade, their number has doubled, with 1,075 in 1988, more than 2,000 in 2002 and more than 4,000 nowadays. On the policy of expanding of Chinese higher education to the masses, see Lin Jing and Sun Xiaoyan, ‘Higher education expansion and China’s middle class’, in Li, C. *China’s Emerging Middle Class: Beyond economic transformation*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010, p. 217.

bring advice regarding economic and social policies.³ Reforming the system of the intellectual professions was officially connected to successful economic reforms in Zhao Ziyang's speech at the third plenary session of the Twelfth Central Committee in October 1984, condemning persisting forms of anti-intellectualism in China:

In our drive for socialist modernisation we must respect knowledge and talented people. We must combat all ideas and practices that belittle science and technology, the cultivation of intellectual resources and the role of intellectuals. We must take resolute action to redress cases of discrimination against intellectuals which still exist in many localities.⁴

In the early 1980s, exchange programmes with many foreign countries were reinstated and most OECD countries launched development-aid programmes, to enhance opportunities for Chinese students to study abroad. The World Bank financed many projects aiming at encouraging training visits abroad for the higher education teaching community. It was indeed crucial at the time for Chinese universities to start catching up with other universities in the world. Under Soviet influence, the development of higher education since 1949 was supposed to 'serve economic construction, which is the foundation for any construction (whether political, cultural or of national defence)'.⁵ The whole system, which was extremely centralised, was therefore structured to ensure higher education would directly contribute to the economic and social objectives of the first Five-Year Plan. The main aim was to train a disciplined elite corps of specialists in all the fields that were necessary to the new socialist state and industrialisation, which led to the decline and restructuring of social sciences and humanities. The consequences of the Cultural Revolution and the radical desire to overthrow experts and top-down policies and 'cleanse' the elitist selective system so as to open up peasants' and workers' access to education were extreme: mass primary and secondary schooling were introduced but access to higher education totally frozen.⁶

3. Li, S. 'Identify the essence and absorb it', *Lishi Yanjiu*, 15 November 1979, p. 35, quoted in Goldman, M. 'Hu Yaobang's intellectual network and the theory conference of 1979', *China Quarterly*, June 1991, p. 239.
4. Quoted in Simon, D. F. 'China's scientists and technologists in the post-Mao era: a retrospective and prospective glimpse', in Goldman, M. *et al.* (eds), *China's Intellectuals And The State: In search of a new relationship*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 145.
5. *Renmin Ribao*, 14 June 1950, quoted in Hayhoe, R. *China's Universities, 1895-1995: A century of cultural conflict*, New York and London: Garland Publishers, 1996, p. 75; Shlapentokh, V. *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin era*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1990.
6. From 1966 to 1969, no new student was admitted to Chinese universities except for short political mobilisation training. The national entrance examination was suspended in 1967. Admissions progressively started again after that date, based not on academic standards but on work-unit recommendations, according to class background and political behaviour, and on the condition that candidates had performed manual work for more than two years. As a matter of fact, the children of city cadres requalified as peasants and formed the great majority of those entering university at that time. See Perrolle, P. M., Reed, L. A., U.S.-China Education Clearinghouse., Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (U.S.); National Association for Foreign Student Affairs, *An Introduction to Education in the People's Republic of China and U.S.-China Educational Exchanges*, Washington, DC: The Committee: The Association, 1980, pp. 24-5.

Chapter Three

Ideas - A Market or a Battle?

The first chapter endeavoured to grasp the scope and limits of Chinese academics' freedom of expression, which has expanded even if some rules must be obeyed and research is partly oriented by authorities. Let us now distinguish between the different types of political commitment that the academics I studied opt for. I focus on so-called intellectuals, committed scholars adopting one of the postures described by Liang Shuming: the scholar completely 'engrossed in learning' and knowledge, working at most indirectly for the transformation of society and the regime; or the scholar 'engrossed in issues', accepting political functions in the hope of having a direct impact on political decisions.

Intellectuals and patriotism

Intellectuals?

In order to understand the array of intellectual postures which academics can opt for, specific attention should be paid to the different types of audience they target, which can be defined as academia, the leadership and/or society. Intellectual production therefore oscillates between specialised academic forms and widely accessible generalist ones, depending on the targeted audience(s). French sociologist Raymond Boudon distinguishes between three 'markets', which obey different writing rules: the type I market, the scholarly market of the scientific community of peers; the type II market, which reaches out to a wider educated audience, comprising peers and specialists who are not sociologists but who are directly concerned with the themes sociologists tackle; and the type III market, which is less clearly defined and corresponds to all citizens (the audience of public conferences, for instance).¹ To this typology should be added the market of official publications, in which experts and technocrats are involved as well. Academics, as well as senior cadres, may work and publish under the command of public authorities, referring to publications on the primary market which they adapt and popularise. They could be assimilated to the academic type that Gérard Noiriel describes as 'the government intellectual' (*l'intellectuel de gouvernement*), who shouldn't be confused with 'specific intellectuals' (*intellectuels spécifiques*) or 'revolutionary intellectuals' (*intellectuels révolutionnaires*).² The primary

1. Boudon, R. 'L'intellectuel et ses publics: les singularités françaises', in Reynaud, J. D. and Grafmeyer, Y. (eds) *Français qui êtes-vous? Des essais et des chiffres*, Paris: La Documentation Française, 1981, pp. 465–80.
2. Noiriel, G. *Les Fils maudits de la République. L'avenir des intellectuels en France*, Paris: Fayard, 2005.

function of the government intellectual is to bridge the gap between scholarship and political leadership as he accepts the way current problems are raised by politicians and mobilises his expertise in his attempt to resolve them. Noiriel insists on the ambiguous nature of such a position, in contradistinction to the image of the intellectual as a spokesperson for the oppressed.

This matrix can help us understand the similarities and discrepancies between committed academics in China and in Europe or in the United States. In France, government intellectuals are looked down upon because they are deemed too close to power to fulfil their role as Sartrean intellectuals. But elsewhere, the situation is quite different³ and all the more so in China. Since, in the current situation, a narrow definition of intellectuals understood as explicit critics can only describe dissidents, such a definition excludes a whole set of relatively independent figures and the wide array of types of political commitment corresponding to their various stances as regards power.

The set of well known academics involved in the debate on political reform that I have studied in this research doesn't correspond to the definition of intellectuals directly opposing power. They are animated much less by the 'adversarial culture' that Lionel Trilling describes as the tendency of scholars, artists or writers to ceaselessly attack the *status quo*⁴ than by a sense of 'social responsibility' as regards the development of the Chinese nation.⁵ These scholars should, however, be seen as intellectuals in so far as they go beyond their field of expertise, emboldened by their cultural capital and their national and international achievements; and because they have become involved in the public sphere, in order to share their analyses and views on burning issues and to defend values. The positions they take and their publications on political reform, as well as their impact, make it particularly relevant to describe them as 'public intellectuals'.

According to Amitai Etzioni, what the different approaches used by public intellectuals have in common is the idea that these academics express themselves publicly on a wide array of issues; are generalists rather than specialists; focus on problems affecting a large public; and don't keep their

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3. In *Absent Minds*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, Stefan Collini studies the denial that such a thing as 'true' intellectuals exist in Great Britain, which considers itself as a unique case. Even in France, intellectuals are said to be an endangered species, which is the explicit title of Etzioni, A. and Bowditch, A. *Public Intellectuals: An endangered species?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
 4. Trilling, L. *Beyond Culture: Essays on literature and learning*, New York: Viking Press, 1965; to Trilling, this culture of contestation ran the risk of becoming a new diktat.
 5. Hayhoe, R. *China's Universities, 1895–1995: A century of cultural conflict*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1996, pp. 115, 117, 125. 'Social responsibility' is also the concept used in Zhang, Y. 'Politics, culture, and scholarly responsibility in China: toward a culturally sensitive analytical approach', *Asian Perspective* 31(3), 2007, pp. 103–24. See also Hao, Z. *Whither Taiwan and Mainland China: National identity, the state, and intellectuals*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

judgments and opinions to themselves.⁶ These ‘specific intellectuals’⁷ go beyond their particular field of expertise to make statements on general-interest issues, in the name of ethical or moral universal values, which can be associated with particular regime forms or forms of political organisation that supposedly embody them. Tony Judt refers to this definition when he calls Raymond Aron a ‘peripheral insider’.⁸ Richard Posner highlights the fact that these intellectuals address an intellectual public on political and ideological issues in an accessible way.⁹ Russel Jacoby insists on the public dimension of their commitment, which is not only professional and private.¹⁰ A major component of being a public intellectual is the public reception of one’s ideas. To be a public intellectual, on top of expressing oneself publicly, a scholar must find an audience: mainly an educated audience and sometimes a highly educated one, limited to intellectual and political spheres, but which thereafter spread the ideas more widely. This means that even if the number of people who are truly familiar with the work and ideas of a public intellectual is very limited, the public impact of them should not be underestimated since the

6. Bowditch, A. and Etzioni, A. *Public Intellectuals*, p. 1.

7. Foucault, M. ‘La fonction politique de l’intellectuel’ (The political function of the intellectual), *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988*, Paris: Gallimard, 2001, p. 109: ‘For a long time the “left” intellectual spoke and was acknowledged to have the right of speaking in the capacity of master of truth and justice. He was heard, or purported to make himself heard, as the representative of the universal. To be an intellectual meant to be, a little, the consciousness/conscience of everyone. I think we encounter here an idea transposed from Marxism, from a faded Marxism indeed: just as the proletariat, through the necessity of its historical position, is the hearer of the universal (but its immediate, unreflected bearer, scarcely conscious of itself as such), so the intellectual, by his moral, theoretical and political choice, aspires to be the bearer of this universality in its conscious, elaborated form. The intellectual is supposed to be the clear, individual figure of a universality of which the proletariat is the obscure, collective form. For some time now, the intellectual has no longer been called upon to play this role. A new mode of “connection between theory and practice” has been established, intellectuals have become accustomed to working not in the character of the “universal”, the “exemplary”, the “just-and-true for all”, but in specific sectors, at precise points where they are situated either by their professional conditions of work or their conditions of life (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, familial and sexual relations). Through this they have undoubtedly gained a much more concrete awareness of struggles. They have also thereby encountered problems which are specific, “non-universal”, often different from those of the proletariat and the masses. And yet, I believe that they have really come closer to the proletariat, for two reasons: because it has been a matter of real, material, everyday struggles, and because they often came up, even though in a different form, against the same adversary as the proletariat, the peasants and the masses, namely the multinational corporations, the judicial and police apparatuses, property speculators, etc. This is what I would call the “specific” intellectual as opposed to the “universal” intellectual.’

8. Tony Judt about Raymond Aron: ‘he took an active lifelong interest in public matters beyond his sphere of professional expertise.’ See Tony Judt, ‘The peripheral insider: Raymond Aron and the wages of reason’, in Melzer, A. Weinberger, J. and Zinman, R. (eds) *The Public Intellectual: Between philosophy and politics*, Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 142.

9. Posner, R. *Public Intellectuals, A study of decline*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 1.

10. Jacoby, R. *The Last Intellectuals: American culture in the age of academe*, New York: Basic Books, 1987, p. 235.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

This investigation stemmed from the desire to understand how democracy is conceived in China from the perspective not only of ideology but also of sociology. It therefore introduced the complex situation of Chinese intellectual elites and described their turning from an activist elite into an academic elite, adopting different positions as regards political power. Some scholars strive to keep as much distance as possible from power so as to ensure their independence. This, however, is not the most widespread scenario in the research field; all the more so as it is no longer forbidden for Chinese scholars to focus on political issues. The government and various other organisations actually ask academics to do so (and they are decently paid for it when they are well known). Is it possible to speak of freedom of opinion and thought in the Chinese academia? It is, but academic freedom is still relative and freedom of publication limited, as academic research and commitment are still bridled by the Party and resilient censorship. Academics endeavour to make an impact on political decisions but this does not mean they are simply bound hand and foot to power, with which, one way or another they are always associated. In China, a veritable market of ideas exists: the technocratic and pragmatic nature of the Chinese regime and the great diversity of viewpoints within political elites make it possible to voice criticisms and suggestions, and to experiment with reform proposals – including for institutional reform – at different levels. Besides, the variety of interests and political opinions within political elites guarantees powerful sponsors for any kind of proposal coming from academics, if it is legitimised by their cultural capital and expertise.

Even though when Chinese academics are involved in the public sphere, like academics worldwide they have to take into account the standards of rigour, disinterestedness and open-mindedness that characterise their profession, the patriotism of the scholars under scrutiny stands out. They indeed address a public which is not spoken to in France or in the United States: the country at large. And they are still searching for state recognition. Academics who do not fear losing their independence or are convinced that their proximity to power brings them a legitimacy and political influence which counterbalance any disruption to their lives as researchers often accept official functions. Within Chinese think tanks, official researchers, specific intellectuals playing the part of experts advising power, as well as political intellectuals like Hu Angang, Kang Xiaoguang and Wang Shaoguang, who are intellectual originators of policy proposals resembling what Gérard Noiriel describes as ‘government intellectuals’ (*intellectuels de gouvernement*). They are willing to actively but occasionally collaborate with authorities but have retained some leeway since their political proposals derive

from criticising the *status quo* and some policies. As to liberals, their criticism of the regime is less compatible with official discourse and they are restricted to the last two strategies in Chapter Three's typology of intellectuals: the media intellectual and the politically committed professor, whose political influence is indirect. The growing importance of public opinion in the decision-making process nonetheless contributes to erasing the distinctions between these various strategies, which some scholars do not hesitate to take in turn or combine.

This study has investigated the fragmentation and pluralisation (*duoyuanhua*) of the Chinese intellectual field. The convenient but simplistic labels of 'liberalism', 'New Left', and 'cultural nationalism' do not suffice to account for its diversity. From the most anarchist libertarianism of Liu Junning to the authoritarian and elitist Confucianism of Jiang Qing, to the variants of social democracy – whether liberal as championed by Qin Hui, or statist as defended by Wang Shaoguang – the most diverse trends of thought can be found in Chinese academia. Ren Jiantao attributes this transformation of the intellectual field to the Open and Reform policy, which 'split it into many contending kingdoms with their respective sphere of influence' (*zhuhou fenqi gequ yi di*). This fragmenting of political trends is partly due to academics' increased professionalism and deeper mastery of both western theories and Chinese traditional thinking, which was quite limited until the 1990s. Chen Yan's thesis is worth mentioning here:

[...] to circumvent censorship, all sorts of actions are possible: criticizing the current policy, claiming for individual rights, analysing social phenomena and describing things as they truly are. They must nonetheless all borrow the words of westerners or hide behind quotes from thinkers of the past.¹

This could explain the recurrent but often partial and superficial references to classic or foreign authors, theories and concepts, even though, as already explained, censorship is much less debilitating than it used to be. Liu Dong's theory of theoretical patchwork or *bricolage* is more convincing, and it describes a tendency prevailing among all the scholars under study. Their rejection of dogmatism and universal theories has led to a propensity to glean ideas, concepts and fragments of theories which form the pieces of a puzzle – the puzzle of China's development and greatness, a project which each Chinese individual, even if expatriate, is proud of and which contributes to his or her self-realisation. The remoteness of these fragments, whether because of their geographical or historical origins, seems to render the discourse of the intellectuals who deploy them more innocuous. This is not the only reason for their usefulness, however. They are also instrumental as authoritative arguments, attesting to the cultural capital of the intellectual and the legitimacy of his or her involvement in public and political debate. Last of all, the legitimacy of expressing oneself on major issues and national problems is all the greater as the intellectual displays independence and a fine sense of Chinese

1. Chen, Y. *L'éveil de la Chine: les bouleversements intellectuels après Mao, 1976–2002*, Paris: Editions de l'Aube, 2002.

realities. He or she must be able to take things into consideration with realism and pragmatism, to patiently select the necessary ingredients to solve problems and set up the right regime for China. The principal driving force of intellectual production, expression and commitment is patriotism, a desire to defend the national interest and awareness of and concern about the problems that remain unsolved.² In the name of the general interest, despite the harsh criticisms the opposing intellectual factions make of each other, the overall debate is perceived as constructive and each camp is seen to be contributing in its own way. Liu Dong recognises all the protagonists have a role to play but he believes the process can be perverted by private interests and recognition-seeking:

I think that the New Left theory is very useful to criticise western hegemony and the fact that westerners promote spectacular ideas while having a hidden agenda. The New Left is indispensable from an intellectual perspective and the liberals from a domestic perspective, to fight against all sorts of hegemony and criticise unfair situations. Most wealthy capitalists are the offspring of cadres. But China is unique in as much as liberalism here is externally oriented. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* are most interested in Chinese liberalism while the New Left is domestically oriented. This is our main problem. But this criticism has been used for political reasons and criticising has become dangerous, and exhausting. As a result, intellectuals are less critical and they take less pains. What is an intellectual? To be a Zola. We have many problems to solve but China must first grow. It must first seize the unique opportunity currently offered to impose itself more on the international stage.

Liu Dong therefore describes the lassitude of intellectuals, which he attributes to the exceptional circumstances of China's achieving world-power status without a democratic transition, contrary to 150 years of belief within China that only the pursuit of science and democracy would lead China to wealth and power and the conventional wisdom that tells poor countries that democracy is the route to prosperity. This relegates democratisation to a position of secondary importance. Many studies show that pressure from the thriving middle classes will not necessarily lead to more democratic claims because elites and those benefitting from the reforms do not fundamentally put the Party or the regime into question for the time being.³ On the contrary, the Party's policy has considerably improved their condition and they still hold that only the Party can maintain the order and growth which are their main priority. It is tricky to generalise about Chinese elites but, as they are the main beneficiaries of the reforms, they tend to defend the *status*

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2. The titles of two different books explicitly refer to this concern: Davies, G. *Worrying About China: The language of Chinese critical inquiry*, Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007; Davies, G. *Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese critical inquiry*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
 3. See Jean-Louis Rocca's publications on the middle classes as well as Li, C. *China's Emerging Middle Class: Beyond economic transformation*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2010.