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## Is China Moving Towards “Enlightened” But Plutocratic Authoritarianism?

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# Is China Moving Towards “Enlightened” But Plutocratic Authoritarianism?

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Translated from the French original by Michael Black

- 1 What does the future hold for the Chinese political regime?<sup>1</sup> This is a particularly difficult question to answer, as China, more than many other countries, has evolved in an atypical way, both when it was a totalitarian state and since the death of Mao Zedong, and especially since the end of the Cold War and of European communism<sup>2</sup>. For a multiplicity of reasons its path has been different and is likely to continue to be. This does not mean that any break with the present political system and, in particular, any transition to democracy should be ruled out. One cannot help thinking that the present political regime, directed by a single party which, despite all its metamorphoses, still claims to be communist, will, eventually, disappear. But what will replace it? We know that a democratic transition is clearly not envisaged by the current political leadership. In September 2004, a few days before succeeding Jiang Zemin at the head of the country's powerful Central Military Committee, did not Hu Jintao, head of the Party and of the state declare that Western democracy was a “dead-end” for China?<sup>3</sup> Pressure in favour of greater liberalisation and even democratisation of the Chinese regime does indeed exist, within the Communist Party (CP) as well, and it would be wrong to ignore or overlook it. But what I would like to try to show here is the China's great ability to adapt—and therefore to resist—the Chinese CP, its leadership and its *nomenklatura*, as an institution exercising political power in a monopolistic fashion and seeking to preserve this monopoly.

2 Since the launching of reforms in 1979, this adaptation has been based on both a redefinition—in reality a reduction—of the political sphere, and an undeniable “modernisation” of the state and of its relations with society. For a number of reasons which we will explore briefly, this successful adaptation<sup>4</sup> is highly likely to continue in the foreseeable future, which is to say in the medium term. This will allow the CP to maintain both its monopoly on politics and its grip on the essential pillars of the economy, while accepting a certain number of compromises with society, and particularly its new elites, through the development of more equitable conflict resolution institutions (legal arbitration and conciliation institutions), of more or less institutionalised systems of consultation (people’s congresses, think tanks, opinion polls) as well as through the setting up of proto-democratic mechanisms within the apparatus of a Party where promotion will remain above all based on co-optation mechanisms.

A more flexible authoritarianism

3 There is a preconceived idea about the present Chinese political system: while Chinese society has undergone profound changes under an onslaught of unprecedented economic growth and opening up to the outside world, the state is supposed to have remained immobile, unruffled and impassive, firmly maintaining a monopoly of political power in the hands of the *nomenklatura* of the Communist Party, continuing to tightly control any organised social action and nipping in the bud, to use the term favoured by Jiang Zemin, any dissident expression it deems to be destabilising or irreverent. In short, the political system is supposed to have remained totalitarian<sup>5</sup>.

4 Yet since the death of Mao Zedong, and especially since the repression of Tiananmen and the relaunching of economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1992, the state, or rather, the Party-state which officially presides over China’s destinies, has been profoundly transformed. These metamorphoses seem to have been reforms desired and taken on by the country’s central leadership with the sole aim of perpetuating the dictatorship of the CP by modernising and adapting it, at the best rate of “return on investment”, to the new economic, social and international environment with which it found itself confronted. There again, as we shall see, this environment has played a more direct and clearer role in the changes involved than is often believed.

5 It is clear that the political and institutional foundations of the system established by Mao Zedong in 1949 have not been formally called into question. Nevertheless, with the death of Mao in 1976, the return of Deng Xiaoping to power, and the launching of reforms at the end of 1978, it seems to me that China emerged from totalitarianism and entered an era which some have called post-totalitarian, and others authoritarian. The end of the mass movements, the decline of ideology, the stabilisation of the workings of the institutions as well as the partial and gradual withdrawal of the Party-state from the economic and social spheres, are the aspects of this major change most frequently mentioned<sup>6</sup>. Seeking to take into account the desired and perverse effects of the spreading of power within the *nomenklatura*, both vertically (decentralisation in favour of provincial, and then municipal authorities) and horizontally (collegial administration, limiting the holding of more than one office at a time, restoration of the formal institutions of state), commentators such as Michel Oksenberg, Kenneth Lieberthal and David Lampton have applied to China the concept of “fragmented authoritarianism”<sup>7</sup>. For my part, the evolution of the system since Tiananmen, and above all the relaunching of economic reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1992, along with

the limited and controlled liberalisation begun under Jiang Zemin and continued by Hu Jintao, have led me to prefer the concept of “soft authoritarianism”, thus deliberately establishing a parallel with Taiwan in the 1970s<sup>6</sup>.

- 6 This working hypothesis does not in any way prejudge a similar evolution of the People’s Republic towards democracy, say in a decade from now: on the contrary, a comparison between the two states, as we shall see, allows glimpses of future progressions which will probably be very different. The widely differing ideological foundations of the two political systems (one Soviet, the other liberal), the persistence on the mainland of institutions which are still impregnated with totalitarian culture (such as Public Security, or to a lesser extent, the propaganda organs of the Party), the determination of the CP to maintain its tight control over the essential segments of the economy, and particularly in industry (and this despite the relative size of the public sector in Taiwan up to the 1990s), even the simple differences in geographical and human scale or the level of average development of the two entities under consideration militate in this direction. At the same time, the shared culture, and in particular the political and legal culture, in both societies, the following by both of the ruling parties (the CP and the *Kuomintang*) of the organisational principles of Leninism, the gradual privatisation, the opening up to the outside world as well as the general and rapid growth of the mainland’s economy, are all particulars which invite us to make comparisons.
- 7 The obvious and well-known limitation of the concepts of post-totalitarianism or of authoritarianism, soft or fragmented, is, as with the notion of totalitarianism, their static character. These notions do not make it possible to embrace those factors which force the system to evolve, and which concern us particularly here. To Oksenberg, there were four: the individual answers and the *ad hoc* solutions by the Party to the structural changes it has brought about, the opening up to the outside world, the emergence of a proto-market economy, and the transformation of communications (the Internet) and transport<sup>9</sup>. We could add other factors such as the increasing demands of society, whether these come from the victims or the beneficiaries of the reforms, as well as the appearance of a private entrepreneurial class (whether *de facto* or legally private, one should stipulate) which maintains close but increasingly complex links with the political leadership<sup>10</sup>. Whatever is the case, all these evolutions have favoured a general transformation, an adaptation of the Party-state and of the political system which I would be tempted to designate by the deliberately vague and apparently neutral term of “modernisation”.

A “modernised”, but only partially institutionalised authoritarianism

- 8 This modernisation of the Party-state is evidently not the “fifth modernisation” wished for by Wei Jingsheng in 1979 (i.e. democracy); it does not therefore include the idea of democratisation. But it encompasses a reality which is also outside of the “four modernisations” announced by Zhou Enlai in 1975 (agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defence) and taken up by Deng in 1978. It affects the political system, its structures, and its cadres, governmental and judicial institutions, the law, and the relations which the state maintains with society.
- 9 This modernisation of the political system is evidently not neutral: it consists of adapting the state as well as possible to the new environment without having to call directly into question the monopolistic power exercised by the CP in the political, administrative (civil and military), and judicial spheres. It implies a certain stabilisation

of the working mechanisms, without however allowing a complete institutionalisation of the political system. The official objective of this strategy is to provide the country with the stability necessary for it to succeed in its economic development and to impose itself on the world scene as power of the very first rank—the familiar *fuqiang* of Chinese modernisers in the nineteenth century. Economic development, international power and nationalism, stability and modernisation of the state, these are the four main foundations of the legitimacy of the present Chinese regime.

10 This combination of modernisation with adaptation has engendered numerous reforms:

- the large-scale training of more competent cadres, in China and abroad;
- the creation of a civil service, which, although directed by the CP, enjoys a number of safeguards which assure its stability and efficiency;
- the transformation of government institutions (ministries, commissions, local offices, etc.) into organisations no longer in charge of directly managing the enterprises they control, but responsible for the implementation of public policy in their sector of intervention;
- the establishment of national and local administrative systems on Western lines (taxation, banking, social security, stock exchange controls, etc.), some of which, in particular the tax reform of 1994, contributed to recentralising the state to a certain extent and to building a “modern state”;
- the re-establishment and diversification of the organisations for the control of the Party-state, of leading cadres and of corruption (the CP’s disciplinary inspection commissions, the Ministry of Control, the Public Prosecutor’s Offices, the State Audit Administration, etc.);
- the reintroduction of formal political institutions of Soviet inspiration (particularly the people’s congresses), and the transfer to these institutions, whose elections are however still directed by the CP, of a limited number of powers (e. g. the people’s congresses have a particular influence on the legislative process)<sup>11</sup>;
- the introduction of more or less pluralist elections on the edges of the system (village committees, then urban committees) and the launching of certain experiments at the basic level of the administration, the township and the town<sup>12</sup>;
- the simplification of administrative procedures and the improvement of relations between the state and its citizens (a typical example is the easier issuing of passports);
- the introduction of legal rules and of institutions which make it possible to provide a certain legal protection to Chinese citizens as well as to foreign investors, a process which has speeded up since China’s accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001<sup>13</sup>;
- the reactivation or the expansion of institutions of extra-judicial appeal, aimed at settling conflicts within society or between society and the state; organisations for arbitration, mediation or conciliation, complaints offices (*xinfangke*)<sup>14</sup>;
- and the proliferation of opinion polls (the results of which are often kept secret) aimed at a better understanding of the state of mind of the citizen, of a locality or of a particular social category (with the help of semi-private institutions such as Horizon, Lingdian zhibiao, etc.).

11 Reading the list, it is clear that this modernisation has not been merely a technical adaptation to globalisation and to the WTO, but has also pursued much more directly political objectives: better management of growing socio-economic inequalities, assuring the stability of society as well as reinforcing the domestic and international legitimacy of the regime. Thus the introduction on the margins of consultative and electoral mechanisms seeks both to reduce social tensions and to improve China’s image. Similarly, the development of legal, administrative or *ad hoc* ways of appeal

available to society can be interpreted as the application of the principle, cherished by Deng Xiaoping, according to which “stability comes before all else” (*wending yadao yiqie*). In other words, both domestically and on the international scene, the Chinese government tries above all to head off conflict and avoid confrontation, in order, they hope, to remain in control of the game.

- 12 However, this combination of modernisation and adaptation has been much less thought through and much less the product of a grand design, than some might have believed. It has also been reactive and has sought to accommodate the less dangerous or destabilising demands of society (or of foreign partners), the better to preserve what is essential—control by the CP of political power and of the vision of the future of the country.
- 13 It is in this line of thinking that one can place part of the legal reforms and the widening of certain public freedoms. In fact, since 1997, legal reforms and the establishment of the rule of law have substituted for “unattainable political reforms” and have to some extent become political reforms by default. Hence pressures from society, and sometimes government concessions in this area. In this regard, the case of Sun Zhigang in the spring of 2003, underscores the new and very relative flexibility of the Chinese government. Sun was a young migrant worker arrested in Canton during an identity check who died in custody after being ill-treated by other prisoners. His death led, under pressure from local lawyers and decided by Wen Jiabao in person, to a partial liberalisation of the restrictions affecting the residence rights of migrants to the cities.
- 14 It is unquestionable that this combination of modernisation and adaptation by the political system has favoured a certain institutionalisation of the system. The regularity of CP congresses and plenary sessions, of meetings of the National People’s Congress or of local people’s congresses is one of the most visible manifestations of this. The constitutional procedures and the working regulations of state institutions are formally respected, more frequently invoked and more transparent<sup>15</sup>. And, particularly since the promulgation of the Legislation Law in 2000 (*lifafa*), the hierarchy of legal norms has gradually become clearer<sup>16</sup>.
- 15 However, this institutionalisation, in the framework of the present political system, will remain by definition incomplete. The submission of the state to the CP (*dangzheng yitihua*) and the largely opaque and undemocratic character of the latter, despite intentions outlined vaguely by Hu Jintao since 2003, though more clearly since 2004, make it difficult to institutionalise a certain number of decision-making processes and of relations between organisations<sup>17</sup>: the appointment of leading national and local cadres (still decided by co-option on the basis of multiple and complex consultations), relations between the centre and the provinces (and between local government and the various levels)<sup>18</sup>, the “parliamentary” role of the Central Committee, the modes of decision (vote or consensus?) within the Political Bureau and its Standing Committee (which has nine members), as well as the process of political succession. For example, while some local people’s congresses, despite being dominated still by CP cadres, have sometimes tried and succeeded in making choices which were not those that the Party had officially decided on, such cases remain exceptional. Similarly, while the CP will hesitate to appoint an overly unpopular secretary or governor, it still has mastery over the nomination process since it controls the nursery from which it can draw the cadres it needs. Lastly, the maintenance of Jiang Zemin at the head of the Central Military

Commission for two years after the CP’s sixteenth Congress (in October 2002) shows the difficulties involved in the institutionalisation of the highest positions: it was the changes in the balance of power between Hu Jintao and his detractors (the Shanghai group and others close to Jiang) which constrained the former President to retire in September 2004.

- 16 However, complete institutionalisation of the regime is not the Chinese leadership’s first priority. Rather they have concentrated simultaneously on the *ad hoc* but swift management of social conflicts in an economic environment which is increasingly inegalitarian, the appropriation by the state or by CP leading cadres’ families of the most vital, dynamic or promising sectors of economic activity and the nationalist protection of those sectors from the effects of market mechanisms, as well as the establishment of a sort of “alliance” which some would call a “class alliance” with the country’s elites, and the new elites in particular, in order, among other things, to dissuade them from engaging in any democratic transition. This wager is far from being a certitude, and one may well wonder whether, in the end, it will prove to have been in vain, so great is the diversification of interests produced by the present economic expansion. However, it is important to emphasise the fact that, for the moment, by exhibiting what constitutes in the eyes of the urban elites the foil of a “beggars’ revolt”, reinforced by the persistent symbiosis between the Party and the economic sphere, this strategy has borne its fruit: the alliance between the CP’s leadership and the elites is holding and seems even to be growing stronger, thanks to the establishment of a political system which is both more consultative and more elitist.

A consultative but elitist authoritarianism

- 17 The Chinese political system remains authoritarian, but the regime has sought, particularly since Tiananmen, to noticeably adjust its authoritarianism in view of the social category it targets. It has pursued a controlled process of liberalisation and has increased the number of informal processes of consulting with society and in particular its elites. Lastly, it has sought to avoid alienating any of the new elites, even going so far as to welcome so-called private or semi-private entrepreneurs into the CP.
- 18 This adjustment of Chinese authoritarianism is still a fallow field of research. Some may find this notion hardly relevant. And yet, one has to acknowledge that the government now claims a privileged representation of the elites. This is the true meaning of the “theory” of the three representations (*sange daibiao*) which was made public by Jiang Zemin in 2001: the Party represents the productive forces and advanced culture much better than society as a whole; it therefore defends the interests of the former more directly than the interests of the latter. Taking up a Confucianist tradition several thousand years old, this elitist approach to the social body also has concrete ramifications: the government has deliberately allowed cells of freedom of expression to develop within certain privileged categories of society, or rather *danwei* (production units), on condition, of course, that this freedom is not used to communicate publicly with society as a whole. This is the case first of all with the economic *nomenklatura*, the country’s “plutocracy”, the sons and daughters of leaders who directly control many state or quasi-state enterprises: despite regular campaigns against corruption, the latter often remain above the law, protected by the norms and customs of the Party<sup>19</sup>. This is also the case with the universities and research centres where academic freedom has made great progress in the last few years, without the debates that are

developing there being reported by the *People's Daily* (which no-one reads anymore anyway), or the country's other official publications. Similarly, the demands of students (protests against the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and lack of security on campus) are quickly taken into account, even if not always satisfied. One could say the same, *mutatis mutandis*, of the demands of private or semi-private entrepreneurs on local authorities over whom they exercise growing power. In general, the Chinese elites enjoy privileged access to information, particularly if they can speak English well. In other words, tomorrow's elites are being pampered by the government.

- 19 In contrast, the CP's tolerance is much more limited with regard to worker and peasant circles, or complainants with no education. Social movements (such as strikes or demonstrations) are indeed less often (and less severely) banned than formerly—in reality, the rapid increase in their number makes any interdiction illusory—, but the leaders are still subject to uncompromising repression, in particular if the mobilisation takes a political turn (cf. the events in Liaoyang in 2002). Similarly, the fluctuating repression of the quality press, such as the *Nanfang dushibao* (*Southern Metropolitan Journal*) in the spring of 2004, shows the nervousness of the government as soon as the new elites try communicating too freely with society. Moreover, this modulation has obvious limits: any public and organised heterodox political action is still forbidden and immediately repressed, wherever it may come from (for example the creation of an independent political party).
- 20 In parallel, in order to win the confidence of the elites, the government seeks their advice and opinion on a growing number of questions. The consultation of experts has in fact become one of the essential sources of the legitimacy of the present regime<sup>20</sup>. These experts, and the centres and universities that harbour them, are caught in this game, competing to obtain and maintain access to the ears of the leadership and claiming proudly an often disproportionate influence on government decision-making processes.
- 21 It is not a question here of denigrating the usefulness of these consultations: they undeniably increase the quality of decisions and contribute to a revalorisation of the role of experts at the expense of political leaders, who remain generalists for the most part, in spite of what in most cases is their technical training (in engineering in particular). But because of this, these consultations tend to neglect the opinion of society as a whole, while giving these counsellors the illusion of taking part in decisions that are still made elsewhere.
- 22 It is true that the CP as an institution is neither monolithic nor outside society. The economic reforms and globalisation have forced it to negotiate more and more frequently with forces (both domestic and trans-national) that it does not control, and in whose eyes it has to renew and reinforce its legitimacy (whence Jiang's “three representations”). This prolonged haggling has affected and transformed it, both on a structural level and where its cadres and members are concerned. While it continues to co-opt its leaders, the methods of their selection have changed: economic results, “good government” and the peaceful management of conflict have become important criteria for promotion<sup>21</sup>. Above all the interweaving of the Party's interests with those of the new elites—if only in the common objective of creating jobs—is so strong that it is increasingly difficult for it to backtrack and regain the ground lost in the economic and social spheres. The dismantling of a large part of loss-making state industry and



the proliferation of charitable organisations are realities that are now accepted by the government (which nevertheless still tries to supervise the latter’s activities).

- 23 It remains true however, that the political heights of the regime—as well as the economic ones (vital sectors such as energy, weapons, transport, media and construction)—remain the monopoly of the communist institution and it is difficult to see this monopoly crumbling away—except in the case of a major social or economic crisis which is precisely what the present authorities strive by all means to curb, and have so far succeeded in avoiding. One can also consider that the projects for partial democratisation of the workings of the CP are aimed at increasing the cohesion of the structure and will probably contribute to this. While within the Party there are indeed those who favour a clearer liberalisation of the system, they do not seem ready to take the risk of a break, and thus a schism, from their more conservative comrades, for they are too closely tied to them by a multiplicity of plutocratic connections. Moreover, there is no sign within the more autonomous elites, of movements powerful enough to organise a move away from the present political (and economic) model. In other words, the Chinese Communist Party has adopted a deliberately corporatist strategy, which for the moment is succeeding<sup>22</sup>. At the risk of being over-simplistic, one might be tempted to assert that in the years to come, the largest segments of these elites, in particular the economic and cultural elites, closely tied to the Party as they are, will remain engaged in their personal enrichment, the improvement of their well-being and the enlargement of their individual or categorical freedoms. The political elites (in particular the cadres) will try to make the most of the adjustments introduced by Hu Jintao in the rules of co-option within the CP, in order to advance their careers satisfactorily. Both kinds of elites will continue to mobilise only intermittently around the great nationalist questions in order to influence the government (Taiwan, Senkaku, etc.).

A difficult move away from the authoritarian model

- 24 Can this novel mixture of flexible authoritarianism, of elitism and of selective liberalisation last? The answer is “yes”. What could make things change? A major social or economic crisis would undeniably be likely to divide the Party and encourage some of its leaders to propose a democratic transition<sup>23</sup>. But, on the one hand, such a crisis is far from being as probable as was predicted by Gordon Chang in 2001<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, would the supporters of democracy prevail? Nothing is less certain, given the extent to which the previous crises have generally favoured the most conservative and nationalist forces in the Party, particularly if foreign governments began showing their preferences. The extent of the social, economic, financial and demographic, as well as institutional and legal problems to be solved, the answers to which are not to be found in the “lucky bag” of democracy, are already inciting the Chinese elites to prudence. The evolution of intellectual debate during the 1990s is evidence of this<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, despite the well-known weaknesses of the present economic system (state enterprises, the banking system, agriculture, environment protection), the Chinese Party-state has reformed and modernised itself with much clearer success than the Soviets managed, making many believe in its ability to stand up to the costs and the impact of accession to the WTO, particularly thanks to the introduction, limited to say the least, of market mechanisms. Also the deep elitism of the Chinese elites, their massive support for Confucian values which are now openly promoted by the Party, their terror in the face of the impossible reduction and the tricky management of socio-economic inequalities and their nationalism (in particular economic), could persuade them to continue

turning their backs on any democratisation of the present system, particularly if the latter guarantees them, due to their privileged social position, de facto enjoyment of the main basic freedoms which they dreamed of, say, at the time of Tiananmen.

- 25 It is true that the idea of democracy is making headway in China, that the Western democratic model and the Taiwanese experiment appeal to a growing number of Chinese irritated by the corruption among the leadership, the lack of pluralist elections, the persistent censorship of the media and of the Internet, by the serious breaches of human rights and the profound weaknesses of the legal system. Moreover, one cannot rule out that one day, a major segment of the governing political elite will realise that the democratic system and the rule of law which is tightly bound to it—because the system is really institutionalised and therefore stable—manages inequalities and social conflict much better than other political systems. But this idea still remains very much on the sidelines of present political debates, much more so than for example in Taiwan, where, even under Chiang Kai-shek, almost all the leaders of local authorities (towns, *xian*, townships, villages) were elected, and while opposition parties were banned, non-Party figures (*dangwai*) could participate in political life. Because of this, the mainland’s political (and economic) system remains more tightly controlled by its leading party and there is no major reason to go beyond authoritarianism<sup>26</sup>. In these circumstances, will the supporters of democracy in China take the risk of confronting and provoking the government, without any impetus from the top? Should one not add that the increasing power of the urban middle classes, the persistent economic privileges of the communist or para-communist *nomenklatura*, as well as the affirmation of state corporatism rather make up additional factors in favour of prudence by the elites in the confrontation which could appear in the event of a social or economic crisis?
- 26 In other words, the numerous economic and social but also international constraints—strengthening its rank vis-à-vis the United States—which China must overcome, as well as the “class” interests of the political and economic elites which govern the country, militate against a move away from authoritarianism any time soon. It cannot be ruled out that the changes *within* the system, which we have presented, might eventually favour a change of system. However, must the move to a different system necessarily translate into a transition to democracy, in 2020 or even earlier, as some are predicting?<sup>27</sup> Is it not possible that China will once again innovate and manage its retreat from communism through a movement towards a softer but stabilised authoritarianism that is consultative yet also elitist and corporatist and equipped with a certain legal modernity but not with the rule of law and only partly institutionalised? In short, might China not be moving towards what I would be tempted to call “enlightened” but plutocratic authoritarianism?

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NOTES

1. This article is a revised version of a paper read at the conference “Transformation de l’Etat et restructuration de la société chinoise” (Transformation of the State and restructuring of Chinese society) co-organised by the CERI and the CEFC (April 29th and 30th April 2004).
2. This thinking has been widely developed among observers of contemporary China. For a recent high-quality overview of the question cf. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, January 2003. I will quote here from some of the contributions, but a reading of them in their entirety is highly recommended.
3. *Renmin ribao* (*People’s Daily*, hereafter RMRB), September 15th 2004.
4. When I published my state thesis in 1992, based on a study of the administrative reforms introduced between 1979 and 1991, this adaptation did not seem as “successful” as it may appear today. Nevertheless, this does not mean that this adaptation will be able to continue smoothly in the future: it is a question of assessing results found in 2004 and not of prediction; cf. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *L’Administration chinoise après Mao. Les réformes de l’ère Deng Xiaoping et leurs limites*, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1992.
5. Michel Bonnin, “Les métamorphoses du totalitarisme”, *Le Débat*, No. 117, November-December 2001, pp. 114-135. In the 1980s, along with Jean-Luc Domenach and others, I had subscribed to this idea. The relaunching of reforms in 1992 and the consequent flexibilisation of the regime led me to revise my judgement about the nature of the Chinese political system. Cf. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “La Chine : un totalitarisme oriental”, in Léon Poliakov, *Les Totalitarismes du XXe siècle*, Paris, Fayard, 1987, pp. 321-357; Jean-Luc Domenach, “La Chine populaire ou les aléas du totalitarisme”, in Guy Hermet, *Totalitarismes*, Paris, Economica, 1984. Jean-Luc Domenach has also moved forward on this question, cf. Jean Luc Domenach, “La transition post-totalitaire en Chine”, *Commentaires*, XXIV, 2001-93, pp. 35-47.
6. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, *Le Système politique de la Chine populaire*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1994.
7. Kenneth Lieberthal, Michel Oksenberg, *Policy Making in China: Leaders, Structures and Processes*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, and Kenneth Lieberthal, David Lampton (eds.), *Bureaucracy, Politics and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.
8. Edwin A. Winkler, “Institutionalization and Participation on Taiwan: From Hard to Soft Authoritarianism?”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 99, September 1984, pp. 481-499.
9. Michel Oksenberg, “China’s Political System : Challenges of the Twenty-First Century”, in John Unger (ed.), *The Nature of Chinese Politics. From Mao to Jiang*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 2002, p. 201.
10. Bruce J. Dickson, *Red Capitalists in China. The Party, Private Entrepreneurs and Prospects for Political Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
11. James Derleth and Daniel R. Koldyk, “The District People’s Congresses and Political Reform in China”, and King-lun Ngok, “Law-making and China’s Market Transition. Legislative Activism at the Eighth National People’s Congress”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 49, No. 2, March-April 2002, pp. 15-22 and 23-32.

12. Lai Hairong, “Semi-Competitive Elections at Township Level in Sichuan Province”, *China Perspectives*, No. 51, January-February 2004, pp. 13-27.
13. Stanley B. Lubman and Leïla Choukroune, “L’incomplète réforme par le droit”, *Esprit*, n° 302, February 2004, pp. 122-136.
14. Isabelle Thireau and Hua Linshan, “The Moral Universe of Aggrieved Chinese Workers: Workers’ Appeals to Arbitration Committees and Letters and Visits Offices”, *The China Journal*, No. 50, July 2003, pp. 83-103.
15. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, “The 10<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress and After. Moving towards a new authoritarianism, both elitist and consultative?”, *China Perspectives*, No. 47, May-June 2003, pp. 4-20
16. Zou Keyuan, “Harmonising Local Laws with the Central Legislation”, *China Perspectives*, No. 52, March-April 2004, pp. 44-55.
17. His speech on September 15th 2004, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the promulgation of the first Constitution of the People’s Republic confirms this orientation, cf; *RMRB*, September 15th 2004.
18. Alan P. L. Liu, “Mini-Nationalism in Post-Mao China”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 49, No. 2, March-April 2002, pp. 44-51.
19. Stéphanie Balme, *Entre soi. L’élite du pouvoir dans la Chine contemporaine*, Paris, Fayard, 2004, p. 147 and following.
20. Gongqin Xiao, “The Rise of the Technocrats”, *Journal of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-65.
21. Bo Zhiyue, *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility since 1949*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 2002.
22. Jonathan Unger, Anita Chan, “Corporatism in China: A Developmental State in an East Asian Context”, in Barrett L. McCormick and Jonathan Unger (eds.), *China After Socialism, in the Footsteps of Eastern Europe or East Asia?*, Armonk, New York, M.E. Sharpe, 1996, pp. 95-129; cf. also Jean-François Huchet, “Le capitalisme au secours du Parti communiste chinois”, *Esprit*, n° 302, February 2004, pp. 137-150.
23. Qinglian He, “A Volcanic Stability”, *Journal of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72.
24. Gordon Chang, *The Coming Collapse of China*, New York, Random House.
25. Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen. The Politics of Transition*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.
26. Andrew J. Nathan, “Authoritarian Resilience”, *Journal of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-17.
27. 2020 is the deadline put forward by Bruce Gilley in his recent book, the optimistic tone of which appears in the title, cf. *China’s Democratic Future. How It Will Happen and Where It Will Lead*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004. This optimism was already perceptible in his contribution “The Limits of Authoritarian Resilience”, *Journal of Democracy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-72.

## ABSTRACTS

Since the launch of the reforms in 1979, most striking has been China’s tremendous ability to adapt to—and therefore to resist—the Communist Party, its leadership and its nomenklatura, as an institution exercising political power in a monopolistic fashion and seeking to preserve this

monopoly while maintaining an increasingly plutocratic grip on the most strategic segments of the economy. Moreover the numerous social and economic as well as international constraints—such as maintaining its position vis-à-vis the United States—which China must overcome, as well as the “class” interests of the political and economic elites that lead the country, militate against any quick escape from authoritarianism. That changes introduced within the system might eventually favour a change of system cannot be ruled out. However, does a move to another system necessarily translate into a transition to democracy? Is it not possible that China might once again innovate and succeed in emerging from communism by means of an evolution towards a more flexible but stabilised authoritarianism, consultative yet elitist and corporatist, endowed with a certain legal modernity but not with the rule of law and still only partially institutionalised? In short, might not China be evolving towards what I would be tempted to call “enlightened” but plutocratic authoritarianism?