

Reading the China Dream





Wang Shaoguang, "Traditional Moral Politics"

Wang Shaoguang 王绍光, interviewed by journalist Ma Ya 玛雅,

"Traditional Moral Politics and Contemporary Concepts of Governance"[1]

Introduction and Translation by David Ownby

Introduction

Wang Shaoguang (b. 1954) is Emeritus Professor of Government and Administration at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a Schwarzman Scholar at Tsinghua University in Beijing. He did his doctorate at Cornell and taught for several years in the United States before moving to the Chinese University of Hong Kong, where he spent most of his very productive career. A prominent member of China's New Left, Wang's research agenda has from the outset been directly engaged with China's reform and opening, arguing for the development of "state capacity" and against the ravages of untrammelled free markets in dozens of well-researched, empirically based articles and book chapters (click [here](#) for a bibliography of Wang's work available in English).

More recently, as China has embraced its own "model" in which market forces are largely subordinate to state control, Wang's research focus has become more theoretical, moving away from specific challenges of the reform and opening era and toward a global defense of China's model of "democracy." Displaying his habitual energy, Wang attacks his theme from multiple angles. His Four Lectures on Democracy 民主四讲 (2008) traces the history of democratic thought and practices from ancient Greece and Rome down to the present day. Other texts, such as "[Representative Democracy and Representational Democracy](#)," available in translation on this site, tackle the problem from a political science perspective. Elsewhere, such as in China: The Way of Governing 中国政道 (2014) he explores notions of traditional morality undergirding the practice of Chinese democracy (which he contrasts with the Western fixation on "political forms").

The interview translated here, originally published on the Utopia website (which was closed down for awhile, though I have the impression it is back online) offers a useful introduction to the themes Wang explores in his most recent research. Asked to explain "why China works," he begins with an overview and reperiodization of modern and contemporary Chinese history which, strangely enough for a New Left scholar, largely ignores CCP

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mentality, diversity in terms of policy implementation, and responsiveness to popular needs.

Translation

Three Periods in the Last 200 Years of Governance

Ma Ya: Following the continual deepening of globalization and the spread of the internet throughout the world, the notion of China as a rising great power has become a “key word” on the web and throughout the world. At the end of 2009, the “Global Language Monitor,” an American organization that surveys the media, discovered in looking at paper media, electronic media and the Internet that “rising China” was the hottest news topic of the past ten years, surpassing 9-11 in the United States and the Iraq war. If “rising China” has become a key word in today’s world, then what’s the key word that explains the fact of China’s rise? In the plainest language, why has China been able to succeed? Why does China work? Please share your viewpoint with us.

WSC: Let me start by going a bit further back in history. Why does China work? In fact, China has only worked for the past sixty years, and for the 150 years before that did not work well at all. Of course, if we go back even earlier, prior to the nineteenth century China was quite well-developed in a world perspective, even if it fell behind during the nineteenth century. In a recent talk I gave, I focused on three periods in China’s state management over the past 200 years. I divide the periods up in a way that is somewhat unusual. My first period is from 1800 to 1956, which includes even the 1949 founding of the country. My second period is from 1956 to around 1990; and the third is from 1990 to the present. There are three key words attached to these three periods. If we use English to define the key words, there are similarities as well as differences among them. The first key word in English is “governability 治国能力,” which is the question of whether or not the capacity to govern the country exists, whether there is a political force that can govern the entire country. In the 150 years prior to 1949, this was a big question that was never resolved, so the first question to be answered is whether or not there is a political force that can govern the country. The key word for the second period is “government 政府管理,” which means government management, where the government emerges to control the country, and does not allow other forces to participate. This stage probably occupied the first thirty years of the sixty years of the new China, perhaps a bit more, extending to 1985 or 1990. The key word for the third period is “governance 治理,” by which we mean state management.

The three key words sound as if they have points in common, so I have summarized them, and employed the Foucaultian term “governmentality 治理理念” to bring them together; “governmentality” is the theoretical justification for the way a country rules itself. What has China’s most critical governing concept been over the past 200 years? What were the characteristics of each of the three periods? These three terms—governability, government, and governance—embody the governing concepts of the three stages, which identify the problems they were hoping to resolve and how they were hoping to resolve them.

Ma Ya: Do these three terms exist in a relation of development and evolution?

WSC: Yes. If the problems of the first stage were not resolved, then the latter two stages could not have occurred. The problem China faced during the first stage was that the central government lacked the power to rule the country, or to say the same thing in a well-known formula, China encountered “inner disturbance and outer perils 内忧外患.” The inner disturbances refer to the peasant uprisings occurring all over China beginning in the late 18th century—the Nian Rebellion, the White Lotus uprisings, the Taipings....These were occurring all over the place. Among these, the Taipings almost took all of China in the 1850s. The foreign perils began with the Opium War in 1840.

This situation of inner disturbance and outer peril took a particular turn not long after the Xianfeng emperor 咸丰 [r. 1850-1861] took the throne, when the Qing government admitted that its armies were not up to the task, and allowed the Hunanese Zeng Guofan 曾国藩 (1811-1872) to organize his own Hunan army to save the country. This was unprecedented; from the time of the founding of the dynasty the Qing had never allowed Han Chinese to command the army, and Han Chinese could absolutely not encroach on military authority. But now there was no way out, and the Qing had to allow first the Xiang army 湘军 and then the Huai army 淮军 to help to put down the

challenges, there was no way to govern the country.

From that time, and all the way down to 1956, the biggest problem that China faced was that of governing the country. In other words, who had the power and what means would they use to hold the country together? After the Xiang and the Huai armies suppressed the peasant uprisings, and after the Qing government signed a series of unequal treaties, the situation largely stabilized, and it looked like things were going to be all right. But militarization occurred quickly, and the Xiang and Huai armies, as well as the later Beiyang warlords 北洋军阀, were not really under the control of the government in Beijing. If these forces had really been under Beijing's control, then the warlord period would not have occurred.

The Wuchang uprising [that started the 1911 Republican revolution] was in fact a random event with no real plan behind it, nor was it led by Sun Yat-sen. At the time, Sun Yat-sen was in Denver, in the United States, and had no idea what had happened in China. Hearing the shots fired during the Wuchang uprising, the provinces throughout the country declared their independence one after the other, and the country fell apart. A bit later, Sun Yat-sen returned to China, but was still unable to rule the country, and was forced to ask for help from Yuan Shikai. Was Yuan Shikai able to rule the country? Between 1912, when the Republic of China was founded, and June 6, 1916, when Yuan died, there occurred the National Protection War 护国战争 [or anti-monarchy war, in 1915-16], the Second Revolution 二次革命 [in 1913, a struggle between Yuan and Sun], during both of which provinces once again declared their independence from the Beijing government, leading to another situation where the country fell apart. After Yuan's death there was chaos as the warlords took control; there was no government to hold the country together, and no one to rule the country.

In 1927, the Nationalist Government was established in Nanjing, but only a few provinces around Shanghai were truly under its control: Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Anhui. By the 1930s a few more provinces had come under the government's control, but others remained out of the government's hands. It is hardly necessary to point out that when Japan occupied Manchuria, North China moved toward self-government, and was outside of the government's control. The warlords of Yunnan, Guangxi, and Shanxi were equally outside of the government's control, to say nothing of the Communist rebellion. With the Japanese invasion and the beginning of the War of Resistance, the territory that the Chongqing government could control was even smaller, confined to the rear area.

Behind enemy lines in the north, Communist power clashed with the Japanese. With the Nationalists and the Communists fighting one another, there was still no government capable of ruling the country. Following Japan's defeat there was a brief period in which the country rallied to Chiang Kai-shek as the leader of the entire country, but when talks between the Communists and the Nationalists broke down, war broke out once again less than a year later in 1946, meaning that there was no one to rule the country. So from 1800 to around 1949, the most important question China faced was how to resolve the problem of ruling the country.

Ma Ya: When the Communists established their regime, this was a completely new beginning. Why do you extend this first stage down to 1956?

WSC: With the establishment of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, it looked as if the problem of ruling the country had been resolved, but in my view it was not. After the establishment of the Nanjing government in 1928, the Nationalists nominally ruled the entire country, but in fact its control was weak, and all of those who helped Chiang Kai-shek fight the war had their own motivations. When the Communists were fighting with the Nationalists and the Japanese, there were also many independent groups. These existed ever since the founding of the Red Army, and every liberated area printed its own currency and had its own legal systems and management practices. These "mountaintop groups 山头" were only completely wiped out in the 1970s or 1980s.

On this point, the leadership of the CCP was very clear, and from the beginning of 1948, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the central committee all realized that as the day of victory was soon approaching, the CCP should not only defeat the enemy, but also unify itself. Mao Zedong's most important essay of this period is now largely ignored. It is called "On Setting up a System of Reports 建立报告制度" and is in the fourth volume of *The Collected Works of Mao Zedong*. In this essay Mao established a regulation to the effect that every base area and every army had to

report according to the regulations. Mao criticized him directly. After the publication of "On Setting up a System of Reports" in 1948, there followed a series of essays in which we can see the intention of the central committee to unify the CCP, including the designation of military units in the PLA, and what used to be the Northwestern Field Army 西北野战军, the East China Field Army 华东野战军 became the First Field, the Second Field, etc., as the structure of all the field armies begin to be normalized. Currency was also unified in all of the liberated areas, as were the bank notes used by military personnel. This process continued through 1949, when the PRC was founded.

After the founding of the PRC, conditions were still not favorable to ruling the country. At the time, there were still many bandits in many areas that had to be gotten rid of. In fact, ridding the country of bandits was one of the new regime's great accomplishments, solving a big problem that had hindered China for the past hundred years. Between 1950 and 1956, the central government carried out a great deal of work, unifying military affairs as well as administration and the economy, including the unification of finance, the establishment of the Bank of China, which issued the new currency, the renminbi. The center carved out six large military districts in the northeast, north China, northwest, east China, central south and south west, and in each of these six groups were more than one million soldiers, and they functioned both as administrative and military managements, led respectively by Lin Biao, Deng Xiaoping, Peng Dehuai 彭德怀 (1898-1974), and Gao Gang 高岗 (1905-1954).

Within this structure occurred the Gao-Rao affair 高饶事件,[2] which was a result of the problem of independent "mountaintop groups." Gao Gang was in the northeast bureau, and Rao Shushi 饶漱石 (1903-1975) in the east China bureau, and both were very competent. Gao Gang was known as the "king of the northeast," and was also the Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the People's Government. In the early 1950s there was an affair called "five horses enter Beijing, but one horse wins 五马进京, 一马当先." This was a policy designed to bring in the "outlying areas" 收藩政策, in which the military leaders were all transferred to Beijing and given a position as vice-chairman of this or vice-premier of that, while continuing to maintain their military position in their original posting. This was because there was sure to be resistance if their military position were to be taken away. After the Gao-Rao affair, the central authorities finally decided to sort things out, which took until 1956. In February of 1955, the State Council issued a document entitled "Decision Concerning Certain Questions Related to Redrawing the Military Regions of the Entire Country, 关于全国军区重新划分的若干问题的决定," in which the original six regions were increased to twelve. The establishment of these twelve military regions marked the real unification of China.

The Party-State System Solved the Problem of the Capacity to Rule the Country

Ma Ya: Would this process been faster in the absence of China's resistance to America in Korea?

WSG: Not necessarily. China's actions in Korea actually helped to bring order to the army and to the country in general. The period between 1949, when the country was established, to 1956 when a high-level centralized system had been set up, can be seen as a process of overcorrection. What kind of overcorrection? An overcorrection for the fact that for the preceding 150 years there had been no one capable of ruling the country. In 1956, this problem was finally resolved, and the country was no longer divided, with the exception of Taiwan, which had not been liberated, and Hong Kong and Macao, which had not yet been retaken. This was a historical achievement, to solve a governing problem that had existed for 150 years.

Although today people don't care much about this, in fact it is an extremely important question. The sociologist Huang Jisu 黄纪苏 (b. 1955) wrote an essay talking about his grandfather, and he noted that what intellectuals of that period worried about was if the country was going to exist as a county, and what China was going to do. Politicians at the time were worried about the same thing, whether it was Sun Yat-sen, Yuan Shikai, or Chiang Kai-shek. At the outset there were some people who thought things through very well, in very ideal terms, the idea being that if we imported the Western model, then maybe we could solve the problem of governing the country.

For example, Sun Yat-sen said that if we used the American federal system then we could manage the country. Prior to the 1911 revolution he gave a great many talks in America about decentralization, promising that the central government would not intervene too much. But when he got back to China he changed his tune and started talking about the five unifications 五个统一, in which powers would all be unified in the central government,

level centralization and concentration of power.

Now there are some people who argue, on a conceptual basis, that China at the outset overdid it in copying the Soviet system. Actually all of this is unrelated to the Soviet model; the question was one of governing the country. Could we govern the country, was there a government capable of managing an area of 9,600,000 square kilometers and a population of six hundred million? To manage a huge country like this requires a highly centralized government. And in fact, beginning from the Guomindang period there were efforts to combine the party and the country. The system established by the CCP was a party-state system. Whether you approve of the party-state system or not, it genuinely solved China's first problem, which was that of ruling the country. By 1956, almost no one questioned if the CCP was capable of managing a large country like China.

Ma Ya: This was a product of history.

WSC: Yes, it was a product of history. We have to be clear about this, otherwise everybody will argue that it was a conceptual product, the communist ideal imported from the USSR. There were conceptual components, but more importantly it was a product of history, and the point was to be able to govern the country, and that is why they combined party and government in a highly unified system. Mao Zedong himself did not necessarily like this high-level unified system, because he had been an anarchist when he was young, and had advocated for more powers for Hunan and for other provinces.

So in 1956, when the problem of ruling the country had been resolved, Mao Zedong himself was the first to argue for decentralization. In his famous speech "On the Ten Great Relationships," one of the most important of those relationships was that between the center and the localities. He said that China must decentralize, and develop the positive points of both, which he described with the term "constitutional monarchy." This "constitutional monarchy" was first used by Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927), and the idea was that the emperor would be less important. Mao Zedong meant that the center would be less important.

In the latter half of 1956 Mao Zedong started a partial decentralization, because now that the problem of ruling the country had been resolved, the next question was that of activism and initiative. The idea was that both the center and the localities display initiative, and for that decentralization was called for. In 1957 and 1958 there was a great deal of decentralization, as a good number of state-owned enterprises were decentralized and managed by local governments. After the 1956 socialist transformation of agriculture and industry, enterprises basically were state-owned or collective, whether we are talking about the central government or about local governments.

This is why I say that the key word for the second period is "government." The question of governing capacity was resolved, and the government then began its chief function, playing the most important role in the nation's economics, politics, and cultural life. This is also the period that we call that of the planned economy. During this stage, the economy was controlled by the government, the culture was controlled by the government, politics of course was controlled by the government. All production was either state production or carried out by collectives, and collective production had to obey the economic plans of the localities, in a system of unified management.

The advantage of the second stage was to concentrate resources that were extremely limited. At the time, China was very poor, even if the people's basic needs were met. But living standards were very low and accumulation very limited. Developing a state requires a basis, and many resources, whether in terms of manpower, materials, or finance. At this point, relying on the market to mobilize these resources was completely impossible, so China basically relied on the government to carry out institutional accumulation, bringing together human, material, and financial resources, creating the concentrated force to do important things.

In the First Thirty Years, Build the Base; in the Next Thirty Years, Lift-Off

Ma Ya: That was the period we used to call the "high tide of socialist construction." What were the major accomplishments of that period?

WSC: To lay the foundation. Between 1956 and the mid-1980s, China accomplished many important things. For

not been too much change in the past thirty years, up until the last year or two when the central government spent a good deal of money to redo irrigation works and carry out basic agricultural land construction.

The basis of an independent industrial system was built, and the foundations of irrigation and agricultural land as well, and there was also the important matter of human capital : health and education.

When New China was established the quality of human capital was very low. The state of people's health was poor. Prior to 1949, people's life expectancy was 35 years, and the infant mortality rate was extremely high. The education rate was also very low, and only about ten percent of people were literate, which does not mean that they were well educated. In the first thirty years of the PRC, China's human capital underwent a huge improvement. Life expectancy went from 35 to 68 years, which is an amazing achievement, as even today, life expectancy in India has not reached 68 years. The education rate also increased greatly. Workers and peasants came to be able to read basic textbooks in their fields, and most people began to receive an education. Junior High and High school education were largely universalized, and in 1978 the number of students registered in middle school reached a peak. You can say that the quality of the education at that time was not good, that the teachers were not well trained, that they didn't study chemistry, physics, and instead focused on the foundations of industry and agriculture, but this kind of universalization allowed large numbers of people to master a few basic skills : reading skills, working skills...This too was an enormous achievement.

In these three areas the point was to establish the foundation, and when you establish a foundation, you do not always see immediate results. When the Chinese University of Hong Kong, my university, builds a new faculty building, it takes two or three years to lay the foundation, and for a very long time you see no results, just a big hole in the ground and a lot of mud. But once the foundation is laid, the rest of the building appears in a few months. In line with this analogy, the foundation established by New China in the first thirty years was quite substantial. We can compare this with the situation of other developing countries, and especially other big developing countries. Building the foundation is the job of the government. The government concentrates its power to do great things, and uses the combination of party and government to mobilize all necessary resources, employing all of its might to increase China's national power. At the time, in addition to military goals and political goals, there were naturally also economic goals, the idea being that by using all their might to increase national power, the country would be rich and strong.

Yan Fu 严复 (1854-1921) was the first thinker to talk about wealth and power, a dream shared by Mao Zedong and Chiang Kai-shek, as well as Deng Xiaoping. So the total control of the country by the government during this period was not entirely a product of ideas. It was not only a matter of communist ideals, or learning from the Soviets. More important was that at that time, China needed strong government power to establish its foundation. Without the foundation, the lift-off of the next thirty years would not have been possible.

Ma Ya: Good preparation is the key to success, and the contribution of the first thirty years to the take-off of the next thirty years cannot be ignored. It's like what Xi Jinping says : the history before and after reform and opening is absolutely not divided in two, nor is it antagonistic.

WSC: I extend this period down to 1985, which a good many data prove to be a reasonable dividing line. For example, in 1983 there was a new transition in agricultural reform, and municipal reform did not really take off until 1984-1985. The number of people employed in state-owned enterprises reached a peak during this period, after which it slowly began to decline. In 1986, the most important reform that began to be implemented was the "contractualization of labor," when the contract system began to be used. The original employee's "iron rice bowl" was retained, but newly added workers were not accorded the same privileges, and in the cities they began to allow individual workers to appear, and later on slowly encouraged outside capital to come in. This was a new transition, which was occurring throughout most of the world.

The key word for the third phase is "governance." This word meant something very different in Chinese earlier on. In publications from the 1980s, the term *zhili* 治理 was not used to describe people, only things, such as the control of the Yellow River or the "three wastes" 三废 [gas, water, and industrial residue]. It meant "management." Our current use of "governance" began in the 1990s, and only came to be widely used in 1996-1997, and it meant that

all preached that the governments should do less, that power should be returned to civil society and to private enterprise. These ideas basically began to spread in China in the 1980s. In one of Yu Keping's 俞可平 (b. 1959) articles, he argued that "governance is to govern without a government (governance means non-governmental control)." He meant that the government cannot do everything. In the economy, the market should control things; any system must have multiple inputs. One should avoid a situation in which there is only state-owned and collective property; we also need private ownership and outside capital.

Large-scale changes in China's ownership structure occurred after Deng Xiaoping's death in 1997 (prior to Deng's death, the public economy—state-owned and collective—still composed the majority of the Chinese economy). During this period we began to reform state-owned enterprises, "reducing personnel and raising efficiency," employing a series of measures that led to huge changes in the Chinese economy. It was no longer necessary for the government to comprehensively manage the economy; its role was reduced to that of planning. In the past China did not have many active social groups, but many began to appear during this period, and there were also popular non-profit organizations, like old folks homes. This concept has continued down to the present day.

State Governance and State Capacity

Ma Ya: From national capacity to government control, and then later to national governance, these conceptual changes were basically moved forward by Chinese factors, right? Or were there elements coming from the outside world?

WSG: The trends in the wider world were important here. In the first period, the Chinese Communist Party was established when the Chinese people were facing great threats—the chaos of militarism domestically and increased imperialist threats to carve up China after WWI. The first half of the twentieth century was also a period in which the worldwide communist movement was expanding quickly, including in a few European countries, such as France, and Italy where there were big communist parties.

In the second period, to achieve wealth and power, China used a strong government to increase state capacity. Looking at other countries during that period, trends were similar. For example, many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin American had been colonized, and their countries destroyed. During this period they needed to achieve independence, a process that began in the 1940s and was basically completed in the 1960s. All countries were managed by their governments, although the process was different. This was a world trend, and not only were the USSR and Eastern European countries like this, even Western European countries had a good many state-owned enterprises, and began talking about planned economies. Even the United States, frightened by the launch of the Soviet satellite, also came to believe that the government should play a bigger role. This lasted through the 1970s, when neoliberalism rose up, and the entire world slowly moved toward governance, as China entered the third phase as well.

In this third period, China was to a large degree moving apace with the world. What was different was that China was traversing the territory of this third period under the guidance of a political power. In the first period, the CCP established a republic to unify the people through armed struggle, solving the problem of the capacity needed to manage the country. In the second period China used overall government management to lay the foundation for a strong and wealthy country. In the third period it used governance, surrendering some of its power for the sake of rapid development. This transition was not particularly smooth, but given the particularities of the Communist political system, the results were not bad.

Ma Ya: This means that political stability is extremely important to a country's socioeconomic stability.

WSG: I recently made a trip to Turkey. Turkey entered the OECD—the rich man's club—in 1961, and at present its per capita GDP is twice that of China. Most of Turkey is really not bad, but looking at macro indicators, there is not much difference between China and Turkey, and China looks better on some fronts, such as life expectancy. Conditions in Turkey are not bad; much of the land is level plains, and arable land occupies twenty-six percent of the land mass. The climate is excellent, with access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. It's geographical position is also very good, serving as a travel hub, which is a great advantage for a developing country.

not only with that of big developing countries like India, but also with lower-level OECD countries, which I consider to be an amazing achievement. I'm putting China's success into a longer-term framework in order to answer your question : Why does China work?

Ma Ya: You said before that before the CCP finally resolved the problem of the capacity to manage the country, China had had no one to govern the country for 150 years. If the problem of this first period had not been resolved, then the later two periods could not evolve. This basically proves that without the CCP, there would have been no new China, nor would there have been today's rise of the Chinese nation.

WSG: The CCP solved the problem of the capacity to rule the country, this was crucial. At a time when we now possess this capacity, deciding that this power was not all that important at the outset would be extremely erroneous. Many countries in the world have still not solved the problem of state capacity, and in the absence of a solution they cannot advance to the second stage, because in the absence of political force, there cannot be an efficient government to manage the country. Only with an efficient government can you transition to the stage of governance, wherein the state manages some things and does not manage others.

Here there is something I should point out. Having entered the stage of governance, on the one hand, as everyone in the world says, the state should manage less, and allow other forces to manage more. But on the other hand there also appears the question of state capacity. A state can decentralize, but only up to a certain point. If this point is passed then there is great danger that state capacity will be diminished. China has been in this situation. In the 1980s, after China moved toward the governance stage, at a certain point the state decentralized too many of its powers, and local governments sought to resolve certain problems with the aid of other forces. In fact it was an illusory, unrealistic assumption.

For example, handing the medical system over the municipal authorities, or education, or imagining that the military could make money itself, that the police could generate their own budgets, that government agencies would carry out the "three produces" 三产 and support themselves. When we got to the early 1990s we discovered that such policies created big problems, and started to make corrections. So when we're talking about problems of governance, the government must on the one hand decentralize but at the same time must maintain and strengthen state capacity. Only a proper combination of the two will create the situation where the government manages well the things that it should manage, and doesn't manage what it shouldn't manage, without creating chaos.

Ma Ya: In the early 1990s you wrote an article entitled "Building a Strong, Democratic Country 建立一个强有力民主国家," in which you discussed the question of state capacity. How did you understand the question at that time?

WSG: When I started talking about the question of state capacity in 1991, this was related to concepts that were popular throughout the world at the time. I recognized this problem because of a trip I made to Russia, where I discovered that although Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe had gone through a transition, their states were a total mess. In 1993, together with Hu An'gang I wrote a book called *A Report on China's State Capacity* 国家能力报告, at a time when few people were talking about the topic. [The American political scientist] Francis Fukuyama, who had previously written *The End of History* later on in 2004 wrote a book called *State Building*, in which he also discussed the question of state capacity, although he basically repeated what I had said in the early 1990s. So in the third period, governance must link up with state capacity, which will provide a guarantee that things will work. China followed a winding road, and the government decentralized too much power, so that things that should have been managed wound up not being managed.

In the past few years a huge change has occurred, which I call the emergence of "welfare China." In July of 2012 I went to New Zealand to give a lecture called "China's New Great Leap Forward 中国的新大跃进," in which I discussed this problem. In the past, China had no welfare system, but over the course of the past ten years or so, 95% or more of the people's medical fees have come to be covered. As for pensions, in the past the state only bothered with workers in the cities, and now it takes care of all urbanites. There are new guarantees in the rural areas, and more than a hundred million people have received pensions. The money is not much—several tens of RMB per month—but in China's context it was a major achievement. This is like the New Village Medical Cooperatives 新农合, which

There are also minimum income guarantees, as well as many sorts of social aid. In the short period of ten years China built a complete welfare system, which was impossible without the participation of the state. During the 1980s and 1990s, when those erroneous trends were popular, the state abandoned those responsibilities. There was a period in the 1990s when there were already some 80,000,000 villagers with basic old-age guarantees, but some leaders said that taking care of them was not in accord with national characteristics and that the government should not intervene, which led the existing system of elderly guarantees to collapse. The medical cooperatives in the villages completely collapsed, and were only maintained in roughly 5% of villages. The state did not intervene again until after 2002, when it began to rebuild the system. So during the third period, China actually went through tensions and contradictions before arriving at the present equilibrium.

Four Superior Points of the Chinese System

Ma Ya: As you said, the system China built in the process of exploring how to govern the county was a historical choice more than the product of ideology, born out of the real needs faced in each stage, while at the same time reflecting world trends. But the Chinese system is not the same as other systems; we went through the three stages under the leadership of a political force. In your view, what are the particularities and superiorities of the Chinese system?

WSG: I think that there are four superior features. The first is that there is a stable political center, a center that can make decisions. This point is very important, because many countries inevitably wind up in situations where they cannot make a decision. In political science in the past few years there has been a well-known theory of the "veto player." At present, most people who analyze decision-making use this concept, replacing the former framework that talked about the presidential system, the parliamentary system, the federal system, the unitary system, etc. In a political system, if there are many veto players, then there is no way to make decisions, because there is no one place where the decisions can be made. Things move through stages, and if too many people in various stages have veto power, then if they can't stop it in one stage, they stop it in the next, so that the decision is never made. In the eyes of this theory, "veto players" in China are very few. In terms of important decisions, true "veto players" in China are confined to those who are on the standing committee of the Politburo. A high concentration of power can lead to problems, which is an underlying problem that we will discuss below. Its advantage is that it reduces the handicap of having too many "veto players" so that decisions can be made on important issues.

The second advantage is a problem-solving mentality. Whether we are talking about China's decision-makers, China's cadres at every level, or the Chinese people in general, there exists a straight-forward common sense philosophy, a theory like Deng Xiaoping's concerning the "white cat and the black cat," a problem-solving attitude. Because of this attitude, when we confront a problem, people don't engage in ideological debates, but rather think: we've got a problem that we need to solve. This mindset is very important as it makes our system responsive to social needs and the impetus of these needs.

The third advantage is also important, and it is diversity. The Chinese system permits diversity. The way the Chinese system passes laws is very different from the way Western countries pass laws. In the West, laws are created by a representative body in the form of texts containing hundreds or even thousands of pages, demanding that implementation strictly follow this text throughout the country. The Affordable Care Act in the United States is more than a thousand pages long. All this accomplishes is to give lots of work to lawyers, since no one else knows what to do. The assumption behind this way of passing laws is that there is one group of people that is extremely intelligent, capable of doing anything, capable of foreseeing any eventuality, and possessing the solution for any eventuality they might foresee. This assumption is wrong.

The Chinese mindset concerning laws is very different. We don't start with a law created by the People's Congress, a comprehensive, detailed law that will be implemented throughout the country. In our case, when there is a problem, we allow various localities to attempt to find a solution. Another method, when the center is not sure what to do, is to first choose a place to experiment, which in Communist history is called "drawing experience from selected units to promote overall work. 抓点带面" This is a very practical, down to earth method in which you first carry out one or several experiments, using different methods to solve the problem. If the experiments work, then

Another is called experimentation, where the center selects several points of experimentation, and popularizes the best results. This creates a certain diversity, and diversity is important in the world of nature as well as the human world. It's like for agricultural products: if a country only grows corn, then there is always the danger of plant diseases and insects. In the same way, there must be diversity in ways of problem solving. Take for example the problem of medical care in the villages. The basic intention expressed in the new rural contract is consistent—provide everyone with basic, equal medical guarantees. But there are different ways to arrive at this goal, and can be decided by the localities. China has done things this way since the 1950s. This diversity has become our best source of learning.

Usually, we learn from books, from ideology. In the process of reform, the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries decided they needed to privatize, and carried out a vast privatization overnight. This reflected an ideological choice, learned from a textbook. In China, our learning sources were our diverse localized practices and experiments. And as the reforms deepened, the government paid all the more heed to experiments. For example, China now has between ten and twenty experimental zones for resolving all sorts of problems. These zones attempt to solve not only local problems, but national problems. They might fail, but the impact of the failure is confined to small area. And when they succeed the results are used broadly. But even the successful results are not blindly imposed throughout the country, but instead implemented according to local needs. That is why I say that our diversity has become our source of learning, and has structured our unique way of learning.

Ma Ya: I remember your argument that the strength of the Chinese system is found in its ability to learn. To take diversity as a source of learning, to learn from doing, to seek lessons from success and failure, all of this is also an example of the fact that the Chinese are good at studying.

WSC: The fourth advantage is that the Chinese system is quite responsive. Precisely because experiments from all over China go into the resolution of China's problems, the system is responsive to social needs. Changes in policy over the past few years are a good example. For example, in the 1990s, what people talked about the most were the "three agricultural issues 三农问题" [agriculture, rural areas, and farmers]; the magazine *Dushu* 读书 published a number of articles on this over the years. By 2003-2004, the state had first reduced agricultural taxes, then eliminated agricultural taxes, and the old "three agricultural problems," for instance the overly high agricultural taxes, were basically resolved. After that everyone was talking about the expense of medical care and the difficulty of obtaining it, as well as the expense of education and the difficulty of obtaining it. So in the past few years we have been solving the problems related to health care and education. Now everyone is talking about problems with elder care, hoping for some sort of solution. So you see the process. The concerns that we talked about before we don't talk about now, because we found solutions, or in some cases are now finding solutions. This illustrates that the system possesses a certain responsiveness to society.

We can compare this to another kind of system, which in English is called "representative." The representative system is only representative in an abstract or procedural sense, but in the final analysis to represent one must be responsive. The Chinese system is clearly responsive. When there are problems and people call for changes in policy to address these problems, the solutions appear in the following years.

If we take these four points together, they represent an important part of the Chinese experience. In a big, complicated country like China, with much land and many people, imagining that one method will be enough to solve all the problems is impossible. So using the Chinese experience to rule our great country is wholly appropriate. These four points go a very long way to explaining why China works.

The Four Points of Superiority are Two Sides of a Coin

Ma Ya: You said before that our system has advantages but can also produce problems. What are the main problems, in your view.

WSC: The main problems are found within the advantages. The first advantage, the relative scarcity of veto players, means that there is a leadership core capable of making decisions. This is an advantage, but at the same

decision-making, but rather in the selection of these seven people. In the past sixty years, the problem of leadership succession has not been successfully resolved. We once thought that the succession carried out by the 16th People's Congress was relatively smooth, and that we had slowly started to reform the system, but looking at things from the perspective of the past few years, this is not completely correct. In the Mao period there were the Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao affairs, in the Deng era, there were the Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang affairs, in the Jiang Zemin era, there was the Chen Xitong affair, and in the Hu Jintao era there was the Chen Yuliang affair. We still have not solved the problem of the selection of the "veto players."

From the positive side, once collective leadership came together, it has worked quite well. Hu An'gang 胡鞍钢 (b. 1953), the specialist on China's national character, coined the phrase "collective presidency 集体总统制," which is an extremely interesting way to understand it. Switzerland has a "collective presidency," and the 7 members of the Chinese standing committee to the Politburo also constitute a kind of "collective presidency." But at present we still have no good way to put this body together, and we're not sure which mechanism to employ. Elections will create a lot of problems. Continuing in the way we have been doing will also create a lot of problems. So, having a leadership core capable of making decisions is an advantage, but can also be a weak point. Every time the leadership succession is carried out well, the system works fine. But every time there is a crisis in the leadership succession, the whole system wavers as if it is about to fall. Over the past sixty years, all major crises have appeared at transition points in the leadership succession process, which means that if China is going to have problems, it is going to have problems at the highest level.

The second point is the problem-solving mentality. If from the top to the bottom there is a clear goal, then this mentality is a good thing. For example, eventually we want to build a society where all people commonly share the wealth. If the CCP as a whole, and the people as a whole, clearly work together to achieve this goal, then things are fine. But if the goal itself becomes unclear, and we seek only to solve particular problems, then things can become routine and transactional, and we can easily lose our way. At present there are many very capable officials, who are very good at solving problems, but these use their abilities to promote themselves and satisfy their needs or those of their families, in which case this "superiority" is problematic. Today people talk about "top-floor design 顶层设计," which I don't like too much, because the basic assumption behind this is that there are a few intelligent people who know everything, who can do everything. I don't think this group of intelligent people exists. If we don't resolve the question of the party's leading core, then the 80,000,000 plus CCP members and the Chinese population in general will have problems with identifying with the larger goals and with the mentality of problem solving itself. Because in that case, although we know how to solve problems, we don't know which problems to solve.

Ma Ya: That makes me think of a saying : "Keeping your head down and pull the cart without lifting your head to look at the road 只顾低头拉车, 不顾抬头看路." As to the question of losing direction, if it gets to the point that we turn our back on the basic nature of socialism, if the ruling party becomes the representative of interest groups and no longer pursues the goal of the welfare of the whole society, then no matter how good its problem-solving ability might be, it can only injure the interests of the country and the people.

WSC: The third point is diversity. There are advantages here, but there are also problems. At any time, diversity can look completely chaotic, because allowing many types of outcomes is simply confusing. From an optimistic standpoint, this maybe is not a problem, but on occasion, especially when new problems arise and no one, from the top to the bottom, possesses practice or experience and no one knows what to do, then things can get really crazy. Over that past thirty years we have seen that there have been times of great confusion where people felt that things were out of control, and this has to do with the fact that we allow diversity. The notion of diversity comes from the natural sciences, but we cannot get carried away and wind up with chaos; but the total absence of diversity is called monoculture, which is also problematic. So we have to master the proper degree of diversity, avoiding extremes in the two directions. If we can't get the degree right, then the advantage accorded by diversity becomes a disadvantage.

Finally we have responsiveness. In sum, over the past sixty years China has done pretty well on the responsiveness front, but this responsiveness has been established on the basis of the three advantages just discussed. If there are problems with the first three, then responsiveness will lose its foundation. For example, if there are problems in

experienced these problems. So they are two sides of the same coin, and are contradictory. How to handle these contradictions with aplomb is extremely difficult.

Western Political Thought and Chinese Political Thought

Ma Ya: Managing a big country like China has always been hard. It's true that there are some people who do not take into account China's size and complexity, and address all problems in relation to the political system.

WSC: Many people who criticize China's system actually do not know what they are talking about. When they say "system" they actually mean the political system. And then they bring it all back to the question of whether there are multi-party competitive elections. All of their analysis is focused on this, and they don't look at anything else. And their final solution is to overturn the existing government and establish a system with competitive, multi-party elections.

This is a typical Western way of thinking, which I call "political forms mentality 整体思维." In 2012, I wrote a book called *The Ideal Political Order: Explorations in China and the West, Ancient Times and Present* 理想政治秩序：中西古今的探讨 in which I discussed this question. Political forms thought in the West has its tradition, which argues that the political form is the most important thing, what in English is called the "form of government." Thousands of years ago the ancient Greeks thought this way, from Aristotle and Plato or even earlier figures, and continuing with Cicero, Macchiavelli—a series of thinkers who emphasized the form of government. Western political scientists continue to consider the form of government as the most important thing. What they study is generally something related to the form of government, for example, can democracy produce economic growth, equality, can democracy make people happy, etc.

You can call this "political form determinism 政体决定论," and those in China who frequently talk about the system in fact adhere to the same "political form determinism." As they see it, all questions are related to the form of government, such as economic growth, social equality, corruption, happiness, etc. If the form of government is right, then everything else is good. If the form is not right, then nothing can be good. In Europe and North America, and India, the political forms are good, and for this reason no matter what problems come up, in the long run there will always be a solution. China's political form is not good, and for that reason no matter what China has accomplished in the long run it won't last, and China will eventually have to change.

Are political form mentality and political form determinism right or not? They sound reasonable but in fact they are not. For example, in some people's view, the special features of "democratic" political forms are the competitive elections between different political parties, and that this kind of political form is a good thing. In my *Four Lectures on Democracy* 民主四讲, I produced a great deal of evidence that proved that there was actually no necessary relationship between this political form and economic growth, social equality, and people's happiness. In other words, the form of government does not really possess the sacred deciding power suggested by its mythology.

People often say that if we had a system of free and competitive elections the country would be much better off. As evidence, they cite only examples that reveal the benefits of the system, is in Western Europe and North America. They forget that those countries were once imperialists, colonialists, and that their wealth today might well be connected to their imperialist and colonialist pasts. But what those who have been hoodwinked by the Western form of government ignore is that those same countries from which they take their examples also contain many instances of failure. This is why we do big-data, longitudinal, comparative research, which reveals that there are no results suggesting that political form is determinative. No matter whether it is the impact of the form of government on economic development, on social equality, or on the people's feeling of happiness, vast amounts of data, in the form transhistorical, transnational research, arrive at only one result: that there is no relationship. Hence, the form of government is not a decisive element.

No matter what question you are discussing, you have to remove yourself from the framework employed by other people, even in the case of popular concepts, so as to analyse the framework and the theoretical system. This is especially true of political questions, as the popular concepts in this field, their analytical frameworks and

WSG: As I argued in *Ideal Political Orders*, the traditional Chinese style of analyzing politics was not to focus on political form. Instead, the focus was on the “way of politics 政道.” In contrast with the West, what Chinese sages focused on through the years was not the form of government or the form of the political system, but rather the way of government or the goals and methods in the functioning of the political system.

Ma Ya: What does the “way of politics” mean? What’s the difference between a mentality focused on the way of politics and a mentality focused on the form of politics?

WSG: The “way of government” means the way of governing, including the principles and techniques, in English it is “the Dao of governance” [in English in the text], in other words, the “way” of governing. In ancient Chinese texts, the term *zhengdao* 政道 is not often seen, but there are terms that convey the same meaning, such as “governance that does not find its way 政不得其道,” “the ruler without the way 无道之君,” “the ruler with the way 有道之君,” “the ruler has the way 君有道,” “the ruler does not have the way 君无道,” the “kingdom with the way 国有道,” the “kingdom without the way 国无道,” etc. In his “Heavenly Way 天道” chapter, Zhuangzi 庄子 made a distinction between the “way of governance 治之道” and the “tools of governance 治之具.”

The former referred to the principles for governing the world and the latter to the means employed to govern the world. I shortened the “way of governance” to the “governing way” and the “tools of governance” to “governance techniques.” My understanding of the “governing way” is that it means the principles employed to govern the country, the highest objectives of politics, the ideal political order. I understand “governance techniques” to mean the way in which a country is ruled, including “governing institutions” as included in ancient Chinese texts, meaning laws and institutions used to rule the country.

“Governing tools” are the various measures employed to govern the country. “Governing techniques” refers to policies, etc. employed to govern the country. Comparing the governing way and governance techniques, the way refers to the highest objectives and the techniques to the means employed to arrive at that highest objective. I often combine the two notions in the concept “*zhengdao*/the way of governance.”

The difference between focus on political form and focus on political way is that the former only concerns itself with the form of the political order, while the latter focuses on the essence of politics. In the words of the poet Su Shi 苏轼 (1037-1101) writing about the beauties of Lushan, “Sideways a mountain range, vertically a peak 横看成岭侧成峰” [i.e., whole sight is needed in order to make sure judgement]. If we replace the Western perspective on the form of government with the Chinese perspective on the way of government, then no matter whether we look at Chinese politics throughout history, or criticize current Chinese politics, or imagine the future of Chinese politics, we will find up with a very different feeling.

Ma Ya: How did Chinese come up with a way of governance mentality so different from the Western form of government mentality? Is it because they ignored the existence and superiority of the Western political system or was it the result of a unique Chinese political heritage?

WSG: Today’s Chinese people do not ignore or misunderstand the mentality of political form. Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) was the first to pay attention to the Western form of government and to bring its mentality into China, although he later discovered that using the point of view of governmental form to think about current politics is difficult, and ultimately returned to an approach that emphasized the way of governance. In the late years of the nineteenth century, Liang Qichao read a few Western books, and discovered Western discussions of political forms, and was very excited. He quickly brought this analysis into discussions of Chinese politics, and using Western interpretations, argued that China was an autocratic country, which meant that once the autocracy was overthrown, then the problem would be resolved.

For example, he praised “liberal democracy as the world’s most holy, honored political form.” He asked himself: “China has been in existence for several thousand years, from the time of the Yellow Emperor, yet today is unable to organize an appropriate, organic, well structured, modern government. Why is this?” His answer was the form of government: “Because the people of my country have long suffered under authoritarian rule, although they have

eight-month visit to the United States, at the height of America's "gilded age," a period when there were many problems. He quickly became disappointed with what he had previously praised as the "ancestor of the world's republics," coming to the following conclusion: "Freedom, constitutionalism, republicanism—this would be like wearing summer garb in winter, or furs in summer; beautiful, to be sure, but unsuitable." [3]

Later he read a few more Western books, as well as a great many classical Chinese books, and after the 1911 revolution worked for a few years in the government as an official. So he had practical experience, and had also compared East and West, when led him to the conclusion that political form determinism was wrong. In order to seek out the way for China to establish an "organic, centralized, and powerful order," he turned his gaze to factors outside of political form, and began to argue that judging politics as good or bad is not a simple matter of political form, that in fact morality was more important. "When governance is the affair of one person, then in times of Yao and Shun there is governance, and in times of Jie or Zhou there is chaos. When government is the affair of many people, then when we select good people there is governance, and when we select bad people there is chaos." Just like that, he moved from a mentality of political form to a mentality of political morality.

The CCP's "Democracy" is Part of the Moral Way of Politics

Ma Ya: Liang Qichao discovered that imported political ideas were difficult to use, and then returned to traditional moral concepts. This process of transformation looks a lot like that of many "pro-China" scholars who have come back from the West. Can you provide a few examples to explain how the moral way of politics is the traditional way in which Chinese thought about politics?

WSG: If we analyse the most influential schools of thought in ancient China we will see that a moral politics is the Chinese way of thought. In terms of the goal of governing the country, Confucians, Legalists, Daoists, and Mohists are all different. The Confucians talked about "ennobling the people 贵民," which meant to respect or venerate the people. Mencius 孟子 said this, that the people were the most important. The people should be ennobled, and the country 社稷 was a secondary concern. The Legalists talked about ennobling the ruler 贵君, elevating him to the highest position; to rule the country well, the ruler had to be respected. The Mohists talked about ennobling the worthy 贵贤. The Daoists about ennobling the self 贵己. So their final goals in terms of rule were different.

Their methods of rule differed as well. The Confucians talked about rule through ritual 礼治 or through morality 道治; the Legalists talked about rule through law 法治; the Mohists rule via the worthy 贤治; and the Daoists about non-action 无为. These debates continued for several thousand years, from the Spring and Autumn/Warring States periods when these schools began, and over the course of dynastic history, emperors, courtesans and literati all drew on these classics to develop their thought, creating a corpus of ways to rule the country. These various ways were employed at different times, sometimes China was ruled through non-action, at other times through a great deal of action, and still others through ritual or through yielding to the worthy.

So Chinese and Westerners think about politics differently. For the Chinese, and especially the great Chinese thinkers, once they have thought things through, their preferred method of problem solving is not concentrated on the form of government but rather on a moral politics. For example, Mao Zedong in his "On New Democracy 新民主主义论" also talked about the question of political forms, in his discussion of "the question of the form taken by political power." He argued that "Without a legitimate form of political institutions, the government cannot represent the country." But when Mao talked about "political forms" it was not the same thing as with Aristotle or Montesquieu, because Mao was talking about a moral politics. For example, he cited "democratic centralism" as the ideal political form. Clearly, Western theories of political form will not accept "democratic centralism" as a political form, as it is merely the way in which the CCP governs the country.

In the same way, in his "cave dialogues 窑洞对" in Yan'an with Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965), Mao's discussion of "democracy" was not of a political form but rather a moral politics. In other words, what he was talking about was a concept of political morality and not of political form. He said: "We have already found the new path, and can escape from this cycle. [Huang Yanpei talked about a cycle of rise and fall of any political body]. This new path is democracy. Only if we allow the people to supervise the government, then the government will not dare to become complacent. Only if the people rise up and take responsibility will we avoid the eclipse of the people and

WSG: We can say that the “democracy” of the CCP was always a politically moral democracy, which explains sayings like “a democratic style,” “this is relatively democratic,” “this meeting was run fairly democratically.” If we are thinking in terms of political form, these don’t make sense, since they have nothing to do with free elections or multiple parties. But they do make sense if we understand them from the perspective of moral politics, because only when we allow the wishes of majority of the people to be expressed in the context of governing does moral politics achieve its goal.

The original meaning of “democracy” was that the people be the masters and make the decisions. You can look at democracy from the perspective of political form and from the perspective of political morality. From the perspective of form, the key question is whether the government is a product of free competitive elections. From the perspective of morality, the question is the extent to which the government responds to the people’s demands. In this sense, the Chinese system responds to the people’s demands and should be understood as a politically moral democracy.

Ma Ya: As I understand it, “the people being the masters and making decisions” is the Chinese expression of democracy, is the unique view of democracy of the Chinese people.

WSH: Actually, this is the “ancient view of democracy.” In English, it is “rule by the people,” and “popular rule” and “the people being the masters and making decisions” are the same thing. The most popular view of democracy from the point of view of political form in today’s world is based on Schumpeter’s 1942 book, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, where he criticizes so-called “classical democracy” for its having put the people first and the choice of representatives second, which he felt was wrong. He redefined democracy to mean an institutional arrangement allowing a small number of elites, chosen through election by the people to obtain (republican) decision-making power. This completely reversed the original meaning of democracy. He did not try to hide this, saying “democracy is not, and does not signify any literal sort of ‘popular rule’; democracy means only that the people have the opportunity to accept or reject those who are going to rule them. But because the people can also use completely undemocratic means to decide who will be the leader, we must also add another criterion to narrow our definition of democracy, which is that candidates freely compete for the people’s votes.”

Schumpeter’s theory completely transforms “democracy” from “popular rule” to “people choose their rulers.” The “people” become “voters,” and “democracy” becomes “votocracy,” in which every four or five years the people make their choices from among competing elite groups. From this perspective, any political form where there exists competitive elections is democratic, otherwise it is autocratic, because in the first instance the people have been “represented.”

But from the perspective of a politically moral democracy, the responsiveness of the government to the people’s demands is more important. Robert Dahl, the contemporary West’s best known theorist of democracy, points out that “democracy’s most crucial feature is that the government is consistently responsive to the citizens.” Dahl argues that the current world has no real “democracies,” only “polyarchies.” Even if Dahl is very well known in academic circles, his views are almost completely obscured in current discourse.

For everyday people, are competitive elections important? Or are responsive government policies important? Of course, both are important. But what the people care most about is surely that the policies crafted by the government truly reflect their genuine demands. Looking at the contemporary world, it is not hard to discover that there are some political systems that, in terms of form, because they use competitive elections, appear to be “representative,” yet their responsiveness may not be very high; and there are some political systems without multi-party elections but which are quite responsive to the people’s demands.

Abandoning Political Form Determinism

Ma Ya: There are Western scholars who compare the Indian and Chinese political systems, and arrive at the following evaluation : although India has competitive elections, in its elite-dominated democracy, those who govern, in the making and implementation of economic policy, use the limited resources of the state to serve the

India in terms of economic development and improvement of the people's living standards.

WSG: People who explain all of China's problems through the question of political form have not thought clearly about the problem with political form thinking. Political form thinking is extremely simplistic, and ignores the complexity of real politics, reducing this complexity to a few labels: democracy, autocracy—it's all black and white and antagonistic. When they say that the Chinese system is a one-party system, this is a question of political form. So should we add some more parties? Many people want a two-party system, but they haven't thought things through. If I want two, and you want another two, why not 100? Why not 1000?

Ma Ya: After the collapse of the Soviet Union, hundred of political parties appeared. In the 1995 elections for the Russian Duma, 258 social organizations participated. In 2000, Putin proposed the "law on political parties," which increased restrictions on the organization, structure, and activities of political parties. Russia has only 1,400,000,000 people, a tenth of China's. If China had a multi-party system and followed that ratio there would be several thousand political parties.

WSG: This is entirely possible. Just like the Bloc Québécois in Canada, and the Scottish National Party in England, in China we could have the Xinjiang Party, the Tibet Party, or within Sichuan there could be the Southern Sichuan Party and the Northern Sichuan Party. In 1991 there was a debate in the USSR about whether or not to open up. Some people said that the ideal solution would be to transform into a Scandinavian-style country, but at the time some people pointed out that after reform the USSR might look more like a bunch of African countries. In fact, for much of the past twenty years, the path taken by Russia has not been that of Northern Europe but instead more like that of Africa, falling into chaos and poverty. Only after Putin came to power did things improve, as per capita GDP began to climb, although even now it is only a bit higher than it was in 1989. The fate of what was once the world second greatest superpower can only make people sigh. This is why I say that political form thinking is very simplistic, and if you follow this thought, many questions remain uncertain, especially the outcome. To expect that with reform of the political form, a good outcome will immediately follow has no logical basis.

Ma Ya: Especially in a case like China, with its huge population and its vast regional differences. The degree of uncertainty is even higher.

WSG: So we can't experiment with this sort of thing. China tried this experiment in 1912. At the time, China had just opened up, and from the perspective of political form, was just like the West—a multi-party system, with several hundred parties, with a constitution, a congress, a president, elections...There was also freedom of speech. On the face of things, there was everything. But what actually happened to China in the short period between 1912 and 1916? Look especially at the results: militarists and chaos, a sheet of loose sand. It's very clear. This was a period when we respected political forms. In 1916, Liang Qichao wrote that China had tried everything in the past few years—multi-party system, congress, federalism. They had tried all the concepts taken from the West, but none of them worked, none of them functioned as we had expected.

Simplistic political form thinking might work in a small political system. Like ancient Greece's political system, where there were only a few thousand or a few tens of thousands of people. Even if there were 100,000 or 200,000 people, this would be the equivalent of a Chinese village or a township, and maybe governing according to this mentality could work. But in a modern country, solely emphasizing political form absolutely cannot work. Actually, according to genuine political form theory, no Western country is carrying out standard democracy. They are all mixed systems which include a great many nondemocratic elements which allow them to solve their various problems. If China were to use simplistic political form mentality to try to solve its problems, this would drive China right off the cliff.

I talk about "the politics of form and the politics of morality," I write articles about it, I organize conferences...My goal is to condemn the determinism of political form thinking, and stimulate even more people to adopt a new way of thought, which is that of the politics of morality. I believe that we should spend more time thinking about what the objectives of political rule are, as well as the number of different ways to achieve those goals—concrete analysis of concrete problems. In this way we will be in a position to better resolve China's problems.

the lack of democracy, for example, mass political participation is not high, and mass supervision of government is inadequate. In 2007, we once discussed the question of democratic socialism. Do you feel that China could improve the current political system through exploration and practice of democratic socialism?

WSC: This is more related to socialism than to democracy. But these days people are talking less about socialism, and there are even some people who say that we should get rid of all state-owned enterprises and have only the government see to the welfare of the people, and this would be socialism. I think this is sophistry.

Ma Ya: Isn't this Russia's new system? To try to use the Northern European model? After the fall of the Soviet Union, the character of the whole country changed, but Russia maintained the welfare system of the socialist period, including health care, education, basic housing, etc.

WSC: In China, many people also envy the Northern European model, with its full set of welfare guarantees. But that is not really socialism, only a set of benefits. The people become consumers and cannot really decide the future of the country, nor can they solve questions related to their benefits at the most basic level. So Northern European countries are not really democratic socialist, but rather social democratic; these two have a fundamental difference. Democratic socialism is above all socialist which is democratic, not authoritarian. Social democracy is capitalist, but employs a full set of welfare policies from the cradle to the grave that mitigate class contradictions. The interests of capitalists are protected, and the workers' interests are also seen to.

Very few people know that while the percentage of state-owned enterprises in Northern Europe is small, a good percentage of the population works in such state-owned enterprises. In some of these countries thirty percent of the people are government employees, which is much higher than in China. In China, even if we include village-level cadres, the workers in SOEs, 30,000,000 in public institutions, and 10,000,000 civil servants, we wouldn't be anywhere near thirty percent--maybe ten percent. China should promote democratic socialism. An important tenet of democratic socialism is to start from the base, with things related to one's daily life and work. If you have the democratic right to participate in such things, then this is economic democracy, an important component of democratic socialism. Without socialism, there is no possibility for democratic socialism to exist.

At present, Chinese industry accounts for forty-five percent of GDP, and of this SOEs make up perhaps twenty percent. The percentage is smaller in commerce, and smaller still in agriculture. Of course socialism does not have to mean state ownership, but at least there should be public or collective or common ownership. In cases where public ownership is limited one should talk about socialism before talking about democratic socialism. How to build a new socialist model is difficult; no one in the world has an answer. How to build a new socialism that the people will accept and that at the same time in practice will produce relatively good results is something no one knows. In this situation, of course we can talk about democratic participation, but we need to open our minds a bit. As I said, democracy does not have just one wheel, it's not just elections.

Ma Ya: You spread your idea of the "four driving forces of democracy 四轮驱动" quite widely on the internet. Can you give us a simple description?

WSC: By the "four driving forces of democracy," I mean that democracy has many practical forms, of which I chose four: elections, drawing lots, political participation and the mass line. There's no need to talk elections, so I'll talk about the other three.

Let's start with drawing lots. Drawing lots means arbitrary selection, or a lottery, which means arbitrary selection of someone to serve as a representative. Many people do not know that this arbitrary selection was one of the most important features of classical democracies, and was widely used in the Roman Republic and the federal republics of renaissance Italy, so as to avoid the monopoly of political power in the hands of a few powerful people. Down to the end of the eighteenth century, Western thinkers almost all believed that drawing lots was the main feature of democracy, which elections were the distinguishing feature of oligopolies or aristocratic orders.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, elections replaced drawing lots, and became the hall mark of so-called "democracy." But in representative democracies defined by elections, political power was actually monopolized by

may be the only person talking about it.

There is also political participation. It's not only in China that political participation is low, it's low in the West too. In the West, outside of elections every four years, the people basically do not participate in politics, nor do they understand politics. Extremist democrats in the West greatly encourage political participation, hoping that the people, in the periods between the four-yearly elections, will participate in policy making in a variety of ways.

But the degree of participation in policy of the people—or the interest groups—in the West is not necessarily greater than in China. I recently carried out two large case studies, which will appear as two books. One is about how the twelfth five-year plan was put together, and the other is about how China's medical reform was carried out. We learned that in the process of policy making, the number of interest groups consulted was extremely broad, and the rate of participation was very high. From the perspective of the making of the five-year plan or the health care reform, the rate of political participation in China is not lower than in the United States, and is surely higher than in India.

Finally there is the mass line. This is China's special feature, and is especially associated with the CCP. The logic of the mass line is the opposite of that of political participation. The logic of political participation is: I am a policy-maker, you are the people, I sit here in my chair making policy, if you want to come see me then come see me and tell me your demands, but if you don't want to you don't have to. The logic of the mass line is: I am a policy maker, you are the people. My duty is to seek you out and understand what you want, and especially to seek out the poor and those who lack the means to participate in politics. So the mass line is something that is very important to democracy.

Ma Ya: The mass line is also traditional Chinese democracy.

WSC: I'll give you an example of the necessity of the mass line. There is a program on CCTV called "The Children of Pili Village 皮里村的孩子們." The village is in a very marginal place, and to get to school the children have to walk a long way, walking along the steep slopes of a river bank. The current is strong, and it is dangerous. These children have urgent needs, but to expect them to go to Beijing and engage in political participation is impossible. The only way to resolve this problem is with the mass line. The CCTV program "went to the basic level 走基层" and understood the problem, and then reported it upward. Policy-makers should also do this, should go to the people and understand their needs. In Chongqing in the last couple of years they have been doing a lot of this sort of work, such as the "three attentions and the three togethers"[4] 三讲三同 in which the cadres went to the people instead of waiting for the people to come to them. This is the true essence of the mass line.

This is why I say that we should talk about democracy, but we should talk more about socialism. And when we talk about democracy we cannot just talk about one kind of democracy, but have to explore all types. The four types I just mentioned should all be talked about, and all four should be strengthened. But now when we talk about democracy all we talk about is elections, which is too simplistic.

Ma Ya: On the topic of Chongqing, in 2011 Chongqing promoted a plan called "Twelve Measures to Create Collective Happiness 共富十二条," meaning twelve policies designed to stimulate the creation of common welfare. In the report of the 18th People's Congress it was clearly mentioned that we must continue to march toward the path of common welfare, and unstintingly stay on China's unique socialist path. This kind of standpoint is dear to the people's hearts. How do you see this? Do you have confidence in China's future?

WSC: Common wealth and welfare are among the chief elements of socialism as discussed by Deng Xiaoping. In 1990, Deng said "The creation of common wealth is something that we talked about from the very outset of the reforms, and in the future this will become our primary preoccupation. Socialism does not mean that a small number of people get rich while the majority remains in poverty." And in his southern tour in 1992 he again said: "Following the socialist path means the eventual creation of common wealth." "If the rich get richer and the poor get poorer then there will be extreme divisions, which socialism can and will avoid." Deng was very clear, saying that socialism must first develop productive capacity, but ultimately must create common wealth. If we now abandon this goal, and privatize SOEs, allowing the public system to fade away, then there won't be much left of

1989. I was very pessimistic then, but China got through them.

Ma Ya: It means that the CCP has the capacity to correct itself.

WSC: If the CCP has a self-correcting capacity, it is because the Chinese people can produce great pressure, and as we say "if you win the people you win the world." Before the opening of the 18th People's Congress, there were people advocating doing away with the goal of common wealth and heading more toward capitalism. This is a dangerous signal. At the time, a foreign scholars said to me that he had interviewed many "elites" in China who all firmly believed that after the 18th People's Congress, China had to take a firm step toward capitalism. My answer was they would surely be very disappointed, because they had mistaken their personal wishes for China's future direction. I believe that the chances of China turning fully capitalist are not great, because this would hurt the interests of the majority, which means that there is a great deal of resistance. Most people would not accept this choice, including the grass roots and Party members and the top leadership of the Party. And the 18th People's Congress had barely ended when the People's Congress clearly stated that they were maintaining the socialist path, the creation of common prosperity, thus clearly stating China's development future and goals to the entire Party and the entire people. So from a long-term perspective I am optimistic about China's future.

Notes

[1] "玛雅专访王绍光：中国的治国理念与政道思维传统." The interview was carried out in September 2012. It was originally published on the [Utopia website](#).

[2] Translator's note : The "Gao-Rao" affair refers to the purging of Gao Gao and Rao Shushi, who had amassed enough power in Manchuria and Shanghai, respectively, to make central authorities wary of a coup.

[3] Translator's note: Translation from Andrew Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley: University de California Press), p. 61.

[4] Translator's note : This was part of the Chongqing model's emphasis on cadre involvement in rural life. The "three attentions" were "paying attention to the base level, paying attention to villages, and paying attention to farmers." The "three togethers" were "eating together, living together and working together."

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