Nation Building, State Building, and the Road to Democracy: Political Development in 60 Years of the People’s Republic

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Executive Summary

1. As China celebrates the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic, its history has been preoccupied by two major tasks: nation-building and state-building. The next national challenge is to bring China into democracy.

2. The success of the Communist Movement in China lied largely in its ability to offer a creditable plan to the Chinese public toward a new China, a new China with independent nationhood, a high level of living standards, and sovereignty rights for its citizens.

3. To build a “strong nation” had been in China’s national blood since its imperial decay in the Late Qing period. The West challenges from the 1840s on presented horrifying prospects of national disintegration and colonization.

4. Therefore, the first major task of the People’s Republic of China was nation building. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and his revolutionary colleagues, this project had its economic, social, and international dimensions.
5. China’s “strong nation” ambition produced a mixed record during Mao’s time. After 1978, new policies resulted in rapid economic development. By 2009, China had become one of the world’s largest economies and an influential power in world politics.

6. Economic development and modernization, however, exposed the deficiencies of the government system. Into the 21st Century, China is increasingly haunted by crises of governance such as environmental pollution and public protests.

7. The challenges to build an effective state will dominate China political agenda in the years to come. China needs to build an effective regulatory state for its modern economy.

8. It also needs to build a welfare state to provide social security and healthcare to its 1.3-billion citizens. It needs to institutionalize transparency, accountability, and openness in governance.

9. In the early 21st Century, democracy is only making its first timid steps in China. Following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, political reform and democracy were put off the national agenda.

10. The state’s ability to control civil disobediences seems sufficiently strong. It also spares no effort in controlling the Internet as a platform of political mobilization.

11. But international experiences show that a high living standard almost inevitably leads to the demands for political opening. The probability of China making a transition into democracy will keep rising with its economy.

12. The Party has nominally accepted democracy as the goal for political development. But in the years to come, it will try every means to delay the introduction of multi-party elections.
13. It is highly likely China will make strides toward democracy in the following 10-30 years. The regime will find workable ways to recognize the independence of civil society.

14. Intraparty democracy will take the lead. Intraparty contests and internal supervisions will be institutionalized. Party secretaries at the sub-provincial levels may be elected by a committee.

15. Local elections will be promoted upward. Township councils and township chiefs are likely to be openly elected. It may take up to 15 years for elections to be open at county level.

16. But nevertheless, once free election is installed and consolidated at the county level, the road to a full democracy will have been paved.

17. Given these trends, between 2010 and 2020, China is likely to turn into a “semi-democracy”, and by 2030-50, a full democracy.
1. The success of the Communist Movement in China, since its origin in the 1910s and 1920s, lay largely in its ability to offer a creditable plan to the Chinese public toward a new China, an ability its competitor the Nationalists (the KMT) lacked. The decades-long struggle between two rivals attempting to offer the same social contract to the Chinese population resolved itself in the victory of the Communists in 1949. The Communists, with its better grasps of Chinese social realities and superior organizational strengthens, was taken by the Chinese public as the better choice.

1.2 The vision of the new China centered on the nation problem: independent nationhood, livelihood of the people, and with them the sovereignty rights of its citizens. The KMT referred to this problem as the struggle toward the “Three People’s Principles”: national independence (minzu), people’s sovereignty (minquan), and people’s livelihood (minsheng). The Communists referred to the nation problem as the overthrowing of the “Three Big Mountains”: imperialism infringements of China (diguozhuyi), suppression of peasants by the landlord class (fengjianzhuyi), and control of the economy by the bureaucratic capitalists (guanliaozibenzhuyi).

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2 which guided the Republican Revolution founded by Dr. Sun Yet-sen and inherited by the KMT.
1.3 To build a “strong nation” had been in China’s national blood since its imperial decay in the Late Qing period. The West challenges from the 1840s on presented the horrifying prospects of national disintegration and colonization. The Late Qing’s “Self-Strengthening” Movement, the 100-Day Restoration Movement of 1898, and the May Fourth “New Culture” and “Science and Democracy” Movements were all responding to the national crisis. “Wealthy Nation, Strong Army” dominated all intellectual and political debates. Casted in the global wave of rising modern nation states, dominated by strong nations of the West, China was not searching for a “modern” state, but a “strong nation” (qianguo).

1.4 Therefore, the first major task of the People’s Republic of China was nation building. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and his revolutionary colleagues, this project had its economic, social, and international dimensions. Economically, it was fast industrial development and achieving the status of an industrial power in the global community. Socially, it was the reform of class structure, the improvement of the public entitlement in food, basic education, and healthcare. Internationally, it was the safeguarding of sovereignty, international recognition, and enhancement of global power status.

1.5 Economic independence became the central element of the Mao Era nation building. In the longer run, in fact, economic preeminence among nations was the ambition of the new state. This impelled the new state to choose an economic strategy dominated by heavy industries and “big-push” industrialization. Supported by the Soviet Union at first, this economic strategy also determined structures and policies in other arenas: population planning, urban-rural division, foreign trade, and higher and technical education, among others. Amidst a Cold-War international environment that was later

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3 Yale Professor Jonathan D. Spence characterized China’s history since the Late Qing period as a “search for modern China”. Jonathan D. Spence, The Search for Modern China, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990, 1999).
exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet split, China entered into a long period of self-dependent indigenous industrialization.

1.6 Despite significant achievements, this development model’s enormous social and economic costs are now clear. With a large pool of low-skilled labor and terrible scarcities in capital and technology, China’s emphasis on heavy industries meant it was going diagonally against its comparative advantages. Ill-informed plans such as the Great Leap Forward and the Three Front Project that located and re-located major plants into the western mountainous regions only made things worse—in fact disastrous.

1.7 By the end of the 1970s, despite significant gains in provision of basic food, education, and public health, the Chinese economy was hopelessly inefficient and extremely wasteful. Industrial output was low and consumer goods few. Although slightly freed from hunger, the majority of Chinese people still enjoyed a life standard that is barely above poverty. What was more, the political turmoil during the heyday of Maoism, the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward, produced terrible famines, brutal violence, and chaos. The death of Mao in 1976 finally drew the closing to an era. Two years later a dramatic shift took place.

From Reform to the Economic Miracle

2.1 Deng Xiaopeng’s policy shift was based on the belief that China’s economic strategy was not working. The post-1978 releasing of rural energy through de-

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4 By various accounts, China’s economy grew on about an average of 4-6% from 1953 to 1978. This is deemed as a respectable growth rate but far lower than China’s potential growth rate. See, for example, Barry Naughton, The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
5 For the year between 1949 and 1978, China is generally believed to be an over-achiever in improving the population’s literacy level and health standards. See Ibid.
6 Using World Bank standards, in the late 1970s, 64% of Chinese population lived under the international poverty line.
collectivization, the allowing of the entry by private business, the opening of Special Economic Zones and later coastal cities to the international economy, and the shift toward light industries and consumer goods, constituted a coherent change of economic development strategy. This new strategy worked amazingly well, resulted in a rapid economic take-off. In due course, a “China miracle” was made.

2.2 An economic strategy it was, but it could only be understood within China and the State’s nation building project. In the early 1980s, all national policies, including economic development, were encapsulated in the “Four Modernizations” concept. The Party first announced the “Four Modernizations” as a sublime national goal in the 1960s, and re-iterated it as it faced internal difficulties toward the end of the Cultural Revolution. As a slogan it served to rally the whole population around the Party in the national effort to build a strong nation.

2.3 The Four Modernizations were again pronounced as Deng Xiaoping and colleagues steered China into a new economic path. Economic reform and rapid growths were to push China toward a powerful industrial nation. The Three-Step Strategy offered by the Deng leadership included: 1) doubling China’s 1980 per capita GDP, 2) doubling per capita GDP again, by the year 2000, to 1000 USD, and 3) quadrupling per capita GDP during the first half of the 21st Century, so that by 2030-2050, it would reach 4000 USD.

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9 “Four Modernizations” (agricultural, industrial, military, and science and technology modernizations) was first announced at the Third National People’s Congress in December 1964, by Premier Zhou Enlai. On the Fourth National People’s Congress toward the end of Mao and Zhou’s life, in 1975, it was stated again as the nation’s development goal.
10 Deng Xiaoping’s thinking of the development goals evolved since 1978. The formulation cited here was considered the final version, which he explained to the visiting Vice Prime Minister of Spain on 30 April 1987. See *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3).
2.4 The first step would complete the mission to move the Chinese nation out of poverty, the final resolving of the wen and bao problems.\textsuperscript{11} The second step would see China becoming a well-off (xiaokang) nation. When the third step was to be achieved, as Deng and the successive cohorts of leaders envisioned, China would be a “mid-level developed nation”.

2.5 These national goals were subsequently refined and revised. But two things were constant. First, China’s achievements would be measured against other nations—what levels of GDP per capita would put China in the league of which nations. China in this process would always look at itself as engaging in a race with other nations in the world. In the Great Leap Forward era (1959-1961), the slogan was to surpass the UK and catch up with the US (chaoying ganmei). In to the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century, China’s mainstream media would carefully note its GDP surpassing the G-7 nations one by one, save the US.\textsuperscript{12}

2.6 Second, the time points these staggered goals were set against were aligned with the period of governance of the regime. Around 100 years since the founding of the Party (around 2020\textsuperscript{13}) was set to be the time a major development level would be reached. And 100 years since the Regime came into power (around mid 21\textsuperscript{st} Century) was chosen as another important point of reference: it would be the time China arrives as a “mid-level developed nation”.

\textsuperscript{11} Wen literally means warmth. It refers to having sufficient clothes to wear. Bao literally means belly-full. It refers to having sufficient food to eat.
\textsuperscript{13} The Party was founded in 1921, Shanghai. So one hundred years from its founding would be 2021.
2.7 Taking together, these two constant emphases imply the ‘strong nation’ idea as the main component of the social contract between the regime and the people. The regime’s legitimacy relies on its ability in bringing China along the journey to a strong nation. With such a sense of mission, the Party continues to call itself the vanguard of the nation, and into the 21st defines itself as representing the “most advanced social productive forces, most advanced culture, and the interests of the largest majority of the nation.”

The Hundred-Year Old Dream

3.1 The post-1978 nation building has seen major successes in the economic arena. By around 2000, China had emerged as a global economic powerhouse. The specter of hunger that had haunted China for thousands of years seemed to have fled afar. Households in urban areas were increasingly entering middle class living standards. Problems such as social inequalities, unemployment, corruption, and environmental damages notwithstanding, overall a well-off society had come in the sight of the nation.

3.2 Nevertheless, the State continued to renew the nation building discourse, putting one new project after another onto the national agenda. Industrial strengths of the nation remained the rally point for national attention. The Party invested tremendous resources and stakes in a space program, for example. From the launch of an unmanned vessel in 1999, to the first manned mission in 2003, and the first space walk in 2008, the Shenzhou (“divine vessel”) Project had served very well to boost national confidence. The next goal is to land Chinese taikongnauts on the moon.

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14 This is the Party’s “Three Represents” Theory that was enshrined in the Party Constitution in 2002.
15 The political reports on both the 16th (2002) and the 17th (2007) Party Congresses still called upon the Party to struggle for the victory of building a “Well-Off Society”.
3.3 Next on the list, building craft carriers and a blue water navy, building the world’s largest and fastest high-speed rail, building the largest types of jumbo jets, and building the world’s largest airport and longest bridge all speak to the State’s “Strong Nation” project. One has to wonder, what will the Party have to offer when such goals are exhausted and China becomes the largest economy in the world?

3.4 The obsession with independent and strong nation also dominated China’s foreign policy, from the Maoist period up until today. The “leaning toward” the Soviet Camp in the 1950s was simply because the latter promised recognition, protection, and support for China’s independent nationhood. From then on, the new state’s foreign behaviors were characterized by both a sense of victimhood from the West dominance in the past, and a continued sense of threatened nationhood. Together, they resulted in a desperate quest for a big power status.

3.5 An urgent sense of threatened national independence and integrity first led to the war against the US on the Korean Peninsula, the legacy of which still defines today’s regional and global politics.16 The perceived threats to independent nationhood and sovereignty then led to the decisive split with the Soviet Union, a split that would heighten security threats in the years to come, including those from Soviet Union to the north, and its allies to the south. Meanwhile, to dispel such senses of insecurity and pursue the status of a great power, in the 1950s and 1960s, the State committed itself to a highly taxing nuclear weapon program, even when the nation was suffering economic collapse and political turmoil.

16 Consequently, into the 21st Century, it was only when China gained the confidence that its nationhood was not in peril that it started to work with the US and other parties to solve the North Korea problem.
3.6 It was only after the 1990s did the sense of insecurity start to recede, and China gradually became more ‘normal' in the global politics. With its newly gained confidence, China began to engage more actively in regional and global institutions and frameworks. Nevertheless, the sense of insecurity and threatened national integrity could still haunt, and when it does, highly defensive actions would be the result. By now the West must have learnt to appreciate this, as it did in relation to the Tibet issue.\(^\text{17}\)

3.7 Only with full confidence in its nationhood does China start to actively participate in cooperation toward problems of global governance. To enlist China to tackle global warming, energy security, financial stability, and nonproliferation, the international society needs to ensure China that its status and interests is respected. A Chimerica co-governance of the world may be exaggerating China’s strengths, but stronger wills from the US to let China play a significant role will help.\(^\text{18}\)

3.8 The pursuit of strong nationhood was also preeminent in the sports arena. From the 1950s, the State committed itself to winning medals in international games, and every victory was hailed as dispelling the “Sick Man of Asia” complex. The first Chinese to have won a world championship, the first woman world champion, and the first Chinese to have broken a world record, were all noted in the public memory and official histories.\(^\text{19}\) It was as if victories on the tracks and the uneven bars, in the diving pool, and over the ping-pong table were sufficient to establish China as a strong nation.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{17}\) In late 2008, feeling the European Union was flirting with The Dalai Lama and supporting his “Independent Tibet” line, when the then President of the EU Nicolas Sarkozy received The dalai Lama, China abruptly cancelled its soon-to-open Sino-EU summit, resulting in a nose-dive of Sino-EU relationship.

\(^{18}\) As of this writing, news broke out that a China-US-Australia military exercise is in planning. Such gestures from the Western countries will significantly enhance China’s trust, and make it more forthcoming in playing an active role in global issues. See “Military exercises with Australia, US still on table.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sep.4, 2009.

\(^{19}\) They were, respectively, Rong Guotuan of table tennis (1959), Qiu Zhonghui, women’s table tennis (1961), and Chen Jingkai, weight lifting (1956).

\(^{20}\) While almost all country in the world enjoy victories in international sport competitions, only China and its socialist colleagues such as the Soviet Union, East Germany, Cuba,
3.9 This continued into the post-reform China. The women’s volleyball team’s championships in the early 1980s, Team China’s overtaking of Japan as the winner at the 1982 Asian Games (New Delhi), and Team China’s Olympics debut in Los Angeles, 1984 all added tonic to a nation that was still dealing with national humiliation of the past. On the other hand, the men’s football team’s defeat by Hong Kong in 1985, disqualifying itself from the Mexico World Cup of the following year, led to riots in cities.

3.10 Following the post-Los Angles euphoria, the disappointing performance of Team China in the 1988 Seoul Olympics led to a national outcry of “defeat”. The wounds by the loss to Sydney to host the 2000 Olympics were only gradually healed as Team China moved itself up on the medal table at the Olympics in the following years. All of these were only drawn to a close after the Olympics were completed in 2008 Beijing, deemed a great success. As the grand ceremony opened on the evening of 08-08-2008, 8:08pm, Chinese media exalted, “a one-hundred-year-old national dream is finally realized”.

**State Building in the 21st Century**

4.1 At 60, China’s “nation problem” seems to have resolved itself. China is now a world economic power, and is taken as a major player in many issues of global importance. The Taiwan Issue is yet unresolved, and the construction and the North Korea, among others, pursue these victories through a heavy-handed state system. The Soviet Union was of course the inventor of this sport-state model, and others took it over in full-scale.

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21 A well known sports writer, Zhao Yu, had two books examining Chinese public’s “strong nation complex” in sports, *The Strong-Nation Dream* (Qiangguo Mmeng), and *Defeat in Seoul* (Bing Bai Hancheng) that were highly popular.

22 Team China’s position at the Olympics measured by the number of gold medals moved from the 11th (1988, Seoul), to the 4th (1992, Barcelona and 1996, Atlanta), the 3rd (2000, Sydney), the 2nd (2004, Athens), and the 1st (2008, Beijing).
of national identity among some ethnical groups in Xinjiang and Tibet may still pose challenges. But overall, China’s independent nationhood appears firmly established, and its “strong nation” status internationally accepted.

4.2 But just as China made big strides in its nation project, the problem of state building started to surface. “State-building” involves development of effective governance institutions to serve the society’s developmental, social, and political needs. Despite its many faults, the Maoist state was well equipped to the main tasks it was entrusted to: an urban-biased heavy industrial development strategy, social penetration and control, and national defense. For a while, the Leninist party-state could even claim many admirers.

4.3 Post 1978, while “failed states” were widespread around the world, and many developing countries struggled to build “state capacity” under the tutelage of their Western donors, the Chinese state was amazingly capable in generating economic growth and moving its population out of poverty. It appeared its government structure and institutions were highly conducive to economic development. Not only was the political economy able to diffuse the pressure of democratization, it even gave rise to a “China Model” claim that flew in the face of the “Washington Consensus”.

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23 In March 2008 and July 2009, respectively, riots broke out in Tibet and Xinjiang due to sustained period of ethical tensions in the two regions.
24 Many third-world countries in the 1960s and 1970s looked to China as an alternative model for national independence and industrial development. Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington in his earlier years gave very high esteem to the Leninist system. See his seminar work, Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).
4.4 But the weaknesses and deficiencies of this system were soon exposed. In fact, the problems in governance were created by China’s own successes. Two decades of economic expansion, marketization, and urbanization brought in a society and an economy that began to overwhelm the existing state institutions. By the late 1990s, crises of governance loomed over the sky of Zhongnanhai.\(^{28}\) Starting from worker protests caused by the SOE restructuring around 1998-99, in a short period of time, many social, economic, industrial, environmental, and public health crises escalated.\(^{29}\)

4.5 The challenges to build an effective state for China’s modern society and economy, ‘remaking the Leviathan’\(^{30}\), will dominate China political agenda in the years to come. China needs to build an effective regulatory state that can govern food and drug production, workplace safety, environmental protection, among others. It needs to build a market governance system that can supervise but not infringe in the financial and industrial sectors. It also needs to build a welfare state to provide social security and healthcare to its 1.3-billion citizens.

4.6 To institutionalize transparency, accountability, and openness, the Party has announced that China would build a law-based government (fazhizhengfu). The impersonal, generalist rule of law should replace the case-by-case handling of corruption or ideological campaign, two methods that the Party heavily relied on up till now. In early 2004, the government issued a blueprint for building a “government based on rule of law”.

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\(^{28}\) Zhongnanhai is the name of the compound near Tiananmen where China’s top government offices is housed. For “crises of governance”, see Minxin Pei, “China’s Governance Crisis,” Foreign Affairs 81, no. 5 (2002).

\(^{29}\) The SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) epidemic in early 2003 was a notable case of crisis management. In the single year of 2002, industrial accidents (coal mine collapses and factory explosions, for example) resulted in 14,924 deaths. In 2005 alone, there were 69 coalmine accidents, resulting in a total death toll of 2,671. In 2003, there were 379 cases of food poisoning, involving 12,876, with 323 deaths.

4.7 In these government documents, lofty goals such as constitutionality, due process, and openness were duly put forward. The real challenge now is whether and how they will be realized. A limited and rule-based but at the same time effective and service-oriented government is the ideal, but whether the one-party political system can succeed remains a big question.

“Democracy is a Good Thing”

5.1 If the state building project is already underway, the democracy project is only making its first timid steps. China’s emergence from the Cultural Revolution was followed by a brief period of liberalism in the early 1980s. But that early spring of openness and pluralism was quickly terminated at the aftermaths of the 1989 Tiananmen Student Movement. In the two decades that followed, political reform and democracy were largely put off the national agenda. Democracy was told to wait.\textsuperscript{31}

5.2 Furthermore, the state’s ability to control civil disobediences seemed sufficiently strong. Since the late 1990s, every year tens of thousands of mass protests broke out across the country, but they were all effectively dealt with by the government, with their impacts seldom travelled beyond their own localities. The State spares no effort in controlling the Internet as a platform of political mobilization. Overall, this coercive and highly rigid method for maintaining stability, although high costly, still works.\textsuperscript{32}

5.3 But nevertheless, international experiences and global research have shown that a high living standard almost inevitably leads to the demands for

\textsuperscript{31} Democracy was told to wait, ironically, for the nation building project to complete first: It was painted to have the ability to disrupt economic development and the growing of national power.

political opening. Furthermore, the expansion of affluence in a society means the citizens will gradually refuse or at least turn indifferent toward economic achievement as the base of regime legitimacy.\textsuperscript{33} One study found that at China's current income level, the probability of it making a transition into democracy in any given year is close to 10%. And this probability will keep rising with the increase in China's per capital GDP.\textsuperscript{34}

5.4 In fact, the transformation of China's social structure as an outcome of 30 years of rapid economic development requires a reconfiguration of the state structure. Under the current one-party system, the large and rapidly growing urban middle class is overly under-represented. State corporatism failed to include the diverse social interests, the rise of civil society organizations that overwhelmed the state's ability to monitor, let alone to control. According to various studies, the 390,000 NGOs formerly registered with the Chinese government account for probably only 10-20 percent of the total.

5.5 Furthermore, despite great effort from the State to control it, the media, especially the Internet, is finding an independent and critical voice, bringing about a "quiet revolution".\textsuperscript{35} The Internet is playing a powerful role in facilitating political liberalization and empowerment of the society.\textsuperscript{36} The intellectuals are overwhelmingly pro-democratic. In seminars and classrooms, and at dinner tables, "democracy" and political reforms are vividly debated.

\textsuperscript{33} This has been proved repeatedly around the world. For the example in Korea during the 1980s, see Chong-Min Park, "Authoritarian Rule in South Korea: Political Support and Governmental Performance," Asian Survey 31, no. 8 (1991).

\textsuperscript{34} Globally, excluding former Soviet Union Republics and oil producing countries, when a country's GDP per capita increases from $1000 to $12,000, the probabilities of it make a transition into democracy in any given year increases from 6% to 33%. See Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," World Politics 55, no. 3 (2003).


Liberal scholars within the Party are now openly proclaiming, “democracy is a good thing!”

5.6 The Party has nominally accepted democracy as the goal for political development. Its vision of democracy, however, is anchored at its one-party dominance structure. It openly endorses intraparty democracy and popular elections at the grassroots level, and pays enough lip services to building institutions of “democratic decision making, democratic election, and democratic supervision”. But in the years to come, it will try every means to delay the introduction of multi-party elections.

The Way Forward

6.1 For the years to come, this paper offers the following scenario as the most likely evolitional path for China toward a democracy. First, the regime will find the workable ways to recognize the independence of civil society. As non-governmental organizations are growing beyond the State's capacity to control and monitor, it has to move into a rule-based regulatory framework. The state will have to withdraw its direct control and intervention of the activities of civil society organizations.

6.2 Second, intraparty democracy will take the lead. New institutions within the Party will formalize intraparty contests and enforce internal supervisions. Party secretaries at the sub-provincial levels may be elected by a Party committee, or at least be subjected to a ballot confirmation by such a committee.

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Important appointments will also be subjected to a confirmation by ballots. The internal disciplinary system of the Party will be overhauled.38

6.3 Third, local elections will be promoted upward. Township councils and township chiefs are likely to be openly elected. All such reforms will have to go slow, first starting from pilot sites, before formal implementation in a larger number of localities. It may take up to 15 years for elections to be open at county level—election of county magistrates or representatives to a more powerful county council. But nevertheless, once free election is installed and consolidated at the county level, the road to a full democracy will have been paved.

6.4 Future historians with the advantages of hindsight will see that, from 1949 to 2049, the first 100 years of the People’s Republic can be demarcated into three non-exclusive phases. In the first 60 years, China was preoccupied with the establishment of its independent nationhood. Especially from 1980 onwards, it made big strides toward nation-building, and emerged as a strong nation with one of the world’s largest economies. As the People’s Republic stands at its 60th year, besides a strong economic base, it had achieved significant global influences. Having arrived at a xiaokang society, its people had secured their basic socioeconomic rights.

6.5 The second stage is likely to run from around 2000 to around 2030, in which the main preoccupation is building a modern state: a rule-based, transparent, accountable, limited but effective government. By around 2030, China needs to have an effective state, and a vibrant civil society. A certain degree of rule of law will have been put in place, so that citizen rights are effectively protected. In many regards, this state building process also

38 As of this writing, a new yearly Plenum of the Party’s Central Committee is to meet in Beijing. Designing intraparty democracy institutions and their installation is reported to be on top of its agenda. See
involves the building of democratic elements into the political and government systems.

6.6 In fact, a prominent political thinker within the Party has stated that by 2020, China will have a “democratic platform”.

The Chinese thinking aims at combining good governance with democracy in their political reforms.

Hence, from around 2000, the state building efforts in China has included democratic elements such as expanding participation and representation. Between 2010 and 2030, China’s main political task will be to build institutions that will provide good governance but also prepare a strong state for its democratic future.

6.7 With a relatively effective and well functioning state, which will include limited democratic institutions such as free local elections and an independent civil society, China will likely enter Freedom House’s “Partly Free” category around 2020 (between 2015-2025, that is). This will qualify China as a “semi-democracy”.

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39 Zhou Tianyong, an adviser to the Communist Party’s Central Committee and one of its most liberal voices, told the Daily Telegraph that “by 2020, China will basically finish its political and institutional reforms”. Daily Telegraph, 14 Oct 2008.

40 The one of the most prominent thinkers of democracy and political reform in China is Yu Keping, a professor of Peking University and Deputy Director of the Party’s Central Translation Bureau. He has openly called democracy as a “good thing”. His conception of democracy has included many elements that Western scholarship would put within the “good governance” concept. See Keping Yu, "Toward an Incremental Democracy and Governance: Chinese Theories and Assessment Criteria," New Political Science 24, no. 2 (2002); Yu, Democracy Is a Good Thing: Essays on Politics, Society, and Culture in Contemporary China; Keping Yu, "Ideological Change and Incremental Democracy in Reform-Era China," in China’s Changing Political Landscape: Prospects for Democracy, ed. Cheng Li (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute Press, 2008).


42 Freedom House is an independent organization that rates each country in the world into one of three categories according to its level of “democraticness”: Free (full democracy), Partly Free (semi-democracy), and Not Free (non-democracy). See www.freedomhouse.org.
has predicted China will turn “Partly Free” around 2015. And a cross-national study shows that this will occur between 2010 and 2015.\(^{43}\)

6.8 From 2020 onwards, China will enter its final drive toward a modern liberal democracy. This process may take a long time, but it can also acquire rapid and unstoppable momentums. If county level elections can be held around 2020, provincial elections can be held around 2030, then it is safe to predict that by 2040-2050, national offices are likely to be subjected to some kind of electoral contests.

6.9 Standing at 2009, in the next 10 years China is likely to become a semi-democracy, and in another 20-30 years, a full democracy. Hence, by mid-century, roughly one hundred years since the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949, China will have arrived at what the Party has prescribed itself to achieve: a wealthy and strong (fuqiang), democratic (minzhu), and civilized (wenming) nation.\(^{44}\) That will be the true realization of China’s one-hundred year’s dream.


\(^{44}\) These goals were first stated on the 12th Party Congress of 1982, and adopted in the Party Constitution, as the Party’s “General Guidelines” (zongluxian) during the “primary stage of socialism".
Nation Building as a Consequence of Political Development. It seeks to understand how the political arena transformed over generations, rather than years or electoral cycles in line with the now rather unfashionable political development theories introduced by the likes of. European Sociological Review, 2014, Vol. 0, No. 0. 3. Past levels of state building in the case of the post-colonial world, those achieved before colonization and the emergence of the colonial state (in line with Englebert, 2000; Bockstette et al., 2002; Gennaioli and Rainer, 2007). Many comparativists and political theorists believe that democracy represents, at least in the long-term (Huntington, 1996), the most effective institution to. European Sociological Review, 2014, Vol. 0, No. 0.