Prospects for the General Election of 2020:
Tradition and Transition in Chinese Politics

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In 1943 when the deservedly little-known University of Sydney China scholar, Richard Ormsby Martin, published his monograph on *Tradition and Transition in Chinese Politics*, he could little know that for the next eighty years China's political development would remain dominated by the twin themes of tradition and transition.[1] Even after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), politics was no more noticeably characterised by stability than it had been when he was writing. The excitement of the Great Leap Forward was succeeded by the *Sturm und Drang* of the Cultural Revolution. The first attempts at reform and openness culminated in the Tiananmen Square events of June 1989, only to be followed by three decades of exceptional economic growth that have significantly altered most aspects of life in China. Through this process China's past has been in constant tension with its future as China seeks to negotiate an understanding of where change may lead.

As everyone now knows, General Secretary Hu Jintao thought long and hard before his landmark speech at the opening of the 18th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in October 2012. He was about to announce the Political Bureau's decision to hold open direct national elections. It would be fair to say that this speech came as

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[1] Ormsby Martin (1901-1987) was on the staff of the University of Sydney in various capacities from the start of the Second World War until the early 1970s. In the early 1940s he was an Acting Lecturer in the Department of History. His other book was a translation of poetry, *Shan Shui: Translations of Chinese Landscape Poetry* (1946).

something of a surprise to the rest of the world and particularly to political scientists outside China, given that the leadership of the CCP remained united and faced no state crisis, and that there had been no significant increase in mass unrest.[2]

In the full glare of the world's press and television Hu turned to Deng Xiaoping Theory, quoting his boyhood hero from Deng's days in establishing a border region government in the Taihang Mountains in 1941. Then Deng had proposed an elected border region assembly as an extension of the program to encourage political participation through elections. War-time conditions had made direct elections impossible so the assembly only became a Provisional Assembly when elected in 1941. Hu reminded his audience that direct elections were postponed only until the second half of 1944, with the directly elected border region assembly eventually meeting in March 1945.

Hu Jintao proceeded to quote Deng Xiaoping's precise words:

> We Communists always oppose a one-party dictatorship … The CCP certainly doesn't have a program to monopolise government because one party can only rule in its own interests and won't act according to the Will of the People. Moreover, it goes against democratic politics. (Deng 1941)

Hu acknowledged that sometimes, as Mao Zedong had said, 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.'[3] At the same time, he reminded his audience that elections had always been, and remained, an essential part of the political system introduced by the CCP. Without elections, Hu emphasised, quoting the discussions at the 3rd Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP and its Central Work Conference in December 1978, come the kinds of abuses of power such as occurred during the Cultural Revolution. These can only be prevented if 'the masses become the real masters of the country' and 'the people elect government leaders of their own choice' (*People's Daily* 1978). Hu also quoted Chen Yun's speech at the same Central Work Conference: 'Only democracy can provide stable norms for political behaviour and ensure the mobilisation of popular initiative for economic growth' (*People's Daily* 1979). As a result of the changes introduced by the 3rd Plenum, direct elections to the county level of the territorial administrative hierarchy were introduced in the middle of 1979 (Goodman 1985), and village and township elections, as well as those at the county level, had been

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[2] These are the three simultaneous conditions required for successful regime change in the 20th century according to the comprehensive research undertaken by Ted Robert Gurr and Jack Goldstone (1991).
[3] Mao Zedong (1938). Those familiar with *Alabama Three* will note that the official translation of this quote was employed.

a major feature of local politics during the previous three decades (He 2007; O'Brien & Zhao 2010).

The proposal from the Political Bureau provided for the convening of a Constituent Assembly in 2013 to examine and make recommendations on a suitable form of election. On the basis of the political reform program that emerged, a number of political parties announced that they would compete in the first national general election in 2015. Two issues were not capable of resolution at that time—the extent of autonomy in the Tibet Autonomous Region; and the possibility of federal reform—and have been submitted to referenda at the time of the 2020 election.

The Constituent Assembly

The Constituent Assembly met in Beijing shortly after Spring Festival in 2013. Its members were nominated by the provincial level (including municipalities and autonomous region) people's congresses and political consultative congresses, the Chinese Communist Party, organs of the central government and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The major questions scheduled for discussion centred on the changes that should be introduced into the political system in order to ensure the effectiveness of electoral reform; and the electoral system to be adopted. The choice of political system essentially came down to either a Washington model of direct presidential government, where the executive would be accountable to, but not part of, the legislature, or a Westminster model, where the executive would be part of the legislature, and the prime minister would be elected because of majority support in the National People's Congress (NPC).

The CCP favoured a Westminster model on the grounds that presidential elections delivered either military leaders (France under De Gaulle), faceless ciphers (Calderón, Mexico), or outsiders who rapidly lost support (Obama, USA), and which under all circumstances were simply populist beauty-contest type competitions devoid of political ideas. In their view, a Westminster model was more democratic because it allowed voters more say at a more local level in electing constituency representatives. In contrast the minority view held that the Westminster model led to more easily paralysed government, especially through coalitions, and that only the presidential model could deliver strong and purposive government.

When considering the electoral system to be adopted, at one point it appeared that a majority of the delegates to the Constituent Assembly favoured a system of absolute proportional representation where the number of votes cast nationally would lead to the proportion of delegates elected to the NPC. Their initial view was that this was the fairest and most democratic system. The CCP successfully argued that this would lead to unstable and weak government, where the interests of the minority would be trampled underfoot. Far better, they said, to have a UK style 'first past the post' voting system in single constituencies. This would, they argued, always ensure at least two strong political parties in the NPC able to pass legislation and support the work of government.

The CCP pointed to an analysis of the results of the 6 May 2010 General Election in the UK demonstrating the effect of different electoral systems on the political outcome to prove their point (Table 1).[4] The leaders of the CCP dismissed the various opposition claims that a first past the post electoral system ensured their political futures as 'sour grapes from those who do not have the national interest at heart.' As the leaders of the CCP frequently argued, in a multi-party system it is necessary to ensure that a political party can achieve a majority of power with only 34 percent of the popular vote, as has long been the case with the UK electoral system (Johnston *et al.* 2001; Johnston & Pattie 2006: 273).

Party	Vote (%)	Seats by Electoral System				
		First Past the Post	Proportional Representation	Alternative Vote	Single Transferable Vote	Additional Member
CONSERVATIVE	36	47	36	43	40	42
LABOUR	29	40	29	40	32	36
LIBERAL-DEMOCRAT	21	10	21	12	25	15

Table 1: Analysis of Electoral Systems, UK General Election, 6 May 2010.

The Constituent Assembly agreed that direct provincial-level (autonomous regions and directly subordinated municipalities as well as provinces) elections should occur at the same time as direct national elections. At the same time it could not agree on whether

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[4] First past the post is the UK system, based on single member constituencies. Proportional Representation is a list system for the entire country, as in Israel. Australian elections run on the Alternative Vote, in single member constituencies. The single transferable vote is a multi-member constituency system practiced in Ireland and Tasmania. Germany has a variety of Additional Member system where competitions in single member constituencies are supplemented by deputies elected through a list system elected by proportional representation.

the Tibet Autonomous Region should be permitted a greater degree of autonomy, as some delegates argued; or whether a Federal constitution would be more appropriate, as members of the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League petitioned. Both these issues were slated for referenda to be held at the time of the 2020 general election.

The political parties

One remarkable feature of the party system as it has developed since 2012 is the extent to which it has been shaped by organizations that emerged in the late 1940s just before, and during, the establishment of the PRC. In that era the CCP recognized a number of the other political parties as its partners in a national coalition. These parties all came together in the China People's Political Consultative Conference during the late 1940s, and remained active during the PRC, though perhaps more nominally during the Cultural Revolution (Seymour 1987). With the exception of the Federation of Peasants Parties, and its localised member organisations, these are the only political parties to have gained representation in the new electoral environment. In the words of an editorial in the *People's Daily*: 'China's new political party system suits national conditions' (2009).

The various political parties founded outside the PRC during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century to campaign for change within China (often associated with the democracy activists of the late 1980s) disappeared without trace once direct national elections were introduced, as did the few established secretly inside the PRC.[5] The most likely explanation for their failure is their lack of organisational clout compared to the more established political parties. Those that were established outside the PRC always ran the risk, emphasised by their opponents, of being labelled as 'outsiders.' Some voters may have felt a degree of resistance to being lectured to by Chinese who had chosen to live overseas for more than two decades. Others, particularly younger voters, may simply not have recognized the need for, or contribution of, the political exiles. For their part, those parties that had been established within the PRC in those years were somewhat similarly open to criticism either for being anti-Chinese in their embrace of

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[5] There were a number of these including the Chinese Democracy and Justice Party; the China Democracy Party; the China New Democracy Party; the Party for Freedom and Democracy in China; China Green Party; Human Rights Party; and the United Peoples' Party of China. Two clandestine political parties that formed within the PRC were the Union of Chinese Nationalists, and the Chinese Nationalist Party (Reformed), though little is known about their activities except their position of opposition to the CCP and stated goal of uniting the PRC and Taiwan.

ideas and values such as human rights and green politics that could be portrayed as not having emerged from China's experience; or for having regarded the variety of Chinese nationalism practiced on Taiwan as somehow superior.

Of the political parties that successfully contested the 2015 national election the largest and best organised was the CCP. Active in all provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, it fielded candidates in all 2750 constituencies at the 2015 NPC election, and for all sub-national levels of government. It gained 64 percent of the popular vote and 83 percent of the seats in the NPC. This was considerably higher than the proportion of the CCP elected to the NPC through the previous indirect system, where only about 70 percent of the deputies were CCP members.

The CCP carried almost all the provincial-level elections. The exception was Qinghai, where the election produced such a complex result that no electorally-produced government proved possible despite prolonged negotiations. The political parties that contested the election were entirely community-based: six separate Tibetan clan-based parties were very unwilling to cooperate with each other, and one Tibetan party opposed any form of political system; a political party for the centuries-established Chinese community, and another for the more recent (since the early 1950s) migrants; and political parties for the Hui, Salar and Tu communities.[6] The numbers of those elected approximated the proportion of each community in the province's population, so that no potential coalition was able to command a majority. Qinghai has, in consequence, been ruled from Beijing since 2015. No election was held in Xinjiang because of concerns about community violence; nor was one held in the Tibet Autonomous Region, pending the outcome of the 2020 referendum. In general CCP support was stronger in the provinces to the North (Friedman 1993), though Shanghai as expected remained the company town it had become during the late 1990s (Huang 2008).

The Revolutionary Committee of the Nationalist Party (often referred to as the Left Nationalists) won a large number of seats in the post-1949 Nationalist Party (on Taiwan) leadership's former support areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, as well as parts of Fujian, Guangdong, Shandong, and Shanghai (particularly Kunshan, where it won both seats), but in none of those locations did it come close to challenging CCP domination.

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[6] On the sociopolitical complexity of Qinghai see: Goodman (2004).

Its support is significantly higher in areas characterised by inward investment from Taiwan.

The China Democratic League campaigned hard in the major cities, and did especially well in areas dominated by universities and higher education. It gained a large number of votes across the country but despite receiving fifteen percent of the vote, only won 50 of the seats in the NPC, all in highly urban areas.

Membership of the China Democratic National Construction Association (CDNCA) grew substantially in and after 2012. Entrepreneurs who had previously joined the CCP as a result of Jiang Zemin's formulation in 2000 of the 'Three Represents,' now left the CCP and joined a political organisation they considered more likely to reflect their business interests. In 2015 it campaigned hard but only won rural and peri-urban constituencies where its businessmen-politicians had enterprises and profile. Determined to model itself on the successful examples of the business-oriented conservative parties of Europe, the CDNCA has recently turned to the German CDU and British Conservative Party for assistance and advice.

The China Association for Promoting Democracy, previously strong among teachers, renamed itself as the China Social Democrats and proved surprisingly strong in smaller urban centres away from Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai and Chongqing. The China Public Dedication Party was, and remains, the political organisation for Overseas Chinese (Barabantseva 2005). Unsurprisingly, given the geographic concentration of Overseas Chinese and those with long term overseas links, it was particularly successful in the 2015 election. Its strength is to be found in Guangdong where it gained a third of the vote (centred on Chaozhou, Shantou, Taishan, Zhongshan and Zhuhai), and Fujian, where support is similarly substantial. In Hainan support is concentrated on the largely once Indonesian Overseas Chinese community based in the centre of the island.

The remaining three of the older parties represented in the 2015 NPC had few delegates. The Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League was always a small Taiwanese-speaking political party, and so it remained after 2015, with limited success in those parts of South Fujian with which Taiwan has close social and cultural links. Two nationally high profile artist members of the September 3 Society were elected to the NPC, one each in Hangzhou and Changsha, in constituencies where the local Fine Arts

Academy is located. The Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party proved electorally ineffectual and was successful in only one constituency in Hubei, where its candidate was a local mayor and owner of a flour mill.

The only success outside the ranks of the earlier established parties came from the newly established Federation of Peasants Parties (Peasants Federation). This loose association of peasant groups and political associations from a variety of provinces delivered several hundred delegates to the NPC, and in one or two provinces ran the CCP closer than expected. In Hainan, for example, where the mainstream vote was largely split between the CCP and the China Democratic National Construction Association, with the China Public Dedication Party gaining a further fifteen percent of the vote, the Hainan Peasants' Party found itself within a reasonable statistical distance (less than ten percent) of the number of provincial delegates elected for the CCP.[7]

The prospects for the 2020 election are that the smaller parties may cease to be represented in the NPC as party politics become more nationalised. The challenge to the CCP essentially comes from the CDNCA and the Peasants Federation, with the Left Nationalists, China Democratic League, China Social Democrats and the China Public Dedication Party remaining as small political market niche organisations, if each in different ways.

Issues of public policy

A number of public policy issues have become particularly salient since the 2015 election and these are likely to carry into the election campaign: corruption, which remains high in the public consciousness; housing, a significant indicator of class and class divisions in politics; and regional development.

Corruption

One of the problems with public debate on corruption has been the lack of agreement about its definition, causes and remedies (Liu 1983: 618; Ma 1989: 40; Rocca 1992: 402). Everyone knows it exists but there is little agreement on precisely what 'it' is. The CCP has long seen corruption as a moral problem and so prescribes that its cadres should be educated and trained to be virtuous (Goodman 1987). A further significant

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[7] On the sociopolitics of Hainan see Feng & Goodman (1997).

problem is the legacy of the past. Although it is now more than four decades since the curtain was brought down on the Cultural Revolution, still many citizens regard businessmen and their activities as corrupt. It is a very definite example of a love-hate relationship: people are generally fascinated by the life styles of the rich and famous and attracted by their wealth; at the same time businessmen and entrepreneurs have exceptionally low status and their wealth is seen generally in zero-sum terms as someone else's poverty, and for this reason not just undesirable but corrupt (Zang 2008).

Public perception of corruption focuses to a large extent on the relationship between government and business (Ting 2006). The problem though for government, the CCP and indeed to some extent all politicians is that not all relationships between government and business are corrupt. While government (and to date the CCP) has attempted to ensure its cadres do not act corruptly, it also has to educate the electorate in this respect. Paradoxically, executing a few leading cadres occasionally may actually encourage others to either be less greedy or not to act corruptly, but at the same time it does little to convince citizens that there is less corruption or that the government is under control.

Simply put corruption might be regarded as the private use of public resources, or the engagement in actions knowing them to be either socially or legally unacceptable. There is, however, always a problem of boundary maintenance. Social acceptability may be highly relative, as is legal practice. Moreover, the circumstances under which corruption becomes a focus of public concern are always highly politicised and raise questions about who controls the forum and methods of public debate and concern. In Chongqing, for example, in and after 2007 the new CCP leader Bo Xilai (son of former Political Bureau member Bo Yibo) committed himself and the local CCP to fighting organized crime and to the related 'weeding out of local corruption,' claiming it had deep social roots, which presumably had gone undetected for some considerable time. This campaign then became a cause célèbre propelling the CCP leader in question to further national prominence. There was even speculation that the campaign represented his bid to become General Secretary of the CCP in the next round of leadership succession (Cara 2010; Dyer 2010).

Still there is no doubt that corruption exists and that it is a matter of public concern. There will be candidates who campaign in some areas on specific anti-corruption platforms, and a few are likely to be elected if the experience of elections elsewhere is any guide. Although corruption is not a programmatic issue it is more likely to damage the CCP than any other party, simply because it has been in government for so long and exclusively. Unfortunately for the CDNCA and its attempt to turn itself into a Eurostyle conservative party, the issue may also have some negative impact on its success, because of its inherent links with the business world. Populist parties, such as the Peasants Federation, always benefit more from debates on corruption.

Housing

Housing has become increasingly a marker of social division since the emergence of a significant private housing market in the 1990s, and one which has considerable potential for class conflict even if mediated through electoral politics. Two trends have occurred simultaneously. One has been the demise of the social unit as a provider of community and social service, including housing (Bray 2005). Before the Reform Era all government organisations, educational institutions, and economic enterprises provided housing (and other services) to their staff. The neoliberalist turn has introduced greater economic efficiency into resource management at all levels and in all sectors (Lee & Zhu 2006). One consequence is that previously work-supplied housing has been turned into private housing that is rented or sold on a housing market. The second trend has been the development of new gated community housing estates (Tomba 2004). The evidence is that this has become an almost inalienable principle of urban planning perhaps, at least partially, for reasons of social control. Almost all of these new housing estates are gated regardless of status, though there are clearly class and income differences in access to specific gated communities (Tomba 2005).

Before the 1990s housing already was a marker of social distinction with better public supplied housing being much appreciated. In the past, however, housing quality was essentially a function of career and appointment, and less under the individual's control. Differences in quality were also less visible, as well as probably less in absolute terms. Housing reform, the growth of an entrepreneurial class with greater real disposable income, and the inevitable development of a luxury housing market, has made housing differences both highly visible and also matters of public debate. The development of

European 'national villages' in Songjiang, in Shanghai's southern suburbs, is a good case in point. At the start of the 21st century the Shanghai authorities decided to invite architects and planners from a number of different European countries—England, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany—to build housing estates representative of their architecture. The Italian architect built an estate of 'Tuscan villas.' The English architects designed 'Thames Town,' with buildings and streetscapes drawn from London and various parts of the UK, including a Whitby public house, an Anglican church, and a copy of the Thames near Battersea Bridge complete with bridge. When Thames Town was built in 2005-2006 the entry price was approximately 5000 *yuan* per square metre. In 2006 average GDP per capita in urban China was 11,759 *yuan* per annum and average rural GDP per capita was 3,597 *yuan* per annum (*Xinhua News Agency* 2007).

Issues of debate are somewhat surprisingly not about the right to conspicuous consumption but about land use in development, equity of access, and questions of community self-government. Land use has become a major issue in some areas as previously agricultural land is rezoned for housing development, and then effectively compulsorily purchased by local government either for development or for onward sales to developers (Hsing 2006). In the 2015 elections the various parts of the Peasants Federation campaigned solidly behind a program of equitable treatment for peasants whose families had farmed land for centuries, only to see it disappearing in new housing developments. Interestingly, an analysis of the election results shows that anticipation was more electorally potent than when such fears were actually realised. Communities that had actually experienced what had been seen as land confiscations were less likely to still be around and so were less able to be mobilised by the Peasants Federation than peasants in peri-urban areas who felt threatened. It was in those areas that the Peasants Federation did exceptionally well in the elections.

Equity of access to new housing estates has become an issue of public debate in some cities, particularly large cities (though not mega-cities) such as Shenyang and Taiyuan. And where public resources may be seen to be, or may have been, in some sense involved in an essentially private housing development, the argument can be made that some of the housing made available in this way should be subsidised either by local government or the developer to enable the less wealthy to participate (Tomba & Tang 2008). Interestingly this pressure for equity in new housing developments appears to

have been limited to the rust, iron and coal belts of North and Northeast China. Here the CCP itself has campaigned for equity of access in nominally joint private-public housing developments, and to have built at least part of its support base this way.

The development of gated communities has led to concerns of control by some of the residents' groups. Residents are always asked to pay for security and other community services. At the same time, for both political and economic reasons, local governments will not surrender their involvement in, or oversight of, some community functions. Clearly where local government has been centrally involved in the development of new housing communities, it will retain an interest in their operation. Equally this is likely to be a point of tension between residents and local government. The CDNCA has been particularly active in mobilising support from residents in new housing estates, and not just those that cater for the very wealthiest.

Regional development

Regional development is probably the most important and longest established public policy arena in China. There are essentially two separate matters of debate. One is the rural-urban divide (Christiansen 1990; Chan 1994; Cheng & Selden 1994; Chan & Zhang 1999). The other is the question of severe spatial inequality across China, highlighted by Hu Angang and Wang Shaoguang in their reports to the State Council during the 1990s.[8] While the Peasants Federation is keen to play a central public policy role in the former debate, the latter debate is dominated by a perdictable coalition of the old left and the new entrepreneurial conservatives.

There can be no doubt that the standard of living in rural China remains low, and that there are far from equal life chances between those living on and off the land and those living in towns and cities. Rural GDP per capita is about one quarter of urban GDP per capita and service provision—schools, clinics, hospitals—in the countryside is well below that in the towns and cities. Before the emergence of the Peasants Federation and its various locally and provincially organised groups, these differences were acknowledged but little action was forthcoming. Most of the central government's

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[8] Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang's's *Zhongguo guojia nengli baogao* [A Report on China's State Capacity] (1993) was published in English translation in two parts in *Chinese Economic Studies* (1995a; 1995b); and Hu Angang, Wang Shaoguang and Kang Xiaoguang's *Zhongguo diqu chaju baogao* [A Report on Regional Disparities in China] (1995), was also later published in English translation (Wang Shaoguang & Hu Angang 1999).

poverty alleviation went to nationally designated poverty counties rather than in programs to deliver specific benefits to rural areas.

More determined action is still to occur but at least now there is fairly open debate about the need to amend the 1958 Household Registration Regulations. These are the regulations that effectively tie peasants to the land in perpetuity, by classifying them in terms of their rural household registration and by refusing peasant migrants (who move 'temporarily' to towns and cities in search of work) the wider benefits of their own labour. The matter had been widely discussed during 2008-2009 in certain circles within China and a petition was submitted to the NPC on 25 March 2010 but without immediate result. As is often pointed out the Household Registration regulations essentially ensure a reserve pool of labour for the burgeoning capitalist sector while leaving those who travel for work unable to access urban benefits (especially health care and education) for themselves and their children, regardless of their residence.

The issue of spatial inequality was first highlighted during the 1990s by those concerned about the impact of the Reform Era's policies on the interior of the country away from the Eastern seaboard. In general, during the Mao-dominated years of China's politics, each province and region was expected to be self-sufficient (Larsen 1992). The regional development policy introduced with the Reform Era in the early 1980s changed all this by requiring provinces, and indeed localities, to build on their competitive advantage. The result was that provinces with relatively easy access to the wealth and potential of the East Asian region prospered dramatically. By the mid-1990s GDP per capita in Guizhou, the poorest province, was only 8 percent of that in Shanghai, the wealthiest provincial-level jurisdiction.

In 1999 the reports by Hu and Wang, and the public debate they generated, fed into the formulation of a new regional development policy to 'Open Up the West,' which largely failed to deliver the desired results (Goodman 2002). Few additional national resources were devoted to the West's development, with instead an expectation that external (to the PRC) investment would fuel growth. Not least because locations in the West had poor infrastructure and communications with the rest of the country, let alone the rest of the world, foreign investors were understandably reluctant to become involved (Holdbig 2004: 341).

Electoral reform has again placed the issue of the development of the interior provinces firmly on the agenda. This time support for investment in the interior provinces to support their economic growth comes from a usual alliance. One part of this support is the old left of the CCP. They have concerns about the inequalities that emerged with the policies of the last forty years. Moreover, they see a more balanced regional development strategy as a desirable end in itself, though few would prefer a return to Mao's insistence on provincial self-reliance in case of invasion. The other support has come from the CDNCA. They see the opportunities for economic enterprise that may result if government support and resources are devoted to the development of the interior provinces.

Referenda

Two referenda have been scheduled to occur at the time of the 2020 general election. One is to consider a proposal for substantial autonomy of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The other is for the adoption of a federal constitution. There is little possibility that either will receive majority support.

Tibet Autonomous Region

The issue of autonomy for the Tibet Autonomous Region came to a referendum because of the deadlock that emerged at the Constituent Assembly. There was nothing like a majority at that meeting favouring greater autonomy in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The problem was that all but a handful of the delegates from the Tibet Autonomous Region were vociferous in their support for an autonomy vote, with debate being carried out in the full view of the world's media. The solution was a national referendum, with a majority being required across China's voters as a whole if greater autonomy is to be granted. One of the more interesting features of international law appears to be that a territory can join another jurisdiction on the basis of a decision in that territory alone; but that same territory cannot leave a jurisdiction of which it is part without the approval of the jurisdiction as a whole.[9]

The battle lines for this referendum are fairly clearly drawn. On one side are the voters of the Tibet Autonomous Region who overwhelmingly favour greater autonomy. On the

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[9] This was the fate of Western Australia in 1933, which voted to leave the Commonwealth of Australia having joined only belatedly. In the event the Privy Council ruled the necessity of an all-Australia vote on the state's secession, and this was never held.

other are almost all the other parties represented in the NPC. There is a view, spearheaded by a minority in the China Democratic League, that the Tibet Autonomous Region is a costly project to maintain and it should be left to its own devices. There are also some extreme nationalists in a number of parties who have tried to argue that total independence, if accepted and implemented, would be a good idea since the Tibetans are not ethnically Chinese.

At the same time, the majority view seems to be that of the CCP. It has pointed out that even with greater autonomy the Tibet Autonomous Region is not economically viable. As a landlocked country with a poorly performing economy, it will be looking not simply for allies, but also for aid and assistance. There are basically two places that support could come from. One is China, and having just achieved greater autonomy, Tibet would be unlikely to approach China in that way, irrespective of China's likely refusal. Moreover, China does currently provide aid and assistance, so that in the CCP's view there is little need for the greater autonomy being proposed (Zhou 2011:60). Support could also come from the USA. However, that possible relationship might also entail US military bases being established in the eastern part of the Tibet Autonomous Region—anathema not only to the CCP but also to most Chinese.

Federalism

The issue of federalism is possibly more complex, though no more likely to lead to an acceptance. A referendum has been suggested by two political tendencies. One comprises the lawyers in the political parties, and particularly in the NPC, who argue that a federal system provides a superior system of checks and balances for a sophisticated modernised political system. It would also, of course, replace a single legal system with several systems at the federal and constituent state levels. The other consists of those in China who think that federalism will prove attractive to political forces on Taiwan and encourage them to consider reunification. These include, as might be expected, the Left Nationalists and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.

The prospects for a federal China are far from new elements in debates on public policy. Federalism was debated as a possible model in the early days of the Republic, and the CCP was initially a federal organisation (van de Ven 1992). By 1930 federalism had become equated with feudalism in contemporary Chinese political discourse and so it was unlikely to be regarded favourably by modernising nationalists (Fitzgerald 1998).

Economic federalism was easily embraced and implemented in the late 1970s and early 1980s by the economic reformers (Montinola, Qian & Weingast 1995). There was some discussion of possible federal configurations for China's political system at the same time (Zhao 1982), but these seem to have just disappeared like bamboo shoots without spring rain.

The CCP remains opposed to political federalism on the grounds of practicality. Although it has embraced the project of direct elections, it has articulated concerns about another series of elections, which federalism would almost certainly necessitate, to a second chamber for the National People's Congress. The CCP has also articulated fears that a federal political system might impede the work of government. It has pointed to its world's best practice new superfast rail network as an example of what centralised government can achieve. As the CCP pointed out, both the USA and Australia barely have a long distance inter-city rail system let alone the latest generation bullet trains (*The Economist* 2010; Feng 2010).

Election 2020

At this distance even Directors of China Institutes would be hesitant to assay the results of the approaching election. After all, the element of uncertainty will have millions of Chinese viewers glued to the CCTV Election Night Tally Room broadcast. The CCP remains likely to be the dominant political party. At the same time, with the passage of time one would expect both the CDNCA and the Peasants Federation to increase both their share of the vote and their numbers of deputies in the NPC. There will, however, be much to appreciate, notwithstanding prominent politicians being voted out of office and high-profile celebrities being elected. Election night 2020 will make for great television.

Glossary of Chinese for terms used in the text

China Association for Promoting Democracy	中国民主促进会
China Democratic Leag	中国民主同盟
China Democratic National Construction Association [CDNA]	中国民主建国会
Chinese Communist Party [CCP]	中国共产党
Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference	中国人民政治协商会议
Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party	中国农工民主党
China Public Dedication Party	中国致公党
Housing estate	社区
Household registration	户口
Left Nationalist Party	中国国民党革命委员会
National People's Congress	全国人民代表大会
September 3 Society	九三学社
Social unit	单位
Sturm und Drang	风雨
Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League	台湾民主自治同盟
Three Represents	三个代表

Reference List

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