

Contemporary Chinese Thought, vol. 34, no. 3, Spring 2003, pp. 18–34.
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ISSN 1097–1467 / 2003 \$9.50 + 0.00.

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Rediscovering Republicanism in China

Beyond the Debate Between New Leftists and Liberals

Lack of a historical sense is the hereditary defect of philosophers. . . . So what is needed from now on is *historical philosophizing*, and with it the virtue of modesty.

—Nietzsche¹

Nietzsche once said that philosophers should think like crabs, moving backwards. I shall begin with the current debate between New Leftists and Liberals,² which started in the 1990s in China, and will then move backward to

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This article is a revision of a paper presented at the conference on political philosophy Ethics, in China held at the Centre for Philosophy, Ethics, and Public Affairs at the University of St. Andrews on June 22, 2002. The author has incorporated excerpts from his comments on Xu Youyu's paper at an earlier conference at the University of Oxford. David Archard at St Andrews offered illuminating remarks, while Nicholas Bunnin at Oxford provided intellectual support and insightful comments. The author thanks Merle Goldman for her continuing support and for inviting him to present the paper at Harvard's Fairbank Center, and Joseph Fewsmith, who offered helpful remarks as a discussant. Participants at the two conferences and the Fairbank Center—especially Peter Perdue, Liu Xun, He Gaochao, Carine Defoort, Kimberly Hutchings, Liu Xin, Nick Rengger, Cao Tianyu, and Zhu Yuelin—offered feedback. The author also thanks Anna Sun, "my best editor," for her suggested revisions; Cui Zhiyuan and Xu Youyu for their intellectual openness, generosity, and friendship; and Robert Bellah, Lin Chun, and John Comaroff for their written comments. (Several important questions they raised have not been dealt with due to lack of space.) Finally, special thanks to Richard Bernstein for having taught the author to take seriously Hannah Arendt's thoughts on democracy and power.

Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and his republicanism. One of the main arguments of this article is that the debate is really a sign that the two traditions of Chinese republicanism returned in the 1990s. I shall deal with the debate as a response to Xu Youyu's article included in this issue of *Contemporary Chinese Thought*.³ The issues of the debate are extremely wide ranging; this article is limited to those that concern the nature of Chinese society today and the causes of social injustice. This article owes much to Xu's insights and arguments; indeed, it is part of an ongoing dialogue with Xu, which I hope will continue in the future.

Xu has been one of the major spokespersons of the Liberals in China. He has also engaged in many quarrels with New Leftists. As far as I know, Xu may be the only one from the Liberal camp who has quarreled with almost all of the leading figures from the other camp: Cui Zhiyuan, Gan Yang, Liu He (Lydia Liu), Lu Jiande, and Wang Hui. Xu's paper provides an insider's account of the debate. His paper has three sections: The first gives a brief discussion of the seven issues that he thinks are at the center of the debate; the last two provide his account of why liberalism and the New Left emerged in the 1990s.

Xu's account of the debate has its strengths; his voice is reflective, analytic, and reasonable. Nevertheless, reflectivity and reasonableness have their limits. Let me use an analogy to illustrate the point. When a friend and I, both reflective and reasonable persons, have intense arguments over some first-order issues, our quarrels often follow the following pattern: We end up disagreeing about each other's second-order account of the original debate. Our calm and objective reflections on our original debate are simply continuations of that debate; they cannot settle our first-order disagreements. Very often, a third party's account will not do, either. We will both disagree with the third party's account and challenge its "neutrality." Similarly, I think Xu's account of the debate is, naturally and justifiably, a continuation of his debate with the New Left. We should expect that someone from the New Left camp would give a very different account.

I am not an active participant in the original debate. This fact does not imply that my account is neutral, or that both sides would agree with it. But I think there are indeed times when both sides misidentify the disagreements, and hence speak past each other. My goal is to clarify what the disagreements really are, especially which ones are *false* disagreements (those caused by confusions), which ones are *real* disagreements (those that will remain after we explain away the false ones) and, most importantly, what might be the common ground for a future agreement. My goal here is not really to provide a history of the debate. This is why I shall try to read each side most charitably and in its best light. In some sense, my reading of, say, the Liber-

als' positions, is really what I think Liberals should have held, had they presented their positions in their most coherent version. So I shall not take into account the extreme positions on both sides. In fact, if one focuses on the extreme positions on each side, it would seem that there would never be any possible agreement. As I shall argue, both sides should actually see themselves as representing two subtraditions of one common tradition, the Chinese tradition of civic republicanism.

False Disagreement: China as a Rusty Iron Key with a Leather Strap Attached

Xu lists seven issues that are at the center of the debate. I shall focus on the first and the third on his list, which are about the "market economy and social injustice" and the "analysis of the internal condition of China." They are really issues concerning social and political diagnoses of present-day China: What is the nature of China today? What are the causes of social injustice in China? What is to be done?

I shall argue that, in his article, Xu has actually given two conflicting accounts of the debate regarding these issues. I shall talk about the first in this section and the second in the next. According to Xu's first account, one side claims that China is *a*, and the other believes that China is *b*. More specifically, the New Leftists claim that today's China is a capitalist society, and that the cause of social injustice is global capitalism and the market. The Liberals, on the other hand, think that the nature of today's China is political dictatorship and that this dictatorship is the true cause of social injustice.⁴

It seems that there is something to the views of both sides, which is another way of saying that each is too one-sided. Although I cannot give any concrete evidence here, I want to suggest that China is full of hybridities, contradictions, conflicts, and tensions. Both sides seem to assume that the reality of today's China has to be exclusively one thing through and through, and that there can be only one cause of social injustice. This debate reminds me of the debate between the two kinsmen in a story from Miguel de Cervantes's novel *Don Quixote*, which has been made famous by Hume. Two kinsmen of Sancho disagree on the taste of a cask of wine. One insists it has a taste of leather, the other a taste of metal. When they have finally drunk their way to the bottom of the cask, they find a rusty iron key with a leather strap attached.

So it seems to me that the Liberals who hold the view that China is *a*, and the New Leftists who hold the view that China is *b*, are both half right and half wrong; and this is because China is really *a + b*. And the source of their error is their shared "kinsman of Sancho"-type assumption that China has to be exclusively one thing, and that social injustice in China has just one single cause.

Simple Inequality: Economic Inequality

Xu has cited some New Leftist writings to support his account of the debate. But some other New Leftists, as well as some Liberals, might protest that Xu's account does not apply to their views because they do not make the "kinsman of Sancho"-type assumption. The New Leftists would actually disagree with Xu's way of presenting capitalism and political dictatorship as two isolated and independent elements, and argue that it is the mixture of the two that is the main cause of social injustice.

As mentioned earlier, we can actually find two accounts in Xu's paper, and the second account does not ascribe to either side the "kinsman" assumption. In this account, Xu seems to acknowledge that capitalism is also part of Chinese reality, when he says:

I do not say that we should not criticize the evils of money and capital. On the contrary, it is very important to see that another form of oppression and inequality has emerged through the power of money or capital.

Also, "*in addition to the political evil of dictatorship another oppressive evil and social injustice had emerged through the power of money or capital*" (emphasis added). I think it is reasonable to assume that this second account of the debate should be Xu's real view, or what he should have been holding.

As I shall argue, the real disagreement between Liberals and New Leftists is really about how to understand this "new form of oppression and inequality" and what the remedies should be. I shall have to clarify the issue step by step. But let me begin by putting the disagreement very bluntly first and adding the qualifications later. For the Liberals, the old form of oppression is *political* dictatorship, and what is new is that we now have an *economic* form of oppression and inequality—that is, economic inequality, the gap between the haves and have-nots.

Some New Leftists may agree with this analysis, although the main concern of many New Leftists is something else. In fact, the Chinese New Left has some of the same concerns as the Western New Left. We can formulate the main concern in terms of the distinction between "simple inequality" (economic inequality) and "complex inequality" (domination) made by Michael Walzer in his book *Spheres of Justice*.⁵ For both the Western and the Chinese New Left, in addition to economic inequality, which is simple inequality within the economic sphere, there is another kind of inequality, which is complex inequality or domination across different spheres of justice. As we know, the extremely rich can go beyond the economic sphere and dominate other spheres, such as the media or political campaigns. Complex inequality is a form of social injustice that is based on economic inequality.

Theoretically, of course, there is no necessary connection between the two. For example, we may tolerate simple inequality in the economic sphere, as long as the extremely rich, who dominate the economic sphere, do not dominate and control the other spheres. This rarely happens, however. In reality, domination across spheres often constitutes new forms of social injustice in addition to simple inequality. Social injustice takes many forms; that is why we should be concerned not only with simple inequality, but also with domination. The next section says more about the specific forms it takes in China, and why this domination makes the situation much worse.

Complex Inequality: Domination

Xu uses the terms “economic inequality” and “capitalist exploitation” interchangeably when he talks about the new form of oppression and inequality. But it is not clear whether he means the same thing by these two terms. If we assume that he does, then we can say that, for Xu, economic inequality depends on political dictatorship:

The key point is whether this new form of oppression and inequality has replaced the old form, and whether it is independent of the old form. We must determine whether the fundamental problem of China is political dictatorship or capitalist exploitation. We must also determine the relationship between these two evils. I think that the main problem is political dictatorship, and that in China capitalist exploitation depends on political dictatorship.

Xu does not elaborate on this passage. One possible way to make sense of it is to read “political dictatorship” as meaning “political power dominating the economic sphere.” Xu then seems to be saying that this expansion of the political dictatorship to the economic sphere is really the *new* form of oppression and inequality. And this is why political dictatorship, not economic inequality, is the main problem.

By “political dictatorship,” Xu could also mean “*corrupt* political power dominating the economic sphere.” In fact, in other places, Xu talks about how the managers of the state-owned factories and the “power-holders” (*zhang quan zhe*) used their bureaucratic and judicial power to turn public property into their own private property through the process of “marketization” in the 1990s.⁶ Xu also uses several popular phrases such as *quanqian jiaoyi* (exchange of power and money) and *fubai* (corruption) to describe this problem.⁷ So Xu seems to share the New Left’s view that the peculiar mixture of power and money, the domination of the few power-holders over all spheres of justice, is a main cause of social injustice and

corruption. The following observation made by Wang Hui, a leading figure of the New Left, is shared by everyone:

[M]embers of the political elite or their families directly participate in economic activity and have become agents for large corporations and industries. . . . In China, political and economic elites have been completely conflated, and they participate in international economic activity. The worst scandals in the economic sphere exposed thus far have all involved top-level bureaucrats and their dependents.⁸

The issue of domination is indeed the New Left's major concern. For example, according to Wang, one of our main concerns should be "the large-scale privatization of state property that already has been completed in Russia and is well under way in China,"⁹ and that the process is controlled by the few power holders without democratic process and restraint. Wang also argues that economic liberalism's (or what he calls "neo-liberalism") theory of privatization and marketization has become an ideology that justifies the few power holders' domination and corruption, and that "political democracy is necessary so that the few can be prevented from becoming the exclusive beneficiaries of privatization."¹⁰

So the concerns we all have (and should have) are social injustice that takes the form of not only income inequality, but also domination or "complex inequality"—the domination of corrupt bureaucratic and judicial power over the market, as well as the domination of capital over bureaucratic and judicial spheres. One could also use the phrase "the marketization of all spheres of justice" to describe the phenomenon.

Real Disagreement

So it appears that Liberals and New Leftists have the same concern. The real disagreement seems to be that they have different remedies. For New Leftist (or *some* New Leftists, at least), the solution is democracy, even though it is not always clear what they mean by "democracy." Liberals, on the other hand, believe that marketization is the solution:

The Liberals maintain that the injustice arises because the market in China has not broken free from the control of the old system of power and is not mature and appropriately regulated. For them, the way out is to develop and consummate the market economy. . . . [We need to] expel political power from the market. (Xu Youyu [*Ziyou di yan shuo*])

Here I believe that we should ask these crucial questions: How is this process of marketization supposed to be accomplished, given the reality that it is

the corrupt power-holders who are doing the marketization? How could marketization be the solution, given that “marketization” in China is really “the exchange of power and money?”

To put the question more directly: Who would have power to expel those corrupt power-holders? The Liberals would say that the answer is the rule of law: “We need to establish the rule of law and to complete a system of law, for example, to protect legitimate private property by means of amending and supplementing the existing constitution, to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor by means of legislation, to punish and rectify corruption by law” (ibid.).

I agree that an independent judicial system, when established, would have the power to regulate the marketization and the market. We also need democratic institutions and procedures. Nevertheless, as the Liberals would certainly acknowledge, our predicament is that there are a lot of corrupt power holders in our existing judicial system and “democratic” institutions, as well. The “rule of law” and “democracy” remain slogans today, and have not yet achieved real institutional power.

The point here is that the rule of law and democratic procedure are not really the solution to *our problem*. For our problem is not really about whether the rule of law and democratic procedure will work, *if* they are established. Our problem is how to establish them in China today.

A historical analogy may be helpful here. Our situation is, structurally, very similar to the situation before the civil rights movement in the United States. To say that civil rights legislation was the best solution did not really provide an answer to the problem of racial discrimination and segregation. For the problem was not whether a civil rights act would work, but rather how to force the people who dominated American society to pass a civil rights act, how to enforce the existing laws (e.g., the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown vs. the Board of Education*) in the white-dominated South.

Similarly, in our case, the crucial question is really the following: Where can we find the power to expel corrupt power holders from the political, judicial, economic, and all the other spheres in China today? Would the “individuals who have negative liberties” be able to do it? As atomized individuals in a modern mass society, they have hardly any power. How could they possibly become powerful? By asking these questions, we can clearly see that, when the question is about how to establish and maintain fair and democratic judicial institutions, the Chinese Liberals cannot provide an answer, because they can only talk about “individual citizens with negative rights” and an “independent judicial system that protects the negative rights of individual citizens.” The Chinese neoliberals’ utilitarian individualist notion of “economic animals or consumers that act according to their rational self-interest” is even more impoverished.

The problem is that the Chinese Liberals do not have a strong republican notion of citizens who are not just rights-holders, but also active participants in democratic institution building, democratic deliberations, and social movements. There is no concept of citizens who have republican virtues, citizens whose concerns extend beyond individual rights to the public and common good. I agree with Liberals that representative democracy is desirable; and also, just for the sake of argument, that representative democracy might be able to work without citizens who have republican virtues. However, to repeat the point, *our problem in China today* is really about how to establish representative democracy, and this seems to require a much stronger conception of citizens. It seems that *in our situation* we do need citizens who can generate power to establish new democratic institutions.

That is to say, what is really missing in the Chinese Liberals is a republican concept of power that can counter the domination by bureaucratic and judicial power, as well as domination by the power of capital. This is reflected in the fact that, whenever the Liberals use the phrase “political power” or “power,” they always mean “bureaucratic and judicial power.” I shall call a power that can counter complex inequality “complex power.” As we shall see in the next section, we can find a concept of complex power in Chinese republicanism, from which Chinese liberalism is historically derived.

The language of negative rights not only has difficulty describing domination or complex inequality as a problem, but can also be used to argue against doing anything about it, if one takes these rights as absolute. One example to illustrate this point is the debate about campaign finance reform in the United States. Some have argued against this reform by saying that it would infringe the First Amendment’s absolute protection of freedom of speech; one’s freedom of speech would be violated if legislation limited the amount of money that one can donate to political parties, because such donations are a way to express one’s political views. However, many liberals in the United States acknowledge that there is a tension between the value of freedom of speech and the value of complex equality, and insist that neither value is absolute and that we should try to strike a balance between them.

To summarize, the real issue for both Chinese Liberals and New Leftists is where to find the complex power to counter the corrupt powers that have come to dominate all spheres of justice in China. I think that the Liberals have mistakenly confined their debate with the New Leftists to the issue of simple inequality. When they mention the issue of domination and corruption, their solution often presupposes the existence of uncorrupt legal and democratic institutions that are not available in China today. Further, they are not aware that founding and maintaining these institutions requires complex power. We shall

see in the next section that Chinese republicanism, from which Chinese liberalism is derived, has a much richer language of power.

Liang Qichao's *Quan* as a Republican Concept of Complex Power

We can find a concept of complex power in what I shall call the “Chinese tradition of civic republicanism,” by which I mean a discourse that existed in a period extending before and after the founding of the Republic of China in 1911. I borrow the term “civic republicanism” from Robert Bellah and his coauthors in their book *Habits of the Heart*. They argue that one can find four languages or traditions in America: utilitarian individualism, expressive individualism, biblical religion, and civic republicanism. They blame most of the problems in the United States on the predominance of the two strands of radical individualism; they also argue that Americans should draw upon their civic republicanism to deal with these problems.¹¹

Liang Qichao was one of the leaders of the republican movement, and was its main theorist and propagandist.¹² Like the classical republicanism in Europe and the civic republicanism in America, Chinese republicanism has two closely related aspects: liberty and democracy. The fundamental principle of its liberal aspect is that sovereign power must always be limited by constitutional and legal norms that protect citizens' rights. Its basic democratic aspect is that sovereignty consists not in the emperor but in the citizens, who have the power not to be dominated. These dual aspects of republicanism are conceptually connected in a way that prevents a theory from being republican if either aspect is missing. For a republican, a popular social movement without a constitutional framework is not democracy. Democracy without liberty is not true democracy; similarly, liberty without power is not real liberty or freedom in Hannah Arendt's sense. As Arendt put it:

Power and freedom belonged together. . . . Conceptually speaking, political freedom did not reside in the *I-will*, but in the *I-can*.¹³

Liang Qichao's concept of *quan* has often been translated as “rights.” However, for Liang, *quan* meant both “rights” and “power.”¹⁴ The double meaning reflects the fact that Liang's republicanism does have the dual aspects of liberty and democracy. Here, I translate *quan* as “power” because it is very similar to Arendt's concept of “power.”¹⁵ Liang's concept of power was intimately connected with his concept of associations (*qun* and *hui*). Isolated individuals alone do not have power; but they will generate power when they form associations and act together. Similarly, for Arendt, power was generated when people act together in public spheres. She said: “Power

springs up between men when they act together, and vanishes the moment they disperse.”¹⁶ For both Arendt and Liang, when people act together, they can even have the power to found a new republic, and thereby make history.¹⁷ Of course, a group of morally suspect people can also generate power when they act together.¹⁸ So I should emphasize that the concept of complex power is not exactly a moral concept, but a “distinctively political” one, in the sense Bernard Williams defines.¹⁹

Contrary to the misconception of commentators, Arendt did not think that power operates only in the moment of “founding” a republic. Both Liang and Arendt believed that power can operate in different periods and on several levels, certainly on both national and local levels. Power, in their view, should also be capable of countering “bureaucratic and judicial power” after a republic is born. Both emphasized the importance and necessity of local associations as mediation. Liang talked of associations on all levels, and Arendt’s favorite example was the New England township meetings, which are local. Another favorite example of Arendt’s was the historical analogy we mentioned earlier, the civil rights movement in the United States. It was based on, and was mediated by, the local black churches and other voluntary associations, which eventually led to the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This is another example to show that, to establish and maintain new liberal institutions and laws, we need to form associations and act together. In fact, Arendt argued that the social movements in the 1960s should be understood as a continuation of the American tradition of civil associations that was made famous by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*.²⁰ We also need to understand social movements in the history of modern China in the context of the Chinese tradition of republicanism; and such an understanding would not be complete if it does not include Liang Qichao’s republican concept of complex power.

Rediscovering Chinese Republicanism

It is unfortunate that the Chinese Liberals trace the history of Chinese liberalism back only to the nonrepublican Liberals such as Hu Shi and Yin Haiguang, who were active in the 1930s and 1940s in mainland China, and in the 1950s and 1960s in Taiwan. There is a complex history of how Chinese republicanism split into two traditions in the twentieth century: non-democratic liberalism and nonliberal democracy. As Maurizio Viroli showed, classical republicanism in the West has gone through a structurally similar process. Viroli argued that the transformation of Western classical republicanism into the two traditions of liberalism and democracy should not be praised, but lamented.²¹

There is also an unfortunate historical fact that might explain the Chinese

Liberals' distrust of the republican concept of power. The tradition of democracy in China, unlike its Western counterpart, was completely separated from liberalism during the Cultural Revolution. Democracy was given a bad name by so-called *da minzhu* (Big Democracy). "Big Democracy" was practiced outside constitutional boundaries, with neither rule of law nor civil liberties providing constitutional restraints. There were indeed great violations of the constitution and basic individual rights (see Gu Su's article, in this issue). In addition, Big Democracy was mass democracy; it was not mediated by local civil associations that had already existed for some time.

For the New Leftists, China today is very similar to, if not worse than, China on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. The problem is still the problem of domination and corruption; one may not share such a bleak assessment, but one should share their worry about the ecological and human costs of unregulated capitalism.²² Regrettably, New Leftists also fail to trace their democratic tradition back to Chinese republicanism. Some of them stop with a romanticized interpretation of Big Democracy.

It is fair to say that liberalism was completely repressed during the Cultural Revolution. Xu was an esteemed scholar and critic of the Cultural Revolution; his writings on the dark side of the Cultural Revolution emphasized the fundamental necessity of the rule of law and constitutionalism. I think that Xu was right to worry that the New Leftists tend to overlook these important lessons; but I also believe that the conclusion should not be "Just say no to any social movement," but rather that social movements have to be mediated by local civil associations, and framed by the rule of law and constitutionalism.²³ Chinese Liberals should recognize that the Chinese democratic tradition, which the New Leftists have tried to revive, cannot be easily dismissed, and that what the debate is really about is how to work out democracy's appropriate place in a just social order, and how "considerations about democracy and justice are or should be mutually related."²⁴

This is an issue for Western liberals to resolve as well. In fact, it is an issue that did not get much attention among Western liberals until quite recently. Ian Shapiro observed in 1994 that there is a disjunction between most of the writings on democratic theory since the World War II, and the voluminous literature on distributive justice spawned by John Rawls's 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*.²⁵ Chinese Liberals tend to focus on Rawls's version of liberalism and overlook the theorists, who attempt to make liberalism more democratic and more political. Some critics of Rawls such as Bernard Williams, Chantal Mouffe, and John Gray, have argued that Rawls's "theory of justice" is not "democratic" enough, and that his later work *Political Liberalism* is not "political" enough. Or, some may even argue that Rawls's later account is not

“political” at all. To put it in Williams’s words, “The later account still represents the political conception as itself a moral conception.”²⁶

Shapiro argued that, in Rawls’s theory, rights of democratic participation are protected by his first principle of justice; therefore, Rawls was less responsible for the inattention to democracy than are many of his successors.²⁷ Shapiro offered the following description of these successors:

Many of their arguments seem to take it for granted that there is a correct answer to the question, what principles of justice ought we to affirm; that Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, Amartya Sen, or someone else will eventually get it right. On this understanding, tensions between proffered accounts of justice and the requirements of democratic politics can comfortably be thought of as *problems of implementation to be worried about later* or by others.²⁸

This description seems to apply to Chinese Liberals as well. In fact, the situation becomes worse in the case of China. As we have argued, our problem is about how to establish democratic institutions, as well as complex power, to enforce the liberal principle of justice. That is to say, part of our problem in China now is the problem of implementation that cannot be worried about later. Chinese Liberals thus need to take democratic theories much more seriously.

Beyond the Debate

I am not suggesting that Western traditions of republicanism and Western theories of democracy are the only intellectual source for Chinese Liberals. In fact, we could and should try to rediscover the Chinese republican tradition of democracy, which had been repressed many times since the founding of the Republic in 1911. For example, the democratic tradition was universally attacked after the end of the Cultural Revolution, especially in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The Cultural Revolution became known simply as “ten years of chaos” (*shinian dongluan*). I think the New Leftists should agree with the Liberals’ criticism of “Big Democracy.” They should take the Cultural Revolution much more seriously; it is a good place to start understanding under what conditions power might become violence or terror. On the other hand, I also believe that the Liberals should acknowledge that the Cultural Revolution was partly motivated by the democratic ideal, even though the ideal was manifested in that period in an unmediated and perverted form.

They should also acknowledge that the ideal of democracy continued to manifest itself after the end of the Cultural Revolution and continued to be repressed. It seems that the Chinese Liberals would agree that the 1979 Xidan Democracy Wall movement (*Xidan minzhu qiang yundong*), the first challenge to the Communist Party dictatorship since the end of the Cultural

Revolution, was at least partly inspired by the democratic ideal of the Cultural Revolution. (This is not to deny that there also emerged new ideals—such as human rights—that were the result of reflections on the Cultural Revolution.) In fact, its practice of putting up “big character posters” in a public space came directly from the Cultural Revolution, even though some of the contents of the posters are new ideals (such as human rights). I believe the Liberals would agree that the Communist Party is fully aware that, when people gather in a public space, they can generate power to challenge party domination. It is precisely for this reason that the party immediately cracked down the Xidan Democracy Wall movement. The same can be said about the party’s suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen movement. Interestingly enough, the party actually accused the students of attempting to create another “chaos” (*dongluan*). The party has consistently used the rhetoric of *shinian wenge dongluan* (ten-year Cultural Revolution of chaos) to suppress any democratic movement.

The pattern of the history of the two traditions of Chinese republicanism is a cycle of suppression and rebirth. In this sense, we should be glad to see that two groups of people have once again tried to revive these two traditions. Therefore, the rise of liberalism and the rise the New Left in the 1990s should really be seen as the return of the repressed. Both parties should transcend the debate by recognizing that the debate is really about how to work out democracy’s appropriate place in a liberal social order, recognizing that what has been repressed is not their own tradition alone, but rather Chinese republicanism, the common tradition from which each is derived.

I understand that this debate has been very intense and emotional. Many people do not take disputes within the debate as conflicts between political opponents; they take it personally. The debate has certainly produced the largest number of ex-friends among Chinese intellectuals. However, I think that we should make the distinction between personal and political friendships, which is the most important wisdom of classic republicanism. If indeed personal friends could become political enemies, as in the case of Caesar and Brutus, then personal enemies could also become political friends. Liberals and New Leftists should go beyond this debate and form political alliances, or better, associations. Perhaps there is still hope that Chinese republicanism as a whole may return some day.

Notes

1. Cited by Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. vii.
2. The labels “liberalism” and the “New Left” are misleading. By this I do not just

mean that the terms refer to different things in different societies (a point Xu Youyu also made). My main objection to the labels is that each term covers extremely divergent views, even in China. For example, under the label “liberals,” we find not only those who hold a Rawlsian liberal egalitarianism (or a version of liberal socialism as described in Liu Xin’s article, in this issue), but also those “economic liberals” who believe in a neoliberalism that regards the global market as the solution to all problems, and those who make the notorious argument that corruption is necessary and justified. However, not all liberals are economic liberals or neoliberals. Some other liberals are also critical of economic liberals. On the other hand, “New Leftist” covers not only people with extreme positions, such as those who actually call themselves Maoists and want to have another revolution in China, but also people who call themselves “New Deal liberals,” and refuse to use the “Liberal” and “New Leftist” labels. This makes it impossible to judge people’s positions on certain issues based on what label they themselves, or others, have put on. For practical reasons, I shall still use the labels in this paper. But please keep in mind that when I say, for example, “Liberals believe . . .,” I always mean “some Liberals believe. . . .” What I say about either side will not apply to everyone on each side. Finally, one should not assume that liberalism and the New Left are the only intellectual currents, and that the debate between them is the only one in China since the 1990s. For a perceptive study of several important debates in the 1990s, see Joseph Fewsmith, *China Since Tiananmen: The Politics of Transition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). I am grateful to Merle Goldman for drawing my attention to this book.

3. I shall also refer to Xu’s other papers collected in his *Ziyou de yanshuo* (Discourse on Freedom) (Changchun: Changchun, 1999).

4. See his article in this issue

5. *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

6. Xu, *Ziyou de yanshuo*, pp. 259–60.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 259, 285.

8. Wang Hui, “Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity,” in *Whither China? Intellectual Politics in Contemporary China*, ed. Xudong Zhang (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 185.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 183. Neoliberalism, domination, and democracy are the main themes of Wang’s writings. See also articles in *Sihuo chongwen* (Beijing: Renmin, 2000). Many other New Leftists have written on these themes. Representative writings include: Gan Yan, “Debating Liberalism and Democracy in China in the 1990s,” in *Whither China?*; Chen Yangu, “Lishi de zhongjie haishi quanmian minzhu?” (End of History or Radical Democracy), in *Zhishi fenzi lichang* (Intellectuals’ Positions), vol. 3, ed. Li Shitao (Shidai wenyi, 2000), pp. 232–38; and Cui Zhiyuan, “Hunhe xianfa yu dui Zhongguo zhengzhi de sanceng fenxi” (“Mixed Constitution” and the Three-Layer Analysis of Chinese Politics), in *Zhishi fenzi lichang*, vol. 3, pp. 528–38. The New Left’s critique of the ideology of globalization and the myth of development should also be understood in terms of domination. Their concern is that globalization without democracy could lead to the domination of giant transnational corporations; hence, we should be critical of the ideology of development, which is that we should develop at all cost. The New Leftists (at least, some of them) are not against development *per se*; they are against “backward capitalist development,” which will lead the destruction of the environment (see the quotation from Chen Yangu, cited by Xu).

11. Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, updated edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). I cannot talk here about the similarities and differences between the Chinese and American traditions of civic republicanism.

12. Liang Qichao was well known for changing his position too often. Before the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, Liang was torn between republicanism and liberal monarchy (monarchical constitutionalism). In this paper, I focus on Liang's thoughts during his republican phases.

13. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1965), p. 148.

14. For more detailed discussion, see my paper, "Liang Qichao's Social and Political Philosophy," in *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Chung-ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

15. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); *On Revolution*; and *The Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972).

16. Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 200.

17. This is one of the main theses of Liang's historicism, and Liang's historicism is actually part of his republicanism. In the original version of this article, I also argued that the debate is a sign that historicism has returned; but I lack room to include this part of that paper here. There is also a complicated history of the cycles of the suppression and rebirth of historicism in China. In fact, the quarrel between New Leftists and Liberals over history was anticipated by the "historicism vs. class analysis" debate in the 1950s and early 1960s in China. We should draw upon this intellectual source for our "historical philosophizing," in addition to Western historicism, which is best represented in the field of Chinese studies by the works that have adopted what Paul Cohen calls a "China-centered" approach. These works are the main intellectual source for the historicism of the Chinese New Leftists.

18. For example, a group of SUV drivers in Beijing has formed an "Association of SUV Lovers," and have fought for the right to drive in certain environmentally protected areas where automobiles are forbidden. I thank Liu Xun for this example.

19. Williams argues that political philosophy is not just applied moral philosophy, nor is it a branch of legal philosophy; and that, "In particular, political philosophy must use *distinctively political* concepts, such as power, and its normative relative, legitimation" ("From Freedom to Liberty: The Construction of a Political Value," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30 [1] [2001], p. 5); emphasis added. Williams's concept of power is not exactly the same as Liang's; but both concepts are distinctively political. Williams is referring to the positions of John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin; the former takes political philosophy as a branch of moral philosophy, the latter a branch of legal philosophy. This non-political feature of their approaches becomes more problematic when one's subject is how to establish a liberal democratic regime. Both Rawls and Dworkin made it very clear that their theories are designed for regimes that are already liberal democracies. The influence of Rawls and Dworkin on the Chinese Liberals might partly explain Chinese Liberals' lack of interests in distinctively political conceptions such as power.

20. See Arendt's essay on civil disobedience, which is included in *The Crises of the Republic*. I have discussed Arendt's essay elsewhere (*Zhexue pinglun* 1 [1] [1993], pp. 231–58). Obviously, an Arendtian concept of complex power is very different from Foucault's concept of power. The Chinese New Leftists tend to draw upon Foucault as one of their most important intellectual sources; this might be the reason why they do

not formulate their position in terms of complex power. But some have seen the affinities between their position and Arendt's; see *Wenhua yu gonggongxing* (Culture and Public Spheres), ed. Wang Hui and Chen Yangu (Beijing: Sanlian, 1998). Gan Yang has emphasized the importance of Tocqueville's democratic liberalism; see his paper, "Debating Liberalism and Democracy in China in the 1990s." Another group that is fully aware of how power can be generated when people form associations and act together is the Chinese Communist Party, which started with a voluntary association of a dozen intellectuals, who had been greatly impressed by the republican concept of power. It should not be a surprise that, while the party has allowed an increasing degree of freedom of speech and academic freedom since the 1990s, it sticks to its strict policy of not tolerating any voluntary political associations; it has cracked down on the Chinese Democratic Party, several independent labor unions, and any organizations that could potentially challenge its power (such as the Falun Gong).

21. *Republicanism*, translated from the Italian by Antony Shugaar (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

22. I think that the following passage from Ian Shapiro's essay captures the Chinese New Left's concern, even though he wrote it before the rise of the Chinese New Left in the late 1990s: "As the tendency to equate democracy and freedom with markets and capitalism gathers momentum in the East, many who are fully persuaded of the defects of centrally planned systems, but worried by the ecological and human costs of unregulated capitalism, are troubled by the implications: the possibility that failed socialist systems turning to regimes of private accumulation might end up with the worst of both worlds" ("Three Ways to Be a Democrat," *Political Theory* 22 [1] [February 1994], p. 124).

23. This does not mean that people cannot use civil disobedience as a means to achieve their political goals as long as it is "civil" disobedience. On the contrary, civil disobedience can be easily justified within constitutional liberalism, as Rawls argued in his *Theory of Justice*. Rawls also specified the conditions under which an act of disobedience can be said to be civil and justifiable in a liberal democratic regime. The urgent issues for us are how civil disobedience is possible in a China that is not yet a liberal democratic society; how we can prevent civil disobedience from becoming mob violence in a China that is becoming a modern mass society of consumers; and how we can distinguish civil disobedience from civil blackmail. I have touched on the issues elsewhere; see my essay on Rawls's theory of civil disobedience (*Zhexue pinglun* 1 [1] [1993], pp. 231–58).

24. I'm borrowing Shapiro's formulation ("Three Ways to Be a Democrat," p. 125).

25. *Ibid.*

26. "From Freedom to Liberty," p. 5. For Chantal Mouffe's critique, see *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community* (New York: Verso, 1992); *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (New York: Verso, 1999); and *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000). For John Gray's critique, see *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), especially the chapter on agonistic liberalism. Chinese Liberals have paid much attention to another group of critics of Rawls—that is, the communitarians. But they tend to focus on the nondemocratic, conservative, and right-wing Aristotelian communitarians, not the republican, liberal, and left-wing Aristotelian ones such as Robert Bellah and his colleagues.

27. "Three Ways to Be a Democrat," pp. 147–48. Joshua Cohen has made a similar argument, which is that Rawls's democratic political regime is actually a requirement of his conception of justice as fairness; see Cohen's paper "For a Democratic Society," in *Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2002). But Cohen also admitted that justice as fairness is not a theory of democracy, and said little about the process of democratic politics. I think Rawls could be read as even more democratic than Cohen's interpretation allows. Somehow, Cohen did not discuss Rawls's theory of civil disobedience, which I believe is the most democratic part of *Theory of Justice*. Regrettably, Chinese Liberals do not pay much attention to Rawls's theory of civil disobedience, either.

28. "Three Ways to Be a Democrat," p. 125; emphasis added.

