

Working with China to Promote Democracy

China represents an uncomfortable thorn in U.S. efforts to promote democracy around the world. While some projects have been successful, a large gap exists between the increasing U.S. funding in China and its “limited impact.”¹ Moreover, U.S. democracy promotion in China has contributed to strategic distrust between China and the United States; Beijing perceives it as a strategic move to destabilize the rise of China and sabotage the Communist Party’s leadership.² At the same time, China’s growing power while maintaining one-party rule and rejecting democratic change generates fear and distrust among many Americans.

The scholarship on U.S. democracy promotion is largely and understandably dominated by U.S. scholars with U.S. perspectives. Chinese officials’ and scholars’ responses and perspectives are, however, often overlooked, particularly by democracy-promotion professionals, and are largely omitted from literature on the subject. This paper attempts to understand how the complex and multilayered U.S. democracy-promotion program in China has contributed to this strategic distrust. It examines China’s responses to U.S. democracy promotion and explains the confrontational dynamic between Washington and Beijing. The paper also explores whether and how Beijing and Washington can create mutual trust rather than suspicions. Some skeptics may consider this naïve, but on historical and political grounds it is actually a realistic possibility.

The author is the Chair in International Studies at Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia, and has published four single-authored English books and three Chinese books on various aspects of Chinese democratization. He can be reached at baogang.he@deakin.edu.au

Copyright © 2013 Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Washington Quarterly • 36:1 pp. 37–53
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751649>

China's Views and Experiences

Democracy promotion has been a central element of U.S. foreign policy since the end of World War II, though the degree to which it has been publicly emphasized has varied.³ Annual foreign operations appropriations for democracy programs in China grew from \$10 million in 2002 to approximately \$17 million in 2011, and for Tibet from about 4 million in 2004 to 7.4 million in 2010 (though they dropped to 5 million in 2011).⁴ China's historical perceptions of U.S. democracy promotion shape how China perceives these and other programs today.

John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State under the Eisenhower administration, crafted a global strategy of peaceful evolution in the 1950s that advocated peaceful transitions away from authoritarian, one-party-rule to a more pluralistic model. A recent study reveals that this idea actually contributed to Mao's Cultural Revolution. Historian Zi Shu has detailed that Mao reacted to Dulles' ideas by writing three comments on Dulles' speech in 1959.⁵ The first comment remarked that "[t]he United States . . . pursues a 'peaceful conquest strategy' of infiltration and subversion . . ." The second said Dulles' words "demonstrate that U.S. imperialists are attempting to restore capitalism in the Soviet Union by the method of corrupting it . . ." The third comment pointed out Dulles' contention that the abandonment of force did not mean the "maintenance of the status quo," but meant a peaceful "change."⁶ Mao subsequently waged a political campaign through the Cultural Revolution to prevent peaceful evolution from occurring in China.

Even more than two decades later, Chinese official Qi Fang examined the strategic changes in each U.S. president and blamed an enduring U.S. strategy based on peaceful evolution as a contributing factor to the 1989 student demonstration in Tiananmen Square and in other major cities, despite the fact that there was no democracy-promotion aid then.⁷ Qi Fang's book pointed a finger at the United States for Tiananmen, and was an official textbook for a political campaign against the United States' peaceful evolution.

From a U.S. perspective, however, it was China's retreat from democratization that damaged bilateral relations after 1989.⁸ Despite the initial expression of opprobrium by then-President George H.W. Bush following the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, and the consequent suspension of military sales and official visits to China, the administration subsequently softened its approach and adopted a more forgiving attitude, not making democracy promotion a major theme of U.S. foreign policy toward China during that administration.

Within a few short years, however, in a climate of Western excitement over various democratic governments emerging in post-Soviet, post-communist Eastern European nations, the Clinton administration elevated democracy

promotion abroad to initially become its overarching global foreign policy principle. Clinton in 1993 pursued a more aggressive human rights policy toward China, but quickly abandoned it. His push to rebuild Sino–U.S. relations for economic reasons led to his reversing course and granting Most Favored Nation (MFN) status to China in May 1994, separating human rights issues from trade. Consequently in 1997, Clinton and Jiang Zemin, then-General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, agreed upon a U.S.–China Rule of Law Initiative, which was at first blocked by the U.S. Congress but finally saw funding in 2002.⁹

Despite such short-lived instances of cooperation, Washington’s ongoing support of democracy in both Tibet and Hong Kong since 2004 has been a consistent source of tension, seen as a doorway to destabilizing mainland China.¹⁰ In particular, several democracy-promotion organizations set up their offices in Hong Kong to support labor protests and Chinese lawyers. Fudan University Professors Shen Benqiu and Ni Shixiong, for example, reinforced this view when they warned that the United States developed a plot late in the George W. Bush administration to create a “color revolution” in Hong Kong and use it to infiltrate mainland China.¹¹

That fear of the so-called color revolution, of course, spread in the wake of Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in 2004. The United States provided \$34 million to Ukraine in 2004, and Congress approved an extra \$60 million in 2005.¹² Since that time, Beijing has tightened control on all democracy-related programs and the Chinese media has highlighted the so-called “Bush doctrine,” that is, the emphasis on democratization and regime change which President Bush emphasized in his Second Inaugural address in 2005. Beijing viewed Bush’s proposal of an Asia Democracy Partnership (ADP)—consisting of Australia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Korea, and the United States to promote democracy in Asia—as a deliberate attempt to contain China and to challenge the “Chinese model” of economic development.¹³ Unlike the cooperative approach through the Law Initiative Project, U.S. support for village elections in China at the time of the color revolutions was viewed as a means to seek regime change. By contrast, in the eyes of Beijing, village democracy is designed to improve governing capacity, solve a number of problems, and stabilize local situations, but not to change the Party-dominated political system.¹⁴

The Obama administration has essentially continued the emphasis on U.S. democracy promotion in China. Although it initially softened its approach and

Beijing views village democracy as a way to improve governing capacity, not change the Party system.

publicly treated human rights as a secondary or minor issue in 2009 high-level official talks, in 2010 and 2011 Secretary of State Hillary Clinton criticized China publicly on the issue of internet freedom, while Obama met with the Dalai Lama and publicly declared that China should release imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo.¹⁵

Of course, the U.S. democracy aid program has generally been welcomed by many Chinese dissidents throughout this history. One exiled Chinese dissident, however, has argued that outsiders funding Chinese democracy is shameful for the Chinese people: Even if democracy were created, it would be a democracy bought with money, not genuine democracy. If all funding were cut off, he argues, this would force Chinese liberals to seek funding from the middle class, which would defuse security concerns and develop democracy indigenously, as it should be.¹⁶

The Scope of the Challenge

Before discussing Beijing's views of and specific responses to democracy-promotion programs, it is important to recognize that China's rise itself has inherently reshaped the basic conditions for Chinese democratization and poses a number of new challenges. More specifically, China's rise and growing economic strength distract policymakers' and media attention from the human rights issue, while its economic might shields it from international pressure when attention is placed on these issues.

First, China's economic rise has deflected international criticism of its human rights record, even while producing, according to scholar Minxin Pei, "an increasingly dangerous mix of crony capitalism, rampant corruption and widening inequality" that stunts political reforms and generates resistance to democratization.¹⁷ Recently, human rights issues have been given less importance during high-level official visits. In 1977 President Jimmy Carter presented Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev with a list of Soviet dissidents whom the United States demanded be released from prison. This strategy was also applied to China under the Clinton administration. Today, the U.S. president seldom directly demands the release of Chinese dissidents. Furthermore, Stanford professor Steve Krasner argues that democracy promotion is now merely a ritual element of bilateral talks and is only used symbolically to meet the demands of certain U.S. domestic constituencies. Human rights dialogue largely involves each side complaining and talking past the other.¹⁸

Second, China's sheer size makes the challenge of democratization much steeper. Three common approaches—dissident activism, free radio, and pressure from regional organizations—are ineffective in China's case.¹⁹ This is largely due to China's tough control over dissidents, mass media (as well as the

internet), and the absence of a regional democracy-promotion organization in Asia. Similarly, historical models to impose democracy—either through incorporation (Puerto Rico in 1917); invasion (Panama in 1989); or intimidation (Nicaragua in 1990)—are off the table with a country this size.²⁰

China's rise and economic might have also given it a strong capacity to resist international pressure such as sanctions. Experts Larry Diamond and Michael McFaul, among others, have noted that the principal methods the United States has utilized to promote democracy globally have generally involved either economic sanctions or increasingly aggressive and belligerent confrontation. Both approaches, however, have been rendered less and less feasible in Sino-U.S. relations over recent decades.²¹ China remains the largest foreign U.S. creditor, with its holdings of U.S. Treasury securities rising to \$1.17 trillion in 2011.²²

Scholar and visiting fellow at the Hoover Institute Ying Ma similarly argues that China appears immune to, and unmoved by, the wishes of the United States. U.S. democracy promotion—ranging from economic engagement to democracy programs to lofty rhetoric—has not halted the speed at which the Chinese authoritarian government presses on with grave human rights abuses.²³ In emphasizing the limits of U.S. influence, Tufts University professor of political science Tony Smith notes that “it is not obvious to me how a vigorous campaign in favor of human rights in China will interact with domestic forces there to bring about a favorable outcome. Indeed, I can easily imagine the opposite result.”²⁴

The success of the Chinese economy challenges the long-held assumption in neoliberal economic circles that market economies facilitate a liberal democracy.

Many Chinese believe the U.S. is using democracy to destabilize China and impede its rising.

Chinese Responses and Strategies

While China has proven resistant to democratic pressures, many Chinese believe that the United States is using democracy to destabilize China from rising. In a survey in the *Global Times*, 59 percent of the respondents believed that the United States is seeking to contain China, and 79 percent held negative views toward the United States in 2005–06.²⁵ To combat this external pressure, China responds to U.S. democracy promotion in several ways: it calls democracy promotion a conspiracy theory and infiltration campaign; it reinforces official ideology, even to the point of confrontational statements by high-powered

officials; it impedes NGOs in the country; and it “securitizes” democracy promotion.

Ultimately, China views U.S. democracy promotion as a strategic threat—some Chinese scholars even present it as a U.S. conspiracy to split China. In this view, the United States has a hidden plan for peaceful evolution in China, aiming to isolate it from Europe and elsewhere internationally, in part by consolidating U.S. moral leadership. It is widely acknowledged in China that the democracy project has cut to the core of China’s territorial integrity, with Bill Clinton supporting Tibet, George W. Bush supporting Taiwan, and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) supporting Xinjiang’s separatism. Similar projects undermined the power of the former Soviet Union in the past, and today are perceived as playing a parallel role in containing the rise of China.²⁶ Beijing claims to be able to see through the so-called human rights issue to its real objective: to frame and constrain China’s sovereignty, and to negotiate a better deal for the United States at the WTO or in bilateral business relations during China’s economic transition by highlighting China’s advantage in having a low human rights standard.²⁷

Of course, the United States denies this; in fact, even many Chinese citizens do not believe such an accusation. Writer Yu Shiyu, for example, argues that the current wave of Arab democracy is certainly not a “color revolution” planned by European and American governments. Beijing would do better to learn the real lesson of the Arab chaos: the masses’ hatred of the security forces and of elite corruption.²⁸ In views such as this, the United States has no plan of peaceful evolution anymore, and in fact it would be dangerous for the United States to pursue such a plan. Further, the democracy-promotion project is in China’s interest and does not undermine the country, but instead brings its human rights to an international standard.²⁹

Moreover, U.S. officials would say, China often reproduces the conspiracy theory as an excuse for not carrying out political reform. Some in China have even taken the conspiracy theory to its extreme, claiming that the United States (and the West in general) has an infiltration campaign in the country. In August 2006, Sheng Huaren, vice-chairman of the National People’s Congress, warned that hostile forces in the West used local elections as a spearhead for their infiltration of China, and he explicitly condemned any attempts at direct elections at the township level.³⁰ This blocked the spread of the Ya’an township elections to other parts of China. Also in 2006, the former Party secretary of Guangdong province, Zhang Dejiang, gave a talk to some members of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), warning that Hong Kong has been used by “hostile forces” to infiltrate China through the labor and “rightful resistance” movements.³¹ The public security apparatus has even displayed closed-door exhibitions to show how the United States infiltrates China.³²

University lecturers and students have been mobilized to carry out political studies on how to wage an anti-infiltration campaign, for example, against neo-liberalism.³³ These who go abroad to study often receive “political education” about Western “infiltration.”

These fears about the security of the state often coalesce into reinforcing official ideology. For example, Beijing has fought against the U.S. “peaceful evolution” strategy by establishing the Academy of Marxism Studies; meanwhile, the Universities of Guangzhou, Nankai, Fudan, Beijing, Renmin, Shandong, Shenzhen, and Hunan have established impressive new human rights research centers; and the Chinese government has sponsored the establishment of national institutes, including China’s Association of Human Rights Research and China’s Human Rights Development Foundation, two organizations which discuss a range of issues including human rights, security, harmony, economic development, cultural traditions, environment, and the information age. The Central Propaganda Department and the State Council’s media office also have coordinated resources and activities to deal with the U.S. human rights reports on China.³⁴

In an effort to renew Chinese official ideology, some anti-democracy groups have grown. For example, across universities, all undergraduates are required to study Marxism, and the teachers in this area have been offered more resources. These ideology-based institutions have a vested interest both in following the official ideological line (in order to justify the one-Party state and its policies) and in exaggerating the threat from the United States (so that they can obtain more funding). This is because the government favors the study of Marxism when allocating research funding and is able to match and even exceed outside funding when it offers grants to Chinese scholars. In this way, it can co-opt Chinese scholars, silence their critical voices, and reduce the influence of foreign democracy-promotion programs and organizations. Beijing has even adopted a new strategy of exposing the recipients of foreign funding; for example, it publicized how dissident Liu Junning received funding from Taiwan. In this way, it has attempted to destroy the reputation of dissidents.

Fang Ning, director of the Political Science Institute at CASS, has played an important role in defending and explaining the Chinese official ideology as one critical function of CASS. He argued strongly against U.S. democracy promotion in China, because he believes such a program actually inhibits Chinese democracy. Fang also added to the intellectual debate on the role of democracy in the rise of power. He remarked that the rise of Western power is a complex historical process, which included colonial plunder and even genocide. Many Western countries, such as France and Germany, have even experienced multiple periods of interruption to their parliamentary democracies throughout the course of their rise. According to Fang, the notions developed by U.S.

theorists of “democracy leading to a powerful country,” “democracy creating a wealthy country,” and “the rise of democracy” are fictions.³⁵

Reinforcing the official party line often comes from the very highest sources, and can lead to open confrontation between China and the United States. For example, the new Chinese president Xi Jinping once criticized U.S. democracy promotion and intervention: Xi, during his visit to Mexico on February 11, 2009, gave a speech to local overseas Chinese that harshly criticized foreign intervention. He warned that “[t]here are a few foreigners, with full stomachs, who have nothing better to do than try to be backseat drivers of our country’s own affairs. China does not, first, export revolution; second, export poverty and hunger; and third, cause unnecessary trouble for you. What else is there to say?”³⁶ This speech sent a strong message to the United States that, if it continued its democracy-promotion activities, the new generation of China’s leadership would not shy away from making its case in the United States’ own backyard.

Xi’s strong stance against foreign intervention sparked notable support on the internet. Netizens approved his tough response to foreign intervention, and said that they had not heard so frank and direct a voice for a long time. Xi’s speech showed the strong confidence of the Chinese people. However, some other netizens warned that “if China is not perfect, then dealing with criticism from Western countries should be.”³⁷ This essentially means that China must be careful when responding to foreign interference.

China has also responded to U.S. democracy promotion by impeding NGOs which support civil society, opposition parties, and elections. U.S. and Western funding to civil society is perceived to have contributed to previous regime changes in Poland and other East European countries. China has subsequently suspended, delayed, revised, and even rejected some civil society promotion aids. In 2000, for example, the EU wanted to provide 500 million euros to fund civil society development in China. While the Ministry of Commerce attempted to accept it, the Ministry of Civil Affairs turned down the funding.³⁸ Oddly, one senior officer from the Asia Foundation, a U.S. foundation in Beijing, told me in 2010 that “this is your [Chinese] problem [of how to promote local political reforms and political participation], why should we pay to fix it?” Ironically, a senior Chinese official similarly said in an interview the same day, with some bitterness: “This is our problem, why do foreign organizations finance Chinese NGOs to fix it?”³⁹

Unlike Russia, which shut down one British-funded NGO, or Egypt, which sent some U.S. NGO activists to court, the Chinese government has developed more subtle ways to deal with NGOs. While the authorities allow them to operate when they aid local governments, they will not let NGOs go unchecked.

Authorities monitor and control NGO websites and online activities, while Chinese NGOs also attempt to avoid politically sensitive issues.

Several Chinese officials and scholars have also developed arguments to counter NGO activities such as the NED's democracy-promotion programs. First, despite the fact that the NED is called an "NGO" and its website is ".org," its funding comes from the U.S. Congress. This appears as an organizational hypocrisy. Moreover, civil society cannot be completely autonomous if its funding comes from the NED, and ultimately from the U.S. government. Civil society is thus not viewed as representing people, created from the bottom-up, but as a foreign government agency, from the top-down. Subsequently, the Chinese government treats the NED as "the most dangerous organization" to China.⁴⁰ Second, Beijing felt it was being treated unfairly: the NED has supported several NGOs working on Tibet and Xinjiang that are detrimental to China's national interests, yet, China's suppression of these NGOs is accused of being a "violation of human rights," even though they are working on perceived separatist causes.⁴¹

Finally, China has responded to democracy-promotion programs by framing them as security issues, or "securitizing" them. In the West, part of the appeal of democracy is the democratic peace thesis, which holds that democratic countries tend not to fight each other. If, however, democracy-promotion programs disrupt the peace in China, then they are counterproductive to peace and stability. Subsequently, some would say, they affect Chinese political security. In this context, the public security authorities want to ensure that any democracy program does not undermine national security, and all political reform programs are closely monitored by the Ministry of State Security. Political experiments tend to exclude involving foreigners, while the public security bureau is highly suspicious toward those who have previously worked with the U.S. government and the NED. When democracy becomes a security issue, it creates fear among students and intellectuals, and becomes difficult to develop civil society.

The Logic of Confrontation

Through these responses, China seeks to manage the spread of democracy within its borders and impede foreign interference via democracy-promotion programs. While U.S. democracy promotion toward China has, over time, demonstrated elements of both rivalry and collaboration, on the whole, rivalry has prevailed. Ironically, this strategic tension makes a great difference, and largely contributes to Washington's limited success in pressing China to take the democratic road. In contrast, the United States was capable of pressing allies like South Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines to embark on the path to democratization in the late 1980s. These very alliance relations facilitated these transitions.

Strategic tension largely limits Washington's success in pressing China to take the democratic road.

The nature of democracy-promotion aid helps to maintain distrust and rivalry. Essentially, democracy challenges the authoritarian state. Democracy aid is not ordinary aid; instead, it is a regime-threatening act. It often supports political dissidents which the authoritarian governments see as the enemy. China deems U.S. democracy aid programs as malicious actions that attempt to split

China and weaken the country's rising power. Beijing's reaction is rather unsurprising according to the logic of communist and/or authoritarian systems.

It is taken for granted in Washington that the United States can bypass governments to give funding to NGOs without due respect to sovereignty.⁴² The NED, for example, never seeks to develop programs in cooperation with the Chinese government. This is a major cause for concern for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government. Moreover, the failure of democracy promotion is often seen as the result of the Chinese government's control and suppression, thus simply demonstrating a circular need for more funding to undermine those Chinese government's controls. As scholar Ying Ma suggests, this involves more funding for the free flow of information, dissidents, and proactive public diplomacy.⁴³

The support for human rights activism from Tibet and Xinjiang particularly leads to and deepens confrontation, since Beijing sees such support as against Chinese core national interests. The NED has supported Chinese political dissidents, as well as Tibet and Xinjiang activists. According to *Global Times*, the NED provided more than 50 projects for China, becoming the second priority after Iraq, and 11 projects that supported Tibetan "independence." *Global Times* also blamed the NED for its support for the independence movement in Xinjiang.⁴⁴ While the NED supports Tibetan autonomy, rather than independence, the NED's funding makes Beijing suspicious of its intentions. Beijing sees the NED as a revised version of the CIA, which was involved in helping the Dalai Lama out of China in the 1950s. For Beijing, the NED's activities severely damaged China's core national interest. The top national leaders have ordered the study of the operation of the NED in order to monitor and control all its activities in China. Beijing also makes it more difficult for other organizations, such as the International Republican Institute (IRI), to develop democracy-promotion programs in China.

Confrontation is further perpetrated when Chinese conservatives use NED funding as evidence of an enduring U.S. "peaceful evolution" strategy, evidence they can use to attack the U.S. democracy aid program as an attempt at regime

change, strengthen their influence in Beijing, and marginalize the reform faction. They use Mao Zedong's revolutionary logic: that is, whatever the enemy supports, we oppose, and whatever the enemy opposes, we support. According to this logic, Beijing should oppose whatever Washington supports for democracy promotion. That has not always been true. As recently as the 1990s, the Chinese response to democracy promotion was: we need democracy, but the time is not ripe. Today, Americans in China face a hostile attitude: We don't want your democracy!⁴⁵ In this way, China's conservatives have developed a closed knowledge production system: the existence of Marxist institutions satisfies the conservative forces in China. Whether or not one should develop an accurate understanding of the genuine intention of U.S. democracy promotion does not matter. What matters is to condemn it and to seek funding from Chinese government.

Is Cooperation Possible?

Given the above logic of confrontation, is it really possible to develop cooperative and constructive relations with regards to U.S. democracy promotion programs in China? Can the United States and China develop open, friendly, and constructive relations in this area? The obvious answer is that any such moves will be difficult. For starters, it could be argued that cooperation with the Chinese government always leads to corruption and wasting money. In addition, those in the United States who see it as morally wrong to help an authoritarian regime to rejuvenate itself through limited democracy will criticize cooperation with China as an ugly attempt to legitimize CCP rule. According to one assessment, "different political traditions, value systems and cultures...highlight structural and deep-rooted elements in the United States and China that are not likely subject to major change."⁴⁶ While this assessment is sound, it may overlook some positive developments and some opportunities for partnership. It would be an exaggeration to claim that Beijing is totally opposed to U.S. democracy promotion in China.

Chinese bureaucratic pluralism may once again be creating favorable conditions for collaboration.

We need only to look back to the latter part of the 1980s and the 1990s to find a brief golden period when the United States and China actually developed positive collaborative projects. When Jiang Zemin signed an agreement on legal reform with Bill Clinton in 1997, it sent a strong message to all governments that collaboration

is allowed. Indeed, many collaborative projects followed. In the late 1990s, the Chinese national government organized and paid for a national training program in which U.S. law professors were invited to give a series of lectures about U.S. administrative law to more than 100 officials. (In contrast, today when U.S. professors organize training programs and pay all costs for Chinese local officials, those officials are still reluctant to attend.)

Indeed, some Chinese officials and citizens have great interest in learning best democratic practices from the United States and other democratic countries. From my personal experience, I have met quite a lot of local and even national officials who express an interest in and desire to implement some U.S. methods of democratic governance, like administrative law, which demands a responsive government and limits the excess of administrative power. They are impressed with the high level of professionalism shown by those involved in democracy programs, such as James Fishkin, a public consultant in China, in conducting deliberative polling.⁴⁷

In the past, particularly between 2000 and 2003, there were many initiatives to make certain improvements (for example, I was invited by a Ya'An city official to develop and improve the electoral procedure for township elections in 2000). However since 2005, in the wake of the Orange Revolution, international linkages have not developed because of fears about disruption and social instability. For example, the Ministry of Civil Affairs did not want to become involved with a project on migrant workers funded by an American source. Officials and others are afraid of being charged with "liberalization."⁴⁸

Washington needs to assure Beijing that it has no agenda to change the regime against its will.

Now, increasing bureaucratic pluralism may once again create favorable conditions for renewing or developing some kind of governmental collaboration. Different government organizations have different interests. While some watch carefully and warn of a "color revolution" through U.S.-funded programs, others are willing to accept foreign funding. Increasingly,

different pieces of bureaucracy have learned how to play the "pluralism card" to allow and encourage voices when it is in the national interest to explore their options. At the same time, the CCP is able to use its power, in particular its national security force, to shut down those options and enforce one coherent policy toward foreign funding, if it chooses to do so.

In contrast, the United States lacks consensus and a coherent or consistent policy due to different agencies that have varying and sometimes incompatible agendas. The U.S. government cannot use administrative power to unify all these programs, although some coordination is possible and has been done between the

State Department and the NED.⁴⁹ Such pluralism is a virtue in defending and promoting democracy. It can create a state of confusion, however, in China. While Chinese national leaders can distinguish among the different interests of various U.S. institutions so that they can make a case for foreign funding in some instances, while rejecting others, local Chinese governments largely cannot distinguish such differences and adopt a cautious attitude. This confusion on the part of local officials leads to their resistance to any democracy program funded by the United States.

Constructive collaboration would require considerable effort, patience, and strategic thinking on both sides. In particular, Xi Jinping, the new Chinese president, needs to carry out an independent, scholarly, and objective study of U.S. democracy promotion in China and caution against any internal biased and exaggerated reports. President Xi needs fresh new thinking: he must change some leaders' perceptions that U.S. democracy promotion in China is always about unwelcome regime change, and he must develop faith in the goodwill of U.S. democracy promotion for mutual benefit. Both the United States and China share a common interest in developing democracy in China, although they may disagree about its pace, among other details. Democracy does not undermine China, but serves the interest of Chinese people and the state.

Building a Collaborative Approach

The difficult challenge for both Beijing and Washington is how to “desecuritize” U.S. democracy promotion. While Washington needs to assure Beijing that it has no agenda to change the regime against its will, a wider set of elites in Beijing need to develop the view that democracy in the end enhances China’s national security. The United States successfully

desecuritized the civil rights movement in the 1950–60s, and economic relations between rival countries were desecuritized in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. These experiences offer tips for how to work out a plan with Beijing for the desecuritization of democracy promotion.

Washington also needs a new set of democracy-promotion strategies with China. It is critical to work with reformers within the government, although the waste of money and governmental control are serious issues to consider. Sometimes it is advantageous to use Chinese official language to advance the democratic cause, rather than Western language. For example, when

A wider set of Beijing elites need to view that democracy enhances China’s national security.

U.S. democracy-promotion projects need to focus on improving governance, not changing regimes.

“deliberative democracy” was translated as “xieshang minzhu” [consultative democracy], it helped to promote Western ideas and practices of deliberative democracy in China, and even the official report of the 18th Party Congress for the first time officially confirmed and endorsed deliberative and consultative democracy for China. A lesson from the Bush administration is that democracy-promotion

projects need to focus on improving governance, not changing regimes. Henry Kissinger is right to argue that “a systematic project to transform China’s institutions by diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions is likely to backfire and isolate the very liberals it is intended to assist.”⁵⁰

In the twenty-first century, democratization is the most important challenge for China and the CCP, and the democracy-promotion issue is the most sensitive issue for Sino–U.S. relations. This fundamental question is likely to affect all other issues. In the near future, Washington is not willing to abandon democracy promotion in order to improve the broader relationship, and the current ruling party in Beijing will continue to resist it. This stalemate will certainly continue. In answering my question about this stalemate on July 18, 2012, in Beijing, CASS political adviser Fang Ning argued that top national leaders must handle the issue wisely, and that leaders of both China and the United States need greater wisdom.

Leaders of both countries ought to look for strategies that find common or overlapping interests, narrow the political and cognitive gap, develop collaborative programs, and prevent certain issues from damaging the overall relationship.

Notes

1. Rana Siu Inboden, “The Challenge of China,” *Democracy and Society* 6, no. 2 (2009): pp. 3–5, <http://www.democracyandsociety.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/CDACS-DS-11-fnl-ref.pdf>.
2. Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.–China Strategic Distrust*, John L. Thornton Center Monograph Series, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 2012), p. viii, https://www.csoroundtable.org/sites/csoroundtable.org/files/0330_china_lieberthal.pdf.
3. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, eds., *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
4. Congressional Research Service, *U.S. Assistance Programs in China*, By Thomas Lum, Washington, DC, May 11, 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22663.pdf>.

5. Zi Shu, "Mao Zedong yu Heping Yanbian" [Mao Zedong and Peaceful Evolution], *Dangshi Zongheng* [Perspectives on Party History], no.11 (2004): p.24–26.
6. Qiang Zhai, "1959: Preventing Peaceful Evolution," *China Heritage Quarterly*, no. 18 (June 2009), http://chinaheritagenewsletter.anu.edu.au/features.php?searchterm=018_1959preventingpeace.inc&issue=018.
7. Qi Fang, ed., *Heping Yanbian zhanlue de Chansheng jiqi Dazhan* [The Origin and Evolution of Peaceful Evolution Strategy], (Beijing: Dongfang Publishers, 1990).
8. Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.–China Relations 1989–2000*, (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2003).
9. Lum, "U.S. Assistance Programs in China", p. 7.
10. Qi Fang, [The Origin and Evolution of Peaceful Evolution Strategy].
11. Shen Benqiu and Ni Shixiong, "Meiguo Jieru Xianggang 'Yiguoliangzhi' de Xianzhuang yu Qushi" [The Status Quo and Trends of the U.S. Involvement in 'One Country, Two Systems' in Hong Kong], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations] no. 11 (2008): pp. 30–34; Shen Benqiu and Ni Shixiong, "Meiguo Jieru Xianggang Shiwu de Yuanyin Fenxi" [Reason Analysis on the U.S. Involvement in Hong Kong Affairs], *Shehui Zhuyi Yanjiu* [Socialism Studies] no. 5 (2008): pp. 138–142.
12. Natalia Shapovalova, "Assessing Democracy Assistance: Ukraine," Project Report, FRIDE, May 2010, p. 3, www.fride.org/descarga/IP_WMD_Ucrania_ENG_jul10.pdf.
13. Rana Siu Inboden, "Affirming Democracy as an Asian Value," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 2008, pp. 171–9.
14. Baogang He, *Rural Democracy in China*, (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2007).
15. Thomas Carothers, *Democracy Policy Under Obama: Revitalization or Retreat?* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), pp. 20–21, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/democracy_under_obama.pdf.
16. Wang Juntao, a democrat organizer in 1989, now the President of China's Democratic Party in the United States, holds such a view. Author interview with Wang in 2008 in Melbourne.
17. Minxin Pei, "The Dark Side of China's Rise," *Foreign Policy*, February 17, 2006, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/02/17/the_dark_side_of_chinas_rise.
18. Author interview with Krasner on March 3, 2008, at Stanford University.
19. Catharin E. Dalpino, *Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes*, (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).
20. Laurence Whitehead, ed., *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americans*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): chapter 3.
21. Larry Diamond, "Supporting Democracy: Refashioning U.S. Global Strategy", and Michael McFaul, "Engaging Autocrats (and Democrats) to Facilitate Democratic Transition," in *Democracy in U.S. Security Strategy: From Promotion to Support*, edited by Alexander T.J. Lennon, (Washington: CSIS, March 2009): pp. 29–54 and 75–96, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090310_lennon_democracy_web.pdf.
22. Daniel Kruger, "China Adds Treasuries for Second Month on Reserve Growth," Bloomberg News, May 15, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-05-15/china-adds-treasuries-for-second-month-on-reserve-growth.html>.
23. Ying Ma, "China's Stubborn Anti-Democracy," *Policy Review*, no. 141, February 1, 2007, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/5513661.html>.
24. Tony Smith, "National Security Liberalism and American Foreign Policy," in *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, eds. Michael Cox, John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): p. 100, <http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0-19-829678-9.pdf>.
25. Sina News [in Chinese], <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2006-03-17/22069376677.shtml>.

26. Yu Qiu, "Fanhua Shili Qiandaizi: Meiguo Minzhu Jijinhui" [Moneybag of Anti-China Forces: National Endowment for Democracy], *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* [International Herald Leader], July 21, 2009.
27. The author's interview with one official in Beijing on August 27, 2011.
28. Yu Shuyu, "The Arab tide of democracy is not a colour revolution" [in Chinese], *Lianhe Zaobao*, February 14, 2011.
29. The author's interview with an official at the U.S. State Department on March 10, 2008.
30. Sheng Huaren, "Yifa Zuohao Xian-Xiang Liang Ji Renda Huanjie Xuanju Gongzuo" [Do a Good Job of Electing New People's Congresses at the Township and County Levels According to the Law], *Qiushi* [Seeking Truth], August 17, 2006, http://news.xinhuanet.com/theory/2006-08/17/content_5046196.htm.
31. Author interviews with CASS members in 2006.
32. Author's picture was displayed as one "Western infiltrator," informed by author's friend in Zhejiang Party School on December 31, 2011, in Hangzhou.
33. Zhang Caiguo, *The Ideology of Neoliberalism*, (Beijing: Central Compilation & Translation Press, 2007).
34. Author interview with one senior Chinese official in State Council's media office in Beijing on January 13, 2011.
35. Fang Ning, "Meiguo Weihe Dui Zhongguo Tuixiao Minzhu?" [Why does the United States Promote Democracy to China?], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], June 20, 2007.
36. QQ News [in Chinese], <http://news.qq.com/a/20090212/001884.htm>.
37. <http://blog.gmw.cn/u/lizesheng1218/archives/2009/46928.html>
38. The author was invited by the UNDP to review China's village election program and to interview with the official from the Ministry of Civic Affairs in 2000.
39. The author's interview with the officer from the National People's Congress in 2010 in Beijing.
40. The author's interview with the officials from the State Council in 2011 in Beijing.
41. Xiaode, "Jiemi Guoji Feizhengfu Zuzhi: Ganga zhong Kuaisu Fazhan" [Uncover International Non-governmental Organizations: Embarrassing Rapid Development], *Guoji Xianqu Daobao* [International Herald Leader], June 16, 2008, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/p/2008-06-16/113215753758.shtml>.
42. Luo Yanhua, "Meiguo yu Lengzhanhou de 'Xin Ganshe Zhuyi'" [America and the New Interventionism after Cold War], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [International Politics Quarterly], no. 3 (2002): pp. 71–77; Luo Yanhua, "Shilun Lengzhanhou Meiguo 'Shuchuminzhu' Zhanlue de Xin Fazhan" [Analysis of the New Development of the American 'Export Democracy' Strategy after the Cold War], *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* [International Politics Quarterly], no. 1 (2005): pp. 94–99.
43. Ying Ma, "China's Stubborn Anti-Democracy."
44. Qiu Yongzheng, Fan Feng, Fu Yu, and Yi Chen, "Meiguo Minzhu Jijinhui Fuzhi Rebiya Chuli Zhangluo Fanhua Tuandui" [The NED Assist Rebiya to Establish an Anti-China Team], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], August 12, 2009; Qiu Yongzheng, Chen Yi, Wen Yan, "Mei Minzhu Jijinhui Zizhu 50 Ge Zhongguo Xiangmu, Wei Fanhua Shili Chengyao" [The NED Funds 50 Projects in China to Pop up Anti-China Forces], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], August 22, 2009; Li Haifeng, Xia Lin, and Shi Hua, "Jiekai 'Ziyou Yazhou Diantai' de Zaoyao Zhenxiang" [Revealing the Truth behind Radio Free Asia's Rumor], *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global Times], May 26, 2008, p. 7.
45. The author's conversation with both Americans and Chinese on March 3, 2010 in Beijing.
46. Lieberthal and Wang, *Addressing U.S.–China Strategic Distrust*, p. xi.

47. James Fishkin, Baogang He, Bob Ruskin, and Alice Siu, "Deliberative Democracy in an Unlikely Place: Deliberative Polling in China," *British Journal of Political Science* 40, no.2 (2010): pp. 435–448.
48. Author interview with Mr. Wang in March 2010.
49. Author interview with Rana Siu Inboden on May 25, 2012, in Chengdu.
50. Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 539.