The Western Concept of the Civil Society in the Context of Chinese History

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Executive Summary

The Western term "civil society" has become prominent in current Western and Chinese discussions regarding China's history and possible democratization. There is a complicated relation, however, between these discussions and the meanings of this term in its original Western context. By analyzing this confusing semantic situation, this article makes clear not only that China throughout its history has only exceptionally developed a civil society but also that current Chinese writing using this term has typically conflated it with indigenous assumptions out of accord with the Western civil society tradition. This article argues that, in this Western tradition, "civil society" refers to an un-utopian political order in which morally and intellectually fallible citizens organize themselves to monitor an incorrigible state, seeking either to minimize state intervention in their lives or to use some state intervention to check allegedly oppressive elites outside the state. In Chinese writing, however, this un-utopian, "bottom-up" definition of "civil society" has been filtered out and replaced by a tradition-rooted, utopian, "top-down" view according to which moral-intellectual virtuosi--whether a political party free of selfishness or "true intellectuals"--take charge of a corrigible state or at least are allowed by the latter to guide society. This divergence in political reasoning threatens to complicate international relations.

Introductory Remarks

To what extent has China ever had a civil society? What role has the Western ideal of the civil society played in modern Chinese thought? To what extent has this role converged with the Western ideal or been shaped by the indigenous intellectual tradition? To what extent have Chinese demands for the strengthening of the civil society been politically rational or prudent? To what extent is it epistemologically proper to use a Western category like "civil society" to analyze the lives of people whose own ways of conceptualizing their lives have traditionally lacked this category?\(^{(1)}\)
It is convenient to deal first with the epistemological question. Ethically imposing a Western category on Chinese facts would be justified if one believed that global history follows laws that Westerners happened to discover, or that ideals like "civil society" are based on universal human rights, or that such categories at least are part of a universally homologous terminology which one can properly use to analyze the facts of human life even when this terminology is unknown to the people one is studying. In the Chinese intellectual world, therefore, where none of these three beliefs has been seriously challenged, there is no epistemic obstacle to using "civil society" as a category with which to analyze Chinese history. In much of the Western academic world, however, these three beliefs have been seriously challenged, whether by Karl Popper's denial that there are laws of history, Alasdair MacIntyre's catalogue of philosophical objections to the notion of objective, impersonal norms, or Richard J. Bernstein's discussion of objections to any kind of "objectivism" in the pursuit of knowledge. Yet even in the West, many currently prominent trends refer to universal human nature (whether in medical, psychological, ethical, or epistemological contexts), to universal cognitive modes such as "rational choice," to universal sociological or economic functions, to global patterns of social evolution, and to the "convergence" of only partly "diverging" industrial societies.

Moreover, a purely emic understanding of historical activity is probably unattainable, not to mention undesirable, because explaining the past requires putting it into a frame of reference understandable to people in the present, whether foreigners or natives. Still more, as cultures change, natives frequently think it proper to analyze their own culture by borrowing foreign ideas, as illustrated by contemporary Chinese discussions of Chinese history using the Western idea of the civil society. If foreign ideas cannot be properly used to analyze a culture, a native using them would have to be regarded as having emigrated out of her own culture even as she felt she was just trying to interpret it. Thus the very scholars seeking to avoid etic frameworks would end up imposing one on her own understanding of her life. Such an absurdity can be avoided only by realizing that cultures are not clearly bounded systems. To the extent that they consist not of almost unexplainable customs (such as setting off firecrackers to celebrate a wedding) but of "because" statements, they entail a reflexive discourse or "argument" that is carried on by people often crossing social or ethnic boundaries, such as Chinese serving as professors in the United States and vice versa. If one accepts Bernstein's "hermeneutic" solution to the problem of obtaining knowledge, any category of historical analysis may be used that can be defended by those who use
it as in accord with the rules of successful thinking they regard as veridical.(5) In other words, people inevitably will use categories that way, there is no logical way of showing they should not, and, if there were, it would be useless. The idea of bypassing etic categories is a chimera. Refining them is the only feasible methodology.

Western Definitions of "Civil Society"
Even though the meanings attached to "civil society" in the West have been so various, an attempt to sum up the Western definitions of this term is needed in order to figure out whether any Chinese definitions diverged from Western definitions and whether China has ever had a "civil society." David Held offers what I would call a sociological definition when he says that "civil society retains a distinctive character to the extent that it is made up of areas of social life--the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities and political interaction--which are organized by private or voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of the state." Some would add that, to amount to a civil society, such political interaction cannot be fragmented and excessively particularistic: it has to constitute what Jürgen Habermas called "the public sphere." Second, there is a normative political definition often overlapping this descriptive, sociological one--the idea that this public sphere should be strengthened at the expense of the state. This view can be expressed conservatively (the emphasis on legality, private property, markets, and interest groups) or in more leftist ways (the emphasis on empowering groups prevented by allegedly prejudiced or selfish elites from interacting on the basis of equality with their fellow citizens).

The third definition is the classical one. St. Augustine, for instance, quoting "Cicero with approval . . . defines civil society or the commonwealth as 'an assemblage (of men) associated by a common acknowledgment of right and by a community of interests.' " As is made clear by a number of the articles in this volume, this concept of civility as a common ground shared by the state with the rest of society was traditionally grounded philosophically, notably in some concept of universal, rational human nature. In more recent times, however, especially as the philosophical derivation came under fire, this idea of civility has been used in a more simply empirical or anthropological way to describe the political culture allegedly needed by the normative modern society, often viewed as combining the structure of the modern national state, economic modernization, great interconnectedness with other societies (as illustrated by the global economy), free enterprise, and what John Dunn calls "the modern constitutional representative democratic republic."(9)
The idea that such a modern democratic state requires a certain kind of political culture or certain "personality" traits has been suggested by scholars as various as Sunil Khilnani, Samuel P. Huntington, Alex Inkeles, and Friedrich A. Hayek, though not always by using the term "political culture."[10] I have elsewhere tried to enter this evolving discussion about the orientations or other conditions hypothetically needed to produce the "civility" a modern society seems to require, listing: (1) considerable cultural homogeneity; (2) cordial, trustful relations between fellow citizens who are strangers to each other, a condition not fully met in Chinese societies, as scholars agree; (3) some political consciousness, such as a sense of nationalism; and (4) the assumption that the realization of moral-sacred values depends at least partly on the moral performance of the political center, as illustrated by the Confucian ideal of nei-sheng wai-wang (within, a sage, without, a true king). Also, (5) politics cannot just revolve around a shared saga of past glory, suffering, struggle, and present ambitions, what Robert N. Bellah calls "a community of memory." It must also be based on the intention to follow an abstract, unifying principle, such as the Greek idea of justice or the Confucian idea of jen (compassionately equating the needs of others with one's own). Political disagreement can then consist of arguments about who is being hypocritical instead of murderous struggles between groups who merely feel victimized by each other. Moreover, (6) this concept of principle has to be linked to the idea of the ruler's accountability to the people, an idea common to all axial civilizations, as S. N. Eisenstadt has noted; (7) accountability has to be linked to the kind of emphasis on legality Quentin Skinner saw arising some five centuries ago in the West; and (8) civility entails what Sunil Khilnani called the legitimization of politics as "a terrain upon which competing claims may be advanced and justified," a political marketplace complemented by an open intellectual marketplace and the free economic marketplace.[11] This eighth condition seems inseparable from the seventh, the idea of a differentiation between competing substantive demands and procedural, formal, morally neutral "rules of the game."

As I have argued elsewhere, the main ideological trends in twentieth-century China have strongly resisted legitimization of the three marketplaces, aiming for a kind of gemeinschaft comfortably guided by universally recognized standards of "reason" and "morality" rather than dependent on the frighteningly unpredictable interplay of morally and intellectually ungraded impulses of free individuals competing in the three marketplaces and sharing no values except respect for morally neutral "rules of the game." Therefore, when modern Chinese ideologies endorsed freedom, pluralism, and openness,
they always guaranteed that these values would be consistent with "morality" and "reason," not just with procedural regularity, and that therefore capitalism would not lead to serious economic inequality, democracy would be free of the machinations of "tricky politicians" pursuing selfish interests (cheng-k'o), and the competition between ideas would not prevent full moral-intellectual consensus throughout society. Gesellschaft would be synthesized with gemeinschaft, "instrumental rationality" (Zweckrationalität) with "the rationality of ends" (Wertrationalität) (Weberian terms well known in China). Thus while Chinese intellectuals have been enthusiastic about the "rule of the law," they have typically identified legality with substantive justice in an absolute sense, not merely with formal laws or judicial decisions that may be mistaken but must still be respected. Legality in this morally neutral sense has often been contemptuously identified in modern China with the allegedly mistaken belief that "even a bad law is still the law" (o-fa yeh fa).

The question of civility also entails a ninth issue, that of perspicacity, even though this evaluative term perhaps cannot be applied to specific cases without some disagreement. I have in mind, on the one hand, a way of discussing public issues by trying to obtain information, to be logical, to be serious, and to be reasonable in comparing the gravity of one problem with that of another. This kind of perspicacity has to be cultivated, perhaps from childhood on, through education and the experience of repeatedly arguing about political questions with friends and family members, as opposed, say, to just passionately joining protest movements. In China, so far as my experience goes, politics is not a staple of dinnertime conversation; testing out arguments about politics is not a part of everyday conversation. After all, the chief sage made the remarkable statement that "one should not discuss the affairs of an office one does not hold" (The Analects of Confucius, book 8). Political discussion is no different from any other activity: practice makes perfect. The reader has to judge for herself whether a "public sphere" can be formed when the remarks typically made by citizens include the following (these come from my experience in Taiwan): "Why should I care what happens to the people of Hong Kong? Have you heard that awful dialect of theirs? Who can care about such people?"; "Taiwan is not an ideal society. So how can you say there has been any progress here?"; "There is no real difference between the political systems of Taiwan and the Mainland, since neither has established a real democracy"; "There is no difference between an embezzlement scandal in the Taipei government and the widespread use of illegal drugs by U.S. schoolchildren--these are equally grave matters"; "So what if President Lee Teng-hui's visit to the United
States angers Beijing? Why should we care how they feel?"; "There has been no economic progress here to speak of; "Our prosperity is only based on luck, international trade tendencies that happened to favor us."

"Perspicacity," on the other hand, refers to the propagation throughout society by means of the educational system of a proper philosophy ultimately based on complex, abstruse intellectual arguments, a cognitive map putting the moral obligations of the citizen into historical and political perspective. To be sure, this idea that civility as an aspect of society requires the propagation of some proper philosophy would be rejected by many. Skeptics would deny that there is any objective standard of proper philosophizing. Many historians and social scientists would doubt that abstruse intellectual ideas can seriously influence popular orientations and the development of public institutions. Nevertheless, this issue must be kept in mind, since many scholars, though disagreeing about what the right philosophy is, explicitly or implicitly view political behavior as caused to a large extent by philosophical ideas gradually spreading out from their points of origin in tiny, rarefied intellectual circles. This intellectualistic "trickle down" theory of historical causation has been basic to modern and premodern Chinese thought. It is also illustrated by Robert N. Bellah's argument that Americans can create a "good society" only by learning to reject "Lockean individualism," by Christopher Lasch's opposite argument that America's ills can be cured only by returning to Lockean, "bourgeois" values, by John Dunn's view that a deeply erudite reconstruction of Western political theory can help humankind deal more effectively with the practical problems in its future, by F. A. Hayek's view that wrong theories about the origin of law "have profoundly affected the evolution of political institutions," by Alasdair MacIntyre's view that the ills of modern society have been caused by the failure of the philosophical effort to demonstrate the existence of objective, impersonal moral norms, or by Kao Li-k'o's concept of a China based on the special philosophical insights that no Chinese thinker succeeded in developing except for Mao (see below). James Q. Wilson has largely agreed with MacIntyre in developing his thesis about how "elites" in the United States propagated a kind of "skepticism," altering U.S. culture by promoting an "ethos of self-expression" that undermined "the 'civilizing' process." S. N. Eisenstadt's sociological thesis regarding "axial civilizations" turns on the vast "institutional repercussions" of intellectual or religious visions. Reinhard Bendix, using the idea of "intellectual mobilization," has analyzed how such repercussions transformed the popular concept of political sovereignty in early modern Europe. In other words, even
though so many historians and social scientists insist that the development of a society is caused only by events that directly and materially affect large numbers of people, such as political decisions and economic trends, Leo Strauss's "attribution of profound practical effects to profound theoretical arguments" accords with the views of a broad array of insightful scholars. Thus it should be kept in mind when considering the educational foundation of the civility required by democracies.

If civility can be seen as an orientation inside and outside the state entailing considerable cultural homogeneity, cordiality between strangers, some political consciousness, the idea that the state is to some extent the vehicle of sacred values, the intention of basing politics on abstract principles, an emphasis on legality and the ruler's accountability, the legitimization of the three marketplaces, and perspicacity, civility also seems inseparable in the Western tradition from a certain "bottom-up" rather than "top-down" vision of politics and agency.

This distinction, again, is a matter of degree and may provoke controversy, but it has to be considered if one is to ask whether modern Chinese visions of the civil society have or have not replicated the Western tradition. Even when the ideal of the "civil society" is linked to that of "rule by the people," conceptualization of "the people" can still be carried out in a "top-down" fashion. (Whether this fashion is proper or not is a separate question.)

This distinction between top-down and bottom-up conceptualizations of "the people" and of civility can be made by looking at assumptions about the nature of knowledge, the social visibility of enlightened persons, human nature, and the nature of history; assumptions about the relationship between knowledge, morality, political power, and individual freedom; assumptions about the relationship between the state, the various markets, and society's "ethos" (to use Hayek's terms); assumptions about the relationship between official political theory, intellectual political theory, and amateur political theory (slightly to misuse John Dunn's categories); and assumptions about the relation between autonomy and heteronomy.

In the top-down framework, an "optimistic epistemology" posits that the objective public good can be fully known. Even more, the elites who understand it can be reliably identified and can successfully propagate it, and human nature and history include a strong tendency to realize it. Therefore an enlightened elite can work together with history to fuse together morality, knowledge, political power, and an
effective concern with individual freedom. Consequently, a good society is created more by making the individual and the government good, rather than, as Hayek recommends, by protecting individuals, bad or good, from coercion inflicted by others.\(^{(24)}\) From this standpoint, free intellectual, economic, and political marketplaces may be allowed to a considerable extent, but the emphasis is on the enlightened elite working alongside or within the state, seeing to it that society is guided by a proper ethos, and putting parameters on these marketplaces. Therefore, amateur political theory (grassroots opinion) is looked down on, and all hope is placed in official political theory (or, more typically, the theories of intellectuals who believe they should take charge of official theory). Considerable heteronomy is thus combined with the principle of autonomy.

This top-down viewpoint has dominated Chinese thought, liberal as well as Marxist, up to today, being based on the tradition-rooted distinction between ordinary citizens and "true intellectuals" (*chen-cheng-te chih-shih fen-tzu*) embodying society's conscience, and on the tradition-rooted belief in the state's corrigibility.\(^{(25)}\) Thus the agents of political improvement are not ordinary, economically-oriented citizens fallibly organizing themselves to monitor an incorrigible state, but saintly super-citizens ready to guide society by taking over a corrigible state or at least controlling society's "nervous system."\(^{(26)}\) This persistent vision of a political center run by moral virtuos in turn reflected a tradition-rooted, extraordinarily optimistic concept of political practicability (see below). Also interesting is that, in China, the traditional word for ordinary members of society, *min* (the people), was not primarily a morally neutral term referring to ordinary folk whatever their moral or political preferences but a morally-charged term referring either to "the people of Heaven" acting as Heaven's "eyes" and "ears" by supporting the enlightened elite ("those first in time to know the Tao"), or to the morally unsatisfactory masses pursuing profits and rejecting the views of this elite.\(^{(27)}\) Yet such a top-down view has also been important in the West, as illustrated even by the thought of the father of modern liberalism, J. S. Mill, who combined his emphasis on liberty with his belief that the sane should control the insane, adults, children, the "civilized," "barbarians," and the educated, the uneducated.\(^{(28)}\) Thus in his thought too, civility entailed a balance between autonomy and heteronomy.

In the bottom-up framework, there is a tilt toward autonomy, what might be called "the Lutheran bias." Basic to this tilt is a more "pessimistic epistemology," as illustrated by Mill's emphasis on "fallibility." Also basic to it is a pessimistic view of human nature and a Popperian or Jamesian view of history as developing indeterminately
and failing to exhibit moral guidelines. From this bottom-up standpoint, the very nature of moral-intellectual enlightenment is debatable, and "the best moral and practical insight of the species cannot be the prerogative of reliably distinguishable or specifiable groups of persons." Consequently, intellectual political theory, not to mention official political theory, is open to suspicion, and amateur theory deserves respect as not necessarily more fallible than the other two. In this epistemic situation, there is no way to fuse together knowledge, morality, political power, and individual freedom. The proper social order depends more on protecting the freedom of the three marketplaces against the intrusions of the state or of those claiming to have a better understanding of the public good than other citizens have. The emphasis is not on any enlightened elite working within or alongside the state to promote the proper ethos through education.

Finally, if the Western concept of civility leans toward a bottom-up approach, it is also inherently un-utopian. That is, the social fabric this idea denotes can be identified with either a contemporaneous actual society, as in Hegel's writings, or a kind of social life that a backward society should develop. Either way, however, Western thinkers generally did not expect this social fabric to be morally perfect. In modern Chinese thought, however, "civil society" has been typically seen as a saintly, utopian gemeinschaft free of "selfishness," pervaded with "sincerity," lacking all "constraints limiting properly free individual desires" (shu-fu), free of "exploitation," without any "conflicts or feelings of alienation coming between people" (ko-ho), and also free of all "ideological confusion" (fen-yun)--a "great oneness" (ta-t'ung). This tradition-rooted ta-t'ung ideal, very important in modern Chinese thought, not only Chinese Marxism, connoted what has been called a state of perfect "linkage": the resolution of all doctrinal differences (hui-t'ung); the oneness of self and cosmos (t'ien-jen ho-i); the oneness of the self with the other, whether with all good people throughout history or with all other people in a contemporary world where all bad behavior and alienation have come to an end, internationally as well as domestically (see below); and the oneness of ideals with the actual world. In such a harmonious social order, all agree on not only the procedures for settling disputes but also the substantive questions of right and wrong regarding each major public issue (jen t'ung tz'u hsin, hsin t'ung tz'u li). Given this utopian outlook, Chinese have found it difficult even to find a word with which to translate "civility." The main word they have used to describe how people should interact outside their families is kung-te (the virtue of someone dedicated to the public good), an idea connoting the absolute
morality just discussed. The term for "civil society," *kung-min she-hui*, has a similar connotation.

My argument that modern Chinese thought has to a large extent failed to adopt the Western concept of the civil society is based on the point that Chinese intellectuals have rejected the bottom-up approach and inclined toward utopianism and the gemeinschaft ideal, as well as on my view that the Western civil society tradition is, by and large, bottom-up and un-utopian. My argument about "prudence" is twofold.\(^1\) On one hand, this top-down approach is advisable given current Chinese conditions, at least on the Mainland. On the other, with its utopianism, the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream has been disastrously imprudent. For many Chinese intellectuals, prudence has been a morally suspicious concept amounting to nothing more than an apology for the corrupt vested interests of elites.

The Limited Development of the Civil Society in Modern and Premodern China

Few if any scholars have looked for a civil society in China by using the above anthropological definition of this term, but the shortage of civility has in effect been deplored not only by modern reformers like the great Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (1872–1929), who called for more *kung-te* (the virtue of someone dedicated to the public good), but also by historians, sociologists, and psychologists discussing the thinness of solidarity ties in China between non-kinsmen. True, a considerable variety of traditional norms legitimized such ties: *pao* (the sense of obligation based on favors received); *jen-ch'ing* (the obligation to be kind to certain people with whom one has interacted); *yuan* (the sense of being predestined to have good or bad relations with someone); "face" (*mien-tzu, lien*); the belief that a tie is created by some shared experiences, such as being born in the same district or province, having the same teacher, or passing the same imperial examination in the same year; the important Confucian concept of friendship between men of learning and integrity (*i wen hui yu*); other kinds of friendship, such as that between "sworn sisters or brothers" (*chieh-pai*); brotherhoods formed by secret society rituals; and religious or semi-religious groups, such as the *I-kuan-tao* society in Taiwan. Despite the importance of such norms, however, China has never been and has not become a society emphasizing cordial, trustful relations between non-kinsmen and a social life centering on what Christopher Lasch called "the third place" (places like taverns that are socially located between the home and the place of work).\(^2\) After all, all the above norms presuppose the idea of the exceptional stranger, the person with whom warm relations are appropriate for reasons not applying to fellow citizens generally.
Thus they all contradict the idea of a general spirit of fellowship and courtesy shared by all citizens.

This shortage of trust or cordiality outside the family, not only political authoritarianism, has been reflected in the fact that, during all periods of imperial unity, there basically was no form of social coalescence outside the imperial chain of command that was both legal and politically articulate. Even in the twentieth century, institutionalization of legally independent, politically articulate groups outside the head of state's chain of command remained exceptional until 1989, when independent political parties apart from the ruling party were legalized in Taiwan. Similarly, in modern Taiwan class consciousness has not been salient. Families and factions have typically cut across class lines. The lack of trust outside the family can also be seen, perhaps, in the great readiness of Chinese to see dark plots behind incidents involving public figures. It is striking that, in the summer of 1997, when Princess Diana died as the result of a car accident, some well-educated Chinese who had long lived in the United States suggested Prince Charles had had her murdered. Moreover, as already mentioned, modern Chinese political thought does not focus on society's need for trustful relations distinct from virtue.

This shortage of civility is almost certain to persist, since it is simply the obverse of the distinctive Chinese emphasis on the unique value of ties between me and anyone who is "one of us" (tzu-chi-jen)--that is, kinsmen. After all, Chinese familism not only was basic to the traditional society but also has been vital to all of the successfully modernizing Chinese societies. It is not about to withdraw from the stage of history, however vehement may be the intellectual attacks against it as one of the "poisons of feudalism." "Civility," by definition, differs equally from the social world created by Chinese familism and the tradition-rooted, utopian vision of a harmonious gemeinschaft based on "virtue."

While China's domestic community thus displays a shortage of "cordiality" or "fellowship" as a middle ground between love for and instrumental use of another person, Chinese conceptualizing the international community similarly find it hard to think in terms not of hierarchy or clashing selfish interests but of foreign policies based on enlightened self-interest and so including a limited commitment to the well-being of foreign nations. In March 1996, the People's Republic of China held military exercises near Taiwan to scare it into abandoning any goal of independence, and the United States sent two aircraft carrier task forces into the waters near Taiwan to express interest in the peaceful resolution of the differences between the two Chinese
governments. Not a few Chinese, however, including a presidential candidate in Taiwan, Ch'en Lü-an, ridiculed the idea that the United States had any intention of helping Taiwan. These naval task forces were sent, Ch'en said, not because the United States "loves us that much" but because it means to use them as one more "card to play" in its negotiations with China. Ch'en was described as saying that the Western powers do not like the idea that Taiwan and the Mainland could unify and thus become another great power, possibly shifting the world balance of power away from the West (Shih-chi'eh jih-pao, March 17, 1996).

Admittedly, after years during which the American academic and political mainstream regarded Taiwan mainly as an obstacle to good relations with Beijing, there now is some U.S. concern about such a shift in the world balance of power. Yet it is doubtful that Americans regard reunification as aggravating their security or international trade problems. It is also significant that Ch'en did not take into account how Taiwan's democratization had favorably influenced public opinion in the United States, a nation whose leaders often see themselves as promoting democratization throughout the world. Instead, he depicted the United States as just choosing between "love" for Taiwan and selfish interests, ignoring the possibility that there might be some middle ground between the two motivations. Nor was there anything strange about this perspective for the Taiwan readers of this newspaper. The parallel with how the Chinese tend to exclude this middle ground in their domestic interactions is undeniable. Presumably in all societies, the images used to conceptualize the international arena are continuous with those used to conceptualize the domestic. If "civil society" refers to the normative culture needed for the effective functioning of a modern, democratic society, it may also refer to norms needed for the consolidation of peaceful, cooperative relations between modern societies.

Scholars asking whether China has had a civil society, however, have usually used the sociological-political definition of the civil society, not the anthropological-philosophical one. They have looked at late imperial China, democratic Taiwan, and the recent liberalization trends on the Mainland to seek out examples of politically articulate social coalescence free of state control. From the standpoint of a K. A. Wittfogel or even an S. N. Eisenstadt, the great power of the centralized state precluded such examples during the imperial period. In the recent debate between William T. Rowe and Frederic Wakeman, Jr., however, a fresh approach was evident. Rowe emphasized the existence under the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1912) of social space largely outside the control of capital offices or even local government offices,
the "substantial degree of de facto autonomy" enjoyed by nineteenth-century Hankow, while Wakeman emphasized that this social space remained fragmented, afflicted by ethnic and other fissures, failing to crystallize into what Habermas called a "public sphere."(35)

Wakeman's point is correct and indeed coincides with the above "anthropological" considerations about a lack of "civility," including the lack of legal, politically articulate forms of social coalescence independent of the political center. But Rowe's point also is important, complementing the thesis that imperial China's political center, especially by the eighteenth century (when a governmental complex made up of some 3–4 million persons ranging from officials to clerks, soldiers, and licensed monopoly merchants was trying to deal with a population of 3–400 million), was an "inhibited" political center unable to stretch its organizational capabilities beyond a limited scope and leaving the bulk of the economy in the private sector.(36) Throughout the imperial period, each of the vast societal transformations that occurred, whether Mark Elvin's "revolutions" around the Sung period (960–1279) or the demographic-commercial transformation in the Ming-Ch'ing period (1368–1912), were "crescive" changes stemming from the grass roots, not "enacted" ones guided by the state, to use William Graham Sumner's distinction. This point applies a fortiori to the various intellectual transformations, such as the rise of Neo-Confucianism in the Sung. Moreover, already in Sung times, there was a rising tendency to focus intellectual, educational, and other social energies on the local community, in contrast with the classic effort to influence the emperor's policies.(37) While it was in this period that the civil service examinations began to flourish as the main way to recruit officials, one of their most crucial effects was the production of huge numbers of highly educated losers, men who had failed to pass the examinations or had passed and were unable to obtain positions as officials. This was at least as important as the examinations' effect on social mobility. Forming a huge supply of cheap teachers, these losers both energized education throughout society and necessarily poured their energies into local communities. Still more, the great expansion of the economy in Ming-Ch'ing times was accompanied by a great increase in the differentiation of the economy from the polity. For instance, as Li Wen-chih showed, it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that, for the first time in Chinese history, the appropriation of large land holdings became almost totally commercialized, as opposed to appropriation based on the legal or illegal use of political power.(38) At the same time, a great deal of political communication was not vertical but horizontal; that is, not
memorials sent up to the emperor and orders sent down, but essays and compilations prepared by officials for officials and stimulating one local official to copy the procedure used in another district or province, as illustrated by the spread of fiscal reform (*i-t'iao-pien-fa*) from about 1500 on.

Traditionally, Confucian scholars viewed this abundance of centrally uncontrolled activity as one aspect of China's moral decline. Some modern scholars with an etic, sociological view, however, have instead seen a late imperial political order according to which the center autocratically forbade any political activity challenging its supremacy, while otherwise giving much leeway and freedom a dynamic population viewing it as based on the right teachings but unable to understand and implement them. Thus the legitimization of the inhibited political center was fragmented, but this center flexibly persisted for centuries as Chinese civilization evolved dynamically. In modern times, one can argue, this inhibited center was replicated, not only by the Kuomintang after 1949 in Taiwan but also in China after 1976.\(^{(39)}\)

The Pairing of the Inhibited Center with Confucian Utopianism

What was the mainstream, legitimized political outlook associated with this inhibited center? To what extent, if any, did this outlook resemble any Western concept of the civil society? The Ch'ing centuries have left behind a huge amount of primary material, ranging from local histories and administrative writings to private essays and notes often published in *ts'ung-shu* (collections of various writings) or *wen-chi* (collected writings of one man) (Endymion Wilkinson says there are "at least 3,000" Ch'ing *wen-chi*). Some scholars are now exploring this universe to find scattered remarks shedding light on important issues, such as Ch'ing attitudes toward commerce. Any attempt to define the Ch'ing intellectual mainstream, however, would have to emphasize the spectrum of views in a famous compilation called *Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien* (Our August Dynasty's Writings on Statecraft), edited by Wei Yuan (1794–1856) around 1826. It consists of 2,253 pieces on scholarship and government written essentially during the period 1644–1823.\(^{(40)}\)

Huang Ko-wu (Max K. W. Huang) analyzed the first 299 essays in this book, those making up the introductory sections called *Hsueh-shu* (On Scholarship) and *Chih-t'i* (On the Foundations of Government). They express a threefold outlook.\(^{(41)}\) First, these officials and scholars perceived a kind of ideal, saintly, cosmologically grounded moral order or gemeinschaft according to which all society should be based on *jen* (compassionate feeling equating the needs of others with those
of ego); people should interact in terms of what Herbert Fingarette called "the ceremonial act"; and there should be no hierarchy except that based on gender, age, or merit. The most distinctive part of this saintly vision was the central belief that this ideal had been historically realized during the Three Dynasties, centuries before Confucius (551–479 B.C.). This belief either produced or reflected that extremely optimistic Chinese concept of political practicability which has persisted until today. In other words, this vision of a saintly order strikes many today as utopian, but, in traditional Confucian eyes, it had been historically realized and could practicably, even easily be realized again in the present.

"Chinese utopianism" is a peculiar phenomenon wrapped in a fog of definitional confusion. If "utopia" denotes a societal ideal set forth by someone regarding it as hard or impossible to implement, this idea has been important in the West since Plato but has almost never been expressed in the course of Chinese intellectual history (except possibly by the poet T'ao Ch'ien [372–427]). If, however, "utopian" describes the pursuit of an impracticable goal of political perfection by people insisting it is practicable, then the people pursuing it will necessarily deny their goal is utopian. The Chinese intellectual mainstream has been and still is utopian in the latter sense. More precisely, however, what distinguishes this Chinese mainstream is the way it has defined the recalcitrance of the present. The Chinese have often been well aware that contemporaneous evils could not be conveniently overcome, but they still saw this recalcitrance as an eradicable condition, not as a reflection of permanent human frailties.

Second, as just indicated, this Confucian utopianism was combined with a picture of drastic human frailty comparable to the idea of original sin. Because of selfishness, the inherent elusiveness of moral truth, and their tendency to embrace false doctrines, the Chinese people had been in decline since the Three Dynasties: all the subsequent emperors had been morally deficient; officials had not been properly recruited; bad officials, clerks, and merchants had soaked up the wealth that should have gone to "the state" or "the people"; governmental offices, fiscal procedures, and land-holding institutions had all been wrongly designed; the "people" (min) had been and still were mostly immoral; false doctrines had perverted education; "barbarians" had repeatedly taken over China; and even the "will of heaven" had sometimes been responsible for bad events. (Because they overlook this pervasive Confucian emphasis on "the historical accumulation of evils" [chi-pi], many scholars today assert that Confucian thought identified virtue with the actual hierarchy of power.)
Third, according to this mainstream outlook, the disjunction between a completely practicable saintly ideal and the bad condition of society was accompanied by the moral awareness of the scholarly elite, who defined themselves as super-citizens committed to this saintly ideal even while blaming each other for having proved unable so far clearly to grasp and resolutely to pursue it. To be sure, "moderate realism" was prevalent in the bureaucracy, whose members mostly worried about local, small-scale reforms. Yet they retained the ideal of bringing absolute morality (jen) back into the center of an organizationally uninhibited polity (the ideal of "within, a sage, without, a true king," of The Great Learning's "eight steps"). Like the actual political order, their vision of the ideal order was hierarchical, top-down, but it called for a moral transformation at the top of the actual hierarchy. Their conceptualization of morality, moreover, even included democratic-sounding statements, hardly remarkable in their day, about the fundamental rationale on which government should be based. For instance, in the 1826 compilation noted above, one finds: "At first, people were weak, animals and such strong. Many people were harmed. So a sage appeared and protected the people by repelling these harmful forces. Thereupon the people raised him up to be their ruler and teacher. Therefore the establishment of the ruler is a matter of the people's putting him in that position. . . . The ruler and the prime minister, these two are not different from ordinary people. In their case, it's just a matter of some people enlightening and protecting other people, of being used by the people, not using the people. This is what is intended by heaven and earth."[43]

Some scholars have suggested that this scholarly elite calling for the moral transformation of government were part of the popular society outside direct state control. But one can also see a contradiction between this utopian moral consciousness and the popular sectors as they moved in late imperial times toward commercialization and urbanization. On the one hand, these popular sectors created a kind of gesellschaft society filled with an impersonal, materialistic, morally unpredictable, increasingly complex, urbanized, and decentralized social traffic largely outside state control. Conversely, state power became inhibited. On the other hand, the scholarly elite dominating the society's flow of moral rhetoric, though able to accommodate themselves to this traffic, never dreamed of viewing it the way Adam Smith did, as the vehicle of progress, freedom, and prosperity. On the contrary, they remained morally suspicious of gesellschaft, since the ideal society on which their rhetoric focused was a gemeinschaft, a fundamentally rural, agricultural community bound together by kinship and kinship-like ties, politically ordered in a way fusing together
morality, knowledge, and political power and so fulfilling the true needs of every individual (ch'eng-chi, ch'eng-wu). Necessarily, this society would be a hierarchy led by men possessing Confucius's understanding of morality, not by persons trained in the pursuit of commercial gain or skilled in the morally muddy tactics of practical political negotiation (han-hu).

If one can speak of a general tension in history between gemeinschaft and gesellschaft, or, as Hayek would put it, between "tribal" society and a social order based on "end-independent rules," the history of this tension in China has been different from its history in the West. The popular rise of gesellschaft, as Weber noted, occurred in China as well as the West, but only in the West was the longing for gemeinschaft countered by a decisive moral legitimization of gesellschaft. For the Chinese intellectual imagination, gesellschaft was primarily a moral disaster and has continued to be.

True, in a number of important articles based on his formidable knowledge of Ming-Ch'ing sources, Yü Ying-shih has argued that, from the sixteenth century on, there arose in the Confucian world a "new, central intellectual theme changing attitudes toward social, political, economic, and ethical issues." This widespread change, he holds, was provoked by the rise of commerce and the intensification of despotism. It made many people put less emphasis on the policies of the imperial center, on the leadership of the Confucian scholarly elite, and on containment of the appetite for commercial gain, and more emphasis on efforts outside government to improve the local community, on the importance and dignity of merchants, and on the need to derive the public good from a freer expression of private, even selfish interests.

It seems clear, however, that this new outlook hardly dented the centrality of the traditional Confucian worldview. Indeed, Yü himself, in other writings, has repeatedly treated this worldview as a "value system" inherited intact by Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century, who then tried to replace it with Western values. Certainly this new Ch'ing trend did not lead to a decisive legitimization of gesellschaft. The traditional worldview still dominates the 299 essays selected by Wei Yuan around 1826 to sum up the basic principles of scholarship and government with which he wanted to introduce his huge collection of writings on the art of administration. These essays, which he selected for his then widely praised compilation did not legitimize and identify as progressive the social interests favoring commercialization, urbanization, reduction of state controls, and increasing sophistication in the bureaucracy, the whole tendency to
turn China from a gemeinschaft into a gesellschaft society. Many essays expressed a need to accommodate this tendency, but they still saw it as based on the pursuit of "profits, selfish interests" (li), and they never deviated from the Confucian point that this pursuit undermined the value society most needs, "righteousness."

Despite some philosophical awareness that the relation between virtue and selfish interests could be construed in a more complex way, the latter were still repeatedly identified with jen-yü (material human desires), which almost universally were seen as contradicting "heavenly principle" (t’ien-li). True, the idea that such "desires" and the "selfishness" (ssu) they entailed were part of the desirable social order was far from foreign to Chinese thought in Ch’ing times. Yet the idea of selfishness as free, legitimate behavior violating accepted norms like filial piety did not appear, so far as I know. Who could have dreamed of accepting wu-te-chih ssu (selfishness unconstrained by the idea of virtue)? There is no indication that freedom and equality as opposed to virtue became the archetypal norm. It is significant that Ku Yen-wu (1613–1682), who came to be one of the most admired Confucians, denounced as immoral precisely those contemporaneous institutional changes central to the increasing ability of people to control their economic lives free of state control, the popular "single whip" fiscal reforms. Even more, fully evoking the gemeinschaft ideal, he deeply admired the way society under the terroristic first Ming ruler (1368–1398) had been tightly controlled, morally austere, and largely free of commerce. Similarly, when commercialization and urbanization had increased during the Sung period, some six centuries before Ku's time, a major Confucian movement had arisen alongside them (later called "Neo-Confucianism") seeking a "return to the past" (fu-ku) as a gemeinschaft based on li (the rules of moral propriety), on a state-controlled land-allotment system (ching-t’ien), on regional administration by hereditary lords, not bureaucrats (feng-chien), and on local communities, each organized as a single, coherent lineage (tsung-fa).46

During the imperial period, therefore, the dominant moral rhetoric was not that of ordinary people seeking freedom by calling for limits on the power of the centralized state but that of moral virtuosi, super-citizens claiming to embody the conscience of society, looking down equally on the degeneration of state institutions and the private pursuit of economic profits, and continuing to search for some way to restore the ancient saintly gemeinschaft. In other words, the utopian, top-down view of progress as based on the moral dynamism of super-citizens able to influence a corrigible state was never replaced by an un-utopian, bottom-up view of progress based on the efforts of ordinary free
citizens fallibly pursuing their economic interests and organized in a practical way to monitor an incorrigible state. When Chinese intellectuals from the late nineteenth century on started to embrace the ideal of "democracy" and, later, that of the "civil society," this utopian, top-down approach remained integral to their thought. Yü himself has repeatedly referred to their "utopianism." Far from building on any indigenous notion that the expression of selfish interests is the foundation of the free and prosperous society, intellectual leaders like Chang Ping-lin (1868–1936) anticipated Mao by identifying freedom with the dissolution of distinct, clashing interests. Facing the problems of modernization and the unstoppable tendencies toward gesellschaft that burst forth especially in Taiwan after 1949 and on the Mainland after 1976, China's intellectual leaders retained their belief in the corrigibility of the political center and their own central role as the conscience of society.

Chinese Utopianism and the Western Concept of the Civil Society
After the middle of the nineteenth century, as Western and Japanese imperialism combined with a series of rebellions to shake the foundations of the Ch'ing empire, what John K. Fairbank called "the great Chinese revolution" unfolded, entailing a process of cultural revision, which included a momentous series of intellectual debates. Important among these was an extremely prompt Chinese enthusiasm for democracy on the part of many mainstream intellectuals and leaders, beginning indeed with the very Wei Yuan who some years previously, before the Opium War (1839–1842), had edited the compilation on "statecraft" noted above. Like so many Chinese after him, Wei Yuan felt that this foreign system in which "the discussion of state affairs, adjudication, the selection of officials, the appointment of worthy men to office, all starts from below . . . leaves nothing to be desired." As Huang Ko-wu (Max K. W. Huang) has shown, the mainstream concept of democracy developed in the next decades coming down to the 1911 Revolution blended distinctly Western procedural ideas, such as the concept of elections or the separation of powers, together with many Confucian ideals, such as "the ruler approves what the populace approves," government is "devoted to the public good and free of all selfish interests," "communication between the ruler and the people is opened up," "superiors and inferiors form one body," and realization of "the great oneness" (ta-t'ung). This ready resonance of the Western ideal of democracy with Confucian values would be hard to explain had Samuel P. Huntington been correct when he described Confucian culture as positing that there are "no legitimate grounds for limiting power because power and morality are identical." As already discussed, Confucian culture
included a tension between political power and moral consciousness, a point which has been made abundantly clear in a large body of secondary literature Huntington ignores. This point has been obscured by the modern Chinese iconoclastic ideologies polemically denouncing the Confucian tradition and by Max Weber's mistaken analysis of Confucian culture. Huntington also overlooks that the Confucian intellectual world, unlike the Moslem, did in fact quickly become enthusiastic about "rule by the people" (min-chu). Already by the turn of the century, scholars like Liang Ch'i-ch'ao daring to suggest that China was not yet ready for democracy knew that such "conservatism" would be rejected by the intellectual mainstream. Distinguished scholars ranging from Hsu Fu-kuan to Yü Ying-shih have emphasized the affinity between the Confucian tradition and the ideal of democracy.\(^{50}\) Confucianism is a this-worldly way of thought according to which realization of ultimate values is contingent on fully moral action by the political center; the standard of political morality transcends the current ruler; and the content of political morality is action in accord with "what the people regard as beneficial to them" (The Analects of Confucius, book 20). With this viewpoint, many Confucians logically, almost instantly, and quite naively perceived Western democratic procedures as infallible means with which to realize their old goal of perfect political morality.

This enthusiasm for democracy, therefore, was little if at all combined with the un-utopian, bottom-up perspective of the Millsian democratic tradition. Just because the Chinese from the start so enthusiastically embraced this Western system of democracy as a completely effective method to make government accord with "what the people regard as beneficial to them" (the people, that is, as those masses acting in accord with enlightened opinion), they dealt in a distinctive way with the two main Western traditions of democratic thought, the Rousseau-Hegel-Marx tradition and the Locke–Federalist Papers–J. S. Mill tradition.\(^{51}\) While modern Western political thought has been a battle between these two schools, criticism of Rousseau in the Chinese world has been rare.\(^{52}\) As perfectly illustrated by the thought of Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who in this regard was not at all controversial, the Chinese intellectual mainstream has pictured democracy as realized by a moral-intellectual elite (hsien-chih hsien-chueh) fusing together knowledge, morality, and political power and then seeing to it that everyone enjoyed what Sun called "true freedom" and "true equality."\(^{53}\) Easily meshing with Rousseau's theory of the general will, this picture has been basic to the other three modern Chinese ideological traditions as well, Chinese Marxism, Chinese liberalism, and modern Confucian humanism.\(^{54}\)
Conversely, these four ideologies rejected the Millsian vision of a society as a kind of gesellschaft ultimately dependent on the unpredictable interplay of free, fallible individuals competing in the open intellectual, economic, and political marketplaces and following "end-independent rules." Even those prominent thinkers closest to the Millsian view of liberty, Yen Fu (1854–1921) and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, only partly grasped it, as Huang Ko-wu has shown. What Yen Fu (and indeed all the later Chinese liberals praising his translation of "On Liberty") missed was not Mill's appreciation of the dignity and freedom of the individual, which easily resonated with Confucian ideals, but Mill's epistemological pessimism, his fervent belief that "liberty" was needed to pursue "knowledge" and "progress" because it was the only way to limit the flood of mistaken ideas stemming from the drastic fallibility of the human mind. From the Confucian standpoint, or from that of a society explicitly viewing itself as "backward" and taking for granted the goal of catching up to the "advanced" societies, the fundamental truths of human life were all too clear. Therefore such fallibility could not be an urgent problem. Because Chinese intellectuals could not appreciate Mill's epistemological pessimism, the energy and passion in his argument could not be even remotely duplicated in the Chinese intellectual world.\(^{55}\)

At least to a large extent, therefore, the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream has not only embraced a Rousseauistic concept of democracy as control of the government by a rational, morally enlightened citizenry expressing "the general will" but also perpetuated the Confucian tradition's epistemologically optimistic, top-down, utopian, gemeinschaft approach to politics. Conversely, the old refusal morally to legitimize gesellschaft has persisted. This approach is evident even in recent Chinese humanistic and liberal thought, not to mention Marxist thought.\(^{56}\)

Princeton University's Yü Ying-shih, in an essay published December 28, 1993, in *Lien-ho-pao*, one of Taiwan's leading newspapers, offered an understanding of the civil society with which few if any Chinese liberals or modern Confucian humanists would quarrel. In his eyes, "according to the Chinese traditional outlook, a balance in the relation between state and society should be maintained. This is rather close to the Western views about democracy." Traditionally, this balance was upset by the excessive power of the state, but the ideal of this balance was reflected in the welcome Chinese intellectuals gave to "the Western concept of democracy." They were disappointed, however, as their "utopian" ideal of perfect freedom and equality clashed with the modern Chinese need for "an organized, powerful, modern state."
After 1949, the Communists "destroyed those social sectors traditionally outside state control . . . but the price they paid was destruction of society's vitality." These sectors thus came back to life again and might eventually turn, as they have already in Taiwan, into a "modern civil society."[57]

Yü's view seemingly accords with the sociological and political definitions of the civil society above. Yet in brushing over the traditional disjunction noted above between utopian intellectual aspirations and the interests of the social strata pursuing economic profits, and in regarding "intellectuals" as the central agents of progress, he implies a top-down approach. What is missing in his thought is a clear concept of an incorrigible state monitored not by moral virtuosi but by ordinary citizens pursuing their mundane interests and fallibly competing in the three marketplaces. True, were he questioned, he might endorse this concept. It is another thing, however, to articulate this concept and use it energetically to sort out the facts regarding China's cultural-political evolution and the role of Chinese intellectuals.

The second example is that of Yang Kuo-shu, an eminent professor of psychology at National Taiwan University, whose many well-known essays in the field of social and political criticism have expressed the ideals of liberalism in a way that has aroused little if any controversy in Taiwan. According to essays published in 1985, Yang saw a global shift from the agricultural to the industrial stage, which necessarily called for democracy, a certain individualism, and all kinds of pluralism. Indeed, Yang, like Yü, is a man as deeply and personally committed to the ideal of personal freedom and dignity as anyone can be. Yang's top-down approach, however, is evident in his strongly teleological vision of history and his quite uncontroversial celebration of "intellectuals" as "the conscience of society," persons who "because of the sensitivity of their understanding . . . often can penetrate the outer appearances of things . . . and grasp the basic principles of things." With their help, society will be based on "reason," not on the unpredictabilities and injustices of "the three marketplaces" as defined above. Thus Yang painted a future for Taiwan and China in which there would be no "unfair concentration of power," individualism would flourish free of "selfish efforts to enrich oneself," and society would form a "circle . . . of mutual respect, cooperation . . . mutually beneficial relations of mutual dependence." The key would be the "boundaries" serving as parameters of individual freedom, and these would be justly fixed through "reason," which would reign because, in a free society, if "some thought is not good, it will naturally fail to survive. . . . Legal regulations and moral norms will naturally put
obviously incorrect and bad things outside the scope of pluralistic values." No clearer rejection could be found of the Millsian, epistemologically pessimistic, un-utopian, bottom-up concept of the civil society than these passages by a fervently liberal, professionally outstanding widely admired Chinese intellectual in contemporary Taiwan who obtained his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois.

The current Marxist view is illustrated by the thought of Kao Li-k’o (b. 1952), a respected scholar who in 1995 was on the faculty of the Department of Philosophy and Sociology at Chekiang University in Hangchow. I refer here to his 1992 book on modern Chinese thought, a revised version of his 1990 Ph.D. thesis at Beijing Normal University. Maoism is of course basic to the official line of the People's Republic of China, but it is also being enthusiastically used by intellectuals like Kao to make sense out of China's current development. His argument is strong to the extent that it is based on assumptions that have been central to the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream, not just Marxism. One assumption is the utopian goal—utopian in my eyes, not his—of China as a "new civilization" unconstrained by the unhappy authoritarianism of traditional times; vibrant with the "freedom" and "instrumental rationality" necessary in modern life; and, unlike the West, free of the ills of modern life, such as the "dehumanization" deplored by Jürgen Habermas, who is highly respected in many contemporary Chinese circles. Thus China would "transcend the West" by healing the rupture between "instrumental rationality" and "the rationality of ends"—Max Weber's distinction—and so, for the first time in world history, making possible the realization of socialism. Kao links Mao to this blueprint by using Mao's 1940 essay "On New Democracy." He equates Mao's "minimal guidelines" with the "modernization" program now being shaped by China's government and Mao's "highest guidelines" with the "post-modern" program of socialism that China's distinctive, superior modernization will eventually make possible.

Much like Yang Kuo-shu, Kao sees this top-down approach as needed properly to steer society away from excessive individualism and selfishness. The key for him is an ethos that will find the elusive balance between the desirable individual pursuit of ko-t’i-chih li (what benefits the individual) and the undesirable tendency toward li-chi chu-i (putting selfish interests above all else). Mao, Kao holds, was the only modern Chinese thinker able to show how China could find this balance and thus "transcend" the West, because he not only was open to Western thought but also grasped traditional Chinese values and the advantageous nature of China's current situation as a "latecomer" able to learn from the mistakes of the West and so to profit from the West's
current state of cultural enervation. Like the famous Mainland Marxist Li Tse-hou, who at least through 1987 also was enthusiastic about Mao's vision, Kao is proud of his association with Mao's revolution, even while tacitly admitting that Mao erred horribly after 1949. Kao would no doubt hold that a civil society is integral at least to "the highest guidelines," the socialism toward which China's modernization is heading, if not to "the minimal guidelines," but I would argue that his utopian, top-down approach is out of accord with Western civil society tradition.

In addressing the question of political improvement, therefore, modern Chinese political thought has not yet turned toward an un-utopian, bottom-up approach. Based on the traditional optimism about political practicability, it still reflects the paradigm of a morally and intellectually enlightened elite working with a corrigible political center morally to transform society, instead of emphasizing the organizational efforts of free but fallible citizens forming a civil society with which to monitor an incorrigible political center. Thus it still tends to be at odds with the popular impulses actually forming the economically booming gesellschaft worlds in China as well as Taiwan today. It is hard to see in modern Chinese intellectual writings any willingness to accept the entropy or moral dissonance of the three marketplaces as a normal aspect of history. The rise of gesellschaft has only corroborated the sense of predicament that is still basic to modern Chinese intellectual discourse. Nor has there been any noticeable shift from the ideal of kung-te (the virtue of people dedicated to the public good) to a formulation of that more amoral Western concept of civility described above.

Yet one should not hastily assume that Chinese political thought is backward. In fact, it grapples with a problem not yet resolved by any society: finding the proper balance between the various free markets, the role of the state working with technical and cultural elites, and the cultivation through education of what Hayek called the "ethos" of a society. The way of achieving this threefold balance, moreover, will vary depending on cultural traditions. Thus it is far from obvious that any primarily Western paradigm or concept of political rationality will be adopted by the Chinese as the key to this problem.

At the same time, although not a few scholars argue that intellectual trends strongly influence societal development in the long run, such trends are not necessarily decisive. Taiwan's democratization has been accompanied by many major social changes not obviously influenced by Taiwan's intellectuals. These changes certainly include the
formation of a civil society according to the sociological definition, but not necessarily one according to the anthropological definition.  

**Endnotes**


2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983). Anthropologists use "etic" to describe a conceptual framework for analyzing a human group when that framework differs from the ideas which the members of that group are accustomed to using when discussing their own lives; "emic" describes the latter ideas.

3. Obvious examples are the writings of Talcott Parsons, Lawrence Kohlberg, Alex Inkeles, and Karl Marx. A concept of universal human nature is also basic to John Dunn's political theory. See, e.g., John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 97, 102, 105, 109, 115.


5. This argument is made in Thomas A. Metzger, "Hayek's Political Theory: Notes on His Law, Legislation and Liberty" (unpublished).


7. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Limited Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture"


16. Dunn, *Western Political Theory*.

18. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.


22. This framework comes from Thomas A. Metzger, "Contemporary China's Political Agenda and the Problem of Political Rationality," a series of lectures given as the 1994 Ch'ien Mu Lecture in History and Culture, New Asia College, Chinese University of Hong Kong, and being prepared for publication.

23. The distinction between an "optimistic" and a "pessimistic" epistemology refers to the balance in a body of thought between the sense of the obvious ("obviously racism is bad") and the sense of fallibility. The strong epistemological optimism shared by the Confucian tradition with the modern Chinese intellectual mainstream is discussed in Thomas A. Metzger, "Some Ancient Roots of Modern Chinese Thought" in *Early China* 11 and 12 (1985–1987): 61–117. So far as I know, Karl R. Popper first devised the terms "optimistic epistemology" and "pessimistic epistemology," but he used them philosophically to denote wrong ways of thinking, while I use them in a purely descriptive way.


28. Strauss and Cropsey, pp. 787, 796, 798.


30. The centrality of such "linkage" in Neo-Confucianism, modern Confucian philosophy, and Maoism has been discussed in my *Escape from Predicament* and other writings, such as "An Historical Perspective on Mainland China's Current Ideological Crisis," in *Proceedings of the Seventh Sino-American Conference on Mainland China* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, 1978), IV:2:1–IV:2:17.


32. See entries under "third places" in index of Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites*, and references to the Chinese writing on pao and other such ideas in Metzger, "Modern Chinese Utopianism," p. 277. I am grateful to Linda Chao for information about the i-kuan-tao.


35. Wakeman, "The Civil Society."

36. The thesis of "the inhibited center" was developed as an alternative to Eisenstadt's analysis in Metzger, "Eisenstadt's Analysis," and also used in Thomas A. Metzger and Ramon H. Myers, "Introduction," in Myers, *Two Societies in Opposition*, pp. xiii–xlv. It is based on my study of the "inhibited . . . organizational capabilities" of the late


39. For this argument, see Chao and Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy*; but they do not explicitly see the modern "inhibited" centers as perpetuating a traditional paradigm.


41. This analysis of the outlook in this early nineteenth-century volume is taken from Huang Ko-wu (Max K. W. Huang), "'Huang-ch'ao ching-shih wen-pien' 'hsueh-shu' 'chih-ti' pu-fen ssu-hsiang-chih fen-hsi" (An Analysis of the Thought in the "On Learning" and "On the Foundations of Government" Sections of *Our August Dynasty's Writings on Statecraft*), a master's thesis for the Institute of History, National Taiwan Normal University, 1985.

42. See ibid. and note 36 above.

43. Ho Ch'ang-ling, 1:8b, 1:1b.

44. Such are Yü Ying-shih's views described in Metzger, "Modern Chinese Utopianism," pp. 285–91. These views are found in his December 28, 1993, article in *Lien-ho-pao*, a leading Taiwan newspaper.


49. Huntington, The Third Wave, pp. 300–301.

50. Yü's view in this regard is illustrated by his Lien-ho-pao discussion adduced in note 44 above, while a full interpretation of Confucian culture as a persisting "value system" according with the main ideals of democracy is in his Ts'ung chia-chih hsi-t'ung k'an Chung-kuo wen-hua-te hsien-tai i-i (Chinese Culture and its Affinities with the Ideals of Modernity: A Discussion from the Standpoint of the Traditional Value System) (Taipei: Shih-pao wen-hua ch'u-pan shih-yeh yu-hsien kung-ssu, 1984). Similar views can be found in the English books of Wm. Theodore de Bary, Tu Wei-ming, and Thomas A. Metzger. My refutation of Weber's analysis of Confucianism, found in both my books, as well as in Wolfgang Schluchter, ed., Max Webers Studie über Konfucianismus und Taoismus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 229–70, has not, so far as I know, been criticized in any publication. See, e.g., "Review Symposium: Thomas A. Metzger's Escape from Predicament," in Journal of Asian Studies 39, no. 2 (February 1980): 237–90. That Confucian thought strongly differentiated political power from morality was first made clear in the monumental writings of the modern New Confucians like Hsu Fu-kuan,
T'ang Chün-i, and Mou Tsung-san. Professor Huntington and I exchanged letters on this point, but he defended his view that "in Confucianism Caesar is God" (letter of Sept. 5, 1995).

51. This distinction is close to Dunn's between the "strong" and the "weak" theories of democracy. See Dunn, *Western Political Theory*, pp. 22–24.


56. The idea that modern Chinese political thought has been "utopian" is now widely accepted, as illustrated by Yü Ying-shih's recent writings, and goes back to the new emphasis in the 1970s on its "optimism." At that time, this emphasis appeared in the publications of Wang Erh-min, Don Price, and myself. Whether Mainland scholars now discussing "utopianism" were influenced by these writings, however, is not clear. Less commonly made is my argument that contemporary Chinese utopianism is rooted in Confucian utopianism, and that the latter was integral to broadly accepted Confucian premises, not just to a few texts like *Chou-li*.


60. On the "sense of predicament," see article adduced in note 54 above.


62. For the formation of this civil society in Taiwan, see Chao and Myers, *The First Chinese Democracy.*

http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/publications/he/21/e.html 12/1997