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The Compromise of Chinese Political Thought

Continuity and Change in Chinese Monocracy

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Abstract

The ideas of continuity and change pose difficult problems when analysing political cultures. In studies of the Chinese absolute rulership, i.e. monarchy, one can sense two contending schools. The totalitarians find major changes in the leadership patterns unlikely. This is due to the perceived continuity of an over two-thousand-year old tradition of imperial autocratic thoughts. The pluralists on the other hand have for a long time seen pluralistic tendencies that are constantly eroding the above mentioned patterns.

In this thesis I attempt to explore and bridge the seemingly great divide between these two schools. The main question is *whether the Chinese monarchy can be considered continuous in Chinese political culture*. By applying the theories of constructivism and methodological structurism I will trace the traditional Chinese monarchy as a decisive part of a social construction. The possibilities of change in the modern Chinese monarchy will then be explored by analysing the interplay between the conditioning social structures and the agential people. The emphasis will be on the role of ideas, thoughts, and language; as forces that can both obstruct and promote continuity and change.

Key Words: Chinese Political Culture, Monarchy, Totalitarianism, Pluralism, Constructivism, Continuity, Change.

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1 Introduction

Early morning in late September. The sun has not yet risen, but behind those endless red walls a few rays from the east are filtered through the almost leafless trees, reaching and warming my face. There are no birds singing but even if there were I would not hear them because the sound of a pompous national hymn is filling my ears. I'm stretching my neck to watch that red flag being hoisted, high up in the blue-grey sky. Behind the fluttering flag he is watching us, as always, the Great Helmsman of the past is still in the 21st century with his people. The famous regularly repainted big round, imposing features of Mao Zedong are now facing another glimpse of the past, because behind me on the huge square he is being challenged, just like every year around National Day, by a picture of the national hero and father of the republic, Sun Yatsen. These great men of the past, still in the centre of things, year after year, awe-inspiring and caught in a seemingly timeless untouchable sphere, but all around them life goes on, even escalating into a future full of hope and expectations. Uncountable frame buildings reaching for the sky; millions of unemployed and hawkers fighting for space and money while choking in a yet to be resolved traffic-chaos; and McDonalds heading for their hundredth restaurant in the capital of the most populated country in the world. Soon, very soon the sun will be up and the feeling of timelessness will again be drowned in the time absorbing now.

So what is the allure of this place and why are the features of Mao still hanging there in the very eye of the storm? Will this fascination for great men pass on to the leaders of today, or do they represent something new? The tension between change and continuity is ever present in a country where the national pride includes the current fast economic development as well as the longest continuous history of absolute central power. The relationship between the Chinese people and its leaders has during the last decades caused a debate among researchers in the field. Major contradictions between continuity and change have found numerous more or less tenable explanations. In this thesis I intend to examine various theories and practices of Chinese absolute rulership, i.e. monocracy, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the continuity and change in Chinese political thought. My choice of subject has been influenced by recent events.

In the last years a few major political incidents have given rise to clear manifestations of unrestrained Chinese national pride. The first incident was Nato's bombing of Serbia and Kosovo and later also of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. The anti-American campaign that followed escalated during the Hainan-incident in 2001¹. Suddenly the somewhat ambivalent relationship with the USA turned into grave scepticism about Western values and thought systems. At both these incidents the Chinese leadership came in for criticism in the streets, because of its lame responses to the perceived arrogance of the foreigners. In other words, a lot of Chinese people wanted an even stronger leadership. Once again people looked back on the days when big leaders dared to challenge other countries.

Can this preference for strong leadership prevail in a market-related economy where western capitalistic and democratic thoughts now are pouring into the country, and how deeply entrenched are those kind of authoritarian ideas in the minds of the Chinese people? While some researchers see the cultural inertia and the monocratic continuity as a curse for the Chinese people, others see the possibilities of change by emphasising the actual role of

¹ A US surveillance plan collided with a Chinese jet plane and had to land on Chinese territory.

pluralism and flexibility. I will in this thesis examine these contradictory theories, but I will also show that contradictions in terms are part of the Chinese political culture. When discussing the changes of China I find it futile and, depending on your motives, counterproductive to focus on the limitations caused by the traditional political heritage, and how to get around it. China is rapidly adapting to the global world but since the social, political, ideological and historical references of Chinese people are unique discussions about a changing China has to start from this very uniqueness. This does not imply acceptance of the ideas as such, only an attempt at fuller understanding.

During more than a decade's relationship with Chinese culture I have come to treat the Chinese preference for a strong leadership as one of the biggest intellectual challenges to my idea of an ideal world order. The difficulties my Chinese friends and I have met when discussing these concepts of political thought I have traced in the fact that the cultural matrices of our respective societies has provided us with so fundamentally different definitions and values. To break through this wall of cultural misunderstandings we have to question things we often take for granted. The changes of time furthermore force us to constantly revalue the past. Just like there is a difference between the speed of sound and light the time lag between the slower rhythm of changes of ideas and the faster material and institutional changes cause an ideological vacuum. Times are changing, but our minds are having problems keeping up. The fleeting concept of time is always against us, so let us start immediately before this whole discussion becomes even more out of touch with the human development and therefore unintelligible for those of us who are seriously trying to live at the speed of light.

1.1 Purpose

The fall of the traditional imperial rulership was unquestionable, but the heritage with all its contradictions and inconsistencies still haunts the modern Chinese leadership. Officially the Chinese Communist Party (henceforth CCP) made a clean break with the traditional political system, and the socialist market economy of the last two decades has caused major changes in the Chinese society. Is there still any substance to the notion that Mao and Deng were modern emperors, or was and is this absolute rulership only a myth in a truly pluralistic world?

The main question in this thesis is *whether the Chinese monocacy can be considered continuous in Chinese political culture*. The reason for raising this question is that I think the legitimacy and acquiescence of Chinese monocacy is crucial to the understanding of political and ideological transformations within Chinese society in the past as well as today. Even if I here focus on the Chinese monocacy my implication involves other societies and cultures; totalitarian and authoritarian, as well as apparent democracies. By studying and questioning the unfamiliar we may find the necessary perspective to also question the seemingly familiar.

1.2 Theory

When examining the influence of the authoritarian heritage on modern Chinese political thought one senses a major divide between what Chen Jie and Deng Peng call the totalitarian

and pluralist approaches². The totalitarians emphasise the continuity while the pluralists give more room for changes. The former hold that partly due to cultural inertia any short-term change in the polity-patterns in modern Chinese politics is unlikely. The pluralist approach claims that due to decisive changes in the Chinese power patterns the totalitarian traditions have during the last centuries gradually been broken.

The great divide between the two theories clearly illustrates the difficulties in explaining change and continuity in Chinese political culture. Since I think that this seemingly wide divide is due to the fact that both sides tend to overemphasise certain aspects of Chinese political culture I have in this thesis decided to try an alternative approach. I think that the theory of constructivism can work as an eye-opener and force us to rethink and revalue what we may have taken for granted. The adherents of this theory accept reality as we experience it but emphasise the relativity of certain aspects of this reality in the sense that it can be interpreted and used differently in different parts of the world³. This approach is, as I see it, more suited to explain change and continuity, especially concerning ideas and values. The theories of the totalitarian and pluralist approaches will therefore serve as the bases for the applying of the alternative theory of constructivism, here called the "constructive alternative".

1.3 Method

In order to test the idea of Chinese monarchy as a continuity or as a recurring part of a constantly changing pluralism I will let the leading totalitarian and pluralist scholars and a few other authoritative writers guide me through the history of Chinese monarchy. I will focus on how the monarchy was and is conveyed, perceived, and legitimised, and thereby examine how the political and philosophical theories and practices of the past influenced later imperial and communist versions. In this way I intend to bring the different interpretations of monarchy into a pattern in order to demonstrate a possible continuity or change.

Concerning the ideas of constructivism, it can be called and employed on both as a theory and a method. Constructivism used as a method implies that we do not have to choose between extremes. It allows us to acknowledge both the material and the cognitive aspects of social reality. Furthermore it does not force us to choose between agent or structure levels of analysis but, as Emanuel Adler puts it, tries to explain "...social institutions and social change with the help of the combined effect of agents and social structures."⁴ I believe that the constructivist method is well suited to explain the way the ruler's and its subjects' behaviours both affect and are influenced by the structures that shape the society and the world they are living in.

1.4 Limitations and Presumptions

This thesis covers a history of a few thousand years and deals with difficult and complex concepts; therefore the limitations of its scope are obvious and can not be ignored. I will not deal with specific periods in history but rather try to capture general ideas and sentiments.

² Chen & Deng 1995: 1-6

³ Adler 1997: 319

⁴ Adler 1997: 325

Simplifications and generalisations will be necessary in the sense that the consensus that makes up social facts more or less is dependent on simplified generalisations that are adaptable at all levels of society. The danger of working with concepts in such an uncertain and speculative field as political culture is that their inherent insufficient contextual framing often elicit scepticism that has a restraining effect on fruitful discussions. Nevertheless I find it necessary to challenge this kind of scepticism, since some of these concepts are in urgent need of discussion.

One of my main presumptions is that psychological complications have a casual mutual relation to social complications. Thoughts and sentiments are forces that have a greater importance in modern politics than has often been stated. This is intended to be a personal comment on earlier and contemporary scholarly achievements, and, therefore, I will not shy away from subjective arguments since I find them necessary in the quest for understanding.

1.5 Material and Disposition

I will rely mainly on secondary sources in the form of books and articles. As the scholarly works in this field are fairly numerous I have concentrated on works of influential scholars and mostly on works written after the Tiananmen Incident in 1989. Since discussions concerning this aspect of political culture are more encouraged in the west the sources in Chinese are in this thesis regrettably few. For the search of the past I have used both classics in Chinese and authoritative English translations of these.

Following this introduction, the next chapter will first define the basic concepts dealt with in this thesis and then outline the theoretical framework consisting of the constructive approach as a challenge to the totalitarian and pluralist theories. Chapter three presents the theoretical basis for Chinese monocracy, and this basis will then be analysed in chapter four. In chapter five and six I will trace the main tenets of this traditional monocracy in modern Chinese political thought, and finally by reaching chapter seven I hope I have gained the legitimacy to provide a final conclusion.

2 The Theoretical Framework

Ever since Gabriel Almond in 1956 first put forward the concept of "political culture"⁵ there have been numerous attempts to analyse, interpret and explain the influence of social attitudes and political behaviour within a society. In the case of China the debate has mostly concerned the totalitarian traits and its influence on modern Chinese political culture. As I have mentioned before I will concentrate on the two schools of totalitarians and pluralists. The way these schools treat the idea of Chinese monocacy in the political culture will then be analysed with a constructive approach. Before making us acquainted with the background and general ideas and tools of these theories I will begin by verifying the concepts we are talking about.

2.1 Authoritative Definitions

In this thesis we will come across various definitions of the Chinese political system, like autocratic, authoritarian, totalitarian, and monocratic. In order to avoid confusion I will in this chapter provide my own definitions of these concepts. Autocracy is a wide and vague concept for, as it is defined in the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*, 1992 (henceforth CCELD), "government of a country by one person who has complete power". In this thesis it is less usable and will therefore only be used when necessary, like in quotations. More important is to distinguish between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The former is, according to CCELD, "the belief that people with power especially the State have the right to control other people's thoughts and actions (rather than letting them choose and decide things themselves)", while a totalitarian political system is "one in which there is only one political party, and this party controls everything and does not allow any opposition parties". The emphasis on control over people's minds in authoritarianism is vital and will soon be elaborated on. The other main difference is that authoritarianism does not require the same absolutism as totalitarianism. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski have noted that even non-autocratic constitutional democracies can be highly authoritarian⁶. Totalitarianism has come to define the more absolute version of authoritarianism where a society is, in the words of Fu Zhengyuan, "under the almost total domination of the state."⁷ I will use the differentiation of Samuel P. Huntington as a basis for my more precise definitions,

"[A totalitarian regime is] characterised by: a single party, usually led by one man; a pervasive and powerful secret police; a highly developed ideology setting forth the ideal society, which the totalitarian movement is committed to realizing; and government penetration and control of mass communications and all or most social and economic organizations. A traditional authoritarian system, on the other hand, is characterised by a single leader or small group of leaders, no party or a weak party, no mass mobilization, possibly a "mentality" but no ideology, limited government, "limited, not responsible, political pluralism," and no effort to remake society and human nature."⁸

The absolutism of the totalitarian leadership necessitates some kind of ideology and a strong state apparatus to keep people in order. In an authoritarian system the active imposition of

⁵ Almond 1956: 391-409

⁶ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 9f

⁷ Fu 1996: 7

⁸ Huntington 1991: 12

power may be weaker, but, as Roy Macridis has noted, the coercive means are often stronger⁹. The point is that a pervasive totalitarian ideology may not necessitate as much coercion as an authoritarian more vague mentality, where the state control of the mind can never be as pervasive. I will still argue that a mentality can be as powerful as an ideology, since an effective mentality is more difficult to question. Whereas an ideology, in the words of Christopher Lloyd, “refers to a constellation of ideas of a socio-political kind that states a world-view about history and society and is an impetus and guide to political action”, a mentality refers to how people “understand themselves and the world, and how they express themselves through religion, rituals, dress, music, and so on”¹⁰. A mentality can be less detectable as a political weapon and thereby more pervasive than an ideology.

A vital ingredient in a totalitarian as well as an authoritarian system is the monocratic element. The monocratic tendency is to be found in a hierarchically structured fully developed bureaucratic system under the direction of a single overall command. As Edward C. Page has noted, “[i]n its purest form, bureaucracy is a monocratic system.”¹¹ Friedrich and Brzezinski claim that one of the most central ingredients in a totalitarian system is “[a] single mass party typically led by one man, the ‘dictator’”¹², but even if the monocratic tendency in authoritarianism is weaker it is still apparent. The opposite of absolute monarchy is generally defined as pluralism; a more diversified political system where the power is shared. I will in this thesis challenge this assumption.

The monocratic ruler “is the *autos* who himself wields power; that is to say, makes the decisions and reaps the results.”¹³ The idea of monarchy is built on the principle of unity by one centralising force, and is here defined as one absolute, authoritative and unifying ruler. Tang Tsou’s concentric circles of power, where the absolute centre can be seen as the unifying force and the weakening of this force is roughly equivalent to the increase of the distance from the centre, can illustrate the underlying idea here¹⁴. Just as it is theoretically impossible to have a circle without an absolute centre, it is then as hard to imagine this kind of hierarchical system without one single unifying force, i.e. one monocratic ruler. The “exact” definitions of traditional and modern Chinese monarchy will be provided as we explore the continuity and change in the same concepts. First we will have a look at the two major approaches to political change in China, and we will begin with the totalitarian theory.

2.2 The Totalitarian Approach

It is worth clarifying that the totalitarian approach not in any way implies a preference for the totalitarian system as such. It is only a way to explain continuity and change in the Chinese political culture. In the 1960s and 1970s the influence of this approach was considerable in the studies of China. When the first euphoria and general optimism or, alternatively, shock and dismay after the Communist Party’s take-over in 1949 had resided and the political and developmental problems in the China of Mao Zedong gradually were exposed the more sceptical scholars found one of the main explanations in cultural inertia. The idea that the

⁹ Macridis 1986: 13

¹⁰ Lloyd 1993: 97

¹¹ Page 1992: 106

¹² Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 22

¹³ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 4

¹⁴ Tang 1991: 287ff

”new” socialist China in fact was only another totalitarian dynasty was then rather controversial, since a lot of the legitimacy of the CCP was and still is built on the assumption that they made a clean break with China’s so-called ”feudal” past.

In the late 1950s Joseph R. Levenson was one of the first western scholars to adopt the totalitarian approach by claiming that the basis of Chinese political authority necessitated certain elements from the Chinese past. He stated that not even the CCP could break with its political and cultural heritage.¹⁵ To quote Benjamin I. Schwartz change in China ”must be studied within the framework of a civilisation in which the modern Western premise of a total qualitative rupture with the ‘traditional’ past has not occurred”¹⁶

In 1968 Lucian W. Pye claimed that the years of crisis of authority (1916-27) had given room for a ”widespread receptivity to one-party rule, first by the Kuomintang and then by the Communists.”¹⁷ He meant that the need for a stronger and more complete authority had followed Chinese politics into modern times. ”Instead of picturing revolution as an assault by the weak upon the strong so as to do away with a dominating and repressive authority, the Chinese have tended to conceive of revolution as the collective assertion by a people of their need for more, not less, authority.”¹⁸ The Chinese preference for a strong and enlightened leader is according to Pye the key to understanding Chinese modern history.

Richard H. Solomon, who was heavily influenced by Pye, claimed that ”[p]opular attitudes, behavioural patterns, and emotional concerns which affects society’s ”political culture” will be carried over from the old society into the era of revolution, and will hinder efforts to promote social change”¹⁹. The continuity of the traditional culture and ”the basic cultural logic”²⁰ as an impediment is what the totalitarians emphasise.

The totalitarian approach came to describe the Chinese polity as more or less static, where the history and culture clearly indicate that any fundamental socio-political changes are highly unlikely. The sense of ”the Communist regime as a contemporary incarnation of Chinese totalitarian tradition”²¹ is summarised by C.P. Fitzgerald:

the Chinese Communists, embracing a world authoritarian doctrine in place of one local to China, have enlarged the arena in which old Chinese ideas can once more be put into practice, in more modern guise, expanded to the new scale, but fundamentally the same ideas which inspired the builders of the Han Empire and the restorers of the T’ang.²²

The idea of regular dynastic cycles has among Chinese people fostered a sense of unchanging never-ending repetition. The totalitarians claim that ”this culture, as the socio-political and psychological source of China’s totalitarian regimes, has been deeply entrenched in the minds of both the rulers and the ruled for thousands of years and is unlikely to be eradicated.”²³ This is why the notion that Mao Zedong was a modern emperor was and is so widespread on the Chinese countryside²⁴, and when President Jiang Zemin in the 1990s tried to take the single place as the third of the great communist leaders there was nothing new under the sun.

¹⁵ Levenson 1958-65: 135

¹⁶ Schwartz 1985: 2

¹⁷ Pye 1968: 9

¹⁸ Pye 1968: 10

¹⁹ Solomon 1971: xiii

²⁰ Solomon 1971: 20

²¹ Chen & Deng 1995: 2

²² Fitzgerald 1964: 42

²³ Chen & Deng 1995: 2

²⁴ Barmé 1996: 20, 24, 261ff; Zhang & Sang 1987: 117

According to the totalitarian interpretation of Chinese thought, a major break with the past is not really possible. In the end every change can only be a transition to normality. The implications are that changes can not be forced upon the Chinese people, and that western liberal and pluralist ideas may not be applicable to the Chinese society, at least not in a foreseeable future.

The totalitarians dominated the field up to the early 1980s²⁵, when the end of the Cultural Revolution and the reforms of Deng Xiaoping started to expose a radically new picture of a changing China, and the arguments of their opponents were sharpened. The ruler cult was toned down both by the Chinese leadership and by China-researchers, but in recent years neo-totalitarians, like W. J. F. Jenner and Zhengyuan Fu, have in the same tradition tried to show the continuity of the absolutism with its monocratic elements. Jenner finds the main impediment for change being thought patterns that "bind living minds"²⁶, and Fu sees the traditional monocratic system being revitalized and strengthened after 1949²⁷. Offshoots of the totalitarian school like the political culture school and the neo-culturalists have attempted to broaden the perspective on political changes, but still their main idea is totalitarian and the possibilities for major changes are scarce. This is in stark contrast with the pluralists who not only find more or less "responsible" contending polities, but also see an already ongoing process towards a more pluralistic and democratic Chinese society.²⁸

2.3 The Pluralist approach

Even if there were pluralist reactions to the totalitarian view already in the late 1960s²⁹, it was first in the 80s that what Chen and Deng call the pluralist school tried to find new explanations to socio-political changes in the 20th century. The pluralists³⁰ are not easily bundled together. What they have in common is the belief that since the fall of the imperial dynasty in 1912 there have not been any single polity who has held complete power in China, and that major political changes are caused by this imbalance of political power. Whether the pluralist tendency can be found in imperial China as well is a less stated fact, but I will still take a look at some of the arguments for this theory in chapter four.³¹

The pluralism in question here is not one where every class and group in a society have equal access to the levers of power, but rather a division of the elite. The point is that pluralism, in whatever form, as opposed to totalitarianism and monocracy is a step towards a more egalitarian or democratic society, since as Anthony H. Birch argues "[p]luralism is clearly compatible with democracy but incompatible with totalitarianism, for governments cannot exercise total control over society if autonomous organisations are permitted to exercise any substantial degree of social and political influence."³² Therefore pluralist tendencies are enough to discredit the totalitarian idea of a strict hierarchic and monocratic Chinese leadership.

²⁵ These include John King Fairbank, Immanuel C. Y. Hsu, Tang Tsou, and Frederic Wakeman Jr

²⁶ Jenner 1992: 1

²⁷ Fu 1993: 2

²⁸ Twohey 1999: 4; Chen & Deng 1995: 3f

²⁹ This is what Perry calls the "comparative communism perspective", see Perry 1992: 2

³⁰ These roughly include Andrew J. Nathan, William L. Parish, David M. Lampton, Harry Harding, Kenneth Lieberthal, Michael Oksenberg, Vivienne Shue, Victor Nee, David Mozingo, and Gordon White.

³¹ Chen & Deng 1995: 1-6; Mozingo & Nee 1985: 18f

³² Birch 1996: 167

The pluralist approach sees the Chinese political system as "fragmented, segmented and stratified", and therefore stresses the importance of "negotiations, bargaining and the seeking of consensus [...]"³³ among many contending factions. Victor Nee and David Mozingo argue that the CCP, has had to "share power with such other organisations as the bureaucracy and the army"³⁴, and Gordon White thinks that the sheer size of the government organisations has left the top leadership to the mechanisms of selective information and opinions inside and outside the party³⁵. S. R. Schram considers the changes in the power configuration and the zigzag course of Chinese politics being the result of the struggle between these factions³⁶. One faction might have more power than others, but as Birch puts it even in a well functioning pluralist system the ones who enjoy power "can be expected to maximise it given the opportunity to do so"³⁷. Endless factional disputes have put constraints on the power of the party's leadership, which, according to the pluralists, is sufficient enough to call it pluralism.

Contrary to the totalitarian approach, culture and ideas are considered minor factors in the changes within the Chinese political system, and the absolutism is only one recurring part of a constantly changing political system. This in turn implies that the absolute monarchy is a myth, and that the Chinese people are much less victims of the past than the totalitarians claim. Since we are now touching on the subject of the importance of ideas and thoughts it is time to get acquainted with the theory of constructivism. This approach will provide us with some of the tools needed when problemising the two above-mentioned theories.

2.4 A Constructive Alternative

All theories to some extent determine our choices of objects for observation and study and how we come to understand these. In order to give this study, and our ideas of it, a thorough shake the application of the constructivist theories is, as I see it, a constructive path to take.

Constructivism seizes the middle ground because it is interested in understanding how the *material*, subjective and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality, and because, rather than focusing exclusively on how structures constitute agents' identities and interests, it also seeks to explain how *individual agents* socially construct these structures in the first place.³⁸

By the middle ground Emanuel Adler means the somewhat unspecified research area between realism and relativism. In short, realist and neorealist researchers are inspired by the positivistic search for the objective truth. They believe in the existence of reality and that social phenomena can be studied in almost the same way as the natural sciences. The relativists, i.e. the more hermeneutically oriented researchers like postmodernists and critical theorists, do not believe in an objective truth. They see the world as constructed and that we have to deconstruct this reality in order to understand it. They also emphasise the important role of abstract things like ideas and language.

If we see these two approaches roughly as extremes at the opposite sides of a continuum constructivism is, in Adler's words, "[...] an attempt, albeit timid, to build a bridge between

³³ Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988: 3; Chen & Deng 1995: 4

³⁴ Mozingo & Nee 1985: 18

³⁵ White 1985: 33-37

³⁶ Schram 1988: 179

³⁷ Birch 1996: 160

³⁸ Adler 1997: 330. Italics in the original text.

the widely separate positivist/materialist and idealist/interpretative philosophies of social science.”³⁹ Constructivists agree with the realists on the existence of an objective reality, and they also believe in some of the basic knowledge of natural sciences, like there being different kinds of matter⁴⁰, but they think that this reality is perceived and used differently by human beings in different parts of the world and during different periods in history. They thereby place the social sciences between the natural sciences and the humanistics.

Christopher Lloyd, although not an outspoken constructivist, finds it unnecessary ”to choose between being a partisan supporter of either hermeneutical understanding or scientific absolutism.”⁴¹ Instead of subordinating either level of social analysis to the other, he attempts to tie them together and give an account of “how human personality, intentions, and actions interact with culture and structure to determine each other and social transformations over time.”⁴² This he calls methodological structurism. People are born into social structures, with emergent meanings and rules, and these are then organised, reproduced and transformed by the thoughts and action of people. Lloyd rejects the study of individualistic and holist methodologies as a dichotomy, since people can not act separately from institutional structures. People are agential and structures are conditioning, which means that people are the structuring and changing forces of the world. People can break free from the social structures and promote change, but then the opposite can also be true, i.e. that people can be the force that obstructs change and promotes continuity, because, as Lloyd points out, even imagination is constrained.⁴³

The notion that some things in the natural or objectively existing world can not be done is problemised by the fact that living creatures have developed consciousness. This gives, especially the human being, the ability to recreate the world in ones mind with the help of symbols, for example languages and thoughts.⁴⁴ According to John R. Searle we as human beings have the ability to assign ”*observer relative*” functions to objects in the natural world⁴⁵. This ability he calls intentionality and it implicates that a lot of the social facts that we are taking for granted are facts only by human agreement⁴⁶. In order to make sense of the world we are living in, we collectively make up our own rules and regulations. Both the objective and subjective reality can affect people as agential powers, but only the subjective social reality can be constructed. As Searle puts it, “[...] a socially constructed reality presupposes a reality independent of all social construction, because there has to be something for the construction to be constructed of.”⁴⁷ The power of the socially constructed reality cannot be overlooked, but at the same time, that is all it is, i.e. made up in our minds. This of course opens up for possibilities of change, but at the same time the limitations of the socially constructed world can be as powerful as the limitations set by the natural world.

One implication of this socially constructed reality is that a function of an object can change with time. A good example of this is the curious long S-shaped Chinese object called *ruyi*. Apparently it was first used to scratch ones back, but by the 18th century it had in a slow process turned into a heavily ornamented sceptre worn for luck. The function had changed

³⁹ Adler 1997: 323

⁴⁰ Searle 1995: 6

⁴¹ Lloyd 1993: 8

⁴² Lloyd 1993: 192

⁴³ Lloyd 1993: 25, 43ff, 51, 58

⁴⁴ Searle 1995: 6f

⁴⁵ Searle 1995: 14. Italics in the original text.

⁴⁶ Searle 1995: 1

⁴⁷ Searle 1995: 190

and, even if the people who could actually explain this process were few, the change was dependent on human agreement. Knowledge concerning functions does not necessarily die with the people but will create an intersubjective meaning and live on "[...] embedded in social routines and practices as they are reproduced by interpreters who participate in their production and workings. Intersubjective meanings have structural attributes that do not merely constrain or empower actors. They also define their social reality."⁴⁸

The constructivist contribution is therefore the acknowledgement of two different levels of reality. The objective level consists of the natural world, and the subjective level consists of the socially constructed world. The limits set by the natural world affects people all over the world, while the socially constructed level is an outgrowth of the natural world and therefore can vary according to time and space. There are today numerous widespread social facts that all are results of human agreement, such as money, marriage, sex roles and governments. We can neither take them nor their functions for granted. The assumption in this thesis is that this kind of reasoning can be applied to political systems and mentalities. According to Adler,

*Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world. Constructivism shows that even our most enduring institutions are based on collective understandings.*⁴⁹

In this thesis the social fact examined is Chinese monocacy. The possibilities of change can be found in the fact that the consensus, or social contract, consists of concepts that are never set but formed and developed in the minds of people in a continuous exchange. As Lloyd puts it "[...] change and continuity are not distinct aspects of social reality but two intertwined moments of it"⁵⁰. Even if societies are constantly changing; agential powers sometimes are irrational and both promote and impede change; and the conditioning structures are partly socially constructed, there is nevertheless a relative continuity of structures, which makes scientific enquiry and social understanding possible.

Since the real power of a social construction is found in the collective agreement the possibilities of change should as a consequence be reduced in direct proportion to the number of people involved. There are, for example, a lot of people you have to convince before you can succeed in the lobbying for the abolishment of the function of money. My point is that the change of a consensus or a major paradigmatic shift in a big country like China can neither be easy nor happen fast. The question in this thesis is how deeply entrenched the abstract idea of monocacy is in the minds of the Chinese people, and if one can see any major long-term changes in the socially constructed reality of Chinese monocacy. In the search for an answer to these questions we will empirically have a look at how the above mentioned totalitarians and pluralists handle the question of monocacy.

⁴⁸ Adler 1997: 327

⁴⁹ Adler 1997: 322. Italics in the original text.

⁵⁰ Lloyd 1993: 197

2.5 Final remarks

The seemingly wide divide between the two approaches to Chinese political culture, i.e. the totalitarian and the pluralist, is due to the fact that both sides take certain aspects of it for granted. Totalitarians are often stuck under the historical load of both natural and socially constructed structures, and the impediment of ideas tends to dwarf the possibilities. Pluralists paint a more flexible and changing picture, but the complexity of social structures overshadows the role and potentiality of ideas, mentalities and ideologies. The totalitarians often touch on the subject of a socially constructed reality, but both theories tend to emphasise the rigidity of social structures.

I have in this thesis decided to take a so-called constructive approach, based on the theories of constructivism and Lloyd's methodological structurism. This offers a middle ground where positivist/materialist and idealist/interpretative, as well as holist and individualist, approaches can meet. This thesis will try to cover both social and ideological structures, because if something is to be embedded in the social structures, it also has to be embedded in the minds of the people, as either an ideology or a mentality. If an idea is not built on tenable assumptions accepted by most people the social structures will inevitably change.

The ideas dealt with here will be handled gently and with due respect to the fact that a westerner's subjective views on modern China always are limited by the specific times and cultural values that influences his or her own views. I am here not attempting to stay strictly objective or methodologically "correct". I am only trying to describe my views on things, like Andrew J. Nathan puts it, "fairly, and with insight"⁵¹. In order to structure the collected memory of the Chinese people and how this has been perceived by scholars of modern time I have decided to divide this memory according to Alan P.L. Liu's three layers. The deepest layer will be covered in chapter three and four and consists of the "distant past that began some three thousand years ago."⁵² The fifth chapter deals with the middle layer consisting of the period from midnineteenth to midtwentieth century, while the sixth chapter with the most fresh memory will take us through the communist experience to present-day China. By examining the way these layers together have shaped the reality of Chinese people I attempt to clarify the influence and impact of the Chinese monocratic tradition.

⁵¹ Nathan 1990: 294

⁵² Liu 1986: 1

3 The Deepest Layer Formalised

The deepest layer consists of a past that has been seen as both a burden and a reason for nationalistic pride. In order to evaluate the continuity of a leadership-idea handed down to the Chinese people through the hazes of the past I will try to bring back this past through the ancient classics⁵³ and various interpretations of these. Chinese statecraft finds its main origin in the Warring States period (480-221 BC), with the flowering of the Hundred Contending Schools. This was a period of unfettered intellectual expression, when the art of government was held in high esteem. I will in this chapter focus on two of these schools: the Confucian and the Legalist. Then I will shortly summarise the monocratic tendencies in the alternative schools of Daoism and Mohism. The theories of these schools will form the basis for chapter four, where I will analyse the practical results of the crossbreeding between them in the imperial political system that would prevail up to the early 20th century. Since it nowadays is an accepted assumption that a lot of these monocratic thoughts were well anchored in the minds of the Chinese people well before the Warring States period⁵⁴, I will begin with examining what Confucius and his contemporaries had to work with.

3.1 The Emperor Cult

To trace the origins of Chinese monocracy we have to go back in time to the Shang dynasty (1750-1040 BC) since the Zhou-kings (1100-256 BC) partly modelled their political and cultural thought on the more or less mythical Shang-kings'. The exact shape of their political system and societal patterns is still debatable, but according to Charles O. Hucker there seems to have been some kind of societal stratification, that is, a great gap between the nobility and the common people⁵⁵. During the Shang dynasty the revelation was also made that people's rudimentary beliefs in spirits that controlled their daily life could be ordered in a systematic and hierarchic worship⁵⁶. In this correlative cosmology the earthly structures were supposed to mirror the heavenly ideal, and therefore a form of organised leadership was required on earth as well as in heaven. In order to systematise the "reverence for a supreme being whose powers transcended those of the lesser spirits" the need for an intermediary seemed crucial⁵⁷.

Heaven, as an overarching divine power, would concentrate charismatic force on one person who would be selected by his own supreme virtue, which then would resonate with the power of heaven. This earthly sovereignty, who was to mediate with the supreme being, was called the Son of Heaven, and the divine contract between them was called the mandate of heaven and was assumed to be signed and approved by Heaven itself.⁵⁸ As the dutiful son of the heavenly father he on his part was to be the parent of the people⁵⁹. The idea of the ruler as a trustworthy, old and wise father is reminiscent of the way many Christians and Jews through

⁵³ *Yijing* (Book of Changes), *Shujing* (Book of History), *Shijing* (Book of Odes), *Chunqiu* (Spring and Autumn Annals), and *Liji* (Book of Rites)

⁵⁴ Fairbank 1992: 42ff

⁵⁵ Hucker 1975: 57ff

⁵⁶ Loewe 1966: 73

⁵⁷ Loewe 1966: 74

⁵⁸ Creel 1970: 44f

⁵⁹ *Shangshu: Hongfan* 2.5, 1997: 117; Thomas 1968: 151, 163

the years have pictured their God, i.e. as the “ancient in years” and white-haired man in the vision of Daniel in the Old Testament, or Tanakh⁶⁰.

To be Heaven’s descendant and the representative of the people of course put him in an almost untouchable position in the Chinese hierarchy, but it also gave him a terrific responsibility, since the mandate of heaven had to be ratified by the acquiescence of the people. The mandate of the people’s trustee could in fact be retrieved from any ruler that proved to be unworthy. This implied an impermanence of the arrangement that must have caused many rulers endless sleepless nights. Other ways to justify and legitimise their position would of course be provided.

Ideally the mandate was legitimised through rites, because the idea was that as long as these rites were upheld correctly, then order and stability would prevail on earth. David N. Keightley notes that already during the Shang Dynasty there was a notion that Heaven could turn against its own people and cause instability and disaster by, for example, ordering enemy armies to strike at them⁶¹. The displeasure of Heaven could also be manifested in natural disasters, lost crops, or general disorder. The ruler was then held responsible and the people theoretically had the right to demand a new ruler since he was assumed to have lost the mandate of heaven. He therefore not only had to maintain social order, but he had to be lucky with the weather too⁶². This was the price to be paid for legitimacy. The idea was elaborated on when the Zhou-kings later claimed to be the true successors of the kings over the supposedly unitary state of Shang. Heaven had simply turned against the last Shang-king. This seems to have been taken at face value by later generations.⁶³

Since the centralism of the earthly leadership was supposed to mirror the heavenly structures the supreme ruler with the mandate of heaven was and could only be one⁶⁴. The world and its power structures consisted of concentric circles, or more accurately concentric squares, around one absolute centre with one unifying personalised authority⁶⁵. An imaginative and illustrative picture is the sacred mandala with the four directions where the ruler took hold of the fifth direction, i.e. the centre, and “thereby claimed possession of the world.”⁶⁶ As David N. Keightley has put it, “just as no other Power but Di [the Heavenly Power] ever issued orders in the world of inscriptions, neither did any other person but the king.”⁶⁷ In this hierarchical order the supposedly enlightened ruler was also held responsible for the ultimate moral instruction of the people, and only by way of this didactic leadership were men differentiated from beasts⁶⁸. This was according to Lewis “perhaps the most radical claim to political authority that has ever been made”⁶⁹.

This absolute monarchy was characterised by the ruler’s potent virtue and his ability to maintain control over his people at a distance⁷⁰. In the Chinese classic *Shijing* (Book of Odes) (850-600 BC) the following passage can be read, “The land under the sky is all the king’s

⁶⁰ The New English Bible 1970: The Book of Daniel 7:9

⁶¹ Keightley 1999: 264; *Shangshu: Tangshi 1-2*, 1997: 68

⁶² Loewe 1966: 76

⁶³ Rawson 1999: 449

⁶⁴ Hsu 1999: 566

⁶⁵ Tang 1991: 287; Fairbank 1992: 65; Lewis 1990: 244ff

⁶⁶ Lewis 1999: 648f

⁶⁷ Keightley 1999: 252

⁶⁸ Loewe 1966: 75f; Lewis 1990: 172, 212

⁶⁹ Lewis 1990: 212

⁷⁰ Fairbank 1992: 65; Lewis 1999: 603

domain, and the people far and nigh are under royal reign”⁷¹ The ruler was one with what he ruled over, and furthermore this position would, according to the same book, be inherited by his son⁷². Keightley states that the legacy of the ruler of the patrimonial theocratic Shang-polity was ”derived from his unique relationship to the ancestors”.⁷³ The role of the capricious and often powerful ancestors was to remain central in the Chinese world. It was a truly demanding task to be a ruler. Not only should he keep the heavenly powers and the people happy, but also the ancestors.

The necessity of reaching harmony with the heavenly power by way of monarchy was indeed older than the Zhou dynasty, but it is first during this dynasty that the idea seems to have been taken for granted⁷⁴. It is also first then we have scriptures covering the subject. Even if this centralised Shang dynasty only was an imagined unitary community⁷⁵ the idea was powerful enough to inspire the nostalgia of a golden past under one sage-king, and a longing to yet again reach that perfection. As David Shepherd Nivison has noted even in the darkest years of the chaotic Warring States (481-221 BC) the idea of a unitary state with one monocratic ruler was maintained⁷⁶. The philosopher Confucius was almost obsessed by this golden past and how to bring back and guarantee peace, order and harmony.

3.2 The Confucian Tradition

With the ancient classics as the main sources Confucius (551-479 BC) promoted the mythicized pre-Xia sage-kings (ca 3000 BC) as the role models that by unifying the world had prevented the social chaos prevalent in his own times⁷⁷. Unity was emphasised since it promised peace, stability and prosperity, and this unity was dependent on absolute monarchy. The rule of one single authority was the ideal since, as he has been quoted to say, ”[j]ust as heaven has no two suns, there can be no two kings on earth”⁷⁸. The unique achievement of Confucius was to use these ideas to structure and simplify the societal order.

This hierarchic order was based on the “Three Bonds”, that is, the ”domination of monarch over subjects, old over young, and male over female.”⁷⁹. The Chinese tradition of ancestor worship belonged to the religious sphere but was derived from this secular reverence to senior members in the family and clan⁸⁰. Strict obedience and loyalty had to be shown the elders as well as the superiors, and the superiors had to treat inferiors with courtesy⁸¹. Everything and everyone should know its, his or her place, and the last word was always the father’s in the family and the superior’s at work. By extending the absolute authority into the families Confucians managed to solidify the hierarchic ideal at the grass roots as well as at the top. As

⁷¹ *Shijing: Xiaoya/Beishan* (or Injustice) 1995: 449

⁷² *Shijing: Daya/Wenwang* (or Heaven’s Decree) 1995: 531

⁷³ Keightley 1999: 290

⁷⁴ Fairbank 1992: 64ff; Creel 1970: 86; Nivison 1999: 748

⁷⁵ Hsu 1999: 568

⁷⁶ Nivison 1999: 769f

⁷⁷ Fairbank 1992: 47ff; Nivison 1999: 759

⁷⁸ *Liji*: chs. 7, 30

⁷⁹ Fu 1993: 31

⁸⁰ Lewis 1990: 246

⁸¹ Nivison 1999: 757; Fairbank 1992: 52

Elbert Duncan Thomas has put it, “persistence of the family idea in the Chinese mind has made for the persistence of the monarchical type.”⁸²

As a measure of stemming the potentially dangerous decentralising side-effects of strong families and clans the kin-based lineages of Shang was turned into the host-based lineages of Zhou. As Lewis notes, these new lineages were tied through blood oaths “that formed the prototypes of the hierarchic, personal bonds between ruler and servant that underlay the emerging “bureaucratic” state.”⁸³ The bond between a ruler and his servant was also the basis for a more absolute monarchy.

The justification for this hierarchical system was found in the need for an ideal moral, based on “humaneness” (*ren*), and that this would emanate from the didactic leadership.⁸⁴ Even the intellectually superior Sage king, who is reminiscent of Plato’s philosopher king in *The Republic*, had a duty to cultivate and better himself. The rule of a righteous, enlightened sovereign and his devoted advisers was supposed to be a blessing for the masses, and the obedience was obligatory and not to be questioned⁸⁵. The whole system basically depended on the supposed good will of the ones in superior positions. In other words Confucius believed in the rule of gentlemen, not in the rule of law. The maintenance of moral standards based on the reading of the ancient classics would make force or penal law unnecessary. The worthiness of the ruler was shown “by the people’s tacit acceptance”⁸⁶. The result was the superordination of the state, and ultimately the emperor, over the people. The official was obligated to remonstrate with the emperor when the latter was found unjust⁸⁷, but in the end the official always had to obey the emperor’s final command.

This idea of the senior’s monopoly on the truth was the only real guarantee for stability that Confucius had to offer. In the end it all rested on a dream of the ideal society where everyone was guided by benevolence and righteousness. To say that reality would prove him wrong is not an overstatement. We are all human, even the emperor. As J. K. Fairbank noted, the only comfort Confucius’ words could give the people was that a ruler with incorrect conduct eventually would be disobeyed and lose his power.⁸⁸

Two of the most influential early scholars of the Confucian tradition were Mencius (c. 372-289 BC) and Xunzi (c. 300-c.235 BC). The different conclusions they drew from the thoughts of Confucius clearly reflect the dilemmas of the Confucian heritage. While Mencius emphasised the need for more moral constraints on the authority of the ruler, Xunzi stressed the need for an enhancement of the ruler’s authority. Mencius put a heavy responsibility on the ruler as an educator, since even if the human nature is good and we all are potentially virtuous, the educator has to “draw out of us a recognition of these potentialities”⁸⁹. Furthermore the ruler had a duty to show himself worthy by constantly cultivating himself, and if he did not the people had the moral right to overthrow him⁹⁰.

Unlike Mencius Xunzi believed in the innate evil of human nature and even if goodness could be taught this gave him less hope for Confucius’ dream⁹¹. To Xunzi propriety was the

⁸² Thomas 1968: 151

⁸³ Lewis 1990: 244ff

⁸⁴ Fu 1996: 27; Nivison 1999: 750

⁸⁵ Loewe 1966: 77

⁸⁶ Nivison 1999: 750

⁸⁷ Loewe 1966: 77

⁸⁸ Fairbank 1992: 52f

⁸⁹ Nivison 1999: 773

⁹⁰ *Sishu, Mengzi*: Book 2, 2.8; Hucker 1975: 81; Fairbank 1992: 52, 82f; Fu 1993: 33f

⁹¹ Twohey 1999: 25; Fairbank 1992: 83; Fu 1993: 33

same as the law⁹². He argued that the disobeying of the rule of propriety should be punishable, and since the definition for what was socially and morally acceptable was vague it was for the ruler, or the father, to decide⁹³. For Xunzi it was self-evident that only enlightened rulers could comprehend the bigger picture, and that they would lead the people in a fair way⁹⁴. The moral education and the rights of the inferiors were toned down, while the strict hierarchy and the final word of the absolute ruler were emphasised. To question the superior would only upset the hierarchic system and thereby jeopardise the stability and order that in the end would guarantee wealth and prosperity⁹⁵. The absolute monarchy was justified by the words, "Where only one is exalted, there is order; where two are exalted, there is anarchy"⁹⁶.

The mandate of heaven was natural and not to be questioned. Mencius had once stated that "those who labour with their minds govern others; those who labour with their strength are governed by others"⁹⁷. Neither Mencius nor Xunzi could guarantee the goodness of the ruler⁹⁸, but just like Confucius they both considered the ideal a centralised hierarchical order with one supreme didactic leader⁹⁹. The rest was up to Heaven.¹⁰⁰

In short the main monocratic elements in the Confucian tradition were, firstly, the ideal of a centralised and unified polity under the rule of one single absolute monarch; secondly, the rule of man where the only social limitation of the ruler was his moral constraints; and finally, the absolute submission to the ruler and domination of the state over the people.¹⁰¹ The Confucian texts and rhetoric were used as moral guidance and to justify practices and politics as for the good of the people. Confucius' greatest gift to the rulers was the guiding principles for the maintenance of societal order. The heavy obligations and responsibilities of the ruler were problems, but as long as there was consensus on the need for a strong and enlightened leader all was well.

3.3 The Legalist Tradition

Legalism is a theory that just like Confucianism was gradually developed during constant interstate wars, in a time of great social change and political upheaval, when there was a, as Fairbank puts it, "yearning for peace and order"¹⁰². During Eastern Zhou and the Warring States (771-221 BC) the Chinese world was slowly contracted from the old aristocratic and feudal-like kingdoms, to a more centralised state¹⁰³. The ruler became more dependent on his "military strength, diplomatic manoeuvring, and material wealth."¹⁰⁴, and thereby the influence of the scholarly advisers increased. Outwardly the Legalist recipe for the maintenance of stability and societal order was quite different from the Confucian, but the

⁹² *Xun Zi*, ch. 8, transl. by Fu 1996: 29

⁹³ Fu 1993: 33f

⁹⁴ Fairbank 1992: 83; Nivison 1999: 799

⁹⁵ Twohey 1999: 22

⁹⁶ *Xunzi*, Vol. 2: 121; Twohey 1999: 23

⁹⁷ Nivison 1999: 768-9; *Sishu, Mengzi*: Book 5, 5.4

⁹⁸ Hucker 1975: 81; Nivison 1999: 777f

⁹⁹ *Sishu, Mengzi*: Book 1, 1.6; Twohey 1999: 22

¹⁰⁰ Fairbank 1992: 81f; Nivison 1999: 778

¹⁰¹ Fu 1993: 34; Hucker 1975: 84ff

¹⁰² Fairbank 1992: 51

¹⁰³ Lewis 1999: 597

¹⁰⁴ Fu 1996: 4

crossbreeding between them is illustrated by the fact that two of the greatest Legalists Han Fei (c. 280-233 BC) and Li Si (c. 280-208 BC) both were disciples of Xunzi.

The Legalists were convinced that human nature was evil, weak and selfish. The ruler therefore had to use his position to rectify this menace to the state, all for the good of the people¹⁰⁵. The ideal ruler was to be omniscient and non-active, but if needed, coercion and intimidation were accepted tools of power. Ethical norms could or should not restrain the ruler. Instead the co-ordination of the whole community was to be based on hard and firm rules. These had to be clear, detailed and effective, since nothing could be left to chance. People were to be controlled by the two handles of punishments and rewards. The interest of the ruler did not necessarily have to harmonise with the interest of the people. Power and position were more essential than virtue, since not even a sage could accomplish anything without power. The Legalists advocated a strict hierarchy where the loyalty to the ruler always took priority over the loyalty to the clan or family. In this extremely centralised society the common people were totally subordinated to the supreme authority.¹⁰⁶

Power according to Max Weber is "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests"¹⁰⁷. For the Legalists the probability was to be based on the eradication of alternatives. They were thoroughly convinced that the ruler's absolute and unrestrained power was legitimised by the guarantee of stability, unity, and societal order. The Confucians' prescription of moral education was insufficient and moral constraints on the ruler could only be counterproductive. Shen Buhai (c. 395-337 BC), one of the first Legalists, argued that the art of maintaining absolute monarchy was found in manipulation. By not putting his trust solely in one official the ruler could make them all dependent on him. On the other hand the officials were expected to learn how to manipulate their ruler, and the result was what later has been called 'court politics'. This kind of constant vigilance easily turned into sheer paranoia, since the responsibility of the ruler became daunting. He could not trust anyone and he always had to have the final word, and everyone expected him to.¹⁰⁸

In short, the ideal of a strict centralised, unified and hierarchical society under a single absolute ruler was shared by both the Confucians and the Legalists, but while the former stressed the individual moral investment and the ruler's reciprocal duty the latter put neither moral nor physical constraints on the ruler. The Legalists probably considered the Confucians hypocritical since in their minds the ruler's status of domination was always the highest priority, and therefore the obedience and loyalty of the subjects had to be unconditional, otherwise they would be punished.¹⁰⁹ While many modern scholars¹¹⁰ have regarded the Legalist solution as unrealistic as well as unsuccessful, other scholars¹¹¹ have found the role of Legalism in Chinese political history understated. Fu sees their greatest achievement in that they "absorbed and expanded the most authoritarian elements" of the three schools of Confucianism, Daoism, and Mohism¹¹².

¹⁰⁵ Nivison 1999: 807

¹⁰⁶ Hucker 1975: 94f; Creel 1953: 151; Fairbank 1992: 55, 94f; Fu 1996: 12f; Loewe 1966: 78f; Nivison 1999: 801

¹⁰⁷ Weber 1947: 152; Fu 1996: 56

¹⁰⁸ Fu 1996: 17; Nivison 1999: 800f; Hucker 1975: 93f; Lewis 1999: 606; Fairbank 1992: 94

¹⁰⁹ Loewe 1966: 79f; Fairbank 1992: 62; Fu 1996: 29f; Hucker 1975: 75

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Hucker 1975: 95; Fairbank 1992: 95

¹¹¹ See, for example, Fu 1996: 6

¹¹² Fu 1996: 21

3.4 The Alternative Traditions

The mythical Laozi, who is supposed to have written the classic *Daodejing*, came to represent a peaceful escape from the hierarchic society to nature. The Daoist School prescribed peace and stability through passivity, and favoured a laissez-faire way of nonaction (*wuwei*) toward governance. "Ruling a large kingdom is indeed like cooking small fish [stir as little as possible]"¹¹³, and therefore they considered the law as well as coercion being ineffective and even counter-productive tools for governing¹¹⁴. Ideally the Daoist Sage should treat everyone alike no matter if it was a dog or a human being¹¹⁵. This can of course, like Fu notes, be interpreted, as a crucial lack of compassion for the common people¹¹⁶. The Daoists believed that the populace should be kept ignorant and thereby easy to govern¹¹⁷. All that was needed was to fill their stomachs and then they would be happy. Man should in fact avoid striving for perfection, or else he would interfere with Nature.¹¹⁸

The founder of the Mohist school, Mozi (ca. 470-390 BC), has above all gone down in history for his antiwar stance and utilitarian ideas of universal love and do-goodism. The egalitarian solution, that Nivison points out, "in which hierarchical differences were removed between members of society as well as between the ruler and his subjects" was nevertheless inconsistent with the fact that the Mohists themselves were organised according to a strict hierarchy¹¹⁹. The problem was that people in general are selfish, so even if the intentions of the ruler was for the common good of the people moral guidance was still needed. Mozi found the solution in the concept of *shangtong* (identification with the superior)¹²⁰, which is clearly explained by the following quotation, "What the superior confirms as right, all should consider right. What the superior judges as wrong, all should consider it wrong."¹²¹ This command ethic was to be perfected by an informer network, since in the moral world of Mozi to lie, or to neglect to report to a superior, also had to be punishable. Mozi thereby gave the sovereign a most effective tool of power and paved the way for a state control of the mind. The assumption that the ruler was the only one who could communicate with Heaven had turned a supposedly altruistic worldview into a command ethic. It is quite possible that these monocratic tendencies were a great inspiration to the rulers. It can be argued that all these schools took something for granted: that the ruler was the origin of all power.¹²²

3.5 Final Remarks

According to Emanuel Adler "Power in short, means not only the resources required to impose one's view on others, but also the authority to determine the shared meanings that constitute the identities, interests and practices of states, as well as the conditions that confer,

¹¹³ *Lao Zi*: ch. 60

¹¹⁴ *Lao Zi*: ch. 57

¹¹⁵ Nivison 1999: 804f

¹¹⁶ Fu 1996: 24

¹¹⁷ *Lao Zi*: ch. 65

¹¹⁸ Jochim 1986: 37f; Fairbank 1992: 53f; Nivison 1999: 80, 803f; Fu 1993: 36f; Loewe 1966: 79f

¹¹⁹ Nivison 1999: 762

¹²⁰ Nivison 1999: 761; Fu 1993: 38

¹²¹ *Mo Zi*: ch. 2a, transl. by Fu 1993: 38

¹²² Fu 1993: 37f; Nivison 1999: 761ff

defer or deny access to ‘goods’ and benefits.”¹²³ The relationship between power and knowledge, or preferably correct knowledge, has been strong in the Chinese political culture. The emperor could easily find justification for a monocratic system in the ancient classics.

As I have shown Confucians, Legalists, as well as Mohists and Daoists, stated that there could only be one by Heaven entrusted ruler. The Confucians and the Legalists also agreed on the need for a strict hierarchical societal order, with a fully authorised bureaucracy. The justification for this structure was the guarantee for societal order, unity, and stability, which in the end was presumed to be for the good of the people. If chaos and social instability erupted the mandate of heaven was supposed to pass to a more worthy ruler.

The Confucians who saw people as potentially good emphasised the ruler’s didactic and moral responsibility towards the people. The Legalists who saw people as selfish and unreliable made the guarantee of the people’s acquiescence their first priority, and they then saw coercion as far more efficient than moral guidance. The Mohists agreed that the ruler’s position had to be absolute and unquestioned, and to secure this they advocated mutual surveillance on all levels of society. The Daoist idea of nonaction was theoretically a blessing for the people, but the darker side of Daoism was that the pacifying of the people further guaranteed the absolute power of the ruler. The conflict between the Daoist idea that knowledge was unnecessary and even dangerous and the Confucian idea of the importance of moral education was just one of many contradictions in Chinese political thought.

A characteristic part of Chinese thought has always been to assimilate, integrate, and then merge. This tendency has been evident from the concentrated traditional concept of *sanjiao jiuliu*, the three religions¹²⁴ and the nine schools of thought¹²⁵ to the modern concepts of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought, and Socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. This tradition of packing different concepts together and then finding a stable balance between them is one of the main clues to the understanding of modern China. In Chinese political thought we have no one winner, no matter what the Confucians will tell you. In the next chapter I will therefore discuss and analyse the intermingling of the above mentioned schools, since that is really China’s great achievement and heritage.

¹²³ Adler 1997: 336

¹²⁴ Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism

¹²⁵ The Confucians, the Daoists, the *Yin-Yang*, the Legalists, the Logicians, the Mo-ists, the Political Strategists, the Eclectics and the Agriculturalists

4 The Deepest Layer Compromised

In the Imperial China the struggle between powerful centralising and decentralising forces¹²⁶ formed a seemingly impressive regularity of dynastic cycles¹²⁷. The pattern was that a strong unifying power laid the basis for another more stable and enduring dynasty. This dynasty then slowly declined and was followed by chaos, whereby a new strong unifying force made stability possible again. Even if the dynastic history in reality was far more fragmented, the idea of a centralised Chinese Empire as the regularly recurring ideal has dominated Chinese political thought. The role of the Chinese monarchy was to guarantee a strong unifying polity to work against the assumed destructive and destabilising centrifugal forces. How to find a balance by making use of the centralising forces and tame the decentralising forces has always been a central issue in the art of governing China.¹²⁸ In this chapter I will evaluate the social construction that gave monarchy this central role. I will first take a look at the contradiction between realism and idealism in Chinese political thought, and how this was meant to be solved. In chapter 4.2 I will follow one of the basic features in Chinese history, i.e. that the end always justifies the means. Then I will elaborate on the ruler's tools for legitimising this system, and finally I will take a look at the supposed acquiescence of the people. By analysing these tendencies in Chinese political thought I intend to clarify how Chinese monarchy was conveyed, perceived and legitimised by the Chinese rulers and people. This will provide us with a definition of the concept of traditional Chinese monarchy which then will be traced in modern Chinese political thought.

4.1 The two-faced autocracy

“Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to human existence”

- William Blake –

The following passage I want to dedicate to all you friends of conspiratorial theories. As has been shown above the Confucian idealists tried to restrain the dark sides of humanity by moral education, while the Legalist realists based their theories on “actual facts of the existing world” and relied on coercion and intimidation¹²⁹. The tension caused by these contradictions threatened the continuity of the imperial system of political thought. In order to maintain the status quo in the social contract between the ruler and the ruled, the gap between the two had to be bridged. The solution was found in a compromise that one feels tempted to call ritualised confusion.

Chinese politics and philosophy has for long been intimately related.¹³⁰ At the heart of the latter is the idea of *yin* and *yang*. In the ancient classic *Yijing* (Book of Changes) it is said that the world was “the product of [these] two interacting complementary elements”¹³¹. *Yin* was

¹²⁶ As Ferguson & Mansbach (1996: 169f) note, these forces can also be called “centrifugal and centripetal”.

¹²⁷ See Appendix B

¹²⁸ Loewe 1966: 57f, 287f; Yang 1969: 1-17; Fairbank 1992: 24, 46ff

¹²⁹ *Han Fei Zi*, ch. 46, transl. by Fu 1996: 33

¹³⁰ Creel 1953: 159

¹³¹ Fairbank 1992: 19

the female, dark, weak, passive and negative principle and *yang* the male, bright, strong, active and positive principle. This is not to be confused with the Occidental good and bad, because one could not exclude the other. The attraction of the opposites was necessary. If the two principles of *yin* and *yang* complemented each other the cosmic harmony was maintained and peace prevailed. This pattern reappeared in everything from traditional medicine to the relationship between women and men. By balancing opposites the tension was eradicated, and by finding compromises for contradictions stability and order was attained. The implication is that the ideal can never be reached. One can never erase *a*, because *a* is a necessary compliment to *b*. In Chinese thought there is no Heaven with endless goodness to strive for, and there is no Hell to avoid. The art of life is to take the rough with the smooth. Only the state of equilibrium gives you peace. The balance between the strong Legalism and the weak Confucianism fits this pattern.¹³²

The Confucian idealism and the Legalist realism became two sides of the same coin. The front side consisted of a multitude of idealist ideas that often turned into myths used to cover the cold realism and pragmatism of the flip side. Everyone of course sensed, or sometimes even felt, the presence of the backside, but it was somewhat easier to accept it as long as the myth of the front side was upheld. It was as if the tax collector had dressed up like Santa Claus. The shock caused by the awareness of the tax collector taking all your money was slightly mitigated by all the unconscious positive associations drawn from that kind smile of good old Santa Claus. This is the interplay that has given rise to the traditional way of defining Chinese thought as *wairu-neifa* (outside Confucian, inside Legalist)¹³³.

By keeping certain myths alive the social contract was extended and the monarchy was legitimised. In the end the myths were so strengthened that they covered every aspect of the Chinese political thought, and became socially accepted facts¹³⁴. To illustrate this two-faced autocracy I will provide some examples concerning the myths of monarchy. These are the myth of the enlightened and immaculate emperor, the myth of the unique Chinese political system, and the myth of imperial justice and equality.

The myth of the enlightened emperor as a saviour implied that the country's problems were caused by corrupt officials, and not by corrupt emperors. For common people to criticise the emperor would have been like complaining about the weather. There was simply no point. This perhaps had to do with the distance between the peripheral people and the central but yet remote ruler. Obviously there were emperors that got a little carried away and fell prey to delusions of grandeur. Either they forgot or ignored the implications of the social contract. The price they or their descendants had to pay for this avoidance of obligations were often costly, i.e. in the long run the fall of the dynasty, but the price the people and the officials had to pay were of course felt in a more direct and immediate way. Even then the blame was routinely laid on the corrupt officials. From time to time emperors were made scapegoats, but that was usually in retrospect and then the purpose was to legitimise the regime then in power. On the rare occasions when emperors actually admitted shortcomings it was because there was no other way to legitimise the hierarchic institution as such. Even if this showed the deep concern the emperor felt for his people it was only used as a last resource, since it was

¹³² Jochim 1986: 18f, 64f; Creel 1953: 172ff; Fairbank 1992: 69

¹³³ Loewe 1966: 81; Loewe 1990: 126f

¹³⁴ Smith 1990: 309f

harmful to the myth of the emperor as faultless. In this way the myth of the immaculate emperor stayed fairly intact.¹³⁵

The myth of the enlightened and fair ruler as the origin of all political power was so firmly rooted that even men of letters, who should have known better from studying the classics, seldom wavered in their devotion and trust.¹³⁶ This deeply entrenched loyalty is best exemplified by the Ming censor Zuo Guangdou who even after having been unjustly imprisoned and tortured still nursed regret for not having "been able to make recompense to [his] ruler"¹³⁷. The act of the semi-divine emperor was not to be questioned. The officials struggled to reform and improve the political system but the thought of going "behind it and consider any other forms of authority in state and society [...]" seemed to have never struck them¹³⁸. The thought that the system in itself could be the cause of political corruption was rarely an issue in China before the 19th century. The myth of the uniqueness of the Chinese political system was deeply entrenched in the minds of the people.¹³⁹

The myth of the justice rested on the assumption that when facing the emperor's wrath all Chinese were equal. This did not mean that the individual had any rights, but rather that any individual could be executed, no matter position. Higher officials were in general treated more leniently, but the fate of a minister or even an Imperial clansman that had fallen into disgrace was nevertheless often harsh punishment, exile or execution. There was no security even in the top positions.¹⁴⁰ This relative egalitarian thought was of course built on the idea of the emperor as semi-divine, and a nice thought thereby turned into a very effective instrument of power for the ruler. It was furthermore difficult to distinguish between the Legalist rule by law and the Confucian rule by man, since the "law" and the "man" in the case of the Chinese Imperial System was the same, i.e. the ruler.¹⁴¹

Another myth of justice and equality was the one concerning the meritocracy. The fall of the nobility, starting from the Zhou dynasty (1027-221 BC), meant that official positions could no longer be inherited. This was the same for everyone, except for the emperor. According to the myth of the social mobility anyone could, in theory, pass the national examinations and become prosperous and powerful. In reality it was almost impossible for poor people just to afford the books to study. As time passed the complex stratification came to depend on both pedigree and wealth. These were intertwined and mutually supportive, like the hen and the egg. Since all education should be transmitted from above the implication was that common people were less moral and less human than well-educated and wealthy people. Even if there were obvious exceptions for all to see the implication strengthened the socially constructed hierarchy. The myth of the social mobility was far more momentous than the actual practical results. It is also quite possible that the numerous promotions of the lower strata to high official posts, that E.A. Kracke Jr. reports on, were partly due to the recurring massive political purges of high rank officials and their relatives¹⁴². The justice was always relative. But there was still something that was taken for granted. In the centre of it all was an

¹³⁵ Loewe 1966: 83f, 179; Fu 1993: 65f ; Fairbank 1992: 28; Thomas 1968: 153; Jenner 1992: 45

¹³⁶ Zhu 1997: 120

¹³⁷ Fu 1993: 66

¹³⁸ Fairbank 1992: 96

¹³⁹ Smith 1990: 309; Jenner 1992: 47; Fairbank 1992: 68f, 96

¹⁴⁰ Loewe 1966: 181; Farmer 1990: 118; Fu 1993: 80f, 126ff

¹⁴¹ Farmer 1990: 115; Zhu 1997: 108

¹⁴² Kracke 1968: 173-93

energising force spreading like concentric waves on the water; the fair ruler in the eye of the storm, inimitable. As the popular saying goes, Heaven is high, and the emperor is far away.¹⁴³

The above-mentioned myths were the fit needed to maintain the status quo in the social contract between the ruler and the ruled. As Fu has put it, the official imperial political thought was "an amalgam of classical Confucian rhetoric and Legalist reinterpretation."¹⁴⁴ By balancing idealism with realism the contradictory heritage was sufficiently utilised, and as long as stability, order and unity were guaranteed this compromise was justified¹⁴⁵. It seemed like the end justified the means.

4.2 The End Justifying the Means

"In the beginning was the Deed."

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe -

In 221 BC the First Emperor instigated the title of *huangdi* (emperor), since he found the title of king too weak. His personal name became taboo, both in written and spoken form, and thereby he became more of a deity than a mortal. He is considered to be the first ruler who managed to reunite the "world", just like in the golden past. What is curious is the ambivalence with which Chinese historians have treated this almost mythical emperor. His Legalist ruthlessness has been condemned by the, at least outwardly, Confucian China, but as the ultimate emperor he has at the same time been treated with awe and wonder. Uncountable rulers have through the years tried to emulate the First Emperor in his quest for immortality, that is, in the historical sense, which in the non-religious China was and is the only higher goal worth aiming for. His legacy was the creation of the Chinese Empire, which is such an immense source of pride for Chinese people, and therefore his ends were God-given. In the Chinese history social stability and unity has to a great extent justified repressive means. The threshold for what can be sacrificed for these ideals seems to be high.¹⁴⁶

The idea of letting supposedly worthy and enlightened men rule the country seemed like a brilliant idea, but since the emperor was supposed to be divinely ordained his power naturally became uncontrollable. The cult of the First Emperor's absolute monarchy was a never-ending process towards perfection. Since the whole country was the ruler's property and the population his subjects, the state and the emperor became completely intertwined. Fu notes that since the nobility as well as the appointed bureaucracy were considered mere subjects to the emperor "[t]he social distance between the emperor and his ministers dwarfed the distance between the officials and the common people."¹⁴⁷ This unbridgeable social gap even widened with time. Charles O. Hucker tells us that while high officials during the Tang dynasty (618-907) still could sit and discuss together with the emperor, during the Song dynasty (960-1279) they had to stand erect. The Ming emperors (1368-1644) demanded kneeling and instigated the Mongol custom of having "offending officials flogged in open court".¹⁴⁸ The Qing emperors (1644-1911) later instigated prostration, kow-tow, and, as Fu notes, the habit of

¹⁴³ Fu 1993: 126ff; Smith 1990: 309; Fairbank 1992: 68f; Hucker 1975: 334-41

¹⁴⁴ Fu 1993: 8

¹⁴⁵ Fairbank 1992: 70

¹⁴⁶ Fairbank 1992: 54ff; Loewe 1966: 52f; Loewe 1999: 970f; Jenner 1992: 11

¹⁴⁷ Fu 1993: 64

¹⁴⁸ Hucker 1975: 303f

officials calling themselves "your Majesty's humble slave"¹⁴⁹. Hucker notes that this system kept "the officials in a state of fearful submission"¹⁵⁰, and I am inclined to believe him. The Legalist fear and the Confucian loyalty were the perfect match.

In order to completely eradicate all alternative powers of authority, political as well as religious, centralisation was often prioritised at the cost of both economic considerations and efficiency¹⁵¹. This strengthening of the absolute centre was justified by the decentralising effects of unreliable officials and regional instability, and since the emperor was considered the only real source of power all groups in society, and especially those close to the emperor, had to be dependent on him. The Mohist tactic of "divide and rule" was difficult in reality and usually depended on the strength and ability of the emperor as a person. Ideally devoid of the possibility to totally confer in anyone else he had to rely on books¹⁵². The Chinese political system made heavy demands on the ruler.

The pluralists argue that the ways of influencing the emperor were numerous. The highest and most prestigious officials, like the chief counsellors, were in the Confucian tradition held in high esteem, and the emperors were obligated to heed their advice. Confucians did not advocate blind obedience to the whims of the ruler, but rather the duty to remonstrate, and if this was not possible there were always the Mohist manipulative means. Apart from the officialdom the pressure groups were among others the aristocracy, the vassals, the in-laws, and the eunuchs. Conrad Schirokauer thinks that the fragmented political system in itself "tended to soften the impact of absolutism"¹⁵³. China was too vast an Empire to be controlled by one man, because, as Hucker points out, even if the emperor "could dictate policies as he pleased, only the officialdom at large could put those policies into practice"¹⁵⁴, which implies that the emperor had to at least try to co-operate.¹⁵⁵

According to Joseph R. Levenson the common people's passion for a strong leader could be found in the grudges against aristocracy. Therefore it was important that the ruler always showed that he would share power with neither the bureaucracy nor the aristocracy. The acquiescence of the people was won by playing out these different factions against each other. John Dardess argues that this struggle of manipulation did not necessarily lessen the power of the ruler. It only increased the general paranoia. The problem was that just by questioning the absolute power of the emperor you would upset the system. Manipulation was always a possible resort, but in the end the threatening polity, in the form of a eunuch or a high official, could be brushed away just by a whim of the emperor. The emperor's heeding of advisers frequently ended in so-called word imprisonment. The officials were free to speak their minds, but the emperor was always free to respond. Even the often-praised censorate was only for the bureaucracy, not for the emperor. His power was unfettered.¹⁵⁶

The pluralist arguments weigh heavily in the objective reality, but in the socially constructed reality the notion of the semi-divine emperor as the only guarantor of stability and unity made him untouchable. This social construction, where an unquestioned monarchy was a means to an end, conditioned the Chinese people to conform, but there would always be

¹⁴⁹ Fu 1993: 65

¹⁵⁰ Hucker 1972: 51

¹⁵¹ Fairbank 1992: 28; Fu 1993: 124; Farmer 1990: 124

¹⁵² Fu 1993: 122

¹⁵³ Schirokauer 1991: 57

¹⁵⁴ Hucker 1975: 306

¹⁵⁵ Ferguson & Mansbach 1996: 218ff; Hucker 1975: 150; Yang 1969: 15

¹⁵⁶ Zhu 1997: 108ff; Levenson 1964: 39ff; Dardess 1983: 251ff; Loewe 1966: 179; Fairbank 1992: 28; Fu 1993: 131f; Jenner 1992: 45

people who objected. Luckily for the ruler the imperial political system provided the necessary tools for its own survival.

4.3 The Tools of the Ruler

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely”

- John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton -

The emperor had certain tools to keep the monocratic myths alive. The direct tools were based on Legalist thought and covered nearly all institutional areas from the legislative and the judicial, to the executive and the financial. These were co-ordinated with indirect tools, i.e. the Confucian prescribing of morals and ideology. In accordance with the idea of the two-faced autocracy the fear was to be balanced with awe and preferably pride.

The ultimate direct tool was the control of the army. This was, as Hucker notes, always “essential for national unity and stability”¹⁵⁷, especially when the indirect tools were inefficient or had not yet been implemented, for example at a dynastic shift or during the decline of a dynasty. Taking a long view, large-scale violence was something to be avoided. A war-like situation meant instability, which could cause the questioning of the Mandate of Heaven. Small-scale violence like the penal system was more effective.

In imperial China any idea of a legal system built on a presumed will of God or universal justice would have seemed strange. The emperor was, as Levenson put it, “the living law”¹⁵⁸. This is usually referred to as the rule of man, and was conveyed as an objective law requiring universal obedience. In accordance with the “Three Bonds”, disloyalty was identified as the most serious of criminal offences. A father who had killed his son risked a decidedly less severe punishment than a son who had killed his father, and most serious was disloyalty to the emperor. The penal tools were meant to be used sparsely and with judgement, since intimidation ideally should suffice. As Michael Loewe puts it, “the population must entertain no doubts that the force of the law and its punishments will be brought to bear regularly and effectively.”¹⁵⁹ Intimidation was part of the ruling strategy.¹⁶⁰

The penal instrument of course scared the people into submission, but the cruellest thing of it all was the constant comparison with the past. Any fairly stable dynasty was supposed to be an improvement from the chaos of the Warring States, and any penal system was supposed to be better than the heinous system back in the First Emperor’s dynasty. That was not always so. It was for example first during the Liao state (916-1125) and later in the Song dynasty in 1028 that the intensely inhumane execution by slicing was adopted. This interpretation of a supposed historical fact, is just one example of the pervasive tendency in Chinese politics to persist in the control over history. The compilations of official historical works were to provide the rulers with political lessons, but it was also an indirect tool for the same rulers. In 1699 the Qing-emperor Kangxi ordered the editing of one of the Confucian classics. The editors’ job consisted, among other things, of the extirpation of “offensive passages such as statements that suggest the removal of unworthy despotic sovereigns.”¹⁶¹ Kangxi then kept up

¹⁵⁷ Hucker 1975: 323

¹⁵⁸ Levenson 1964: 31

¹⁵⁹ Loewe 1966: 79

¹⁶⁰ Liu 1990: 53f; Ocko 1990: 215f; Farmer 1990: 115, 124; Fu 1993: 115; Fairbank 1992: 70f

¹⁶¹ Fairbank 1992: 70; Fu 1993: 61

a tradition that had started with the Burning of the Books in Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), when the chancellor Li Si rejected the idea that there was anything to learn from a past "marked by a multiplicity of rulers"¹⁶². As Jenner so eloquently put it, "Chinese governments have, for at least 2,000 years, taken history much too seriously to allow the future to make its own unguided judgements about them."¹⁶³ He calls this the tyranny of history.¹⁶⁴

One of the desired results of this constant rewriting of history was the legitimacy of the ruler then in power, but by bringing broad generalisations into the idea of Chinese history other results became inevitable. Most of these conformed to the ideas of continuity and unification. I have already mentioned the idea of regular dynastic cycles. Another idea was the one of the Chinese people as a unified entity. The latter has for long been more important than the idea of specific national boundaries. In order to understand the idea of a unified people we have to be conscious of the fact that the concept of China, as manifested through the so called Han-Chinese, is not entirely tied to this so-called master race, who today make up more than 90% of the total population of the People's Republic of China. The idea of the Chinese people as a unified entity is more abstract. During the last two millennia of Chinese history the Han-Chinese people has for almost half of the time been ruled by so-called uncivilised barbarians, of which the more famous are the Mongolians (1279-1368) and the Manchus (1644-1912)¹⁶⁵. If you then add the periods when the country was divided in at least two parts, mostly four or five, the ideas of continuity and unification can be questioned. The most remarkable aspect of Chinese unity is the continuity of the idea of a unified people under one ruler.¹⁶⁶

The power over history is directly linked to the power over knowledge. This is, as Adler tells us, a most effective tool for maintaining power, because then you have "the ability to create the underlying rules of the game"¹⁶⁷ The authority to control and determine what constitutes a constructive and socially acceptable discourse, and thereby eradicate alternative sources of information and interpretations of reality, is a very subtle form of power. In Imperial China this indirect tool consisted of moral education, or, depending on how you see it, normative indoctrination. Emperors made constant references to the mandate of heaven and precedents in Confucian texts, and he as well as numerous emperors paid excessive attention to traditional rituals and ceremonies, which all underscored and emphasised the supremacy of the highest authority. No organised activities or sources of information were allowed outside the sphere of the state, unless it was officially sanctioned. The result was the almost complete absence of civil society, and a stately supervision that permeated the whole Chinese society by way of for example mutual surveillance, collective responsibility, and group punishment. This deference to authority in every aspect of social life was aimed at guaranteeing social stability, but the result was a state control of the mind. The altruism of Mohism met the pragmatism of Legalism, under the guise of idealist Confucianism.¹⁶⁸

The Mohist idea of a state control of the mind was elaborated on by a Legalist in Confucian guise, the reformer Wang Anshi (1021-86), who considered opposition immoral,

¹⁶² Loewe 1999: 974f

¹⁶³ Jenner 1992: 5

¹⁶⁴ Fu 1993: 56, 113, 122; Jenner 1992: 47

¹⁶⁵ Other examples are the Ruzhen of the Jin-dynasty (265-420), the Xianbei during the peak of the Northern Wei-dynasty (452-534), and the Nüzhen of the Jin dynasty (1115-1234)

¹⁶⁶ Liu 1986: 9-12; Jenner 1992: 2ff, 26f, 30f; Loewe 1966: 84f; Ferguson & Mansbach 1996: 170; Smith 1990: 309

¹⁶⁷ Adler 1997: 336

¹⁶⁸ Farmer 1990: 108ff, 125; Zhu 1997: 165ff; Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 42ff; Fairbank 1992: 70f

since in an ideally unified society everyone should share the same values. The manipulative powers of the ruling elite were to assert authority over every aspect of Chinese society. The influential Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200) advocated arduous self-control and excessive exercises in self-criticism on behalf of the subdued subordinates, and when patterns for moral education and mutual responsibility within the clans and families were promoted the ideological control of the people reached a new dimension. The local residents' meetings called *xiangyue* (community covenants) were more or less effective, depending on the dynastic phase, but nevertheless they provided an open channel through which the emperor could convey his Sacred Edicts and other ideological adjustments. The gap between the people and the ruler was to be bridged, but in reality, it provided the ruler with one more tool, and the gap could not be bridged as long as the monarchy, built on the idea of the ruler as semi-divine, was intact.¹⁶⁹

For the responsible ruler it was of course a burdensome task to mantle this double role as ruler and teacher. The Ming emperor Taizu often lamented his constant trepidation under the mandate of heaven¹⁷⁰. One can therefore argue that the emperor was as much a victim of this social construction as the people, but as the Qing-emperor Yongzheng (r. 1723-36) put it:

If the ruler did not know how to venerate Confucius, how would he be able to build the supreme authority at the top.... The people only know that the teachings of Confucius explicate normative order, differentiate human relationships, rectify human minds, and correct social custom. Do they also know...the one who ultimately benefits the most is the ruler himself?¹⁷¹

China had been provided with the tools for absolute monarchy over a millennium before Europe experienced the impact of Machiavelli, the Italian counterpart of the Legalists. The art of governance was not to rock the boat by seeking perfection, but to strike the necessary balance between the intimidating law and the rectifying of behaviour. This reasoning was further elaborated in Sima Guang's (1019-1086) *Zizhi tongjian* (A Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), a classic that would prove immensely valuable to numerous rulers, imperial as well as modern. The emperors talked endlessly about morality and righteousness, but they never hesitated to take violent and manipulative measures. The indirect tools of moral education seemed to need the direct tools as reinforcement, but even then the system would not have been possible without the people's acquiescence to the basis of the arrangement.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Fairbank 1992: 97ff, 274, 363; Hucker 1975: 363ff; Fu 1993: 58f; Spence 1990: 102; Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 44; Arkush 1990: 312

¹⁷⁰ Dardess 1983: 260

¹⁷¹ *Qing Shizong shilu*: ch. 59, transl. by Fu 1996: 61

¹⁷² Dardess 1983: 197ff; Fairbank 1992: 70, 97; Lodén 1997: vii

4.4 Stability by Human Agreement

“a nation’s culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people”

- Mahatma Gandhi –

The cultural and social structures that made up the imperial political system conditioned the thoughts and actions of the people born into them, but at the same time the structures were only an outgrowth of the objectively existing reality, and thereby socially constructed by people as agential powers. The intentions and actions of people continuously interact with these structures, but even if consciousness and intentionality theoretically are limitless, people are constrained by their structures. In imperial China the social discourse was extremely restrained and alternative sources of information were practically extinct, and then it became arduous for the individual to make up new interpretations of these social facts. The socially constructed reality was nearly as limiting as the natural world. The possibilities for change were there, in the minds and intentionality of people, but together with the suppressive means the very strength of the arguments for this social construction were powerful impediments for change. This strength was found in the fact that the normative and epistemic interpretations of reality were conditioned by the consensus on certain basic values and preferences.

Consensus roughly equals a general opinion or belief, which either is what people believe other people to believe, or is what seems to be an honest belief. In other words, either people were convinced by fear, or they really found the system relatively satisfying. Aldous Huxley has written that “[b]elief is the systematic taking of unanalyzed words much too seriously.”¹⁷³ That may be to underestimate the individual’s potential for independent analytical thinking, but it can also be the proof for the strength of the convincing assumptions behind the very system that people had reached consensus about. Ferguson and Mansbach has emphasised that “[o]rder, continuity, and central control, as opposed to change and competition [...] pervaded Chinese political thought and conceptions of empire.”¹⁷⁴ This thesis assumes that the belief in the Chinese political system as the ideal solution was shaped by a set of fundamental values, and these were the needs for social stability, order, and unity. In imperial China all actions and decisions were to be measured against these preferences.

In short then the ideal political solution was based on the idea that the ideal was an unrealistic and naive dream. Contradictions were natural parts of the political culture, and compromises became a necessary way to bring heavenly order and stability into a less than perfect earthly world. The idea that the world consisted of concentric squares necessitated a strong unifying and monocratic centre that could work against decentralising forces that threatened the stability and order that in turn guaranteed the people peace and prosperity. This arrangement would also bring continuity and predictability, so valuable in an agricultural society, to a chaotic and contradictory world. Since people as individuals are unreliable and selfish, if not innately bad, the heavenly entrusted leadership had to be didactic. The more centralised and unified, the more moral. Furthermore an imperfect world necessitated a balance between moral and coercive means, all for the good of the people, not as individuals but as a unified entity. All the contradictions between the ideal and real world were thereby bridged, but it still required the indirect or direct consent of the people. Consensus had to be reached, and considering the relatively impressive stability in the Chinese political culture this

¹⁷³ Huxley 1962: 42

¹⁷⁴ Ferguson & Mansbach 1996: 169

consensus was not seldom reached, and then in the biggest unbroken society of people that the world has known. How was this possible?

The idea of a unified China, a social stratified order, and a general stability as the solution to all problems has of course been a God-given present to the rulers. This was also shown by the way non-Han rulers quickly adopted the same political system. Neither the Mongols of the 13th century nor the Manchus of the 17th century saw any reason not to maintain it¹⁷⁵. It was also absorbed in the neighbouring cultures of present-day Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The genius of Chinese political thought was that the people had to yield if the power was justified by the mandate of heaven, a mandate you in theory just had been given by conquering the country, but since it included the potential of a “reaction of the people themselves to governmental authority”¹⁷⁶, the emperor had to win the respect and acquiescence of the people, and then, for the ruler’s own sake, more was needed than the impermanent idea of the mandate of heaven. As Pye puts it,

It is a fundamental rule of politics that the legitimacy of systems should never be tied to the vagaries of fortune, and especially not to popular impressions about the pay-offs of specific public policies. Politics can be adjusted, changed, given a new public face, or even repudiated; legitimacy must be anchored more deeply in the soul of a people.¹⁷⁷

Certain things had to be taken for granted, and they were that the above-mentioned values of stability, unity, and societal order were in the best interest of everyone and that these could only be provided by the implementation of a strict hierarchical order and absolute monarchy. The tradition of compromises as the ideal solution strengthened these social facts.

Furthermore these compromises would include sacrifices for both the people and the ruler. The sacrifice of the ruler was that he took full responsibility not only for the co-ordination between the earthly world and the heavenly forces by way of fateful ceremonies and rituals, but also for the moral education of the people. The peoples’ sacrifice was to give up their individual rights for the benefit of the collective, i.e. the family, clan, and ultimately the state.¹⁷⁸ As Ferguson and Mansbach has noted “the heritage of Chinese experience and thought are the ideas of achievement through collective action and responsibility to the collective.”¹⁷⁹ Only through a consensus on this was it possible to avoid *luan* (chaos), one of the most dreaded words in the Chinese language. The result was a stability by human agreement that could only be broken through outer forces, such as natural disasters, rebellions or invasions that were taken as proof for a broken agreement. Consensus was thereby reached and over the years the veneration of this social contract would generate a general scepticism of change and a praise of continuity.

According to Friedrich and Brzezinski this kind of widespread consensus on “the broad goals of peace and order, as well as on the more particular and parochial goals of specific deities and the cultures associated with them” is in fact a “specific characteristic of autocratic regimes”¹⁸⁰. In Chinese thought the conceptions and values of ordinary people seemed to coincide with the ruler’s. This was of course not a coincidence. The arguments for this interpretation of reality were convincing, but time would inevitably breed new contradictions.

¹⁷⁵ Creel 1953: 218

¹⁷⁶ Solomon 1971: 135

¹⁷⁷ Pye 1988: 164f

¹⁷⁸ Pye 1996b: 16

¹⁷⁹ Ferguson & Mansbach 1996: 169

¹⁸⁰ Friedrich & Brzezinski 1965: 12f

According to Searle the function of an object is observer relative and may change with time¹⁸¹. An intended function of monarchy was the maintenance of social stability and order, but there was another more controversial function, and that was, the maintenance of the system of power relationships in society, which in the end favoured the emperor himself. The first function was never seriously challenged, but the other function of maintaining the stratification of society needed some more argumentative support on behalf of the leadership. It was also this latter function that the Chinese people started questioning in the 19th century. The decline of the Qing dynasty and the impact of Western ideas necessitated a reevaluation of the basis for the legitimacy of the traditional Chinese monarchy.

4.5 Final Remarks

To find a societal equilibrium by compromising has been considered the only realistic solution to the contradictions inherent in Chinese political thought. The Legalist realism and the Confucian idealism found a relative balance in an imperial system, where coercive means were co-ordinated with moral education. Contradictions between the ideal and real world were bridged by the consensus on certain social facts taken for granted. An enlightened ruler and a well-educated elite was to provide the supposedly selfish and ignorant individuals with a collective sense of moral. The social contract between the ruler and the ruled consisted of a reciprocal relationship with mutual sacrifices. The people gave up their individual voice for a strict hierarchical order, while the ruler took absolute responsibility for the societal order. This political system would guarantee the traditionally cherished social stability, unity, and order. The above-mentioned social construction was drilled into the Chinese people by the didactic leadership, and consequently all other alternative political powers were put out of action.

The Chinese monarchy was conveyed as a good, fair and morally justified compromise, but it was probably perceived as a contradictory, but necessary, solution. It was legitimised as the only guarantee for stability and societal order, and it found both the people's and the ruler's acquiescence as the best, or rather only, solution to the problems of China. The traditional monarchy became a socially constructed fact based on human agreement. The emphasis on unity, stability, order, and predictability, generated scepticism about change, and a belief in continuity. Possibilities of change in the perceiving of monarchy could still be found in the fact that consensus consists of concepts that are never set but formed and developed in the minds of the people in a continuous exchange. At the end of the Qing dynasty in the 19th century the agential Chinese people began to seriously question and challenge the conditioning monarchical structures. Time as well as the impact of other social constructions seemed to have made people aware of inherent flaws in the function of monarchy. Was the time ripe for change in a more than two thousand-year-old social construction?

¹⁸¹ Searle 1995: 14ff

5 The Middle Layer

At the end of the 19th century chaos was prevalent in China. Inner and outer political pressures would lead to the collapse of the imperial political system. Modern Chinese history, as it is taught in China, officially begins with the First Opium War (1839-42) and the western impact on the Chinese thought and society¹⁸². In a few decades the pride and jingoism of the imperial days were thoroughly crushed. The ruling Manchus slowly and painfully lost their mandate of heaven. What people had started to question was not only the legitimacy of the ruler, but also the basis for his position. In this chapter I will take a look at what features of the Chinese monarchy that was questioned and how. The continuity and change in the way it was perceived, conveyed and legitimised during the 19th and early 20th century will take us through the decline of the Qing empire (1839-1911) and the Republic of China (1911-49). My analysis will take into account both the totalitarian and pluralist arguments, but my way of handling the subject will still be guided by my constructive approach.

5.1 The Awakening to Change

“History will teach us nothing”

- Sting -

After more than two millennia the traditional Chinese monarchy was seriously challenged. The concentric squares making up the Chinese socially constructed reality had for a long time been affected by peripheral political thoughts, but the effect on the central power had so far been almost negligible¹⁸³. In the late 18th and the early 19th centuries the awareness of the potential power of western political systems and thoughts slowly grew stronger. The decline of the empire and the impending outer threats forced the Chinese people to take action. As Joseph R. Levenson has noted, when the alternatives changed and new problems arose; ideas, thoughts and values were gradually affected. New questions were raised and when the traditional answers felt outdated the need for structural changes became imminent.¹⁸⁴ As mentioned before major changes in the monocratic structures are not possible without the intended or unintended action of people. Christopher Lloyd clarifies,

Action is [...] socially structuring. But structure pre-exists individual actions and conditions them. The generality of action through time is necessary for the creation, continued reproduction, and gradual transformation of structures which leads to the creation of new structures. The historical/transformational dimension is essential.¹⁸⁵

The western impact on the traditional Chinese monarchy was explosive. The Manchu imperial army's humiliating defeat by foreign barbarians in the First Sino-British Opium War “was a shattering blow to the myth of the invincible imperial state in the minds of the

¹⁸² See for example Li Kan 1994:1ff. This book was required reading at courses in Chinese modern history at Peking University in the late 1990s.

¹⁸³ Hucker 1975: 381

¹⁸⁴ Levenson 1958-65: xiiiiff

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd 1993:192

people.”¹⁸⁶ The Chinese correlative cosmology implied that China with its monocratic ruler was the centre of the world and that everything was to be measured in accordance with the social reality of this mighty empire. In the 18th and 19th century the idea of the Chinese political system as unique and superior was challenged by the western political culture and worldview, and maybe more than anything else by the physical strength of the foreign powers. The Chinese army was ridiculed by the foreigners’ so-called ”gunboat diplomacy”¹⁸⁷. A series of domestic rebellions¹⁸⁸ were indeed successfully suppressed, but the time and effort it took contributed to the general impression of imperial decay. The demoralisation and corruption within the bureaucracy who should provide the people with moral guidance was also a clear sign of decline. The traditional political structure was disintegrating. Some of the basic tenets of Chinese political thought seemed to be incompatible with the new situation.¹⁸⁹

In the late 19th century the monocratic structure of the Chinese central power was unclear. Infant or powerless emperors were controlled by the conservative empress dowager, Cixi, who was trying to find the ideological and political balance between reformers and conservatives¹⁹⁰. To begin with the national chaos was blamed on the westerners’ bad influence, but floodings and other natural disasters could not be blamed on anyone but the Manchu leadership, that furthermore many Chinese people considered foreign.¹⁹¹

To control the minds and the way people look at social reality is crucial in maintaining absolute power. People will always think and act themselves, but if the references are limited even the intellectual elite will find it hard to break out of their social construction. In the end even the emperor and his in-laws became prisoners in their own cage and totally failed to adapt to the new circumstances. The strong centralisation of power made it difficult for advisory assemblies to have any real influence on major policies. The reciting of Confucian classics and the Sacred Edicts of former emperors continued well into the 20th century. The leadership intuitively played on tradition, but the lack of a well thought out strategy to resist the impact of western ideas resulted in a situation where it was almost impossible to remain in charge of people’s minds.¹⁹²

The intellectual struggle for survival started seriously when the official-literati under the supervision of the regime launched a quasi-movement to learn western technology¹⁹³. The dream of a viable compromise lived on in a balance between Chinese theory and western practice (*ti-yong*). Even if there was a struggle between the conservative fundamentalists and the ”reformist legalists” Fu has noted that both these factions ”shared the same loyalty to the imperial system and to authority.”¹⁹⁴ It was not a matter of changing the political system, but rather of strengthening the imperial autocratic system.¹⁹⁵

Since an increasing amount of young Chinese students went abroad and foreign merchants and missionaries entered China new western ideas were bound to reach the Chinese people.

¹⁸⁶ Fu 1993:146

¹⁸⁷ For example, the Anglo-French military offensive and the burning of the Imperial Summer Palace in Beijing (1856-60), the French invasion (1883-85), the Sino-Japanese war (1894-5), the Imperialist encroachment in 1898, the Boxer war in 1900, and the Sino-Russian war in 1903.

¹⁸⁸ For example, the Nian rebellion (1853-68), and the Taiping rebellion (1850-65).

¹⁸⁹ Meisner 1999: 5; Fairbank 1992: 232ff, 247f; Spence 1990: 181ff

¹⁹⁰ Spence 1990: 216ff; Fairbank 1992: 220

¹⁹¹ Fairbank 1992: 230

¹⁹² Fu 1993: 151f; Fairbank 1992: 232ff, 247f

¹⁹³ The ”self-strengthening movement” (1860-1894).

¹⁹⁴ Fu 1993: 149

¹⁹⁵ Fairbank 1992: 258; Spence 1990: 218, 224ff

One of the most influential movements of the time was the radical Christian egalitarianism of the Taiping rebellion (1850-65). It questioned the honour and dignity of the intelligentsia that should protect and educate the people, and it denied the immanent virtue of the Confucian system. The seeds of a potential rejection of the Chinese Confucian heritage were sown for future reformers to nurture, and their class-analysis would in fact be inherited by the Chinese Marxists. The monocratic tradition nevertheless lived on in the movement's uncannily charismatic leader.¹⁹⁶

As mentioned earlier the cyclical view of history had generated a sense of repetition. You can picture this by writing a curve where a dynastic top never is higher than the ones before. Social Darwinism provided the Chinese intelligentsia with a fear of not being the fittest for survival but also with a linear conception of progress and thereby a hope for a change to the better. Out of national despair and necessity grew ideas of societal change. The dilemma was to be found in the tight link between the Chinese monocratic structure and the ideal of continuity. Was it at all possible to save the Chinese political traditions, but at the same time promote change?¹⁹⁷

Kang Youwei was one of the first Chinese reformers to search for evolutionary thoughts in the classical texts. His three-step evolution toward a more equal and fair society was a serious attempt to update the Confucian tradition. Michael Twohey sees Kang as a crucial link between what he calls the totalitarian past and the authoritarian future, for his main goal was still a strong centralised authority that spread the reforms from top down.¹⁹⁸ Radical changes in the traditional political system were not necessary for a progression toward constitutional democracy. The political authoritarianism was to be transitional, and democracy would be attained as soon as the state had become wealthy. As Fu notes, Kang's influential colleague Liang Qichao also honoured the legacy of didactic leadership since the fate of the country could not be entrusted to common badly educated people.¹⁹⁹ They were not ready. The people had to revere the authority and sageness of the emperor, otherwise the nation would be lost.²⁰⁰

The shocking defeat in the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese war gave rise to a widespread nationalism. Up till then patriotism and nationalism had been such integral and obvious parts of not being barbarian but part of the civilised world, that it had, as Fitzgerald writes, been left more or less unexpressed.²⁰¹ Levenson sees the Chinese nationalism as a denial of culturalism, including Confucianism and the emperor cult, but also as a way of combining western ideas with the Chinese characteristics. The vitality of the Confucian worldview decreased when "China faced the world instead of containing it"²⁰², and thereby the correlative cosmology with China at its centre lost its vigour. Nationalism was a way to find a place and a role for China in relationship to a threatening outer world.²⁰³

As Marina Svensson has shown there were writings from this time that advocated the destruction of the authoritarian power of the ruler, but this was in order to reach national salvation rather than the emancipation of the individual.²⁰⁴ The question of equality was to be tightly connected to the question of nationalism, but the national equality would overshadow

¹⁹⁶ Meisner 1999: 3f; Spence 1990: 175f, 216ff; Levenson 1964: 85ff, 113

¹⁹⁷ Levenson 1964: 127; Spence 1990: 145, 239, 300ff

¹⁹⁸ Twohey 1999: 43f

¹⁹⁹ Fu 1993: 151f

²⁰⁰ Levenson 1958-65: 84f; Spence 1990: 226f, 259; Fairbank 1992: 227f, 244f

²⁰¹ Fitzgerald 1964: 41

²⁰² Levenson 1965: 104

²⁰³ Spence 1990: 223ff, 231; Levenson 1958-65: 103ff

²⁰⁴ Svensson 1996: 131ff, 137ff

egalitarian and anti-monocratic thoughts. In one of the most influential manifestos of the time, *The Revolutionary Army* (1903), Zou Rong wrote about the Chinese “sacred race, descendants of the Yellow emperor”²⁰⁵. In order to save this race the state had to be strengthened and the individual had to be sacrificed for the collective. The role of the government was to benefit the people, but unless the social contract was violated the individual should always obey the government, otherwise there would be chaos and anarchy.

At the end of the Qing dynasty the hope of the Chinese people was tightly knit to the adoption of a constitution. The main purpose was to strengthen the nation, but seen as a benevolent gift from the ruler to the people the constitution could be rescinded at any moment. Minimal time was spent on the question of the people’s need of protection from the ruler, which was still seen as a foreign thought. The Qing-constitution was not to be, but the idea formed the basis for the constitution of the Republic of China (henceforth ROC).²⁰⁶

The hierarchic tradition, with its inherent admiration for leaders, was deeply rooted, which was clearly manifested by the successful rebels in Wuhan, in October 1911. When looking for a leader they intuitively turned to a military commander that was not only unwilling but also steeped in the old imperial traditions. Status and knowledge were still held in too high esteem to dare make any drastic changes. As Max Weber has noted, revolts of the Chinese urban populace was “always aimed at removing a concrete official or a concrete decree [...] never at gaining a charter which might, at least in a relative way, guarantee the freedom of the city.”²⁰⁷ This can also be applied to national rebellions. The surprisingly long survival of the declining Qing dynasty could partly be explained by the intellectuals’ strong loyalty to the emperor, but also in the true lack of alternatives. Furthermore, change in the Chinese social construction was associated with social instability.²⁰⁸

In the preceding chapter I mentioned two functions of the Chinese monarchy. It should guarantee stability and it should uphold the hierarchic societal system. In the last imperial years the social contract was in danger since the emperor no longer guaranteed social stability. In a changing world where the Chinese people seemed to get the worst of it they had also started to question the ruler’s intentions. A lot of Chinese people slowly realised that they had been living in a limited and antiquated matrix. The moral indoctrination slowly got ineffective and yet again it was time for the mandate of heaven to pass to a new intermediary. In one slow blow both sides of the coin of absolute autocracy were exposed and left open for discussion. The people suddenly rose and the empire was history.

²⁰⁵ Spence 1990: 236f

²⁰⁶ Fairbank 1992: 227, 245f; Svensson 1996: 139f, 143; Spence 1990: 248, 277ff

²⁰⁷ Weber 1951: 14

²⁰⁸ Spence 1990: 264; Fairbank 1992: 235

5.2 Clean Break or Adjustment

“Necessity is the mother of invention”

- Roger Ascham –

The pluralists see a clear, if not completely clean, break with the imperial past, while the totalitarians claim that the break never occurred at all. In the early 20th century one can easily argue for pluralist tendencies, like the mushrooming of schools and thousands of voluntary associations. The centrifugal force was strong and the discourse had indeed changed. People talked about parliaments, democracy, prime ministers, presidents etc. The legacy of the First Emperor seemed to be threatened, and the socially constructed reality was questioned, but it seemed difficult to formulate the questions. General cynicism about Confucian moralism had for ages been found in down to earth proverbs, but this did not mean that people disapproved with the whole political system, especially when the alternatives were unclear. The difficulties faced may be exemplified by the biggest experiment on Chinese constitutional democracy, i.e. the election of a national assembly in 1912. The electorate consisted of 40 million people, i.e. about 10% of the population. That was as far as they got before the warlords and masters of the past found their authority too threatened. The widely supposed premier to be was assassinated, presumably on the orders of the former Qing governor, Yuan Shikai. The dream of a Chinese constitutional democracy was thereby crushed.²⁰⁹

Yuan Shikai swiftly made use of his traditional power base and tried to restore the imperial system. He was a firm proponent for a strong centralised state power and he used the Confucian heritage to bolster his authority. Even traditional rites, like the slaughter of animals, were organised at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, and he might have succeeded had he not been too eager to restore himself as a new emperor already in 1916. It was too soon after the revolution. As Levenson expressed it, the monarchical symbols were “thoroughly drained”²¹⁰. Nevertheless, the dream of a strong sage-ruler lived on. In 1917 General Zhang Xun made a futile attempt at restoring the abdicated “last emperor”, the manchu-child Puyi. The discourse had seemingly changed, but had the needs or the alternative solutions changed? The assumption was that without the control of Peking national authority could not be attained. During the warlords period (1916-1927) in the ROC the symbolic leadership in the shape of a powerless government in Peking kept the dream of a strong monarchy alive, while China once again was thrown into an interim chaos.²¹¹

The intellectual struggle for survival climaxed during the May Fourth Movement in 1919, when the Confucian heritage was heavily discredited and cultural change towards a new paradigm was promoted. The reason for the constitutional failure and national backwardness was sought in the Confucian norm of hierarchy, which was found incompatible with egalitarian thoughts. Paradoxically, new imported socialist ideas led to a general refutation of western liberal and pluralist values that were found unacceptable simply because they were foreign. Autocratic solutions were still defended as long as they guaranteed national strength. The right to question the authority was considered detrimental to the national unity against outer enemies. Svensson mentions Fu Sinian, who earlier had defended this right, “but who later argued for a strong leader whose authority could not be questioned.”²¹² The Chinese

²⁰⁹ Arkush 1990: 330f; Fu 1993: 162; Spence 1990: 279ff

²¹⁰ Levenson 1964: 124

²¹¹ Spence 1990: 286ff; Arlington & Lewisohn 1991: 73; Fu 1993: 154

²¹² Svensson 1996: 161f; from Schwarcz 1986: 230-6

people had been made aware of the plight of their nation, but the lack of consensus on any political and ideological strategy paved the way for almost four decades of chaotic experiments.²¹³

Sun Yatsen's (1866-1925) conscious promotion of nationalism, as the link between his docile compatriots and his dream of a Western type of republic, was one of the most serious attempts at a solution of the time. Just like Xunzi, he saw national unity as a prerequisite for wealth and equality. This unity was to be attained by proper tutelage of the masses from a strong elitist state and a strict hierarchical party-structure. He agreed with Kang Youwei on the need for an authoritarian transitional stage, and as the first years of the republic progressed Sun moved more toward Chinese traditional thoughts than western theories. He saw a widespread belief in the idea of a unique Chinese monarchy where a man possessing great leadership ability was meant to be emperor, and that the people should surrender power to this man. As the supreme leader of his party Sun himself demanded an oath of loyalty from every member.²¹⁴

In his quest for a new stable China Sun Yatsen searched for affinities between Confucianism and Communism. The result was that later the Nationalist Party (or Guomindang, henceforth GMD) and the CCP could both use him in their propaganda. The ambivalence that characterised the thoughts of Sun was a problem as well as a strength. He was a man of compromise, all in accordance with Chinese tradition, and in the end the man who castigated all the warlords with autocratic ambitions was himself worshipped at the altar of the Temple of Heaven. GMD had just conquered Peking and needed an official religion, and hence the famous portrait of Mao Zedong at the Gate of Heavenly Peace came to be preceded by Sun Yatsen's.²¹⁵

The untimely death of Sun in 1925 paved the way for the rise of a new strong leader. The power of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) rested firmly on the monocratic tradition. As Fairbank notes, Jiang never did much to alter "the assumption of uninhibited autocracy as the primal law of the Chinese political order"²¹⁶. His emphasis on national strength moved the focus further away from the right of the individual, and in this way, as Fu claims, nationalism worked "in the service of the autocratic state"²¹⁷. Jiang also adopted Sun's idea of a period of tutelage for the masses and he reinterpreted and made use of the Confucian elements of strict discipline and hierarchy. Nationalism was a great blow for Confucianism as official ideology, but at the same time the former saved the latter by redefining it as part of the honoured though vaguely defined Chinese characteristics.²¹⁸

Attempts at fostering Jiang's personality cult were consciously made, but these failed due to factional tendencies in the politics. In a time characterised by strong anti-hierarchical, anti-imperialist, and anti-Confucian ideas, Jiang's leaning on foreign favours and the corruption within his bureaucracy stroke a discordant note. The social contract with the people eventually became strained because of a lack of reciprocity as well as political and revolutionary aims. As R. Bin Wong has noted, "Jiang Jieshi's program to persuade the rural China to obey Confucian rules of hierarchy and obedience was less than compelling when the

²¹³ Spence 1990: 310ff; Fu 1993: 157; Svensson 1996: 153ff, 170

²¹⁴ Twohey 1999: 77; Spence 1990: 294ff; Strand 1997: 327f, 339; Sun Wen, *Zongli quanji*, I: 169, ed by Hu Hanmin, *Minzhi shuju*, Shanghai, 1930

²¹⁵ Strand 1997: 327ff; Arlington & Lewisohn 1991: 73

²¹⁶ Fairbank 1992: 339

²¹⁷ Fu 1993: 152

²¹⁸ Fairbank 1992: 285f; Fu 1993: 156ff; Spence 1990: 365f; Levenson 1964: 134

obligations of elites to act paternalistically were not equally promoted.”²¹⁹ The acquiescence of the people was lost, and the vacuum of leadership had once again to be filled.²²⁰

At the same time as the power of Jiang Jieshi was crumbling, the Chinese monocacy as an idea was paradoxically strengthened. In the early 1930s countries like Italy, Germany and Soviet Union moved away from democracy and reoriented their political systems more toward totalitarianism. This of course influenced the intellectual debate in China. Svensson has noted that the idea of a transitional authoritarian system with an enlightened despot as the only way to make China strong again was widespread in these days.²²¹ The emigrated intellectual Lin Yutang was stretching his neck for a good man who could lead the poor ignorant peasants out of the misery of the ROC.²²² He even expressed his admiration for the Japanese statesman Ito who was chief responsible for the humiliation of China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. Such was the longing for a strong and enlightened leader. Under the threat of once again being subjected by an intimidating Japanese regime the traditionally Chinese inclination to ascribe even more power to the leader was still apparent. It is as Svensson writes ”difficult not to draw the conclusion that the Chinese advocated dictatorship less out of conviction than out of despair”²²³. On the other hand, it is highly debatable that the people who advocated democracy did it, like Svensson claims, out of a true belief in the individual’s freedom, rather than, like the cited Lloyd E. Eastman claims, out of sheer disillusionment with the ruling GMD.²²⁴

There was in the 1940s an alternative so-called third force in the Democratic League that was outspokenly against one-party dictatorship. The idea that there was a democratic tradition²²⁵ in China was during these years taking hold not only among people in China but also in the West²²⁶. The ”last Confucian” Liang Shuming, on the other hand, thought that democracy was incompatible with Confucian tradition and that ”the Chinese ideas of harmony and adjustment” eventually would triumph²²⁷. Democracy in the western sense, with a self-governing people, has in fact often been seen as improper in China. The sinified version has come to mean the rule of the self-selected able for the good of the people.²²⁸

Many who advocated dictatorship still found that the GMD ”did not live up to the demands of an enlightened dictatorship.”²²⁹ The Chinese people were only too ready to gather around the new progressive and modern ideology of Marxism-Leninism, and the strong and charismatic leader Mao Zedong. Tang Tsou claims that the CCP as well as Mao “derived implicit support from [...] the previous long history of worship of emperor”²³⁰. Maurice Meisner is sceptical about this ”general picture of China as the land of petrified tradition”²³¹. The question if a radical break with the past has occurred has to be traced in the new solution of Chinese communism.

²¹⁹ Wong 1997: 325

²²⁰ Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 48f, Wasserstrom 1991: 181

²²¹ Svensson 1996: 254ff

²²² Lin 1995: 410ff

²²³ Svensson 1996: 262f

²²⁴ Fitzgerald 1964: 76; Svensson 1996: 254ff

²²⁵ It is sometimes called the Mencian tradition.

²²⁶ Herrlee G. Creel was the most potent academic force, see Creel 1953: 243f

²²⁷ Spence 1982: 208

²²⁸ Fitzgerald 1964: 95f; Wood 1995: 175; Svensson 1996: 276ff; Jenner 1992: 180f

²²⁹ Svensson 1996: 255

²³⁰ Tang 1985: 55

²³¹ Meisner 1999: 4

5.3 Final Remarks

The impact of western intrusion; the impotence and decline of the Qing-dynasty; and the fragmentation and corruption of the ROC; it all exposed weaknesses in the Chinese political tradition. The superiority and uniqueness of Chineseness was questioned, but paradoxically the Chinese people still tended to embrace the traditional monocratic structure. As the country grew weaker the attainment of national strength and unity took precedence over democracy and individualism. My view is that the Chinese nationalism saved the monocracy, since the assumption was that a strong and unified nation only could be attained with a strong leadership. The nationalist reaction was just the necessary adjustment to the new impact of the periphery. The traditional worldview with the Chinese ruler in the centre of the world was adjusted to a new perspective with the Chinese ruler in the centre of modern China.

The first function of monocracy, i.e. to guarantee stability and order, was never seriously questioned since the values of the Chinese people were practically unchanged. The second function of monocracy, i.e. the maintenance of the hierarchical system, was questioned but leaders, like Sun Yatsen and Jiang Jieshi, kept defending it. The attempt to update the Confucian tradition was never successful, but leaders during the first half of the 20th century still turned to it for ideological support. There was still no viable alternative.

The traditional social construction based on stability and unity was challenged, but after having been compared with alternative solutions it remained surprisingly intact. New imported concepts like democracy, egalitarianism, and pluralist liberalism were found incompatible with the unique Chinese situation. Furthermore they could not guarantee stability and unity. Pluralists tend to emphasise the influence of these egalitarian and liberal thoughts. The seeds of change had been sown and the dictatorship was only chosen out of despair. The totalitarians stress the Chinese people's tendency to intuitively turn to traditional solutions. There were indeed no signs of leaders that would dare trust the people with the responsibility over the destiny of the nation. The Chinese solution and tenable compromise was to be found in an authoritarian transitional stage with time for tutelage of the masses.

The main tension was found between the new idea of an evolutionary process and the age-old ideal of continuity and predictability. Change was still associated with social disorder, but it also provided the people with the necessary hope of national salvation. The new leadership from now on had to guarantee both change and continuity, but as has been argued above contradictions can be accepted only as long as the leadership reciprocates according to the social contract. Facts earlier taken for granted had been questioned, and this had bred new contradictions. The ideological vacuum was waiting to be filled with a new plausible compromise.

6 The Thin Layer

The solution for the Chinese people turned out to be a nationalistic socialist refutation of western individualism and liberalism. The new evolutionary idea with the hope of a change for the better was combined with a strong and charismatic leadership. I will in this chapter focus on the way this charismatic leader and his successors were conveyed, perceived, and legitimised, and thereby trace the monocratic elements in modern China. The thin layer consists of the history of the CCP and the People's Republic of China (henceforth PRC) under Mao Zedong (1921-1976), and under Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin (1976-2002). As we now enter the second half of the 20th century the totalitarians will be challenged by considerably stronger pluralist arguments. With the constructive approach I intend to strike the proper balance.

6.1 Communism with Chinese Characteristics

“To conquer a people, one must conquer their hearts and minds”
- Zhuge Liang -

The CCP was established in Shanghai the summer of 1921. After 28 years of struggles with and against the GMD and local warlords the CCP in October 1949 finally managed to, in their own words, liberate the country. The resulting PRC was to be lead for almost three decades (1949-1976) by the strong and charismatic leader Mao Zedong. Let us begin with Mao's own words back in 1938:

Contemporary China has grown out of the China of the past.... We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and take over this valuable legacy. Being Marxists, Communists are internationalists, but we can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form.²³²

The CCP leadership was officially guided by Marxism-Leninism and from 1945 also by Mao Zedong Thought. According to Fu the main justification for the authority of the communist leadership and the party-state is found in the theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat.²³³ As mentioned above this had to be complemented by the traditional guarantees of social stability and national unity, and the new guarantee of a change for the better. Together this would bring back the pride to the Chinese people. The concept of a dictatorship of the proletariat was never thoroughly explained by Marx himself and has therefore been more or less open for interpretation. Since it was not restricted by any laws it was up to the communist party in each country to find its own way. Mozingo and Nee confirm that Chinese Marxists argued that a strong centralised state was necessary for the development of the country.²³⁴ Since Lenin considered the authority of the ruling elite as being based on their knowledge of Marxism, the transition to pure communism was to be lead by the most advanced and progressive part of the movement, i.e. a strong didactic leadership justified by intellectual and moral superiority. Lenin called this democratic centralism, which White finds

²³² Mao 1938: Vol. 2, p. 209

²³³ Fu 1993: 173

²³⁴ Mozingo & Nee 1985: 20

an eloquent way of rephrasing the subordination of the individual to the party-state, and the party-members to the Central Committee.²³⁵ The question here is if this democratic centralism necessitated absolute monarchy?

Mao Zedong, just like Sun Yatsen, believed in Lenin's democratic centralism with a strong central authority. Mao was never for absolute equality, but considered the principle of party leadership the most important of his six criteria of political correctness²³⁶. Early on he saw China's need for unity and stability, and that this would be provided by an elite government. His preference for the traditional Chinese political authority was due to his conviction that the unique Chinese circumstances needed unique Chinese solutions.²³⁷

In accordance with tradition Mao compared himself with the Legalist First Emperor, and is even said to have boasted that the CCP surpassed the First Emperor in ideological inquisition²³⁸. The "Criticise Lin, Criticise Confucius" Campaign in 1973-4 hailed the same emperor²³⁹, but according to Levenson the influence of Confucius was still seen in the shadows, like an invisible but necessary dancing-partner.²⁴⁰ That this turn of events could be officially accepted shows how much respect power, in all its forms, had in itself. Only the most courageous and worthy had the much admired and awed imperial psyche (*diwang sixiang*). In the cultural and literary tradition this kind of ability and charisma was and is an ideal. In his own poem "White Snow" Mao had big trouble hiding his own aspirations:

What beauty this mountain and river,
Enticing countless heroes to vie and toil.
Regrettably, Emperor Qin Shihuang and Emperor Han Wudi were deficient in literary taste,
Emperor Tang Taizong and Emperor Song Taizu lacked romanticism.
Pride of an era, Genghis Khan, was only good at shooting vultures with his bow.
They were all bygones.
Only today one is in the presence of the true Hero.²⁴¹

This not very subtle poem was written as early as in 1936. Fu has noted that when the published version reached the public in 1945 "many left-wing Chinese intellectuals hailed it as an epic."²⁴² The contradictions between the party's anti-hierarchic message and Mao's own ambitions blurred the general awareness of Mao's position at the time. This is well illustrated by the classic misunderstanding of Edgar Snow, when Mao, by using a Chinese anecdote, told him that he, Mao, was *heshang dasan* (a monk with an umbrella). In these kind of couplets you leave the second part out, since you are supposed to know it anyway, and in this case it continued with *wufa wutian* (subject neither to heaven nor to law). Mao wanted him to know that he had complete power, but Snow interpreted it as modesty and pictured Mao as "only a lone monk walking the world with a leaky umbrella."²⁴³

²³⁵ White 1985: 35

²³⁶ The other five criteria were unity among the people, democratic centralism, people's democratic dictatorship, socialist transformation, and unity of socialist countries.

²³⁷ Twohey 1999: 82, 93; Mao 1957; Fu 1993: 174; Spence 1990: 569; Fairbank & Feuerwerker 1986: 795ff

²³⁸ Mao Zedong, Speech delivered at the Second Plenum of the Eight Congress of the CCP, May 8, 1958 quoted by Fu 1993: 187; MacFarquhar 1997: 222

²³⁹ One of the then defamed former successor of Mao, Lin Biao's crimes was supposed to have been that he did not approve of the First emperor's greatness, see *Hongqi*: no. 12, 1973: 61

²⁴⁰ Levenson 1965: 63, 120ff; Spence 1990: 635ff

²⁴¹ Mao 1946, transl. by Fu 1993: 187

²⁴² Fu 1993: 187

²⁴³ Li 1994: 120; Fu 1993: 188; Snow 1973: 175

Mao found comfort in the same ancient classics as the emperors had read. One of his favourite books was the above-mentioned *Zizhi tongjian* (A Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government), and he also appreciated Chinese military classics. According to both Harrison E. Salisbury and Michael Twohey Mao possibly never read Marx's *Das Kapital* and Stalin's works were at first not even part of his library.²⁴⁴ V. Holubnychy made the curious discovery that 22 percent of references and quotations in Mao's *Selected Works* came from Confucian and Neo-Confucian writings.²⁴⁵ This was only beaten by the 24 percent from Stalin. In the 1950s modern scholars in Confucianism examined the Chinese classics to clarify their significance for history, that is to say, detect tendencies of social progress. Great effort was made to save the cultural heritage, and in the end Confucian wordings were paradoxically used to consolidate the new leader. Mao knew about the power and political utility of words.²⁴⁶

Well aware of the mutual reinforcing effects of indirect and direct tools he never had any illusions about the fact that the source of political power also "grows out of the barrel of a gun"²⁴⁷. All his life he remained in command over the army, and he never underestimated the direct tool of intimidation. The imperial tradition of word imprisonment was upheld through the persecution of ideological heresy and the prohibition of books. To challenge the official orthodoxy was considered counterrevolutionary and punishable. Mao often advocated criticism and self-criticism but he never took kindly to remonstrance directed against himself or the party apparatus. It was an unwritten law during the Mao-era to avoid the making of, in the words of Frederick Teiwes, "constructive proposals".²⁴⁸

In the Marxist materialist interpretation of social change the economic base determines ideas and consciousness, but according to Fu these were in Mao's China used as indirect tools both "for inciting revolution and for maintaining social order."²⁴⁹ It was Lenin who officially turned ideas into weapons, since the class struggle and the war against feudal and capitalist ideas necessitated maximised control over the official ideology. The use of ideas and language in political manipulation has for long been part of CCP's ruling strategy. Joseph W. Esherick and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom argue that the traditional use of ritual demonstrations made these political movements familiar and thereby more acceptable to the common people.²⁵⁰ In the struggle for the acquiescence of the people the spreading of the central leadership's policies and correct ideological thoughts was organised through grassroot meetings, resembling the imperial *xiangyue* (community covenants), and, as the emperors had their Sacred Edicts, Mao had his Supreme Instructions. The propaganda of CCP was even more efficient due to technological and media-related developments.²⁵¹

The communist idea of the need for rectification of people's minds was a thought very familiar in Chinese political culture. People were encouraged to become docile tools of the party as a way of expressing their resolute and noble character²⁵². President Liu Shaoqi

²⁴⁴ Salisbury 1993: 50, 133; Twohey 1999: 94

²⁴⁵ Holubnychy 1964

²⁴⁶ Levenson 1958-65: 140ff; Fu 1993: 189; Levenson 1965: 65-72; Schoenhals 1992: 3ff

²⁴⁷ Fairbank & Feuerwerker 1986: 822

²⁴⁸ Teiwes as a guest lecturer at NIAS in Copenhagen on the 17th of September 1996; Levenson 1958-65: 140; Barnett 1967: 72ff; Spence 1990: 534; Fu 1993: 170

²⁴⁹ Fu 1993: 170

²⁵⁰ Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 50

²⁵¹ Fairbank 1992: 100; Fu 1993: 101f, 170f; Fu 1996: 155ff; Schoenhals 1992: 10f; Spence 1990: 534f; Barnett 1967: 379f; Madsen 1984: 133ff

²⁵² RMRB, January 14, 1960; Fu 1993: 175

instructed each common party member "to subordinate his personal interests absolutely and unconditionally to the interest of the party, whatever circumstances [...] The supremacy of the Party's interests is the highest principle that must govern the thinking and actions of the members of our Party"²⁵³. This kind of absolute unconditional subordination and total state control of the mind had in China been taken for granted, or at least been accepted, for at least two thousand years. The need for national salvation only enhanced the logic and necessity behind this individual sacrifice for the motherland.²⁵⁴

The indisputability of the official ideology was matched by the party's monolithic absolutism, but how monocratic was it? In 1945 Mao Zedong Thought was elevated to an institutionalised guiding principle that "unifies the theory of Marxism-Leninism with the praxis of chinese revolution"²⁵⁵. The ultimate initiating power was officially concentrated in the Standing Committee of the Politburo, where Mao Zedong was the supreme leader, but in reality the personality cult, that was criticised first after his death, had lifted him well over the rest of the party's strict hierarchic leadership. His authority was legitimised by his position as the founder of the new "dynasty", and the distance between him and other officials was widening.²⁵⁶

The behaviour of most of the top officials, when in front of Mao, implied that the loyalty was unquestioned. This was well illustrated by the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka who after his visit to China in 1972 noted that the Chinese Premier "Zhou Enlai is a nobody before Mao. He behaves in front of Mao like a clumsy secretary"²⁵⁷. Tanaka's remark is rather astonishing since traditional cordiality should not be considered noteworthy in a Confucian country like Japan. According to Timothy Cheek the officials' incentive for this absolute obedience was found in their faith in the leader's charisma and in their trust on ideology as a predictable bureaucratic tool.²⁵⁸ This conception of loyalty and submission was a vital support for Mao, but his power also depended on manipulative means. Jenner claims that the officials were so divided against each other that no one dared organise opposition.²⁵⁹ The balance between awe and fear was kept. The monocracy still seemed to be a central part of the whole social construction.²⁶⁰

Just as the emperor had been compared with the pole star the party was conveyed as a guiding star²⁶¹. As the supreme leader, Mao was compared with the sun, a saviour, and a beloved teacher. An example of a revolutionary childrens' song is "Daddy is dear and Mommy is dear, but not as dear as Chairman Mao"²⁶². In imperial China the first characters school-children learned to write was the Confucian wording *ren zhi chu xing ben shan* (man is innately good) but now this was replaced by "May Chairman Mao Live Ten Thousand

²⁵³ Liu Shaoqi 1964, transl. by Fu 1993: 175

²⁵⁴ Madsen 1984: 20ff; Fu 1993: 101f, 170ff; Spence 1990: 534ff

²⁵⁵ Fu 1993: 183; CCP 1945

²⁵⁶ White 1985: 37; Spence 1990: 482; Fairbank 1992: 350

²⁵⁷ Terrill 1999: 372

²⁵⁸ Cheek 1997: 311

²⁵⁹ Jenner 1992: 36

²⁶⁰ Fu 1993: 190; Teiwes 1984, ch. 2

²⁶¹ The connection with the past can be seen on the national flag where the party is the biggest star and the people is organised in four inferior groups symbolised by four smaller stars. In imperial China the central Pole Star of the emperor ruled over the four cardinal points. The emperor was always placed in the centre as the fifth cardinal point.

²⁶² Fu 1993: 184

Years.” This slogan was a direct copy of the imperial expression *wan sui*²⁶³, and only Mao was allowed to be addressed in that way.²⁶⁴

In the sixties the Mao cult reached its zenith with the promotion of the minister of defence and Vice-chairman Lin Biao. He managed to make instructions like “every sentence of Chairman Mao’s works is truth, one sentence of his surpasses ten thousand of ours” part of the quotations that Chinese youths learnt by heart. In September 1966 Zhou Enlai echoed these words: “Whatever accords with Mao Zedong Thought is right, while that which does not accord with Mao Zedong Thought is wrong”²⁶⁵. Obedience did not and should not necessitate understanding. The result of this personality cult was most clearly manifested during the cultural revolution (henceforth CR) (1966-76), when Mao’s quotations were treated like the Sacred Bible; old ladies danced the Loyalty Dance; people were arrested for sitting on papers with Mao’s photo; and the chairman made people swoon at the Tiananmen Square. The belief in the ruler’s infallibility and supreme authority enabled him to receive the final word on all political decisions. White has noted that even when the party was questioned Mao Zedong and his thoughts were not.²⁶⁶

Just like in old China mistakes were blamed on corrupt officials, not on the leader. These were generally considered to exploit the benevolence of the chairman. This picture of the leader was such a thoroughly established fact that it was practically intact over a decade after his death. According to a survey by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, published by Beijing Youth News in 1993, the majority of the respondents said “they still admired Mao as a great man and leader” and some of the younger ones were even “skeptical about the horrors of the past”²⁶⁷. A Chinese peasant shared his thoughts in an interview in 1985:

[Chairman Mao] [s]itting there in his dragon palace, he couldn’t possibly have known what was happening to us peasants. It was the people under him who were bad. They kept him in the dark and did all sorts of terrible things in his name. Chairman Mao had wealth and greatness written all over his face. He had the look of a real emperor.²⁶⁸

6.2 The Charismatic Leadership

“Politics in a dictatorship begins in the personality of the dictator”

- Andrew Nathan -

What was it then that differentiated Mao’s authority from the former emperors’? Joseph R. Levenson argues that the relationship between intellectuals, bureaucrats and the leadership had changed decisively since the imperial days.²⁶⁹ The emperors had used the intellectuals to strike the necessary balance between themselves and the aristocracy, but Mao had left the intellectuals out in the cold. The anti-rightist campaign in 1957, that equalled a death penalty for thousands of intellectuals, was therefore not a sign of traditional Confucian despotism.

²⁶³ The literal meaning of *wan sui* is “ten thousand years”, but a correct translation is “Long Live”, or “Your Majesty”

²⁶⁴ Spence 1990: 596f; Fu 1993: 183f

²⁶⁵ Schoenhals 1996: 27

²⁶⁶ Tang 1985: 87; White 1985: 49f

²⁶⁷ Barmé 1996: 12

²⁶⁸ Zhang & Sang 1987: 117

²⁶⁹ Levenson 1965: 120ff

Timothy Cheek narrows the new elements down to charisma and ideology.²⁷⁰ Mao's charismatic leadership²⁷¹ allowed him to rely on the faith of both the enthused officials and the common people. By bypassing the filter of the bureaucracy he turned directly to the masses. In this way the officials could never rest assured, since their protection from the people became more uncertain. This new social contract of mutual dependence was, according to Cheek, even more favourable to the ruler than the old imperial had been. Paradoxically the voices of the masses had at the same time been strengthened. This mass line-style of leadership is what the pluralists rely on when dismissing Mao's leadership as an absolute monarchy.

This was, in fact, as Mark Selden notes, the first time that "the peasantry as a group was integrated in the political process"²⁷². The belief in the people as the changing force of society had consequences that were difficult to calculate. White argues that the egalitarian and democratic character of the mass line-style not only resulted in a general disintegration of the traditionally hierarchical patterns, but also in a pluralist weakening of the absolute power of the party.²⁷³ The monolithic party-structure was only on the surface, while a relative autonomy could be found on lower levels and in factions like the army. Furthermore the general flow of administrative, managerial and technical power within the party left the leadership to the mechanisms of selective information and opinions inside and outside the party.²⁷⁴

These pluralist tendencies did not change the fact that the democratic centralism was more centralist than democratic, and that the more egalitarian models in the revolutionary tradition actually were weakened after 1949. As the complex ranking systems within the bureaucracy as well as the army were reinstated, the upward mobility within the top ranks lessened considerably. This hierarchical distribution of power was a leftover from the imperial system and left a wide gap between the officials and the common people. As White acknowledges, even if there were channels for remonstrance the hierarchical structures made "expression of opinion relatively exceptional"²⁷⁵. The mass campaigns were just new manifestations of the traditional need for consensus throughout society. They were always channelled through the party, top down, and may be seen as an ingenious way to use group mobilisation and self-criticism to weed out the less faithful. A. Doak Barnett argues that the effective party centralism together with the mass-line style enabled the leadership to make their will felt on the grassroots in an unprecedented way.²⁷⁶ The concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was in fact invoked to legitimise the monistic rule of the party-state.²⁷⁷

Totalitarians, like Fu, find the discrepancies between theory and practice in the PRC analogous to the ones between Confucian precepts and Legalist practices in imperial China. The ideals of monarchy and the rule of man were inherited by the CCP, and the very idea of tradition inhibiting reform had an inhibiting effect on contemporary Chinese reformers. While the old order was justified by official Confucianism, the new one is legitimised by official

²⁷⁰ Cheek 1997: 310f

²⁷¹ While the Imperial leadership was a traditional authority, based on inheritance, the communist leadership under Mao is often considered a charismatic authority, based on the leader's personal qualities; see Weber 1947: 324-86

²⁷² Friedman & Selden 1971: 360-5

²⁷³ White 1985: 28f

²⁷⁴ Barnett 1967: 437ff; Shue 1988: 12ff

²⁷⁵ White 1985: 36

²⁷⁶ Barnett 1967: 72ff

²⁷⁷ Spence 1990: 536f; White 1985: 28ff, 428-442; Meisner 1985: 131; Friedman & Selden 1971: 360ff

Marxism and can be summarised as "one party, one ideology, and one leader."²⁷⁸ There was an apparent lack of alternatives.²⁷⁹

The supreme position of Mao had probably not been so dangerous if it had not rested so much on the personality and whim of the leader himself. The pluralists find him influenced and manipulated by other officials. This kind of government would maybe have worked if there had been some kind of predictability at the top, but, like Pye has observed "[d]ecisions were made by whim" and the collecting of information was not reliable²⁸⁰. The emotional instability and manipulative streak in Mao's personality made normal government impossible. The dilemma was to be found in the fact that although people could see his faults he was still given a Mohist blank cheque. His word was always the last. Officials below him, learnt the painful way that the supreme leader was untouchable²⁸¹. The blame always fell on officials lower in the strict hierarchy. Regarding pre-CR politics Frederick C. Teiwes has emphasised that the "perversely still influential 'two line struggle' interpretation" where Mao had to "contend with various Politburo 'opponents'" must be considered "increasingly unsustainable in the face of a flood of new information from Party history publications and less official sources which depict an absolutely dominant Mao."²⁸²

How then could this monocratic position be justified? The answer is that the monocratic structure was never seriously challenged. What was questioned was the social system and the class differences, i.e. the second function of traditional Chinese monarchy. Mao's real achievement was that he managed to convince people that the Chinese communism had made this second function irrelevant, i.e. that the traditional hierarchy had been dismantled. In addition, he even strengthened the unity of the people and brought back national dignity.

The problem with his leadership is to be found in the first function of monarchy. Mao's way of looking at stability was radically different from the imperial emperors. They as well as Mao gave political and ideological considerations first priority, as opposed to economic, but Mao went one step further and even risked stability. He did not believe in the people as docile subjects but rather saw the potential of the masses in a continuing revolution, where contradictions were problemised instead of harmonised. Unlike the emperors and the leaders of the ROC, Mao wanted to reorganise the societal order. By adopting the evolutionary theories he believed that the change he wanted came out of chaos and tension. Still he would time and time again show that he did not tolerate excessive chaos that did not serve his own purposes. The mass-campaigns clearly manifested that the Chinese people were mere subjects, although not docile, in the hands of the great helmsman. Considering the Chinese people's trauma of the chaotic CR. Mao's way of challenging the basic values of order and stability was probably his biggest mistake. The risks were high and even if he did not have to pay for it himself his successors have had to struggle with the consequences.²⁸³

After decades of socialist reconstruction traditional social beliefs were still with the Chinese people. This continuity is nevertheless not to be confused with a static state.²⁸⁴ As Timothy Cheek notes, to say that the modern political culture share basic tenets with a predecessor two millennia ago...

²⁷⁸ Fu 1993: 170

²⁷⁹ Meisner 1999: 4; Fu 1993: 171ff; Pye 1968: 233f

²⁸⁰ Pye 1996a: 111

²⁸¹ See Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in the early 50s, Peng Dehuai in the late 50s, Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping in the 60s, Lin Biao in the 70s and many more

²⁸² Teiwes 1995: 56

²⁸³ Chen & Deng 1995: 20; Fu 1993: 124; Lodén 1997: 31; Spence 1990: 577f, Barnett 1967: 428f, 443f

²⁸⁴ Smith 1990: 310; Fitzgerald 1964: 17

...is not to argue that China is unchanging any more than a recognition of the centrality of law, a personal God, and Platonic ideal types in current Western politics and society means that the contemporary West has not changed from Roman times. The point on dwelling on [culture-bearing roles] is just the reverse: to understand *change* in Chinese culture. It is to identify specifically some of the 'forms' of political culture in Chinese civilization which have allowed Marxism-Leninism to 'fit' under the conditions of the early and mid-twentieth century. Because fit it did. 'Fit', however, does not mean repetition without development.²⁸⁵

Traditional and modern political thought were contradictory but inseparable, and the communist revolution could therefore only lead through social instability to a social equilibrium. Levenson finds the necessary balance "nicely centred between moribund Confucianism and the non-communist West"²⁸⁶. Marxism-Leninism had inherent affinities with Confucianism and, according to Fu, the former is today generally regarded "an indigenous product defending a tradition of monistic autocracy against Western 'liberalization'."²⁸⁷ Marx's work had become the new classics that dictated where to find precedents in the traditional Chinese political thought, because the formalised language of the ancient classics was still necessary when mobilising the people's support for new policies.²⁸⁸

The idea of development had made Chinese political thought more flexible, and the awareness of the bigger picture with other contending social constructions had caused a national pride and unity. This nationalistic solution saved a vague definition of the Chinese characteristics, and thereby also the monocratic and hierarchic elements as vital parts of these characteristics. Levenson interprets this as a change in both structure and content. The picture had been enriched, not changed or kept.²⁸⁹ This is what I call the adjustment.

A clear picture of continuity and change in Chinese monocracy was blurred by compromises and adjustments. The Confucian hierarchical structures were adjusted not repudiated, and the main tenets of the traditional monocracy were kept under a new guise. But still the seeds sown by Mao Zedong were not the same as the ones sown by the emperors of the past. The totalitarian view of an educated elite using a new ideological theory but the same method has to be balanced by the pluralist view of a disintegration of traditional structures. My constructive approach implies that the monocratic elements to a great degree are independent of both the official ideology and the exact form of the institutional structures. Instead they are ultimately dependent on a mentality that rests on a Chinese social construction characterised by a pragmatic way of compromising with seemingly incompatible contradictions. Mao's experiments in instability and mass movements as forces of change were only parentheses in a world where the intrinsic values of Chinese people remain surprisingly unchanged. In order to evaluate the continuity and change in Chinese monocracy I will now take a look at the strength of this social construction by examining Mao's inheritance and inheritors. In the 1980s openness towards foreign countries would throw China into yet another clash with Western pluralist, liberal, and capitalistic ideas. How would the new leadership be conveyed, and how would it be perceived by the post-Mao and post-CR generation? Was it at all possible to legitimate an inherited charismatic leadership? The new leaders of the PRC, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, had to recognise that they were walking a tightrope.

²⁸⁵ Cheek 1997: 315

²⁸⁶ Levenson 1965: 54

²⁸⁷ Fu 1993: 172

²⁸⁸ Lodén 1997: 19ff; Levenson 1958-65: 145, 161; Levenson 1965: 42f, 100ff; Fu 1993: 145

²⁸⁹ Levenson 1958-65: 161

6.3 The Inheritance

“Nothing succeeds like failure”

- James Randi -

After the death of Mao in 1976 his charismatic leadership had to be inherited. This was to become a daunting task. As Cheek puts it “the current leadership has been unable to put the ideological pieces back together again.”²⁹⁰ The radical communism and leftist Marxism of the chaotic CR were abandoned for a more pragmatic socialism. It was still rather consistent that the official orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought was written into both the 1978 and 1982 PRC constitution as a guiding principle, since an officially confirmed ideological gap between the thoughts of Mao and his inheritors could have caused tension enough to question the party’s legitimacy. Nevertheless the disastrous years of the CR and the man behind it had to be officially commented and revalued.²⁹¹

Within the party there were voices against criticism of the deceased Mao, since it would lead to the “defamation and distortion of our party and our socialist fatherland”²⁹². If this depended on loyalty to the former chairman or if it was a matter of political survival remain unclear. The problem was that Mao had been so much more than a leader. In the end it was openly admitted that he had made certain errors, especially concerning the CR, and according to Tang Tsou this de-deification of Mao has made a similar kind of personality cult unlikely to reappear. Still the legitimacy of the party-state depended on the legacy of Mao’s charismatic leadership. The question lay in how to inherit this charisma.²⁹³

The successor Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who had joined the CCP in the 20s, was a veteran of the Long March, and had held high positions in the Central Committee during the 50s and 60s. After a series of persecutions and comebacks he became the symbol of hope for modern China. His power was mainly based on age, political experience, revolutionary status, and military prestige.²⁹⁴ When analysing his leadership tentative conclusions become an inevitable ingredient. In the words of Teiwes “[d]espite the unprecedented openness of the 1980s and a surfeit of purported inside information, in crucial respects we know less about politics at the top today than we do for the Maoist era.”²⁹⁵

What we know is that Deng as the new supreme leader was a firm believer in a strong central authority, and according to many scholars, he was even more in favour of elite-party politics than Mao. Freedom was not to be found in liberal democratic theories of liberty but in the emancipation from poverty. Just like Mao, he did not find the masses responsible enough to entertain democratic politics, and he did not believe in natural equality. There was in Deng’s mind a big difference between socialist democracy and bourgeois individualist democracy. He was convinced that “a multiparty system would divert the people’s attention from development goals, hamstringing the government and provoke anarchy.”²⁹⁶ Instead he saw the socialist solution in the strength of a unified and co-ordinating state, and, just like all his predecessors, he emphasised the Chinese characteristics.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁰ Cheek 1997: 312

²⁹¹ Fu 1993: 172; Spence 1990: 658

²⁹² Fu 1993: 192

²⁹³ Tang 1985: 61, 76; Spence 1990: 678f; Barmé 1993: 263ff

²⁹⁴ Spence 1990: 728f; Teiwes 1995: 62f, 67f; Salisbury 1993: 419

²⁹⁵ Teiwes 1995: 57

²⁹⁶ Deng 1987: 196; 1984: 252f; from Twohey 1999: 104

²⁹⁷ Tang 1985: 79; Young 1992: 14; Deng 1983: 150f, 184; Twohey 1999: 97ff, 105; Strand 1997: 329f

Deng's "seek truth from facts" motto emphasised his pragmatism as opposed to Mao's ideological correctness. In the early 1980s he tried to strike a balance between the conservative and the liberal tendencies in the party. The most radical leftist policies, like the continuous revolution and the class struggle, were toned down, and instead the thoughts of the revolutionary forerunner Sun Yatsen were emphasised. He was seen as more pragmatic, and less problematic, than Mao. Deng was far more conscious of the risks involved with potential social disruption. Stability, as well as the promised change for the better, had to be guaranteed, and Deng's solution was a utopian pragmatism that combined democratic centralism with the ideas of economic development, class justice, liberty and individual rights.²⁹⁸

Signs of intraparty pluralism can be traced in these political manoeuvrings of Deng Xiaoping. According to Tang Tsou, the monocacy in the 80s tended to be "increasingly restrained, influenced, and, indeed, penetrated by social forces."²⁹⁹ The recruitment of less politicised specialists at the top levels and an increasingly pluralist system of power inside and outside the inner sanctum of the party had caused tensions and threatened the political unity.³⁰⁰ Kenneth Lieberthal, Michael Oksenberg and David M. Lampton have called this a "fragmented authoritarianism" that made it more difficult to co-ordinate commands³⁰¹. The politics were still more normalised and the vulnerability to the whims of the leader was less acute than before. The problem was the lack of an independent check on the leadership's power³⁰² As Merle Goldman has noted the law was for Deng "a tool of power, not a tool for society."³⁰³ Even if the authority of Deng was less than Mao's it was still, as Teiwes notes, massive in the sense that...

...for Deng as well as Mao, the leadership was permeated with a sense that his words had to be obeyed. Leaders who wished to pursue their own personal or institutional interests had to engage in a 'court politics' of accepting the leader's orders, pandering to his preferences, seeking his ear to advance their projects, and, at most, skewing his often vague and ambiguous guidelines to enhance their respective causes.³⁰⁴

The imperial heritage lived on in traditional assumptions never to be questioned. For Deng the prerequisite of his political solution was the monopoly of the party. Deng was a pragmatist but he never compromised with the sacredness and absolutism of the party and its single core leader.³⁰⁵ This was clearly manifested by the extraordinary official phrasings when the politically persecuted counterrevolutionaries were rehabilitated after the CR. They were then told that "[s]ons would never blame their dearest mother to have wrongly struck them."³⁰⁶ In accordance with the imperial tradition the leadership was compared to a parent, and to be unpatriotic was the same as being unfilial. The Confucian hierarchical concepts of propriety and three bonds were indeed parts of the political culture in the 1980s, and so was monarchy.³⁰⁷

²⁹⁸ Misra 1998: 9; Spence 1990: 676; White 1985: 45ff; Twohey 1999: 107

²⁹⁹ Tang 1985: 79

³⁰⁰ White 1985: 38ff

³⁰¹ Lieberthal & Lampton 1992: 2ff

³⁰² Tang 1985: 79

³⁰³ Goldman 1994: 7

³⁰⁴ Teiwes 1995: 58

³⁰⁵ Tang 1991: 288

³⁰⁶ Fu 1993: 176

³⁰⁷ Spence 1990: 680f; Lodén 1997: 50

The Marxist-Leninist ideas had not in any decisive way changed the traditional hierarchical structures. In the 80s open debates were still seen as a challenge to the authority of the leader.³⁰⁸ Normality was a one way dialogue where the didactic superior held information and only shared it when found appropriate. Subordinates were not allowed any participation in decision making, and the expected reciprocity of the leader rested on his subjective standards. This absolute position brings with it power but also enormous responsibility. This is balanced by a curious tendency to remain officially uncommitted and thereby open to options. A clear sign of this was Deng's decision to deinstitutionalise and depersonalise his authority. An often stated half-joke is that the only official positions Deng held after 1987 was the chairmanship of the Military Affairs Commission and the vice-chairmanship of a private Bridge Club.³⁰⁹ The ability to exert influence with no equivalent official post emphasises Deng's strategic skills and sense for political balance. According to Teiwes this was a way to receive maximum political leverage, and to "avoid the consequences of his mistakes"³¹⁰, which was impossible for leaders just below him in the hierarchy. These simply had to assume that the supreme leader had taken everything into account, and trust in his capacity to intuit the appropriate strategy.³¹¹ This does not imply acquiescence without reservations. Nathan, as well as Solomon, has noted a striking ambivalence in the Chinese people's desire for a strong leader and their resentment against the demands of this leader, but this is, as has been argued above, part of what is to be expected in a less than ideal world.³¹²

Teiwes argues that there is "no convincing evidence of [Deng's] position ever being under threat from any grouping within the higher echelons of the elite."³¹³ The question is if this was due to acquiescence or lack of alternatives. The fact is that there was never any way to campaign for leadership. The only way up was by the dictate of the supreme leader himself. The gap between Deng and other party leaders was paralleled by the solidified wide gap between officials and common people. Misuse of power, patrimonialism and nepotism, or what Pye has called "authority's rights to arrogance"³¹⁴, has in the last decades been major problems in Chinese politics, but, as Richard Kraus states, even though resistance to these tendencies has been evident they are still integral parts of normal Chinese politics.³¹⁵ It seems like the opposite would have been abnormal. As Gordon Redding and Gilbert Y. Y. Wong put it, Chinese individuals "do not perceive themselves as related to each other on some fundamentally equal basis"³¹⁶. The hierarchic structures and the manipulation of them are parts of the Chinese mentality, but since patrimonial tendencies after all are decentralising they result in social tensions. Benedict Stavis conjectures that decentralising forces, such as strong regional tendencies, paradoxically may justify a strong central power as a counterbalance.³¹⁷ This is the necessary compromise that I think explains not only the power of the party but also the vitality of the monocracy.³¹⁸

³⁰⁸ Bond & Hwang 1987: 252ff; Redding & Wong 1987: 278f

³⁰⁹ Spence 1990: 728f; Salisbury 1993: 419

³¹⁰ Teiwes 1995: 87

³¹¹ White 1985: 43; Teiwes 1995: 58ff, 62f, 67f, 91; Misra 1998: 12f

³¹² Solomon 1971: 4; Nathan 1993: 38f

³¹³ Teiwes 1995: 71

³¹⁴ Pye 1968: 13

³¹⁵ Kraus 1985: 143f

³¹⁶ Redding & Wong 1987: 284

³¹⁷ Stavis 1985: 193

³¹⁸ Madsen 1984: 245ff; Teiwes 1995: 93; Lodén 1997: 194f

The impulse to maintain party unity by rallying around the supreme leader was most evident in the late 1980s.³¹⁹ Within the party there seemed to be consensus on priorities like the need for economic growth, social stability, unity within a centralised party leadership, and ideological education to support this rule³²⁰, but even if the latter was on the leadership's agenda Deng did tone down the stress on ideology. When western democratic ideas during the 80s started to pour into the country Deng sensed the danger and launched campaigns against "spiritual pollution" and "bourgeois liberalisation". Ideological movements were still less frequent and more inefficient than in the pre-Deng period. Kalpana Misra thinks that this may partly be due to Deng's lack of interest in them. He preferred tactical manoeuvres behind closed doors. This neglect of the indirect tools of power was to prove fatal.³²¹

The tightrope walk of the post-Mao leadership consisted in a hard-found balance between change and continuity, development and equity, and economic decentralisation and political monopoly. The reforms provided both economic and political changes, but the cherished stability and unity at the same time necessitated conservative and coercive countermeasures. At the same time as China "opened up" internationally and economically the judicial system in the late 1980s became harsher³²². This is all in line with Huntington's theories about increased violence under de-ideologised authoritarian regimes. When the central authority decided to implement policies there should be no interference. That was the way it had always been, and that is why the student demonstrations in the late 80s were to be so ruthlessly suppressed.³²³

In order to maintain the balance between the reformists and conservatives Deng had to sacrifice his reformist successor, Hu Yaobang, in 1986. Three years later this would backfire when the premature death of Hu was one of the main factors that sparked off nation-wide demonstrations.³²⁴ There seemed to be a critical lack of overall acquiescence from the people. The intellectual Su Shaozhi implied at the time that the Party's official ideology did not square to the reality as the Chinese people knew it, and that it therefore would lose all its prestige.³²⁵ Post-Mao ideology was, to use David Kelly's term, dismembered.³²⁶ The contradictions inherent in Chinese political thought were once again exposed and questioned.

In the spring and summer of 1989 the tension resulted in great demonstrations, of which the most famous was staged at the symbolic centre of China, at Tiananmen Square in Beijing. A few points concerning the monocratic structure can be made about this event. As Pye has noted the Chinese people tend to find the remedy for their problems in the traditional call for a better, more competent, and virtuous ruler, rather than in the call for an abolition of authority.³²⁷ In the same way most of the demonstrators in 1989 called for the "real" leadership, i.e. the reformist faction, and not for a change of the political system itself. According to Shen Tong not even the most radical demonstrators ever pondered the

³¹⁹ Teiwes 1995: 82

³²⁰ Teiwes 1995: 74

³²¹ Fairbank 1992: 421; Nathan 1999: 4; Misra 1998: 183ff; Teiwes 1995: 84f; Chen & Deng 1995: 112

³²² According to the yearly-published Amnesty International Report the death sentence rate rose gradually during the mid-1980s, and dramatically during the 1990s; see Amnesty International Report 1983-2001.

³²³ Misra 1998: 15; White 1985: 46ff; Deng 1987: 192; from Twohey 1999: 105; Shen 1990: 113f

³²⁴ Shen 1990: 118; Spence 1990: 738

³²⁵ Su Shaozhi, "Prospect for Socialism as Viewed From China's Experience and Lessons", (1985) *Selected Studies on Marxism*, 1988: 5; quoted in Misra 1998: 193

³²⁶ Kelly 1991: 19-34

³²⁷ Pye 1996b: 40

possibility of getting rid of the party, only to change the inner structure of it.³²⁸ The students' critique to begin with never really concerned the supreme and untouchable leader Deng Xiaoping. It was the conservatives, with Premier Li Peng as the head representative, that was attacked. Since the Chinese leadership always has taken organised groups with an agenda seriously, the movement was early on labelled counterrevolutionary. The fear of an impending CR-like chaos was probably great among the party-leaders.³²⁹ In Deng's eyes anarchy could be the result when the "so-called fighters for democracy would start fighting each other"³³⁰, which he saw as inevitable.

The intra-party struggle was paralleled by a struggle for power within the student movement³³¹. The student committees had the party structure as a model and they even used Mao slogans against the conservative leadership. The language was directly borrowed from the CCP's own rhetoric. The student leaders talked about the duty to lead the grassroots and the responsibilities as Commanders and started labelling disagreeing student leaders traitors. Within the movement democracy was never as emphasised as "unity". The Chinese word for democracy (*minzhu*) has, as Esherick and Wasserstrom point out, never had anything to do with pluralism³³². The ideal has rather been the sharing of the same views. Elizabeth J. Perry explains this "undemocratic style" as structural and dependent on close "[i]nstitutional links" between officials and students³³³. The fascination for the leader role became absurdly obvious when Premier Li Peng visited the square in late May. The students asked him for his autograph. Later student leaders in their turn were asked for autographs by other students and people in the streets³³⁴. The intrigues among the student leaders; all the military titles and old rhetoric; the stress on the heavy responsibility the leaders had for their subjects; it all followed a tradition that is as long as Chinese history itself.³³⁵

Deng may have underestimated the role of the indirect tools, but he never lost control over his direct tools. In the mid-80s Mozingo speculated about the possibility that the military could revoke its support if "new rivalries and conflicts at the center again lead to chaos."³³⁶ In the summer of 1989 the loyalty of certain generals indeed began to crack, but even then Deng showed that he was a master of manoeuvring the army. Both Mao and Deng eventually withdrew from the official post as head of the state, but they never lost the allegiance of the army. Deng resigned from the chairmanship of the Military Affairs Commission first in late 1989, while Mao never resigned at all. They knew their history well.³³⁷

³²⁸ Shen 1990: 138f, 170

³²⁹ Twohey 1999: 142ff; Pye 1988: 138f; Salisbury 1993: 440

³³⁰ Deng 1994: 347-8; from Twohey 1999: 104f

³³¹ Read Shen 1990 for more details concerning the struggle within the Preparatory Committee of Beijing University; between the hunger strike leaders and other Beijing student leaders; and between all the former and student leaders from other cities than Beijing.

³³² Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 30f; read Yang 1999 for a Chinese perspective on Mao's and Deng's democracy

³³³ Perry 1992: 8

³³⁴ Shen 1990: 172-199, 212ff, 237, 268-306; see also the freelance journalist Philip Cunningham's interview from May 28, 1989 with the student leader Chai Ling in the Long Bow Group's documentary *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* from 1996

³³⁵ Tang 1991: 308

³³⁶ Mozingo 1985: 105

³³⁷ Spence 1990, 742f, Salisbury 1993: 450; Chen & Deng 1995: 81

6.4 Walking the Tightrope

"Silence hides nothing. Words conceal"

- August Strindberg -

Coercion, as a method of maintaining stability and unity, runs all through Chinese history, from the First Emperor to Deng Xiaoping. The end is still meant to justify the means. The totalitarians conclude that the 1989 Tiananmen incident indicated that the Chinese communist rulers, in accordance with tradition, saw themselves as inheritors of a divine right to monopolise the truth³³⁸. The mere existence of contending polities is still considered a threat to the basis of Chinese power structures. In my view the totalitarians' notion that the people's silence proved their acceptance of this arrangement nevertheless has to be weighed against the lack of alternatives and the unprecedented scale of the implementation of the direct tools of power.

The catch 22 situation, where a backward country accepts a transitional strong leadership that later proves to be impossible to get rid of, was, as White notes, not unique in the 20th century³³⁹, but the times were changing. In late 1989 the Iron curtain fell and soon after that the Soviet Union and western communism as we knew it was history. The CCP had to curb the tide and they had got off to a running start. The power of the direct tools had been clearly manifested, but now these had to be balanced with the indirect ones. The lesson of Qin was that only by a "balanced mix of intimidation and indoctrination could the imperial rule be stable and effective"³⁴⁰.

After the death of Deng Xiaoping in 1997 the responsibility for this balance act was mantled by Jiang Zemin (b. 1926). He had already in the early 1990s been appointed party general secretary, national president, and chairman of the Central Military Commission, but, as Fu notes, Deng "remained the paramount leader by virtue of loyalties from military commanders, compliance from secondary leaders, and his actual control over the military."³⁴¹ At least since the fall of the Qing Empire there had been no effective mechanism for installations of successors. To be designated heir in the PRC has been the same as the kiss of death, either because of inner party struggles or because of the leader's change of mind. Both Mao and Deng had their aborted protégés³⁴², and many saw in Jiang Zemin a new potential Hua Guofeng, i.e. a sudden compromise not destined to last long. Jiang would prove them all wrong, partly due to hard work, but also due to Deng's awareness of the need for a smooth transition to his successor. The gradual withdrawal of the old leadership was, according to Teiwes, well planned.³⁴³

Deng's dismantling of the personality cult surrounding Mao Zedong had proved futile. The nostalgia of the Mao-era was manifested already during the student-demonstrations of 1989 by the carrying of portraits of Mao and other old leaders, and when Deng in 1992 mobilised the people to promote economic reforms he was using Mao-quotations. Later it was most clearly expressed at the 100 years anniversary of Mao's birth in 1993 and during the anti-American campaigns in 1999 and 2001. The demand for a Mao-like strong leadership could

³³⁸ Chen and Deng 1995: 3

³³⁹ White 1985: 30ff

³⁴⁰ Fu 1993: 48

³⁴¹ Fu 1993: 348f

³⁴² Mao's were Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, Hua Guofeng etc., and Deng's were Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang

³⁴³ Wu 1999: 13; Nathan 1999: 2; Spence 1990: 745; Friedrich & Brzeinski 1965: 71; Teiwes 1995: 79

be considered a sign of the present leadership's decline, but it has also strengthened the CCP's historical legacy. Even if Deng refused to be turned into statues in front of factories or paintings above the Gate of Heavenly Peace, his leadership was still supported by the myth of Mao's, as well as his own, superiority. His so-called modesty only enhanced his position as the supreme leader. The problem with Jiang Zemin was that his revolutionary status was low. His main feat was that he, as mayor of Shanghai, had managed to control the 1989 demonstrations without resorting to violence. The reason why he has not been seriously questioned can partly be explained by the sensitive time at which he came to the throne. As always polarisation within the party lead to the total defeat of the weakest part. The ranks had to be closed.³⁴⁴

Jiang's conscious conveying of himself as a worthy and legitimate successor has therefore necessitated the maintenance of both Mao's and Deng's thoughts, at least in theory and in public speeches. In 1997 Deng Xiaoping Theory was elevated as the guiding ideology; in 2000 a party-sponsored book transmitted the picture of Jiang as the third Great Chinese Communist leader³⁴⁵; attempts to cultivate a Jiang Zemin theory have been made³⁴⁶; and at the 50th anniversary of the PRC Jiang copied his predecessors by waving from an open car to pre-selected hordes of people. This personal campaign is just in accordance with Chinese tradition and is highly unlikely to make people in general raise their eyebrows. His position seems to have won the tacit acquiescence of the people, and the current political problems do not necessarily call it into question. Corruption and economical problems are routinely blamed on corrupt bureaucrats.³⁴⁷

The new leader has shown himself adept at striking a proper balance by not rocking the boat. Even though the traditional mass campaigns (*yundong*) seemingly have been toned down the direct tools of coercion and intimidation are still manifested in so-called mobilisations (*dongyuan*) against potential political threats³⁴⁸, as well as corruption³⁴⁹. By eliminating contending organised polities Jiang has attempted to lift the party up as the only alternative, and by focusing on the corruption within the bureaucracy and the party-elite he has tried to justify the party's moral right to the leadership. This has been balanced by an increased emphasis on indirect tools. The resurrection of the Confucian ethics started in the 1980s and escalated in the 1990s. It was part of a general self-cultivation and search for higher ethical standards among the Chinese people³⁵⁰. Officially party-sanctioned ceremonies honouring Confucius as well as the mythical yellow emperor were in the 1990s co-ordinated with the reintroduction of Confucian teachings in the schools.³⁵¹ The party's support for the "new Confucianism" was based on the economic successes in other so-called Confucian societies like Singapore, South Korea, and Japan³⁵². The enthusiasm for this theory obviously decreased when the economic stagnation of these areas struck in the mid 90s. Nevertheless the Confucian ethics have continued to be part of an increased stress on moral guidance in a

³⁴⁴ Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 30; Teiwes 1995: 77; Barmé 1993: 263; Misra 1998: 214; Tang 1991: 266, 293f; Chen & Deng 1995: 89; Meisner 1999: 523

³⁴⁵ The book is called "Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin on ideological and political work"

³⁴⁶ Dittmer 2001: 54f

³⁴⁷ Misra 1998: xvff; Meisner 1999: 536; Spence 1990: 745

³⁴⁸ For example the spiritual Buddhist movement Falungong, since 1999, and the Democratic Party, since 1998.

³⁴⁹ This campaign is a heritage from Deng and started in 1995. Since 1999 it has been named "Strike Hard".

³⁵⁰ In the early 90s intellectual debates and various seminars were held on the subject of this "new confucianism". One of the main proponents was Tu Wei-ming; see his arguments in Tu 1997.

³⁵¹ Feng 1997: 609; Perry & Selden 2000: 6f

³⁵² Other examples are Hong Kong and the ROC on Taiwan

country that during the last decade has suffered great moral degradation due to economic corruption and high crime-rates. The problem is that the legitimacy of the CCP partly rests on their clean break with the old so-called feudal culture. The ambivalence when treating the Confucian heritage can clearly be seen in the way it was despised in the twenties, promoted in the sixties, despised in the seventies and then again promoted in the nineties. The national heritage has been juggled with like a hot potato.³⁵³

The ideological incoherence is a major problem for the party, since the legitimacy can not solely be based on performance and coercion. As Tu Wei-ming has put it, the art of persuasion and the control over the political discourse is "an essential ingredient that defines Chinese society"³⁵⁴. The leadership is, in Pye's words, compelled to anchor their legitimacy "more deeply in the soul of [the] people"³⁵⁵. The ideological policy struggle in the early 90s was clearly expressed in a, to begin with, unofficial document³⁵⁶, entitled "Realistic Responses and Strategic Choices for China After the Soviet Upheaval"³⁵⁷. Marxism-Leninism was seen as a liability for the party, and instead the emphasis was on nationalism. Western rationalism was to be combined with Chinese traditional culture, and, echoing the theories of Sun Yatsen, the unifying force would be nationalistic sentiments. The ideological contradictions and inconsistencies in the new reform policy necessitated a search for national identity, the perfect substitute for an incoherent official ideology. In the last few years these nationalistic and patriotic feelings have been most clearly manifested in the advocating of national studies (*guoxue*); the party-sanctioned independent publishing of patriotic literature³⁵⁸; the rallying against perceived foreign hegemony and post-colonial cultural imperialism; and in the returning of the British colony of Hong Kong and the Portuguese colony of Macao to the motherland.³⁵⁹

This emphasis on nationalism and a collective progress towards a more civilised and modern country has persistently been linked with Deng's and Jiang's catchwords "stability and unity"³⁶⁰. Nathan sees the potential social instability as "the most enduring concern" in Jiang's China³⁶¹. The chilling experience of the chaotic CR has made the mantra of stability even more appealing to Chinese citizens, and the Tiananmen incident has further strengthened this argument among the leaders and, according to Twohey, also among a majority of the people.³⁶² The greatest threat to this stability has been found in the social tensions caused by the rapid economic development. The living conditions have increased for most people, but at the same time regional inequalities and numbers of unemployed and urban poor are growing. It seems like the higher strata expect less government intervention while the lower strata want more strains on local powers, but that both prefer to preserve social stability rather than to promote rapid and violent changes. These contradictions between continuity and change, as well as between policy and theory, have resulted in the questioning of the leadership's

³⁵³ Twohey 1999: 114f; Misra 1998: xvf, 211f; Teiwes 1995: 73; Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 55; Meisner 1999: 525f; Levenson 1965: 61, 65

³⁵⁴ Tu 1993: 173

³⁵⁵ Pye 1988: 164f

³⁵⁶ It was later printed in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao* in 1991

³⁵⁷ Misra 1998: 209; Feng 1997: 608

³⁵⁸ For example *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (China Can Say No) published in August 1996, and *Zhongguo Zhilu* (China's Road) compiled in May 1999.

³⁵⁹ Wu 1999: 28; Teiwes 1995: 60; Lodén 1997: 121ff; Misra 1998: 4f, 16f, 209f; Meisner 1999: 526f

³⁶⁰ Teiwes 1995: 83

³⁶¹ Nathan 1999: 4

³⁶² Twohey 1999: 145ff

legitimacy. The Chinese leadership wants and has to guarantee changes in material terms, but they do not want changes in the political structures. But is it really possible to promote change and continuity at the same time?³⁶³

These tensions have caused a change in the Chinese political culture, but are the pluralist tendencies strong enough to challenge the monocacy? According to Wu Guoguang, Jiang has taken a big step by letting the law, at least theoretically, include himself, the untouchable.³⁶⁴ His power seems to be tempered by a sense of Confucian reciprocity. The continuous tension between conservatives and reformers has also weakened the leadership. In the 90s the experts that advocated economic development instead of social values received the upper hand, but the Communist die-hards are still strong. Non-CCP officials now hold high posts in provincial governments, and the fourth generation of leaders that now are preparing to take over the CCP leadership do not share their predecessors' revolutionary experiences.³⁶⁵ Teiwes sees a much looser unity at the top.³⁶⁶

The demands on the people and partymembers are less and this indicates a shift from a totalitarian system to an authoritarian one. Chen and Deng claim that a significant change of the overall socio-political condition has caused the interrelated public attitudes to change, and that this in turn has changed the nature of the leadership.³⁶⁷ They see this new authoritarianism as a transitional step and a way out of totalitarianness. Everything is interrelated and when the snowball has started to role nothing can stop it. Nevertheless it is, as Teiwes notes, rather remarkable that even though the influences of non-Marxist ideas during the last decades have been unprecedented "a significant degree of consensus on central aspects of the reforms has been maintained"³⁶⁸. Even if the various factions inside and outside the party disagree with the exact political methods, there still seems to be a wide consensus on the need for stability and unity. The widespread cynicism among intellectuals as well as common people in the 90s can be interpreted as defiance and a change of discourse, but it can also be seen as a compromising defence-mechanism that promotes and justifies passivity. I argue that this ideological and intellectual flexibility is a central part of the Chinese political culture, and that it in fact supports monocacy.³⁶⁹

The increased tension between centralising and decentralising dynamics in society James N. Rosenau has called fragementation.³⁷⁰ The society is at the same time being integrated and more fragmented. In China state-lead nationalistic interests compete with strong provincial and individual interests. The bases for decisions made at the micro level of society are changing, due to better education, increased mobility, and medial influences. The integration makes it easier to quickly anchor political policies among the people, but the fragmentation makes it more difficult to control people's minds. Furthermore, due to the lack of organised political alternative channels for collective manifestations political acts tend to be individually based. Even if these private judicial or evasive acts, like flight and foot dragging, seem inefficient in a national perspective, they may in the long run erode the party's control. Nevertheless the centralising forces are not always so easy to detect. A major support of this

³⁶³ Chen & Deng 1995: 20; Nathan 1999: 7; Misra 1998: 16f; Wu 1999: 28; Teiwes 1995: 94; Meisner 1999: 533f

³⁶⁴ Wu 1999: 43

³⁶⁵ Cheng 1999: 107

³⁶⁶ Teiwes 1995: 56ff

³⁶⁷ Chen & Deng 6ff

³⁶⁸ Teiwes 1995: 61

³⁶⁹ Ferguson & Mansbach 1996: 222; Tang 1985: 54; Li 2000: 26f

³⁷⁰ Rosenau 1992: 274-283

social construction is found in the language. R. Bin Wong argues that "[t]he continued association of *wuguanfang* (non-official) with *buzhengtong* (unorthodox) affirms the difficulties of imagining, let alone creating, an autonomous sphere for the expression of group interests in contemporary China."³⁷¹ Western pluralistic democracy that emphasises the will of the majority, rather than the conforming to a strong leader, is not to be found in Chinese political rhetoric. The modern version of monocracy seems to rest on a passive mentality, rather than on an active ideology.³⁷²

As Misra notes Jiang's Marxist synthesis with Confucianism, neo-authoritarianism, western democratic liberalism, and nationalism is only one more attempt at finding a new compromise.³⁷³ The solution to this balancing act Wu finds in a new ideology based on the "three-sided coin" theory³⁷⁴. Jiang has tried to legitimise his and his party's guiding role by promoting a middle way between the Maoist and the Dengist side of the coin, and it is based on the traditional values of stability and unity. Jiang is walking a tightrope, but as long as he can stand aloof from the intra-party tensions and manoeuvre behind the curtains his monocratic power seems stable. The last years he has met some resistance when trying to appoint his protégés to strategically important posts in the Politburo.³⁷⁵ The next succession might not be as smooth as his own. In 2002 it looks like the man in question is Hu Jintao (b.1942), a bureaucrat that still has to show himself "worthy". As Teiwes put it "competition to be first among equals is inevitable"³⁷⁶. The diversification in terms of ideological solidarity and political experiences within this fourth generation of leaders will be a major challenge for the CCP. A smooth transition has to be anchored in a consensual CCP-leadership, but when that is done the ranks will most likely be closed again. Jiang has consciously emphasised the importance of consensus within the party³⁷⁷, and the clear message is that stability overrides everything (*wending shi yadao yiqie*)³⁷⁸. The Chinese political culture demands a strong central leadership, and even if the CCP, as the only alternative at the moment, in the long run will prove to be just a transitional stage, this does not necessarily apply to the monocratic elements. In my view the Chinese monocracy will be a continuous part of Chinese political thought as long as 'stability and unity' are revered basic values of the Chinese people, and the leadership in power will keep the mandate as long as the same values are as revered a political calculation as in the imperial days.³⁷⁹

³⁷¹ Wong 1997: 325

³⁷² Esherick & Wasserstrom 1992: 55; Wu 1999: 40; Shi 1997: 269ff; Jenner 1992: 230; Perry & Selden 2000: 2

³⁷³ Misra 1998: 15, 215

³⁷⁴ Wu 1999: 36ff

³⁷⁵ Lam 2000: 16

³⁷⁶ Teiwes 1995: 93

³⁷⁷ In early 2001 the main issue was the securing of consensus on the 4th of June verdict; Nathan 2001: 735

³⁷⁸ This hallmark slogan of Jiang Zemin was first introduced in *Renmin Ribao* 24 December 1998

³⁷⁹ Teiwes 2001; Li 2000: 1ff, 32ff

6.5 Final Remarks

The Chinese solution to the problems of the first half of the 20th century was found in the emphasis on national unity and communist orthodoxy, and furthermore democracy was made Chinese through the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The so-called Chinese characteristics was linked to nationalism, and the new evolutionary idea with the hope of a change for the better was combined with the stabilising and guiding force of a strong leadership. The traditional monocratic elements were inherited and transformed by an unprecedented charismatic leadership officially based on a democratic centralist communism. The strong unification of the plagued country gave the people a sense of national dignity and pride. In the 50s and 60s the sense of a strong leader with an intellectual and enlightened elite serving the people seemed intact, and in the 70s the need and longing for the same was just as strong. Unintentionally the destabilising experiments of Mao had provided a point of reference for the consequences of chaos and thereby the need for stability and unity.

In the post-Mao years the ruler cult was toned down and the mantra of stability and national unity was emphasised. There was a general consensus on the need for change, but the leadership misjudged the consequences of major changes like economic development and individual emancipation. The important role of the indirect tools had not been recognised, and therefore the tension between the principles of continuity and change forced the leadership to adopt coercive countermeasures. Since then the political emphasis has been on national dignity; pride of the cultural heritage; and stability and unity. Contradictions have been seemingly bridged.

As long as the social contract is upheld a leadership behind closed doors will be accepted. This leadership unfortunately makes conclusions tentative, but so far there have been no evident signs of any dramatic disintegration of the monocratic structures. The lack of viable alternative political structures has constantly caused the people to ask for a stronger leadership rather than for an abolition of the political system as such. The modern, as well as the traditional, Chinese monocracy has proven to be an ingenious way of giving the leader maximum leverage by putting the blame on the bureaucracy. The pluralist tendencies have been traced in different polities' manipulations of the ruler, but these have not seriously affected the monocratic structures. The social construction that is the basis for this monocracy is stronger than the CCP's political system. The legitimacy of the party is very much related to the legitimacy of the supreme leader.

8 Conclusions

There are three things concerning the concept of Chinese monarchy that strikes me as almost constant in the Chinese history of political thought, and that is: the leader as an enlightened, infallible and untouchable saviour standing aloof from the rest of the apparatus; the absolute loyalty to this leader and the trust in his decisions; and the lack of alternatives, or rather the eradication of alternatives. Monarchy as a potent stabilising force is apparent in traditional as well as modern Chinese political thought. Here I agree with the totalitarian approach, but I find their emphasis on continuity exaggerated and unfair to the agential role of the people. The pluralists claim that the power structures have been more fragmented and that this may lead to major changes in the political system. I agree with this but I do not think that these changes will affect the monocratic elements, in the short run. In accordance with my constructive approach I find the legitimacy of the Chinese monarchy, not as much in the political system as in a social construction well anchored in the minds of the Chinese people.

The modern Chinese monarchy includes all the elements above, but the social construction that justifies it has gone through many adjustments. The basis for this construction is the emphasis on social order, stability and unity, and the guarantee of these basic values has been considered promoting predictability and security. The continuity that was such a vital ingredient in the traditional version has in later centuries been challenged by evolutionary theories. Modern leaders have had to guarantee both continuity and change. The former is to be guaranteed in the political structures and societal order, while the latter is to be promoted through economic development. The social construction has furthermore been adjusted from a concentric worldview to a new nationalistic perspective. The premises for the centralising monocratic power have changed, but the essence of it has not.

The Chinese scepticism about Western concepts like individualism, pluralism and liberalism has its causes in an inherent belief in individualistic actions as counterproductive; a trust in compromises as less naive solutions; a general fear of social instability; and also in a pride of a social construction that is genuinely Chinese. This is what defines the Chinese characteristics and supports the monarchy that still is such a vital part of this social construction. As long as most Chinese people feel secure with this arrangement the Chinese monarchy will thrive, and the pluralism will remain feeble. The Chinese rulers have long shown a remarkable capacity for persecuting threatening interest groups before these got too independent of the centralised state. The Buddhists in the 800s, and the Falungong and the Democratic Party in the 1990s, have all been nipped in the bud. For the rulers it has been a matter of principle, not the scale of the threat. There should always be only one centre of authority. That is what monarchy is all about.

Even if the Chinese leadership during certain periods of time has not been considered the ideal solution, it has nevertheless often been accepted as the best and most viable alternative. That has probably been true in the sense that there has been no alternative monarchy. As I see it these conclusions are dependent on a consensus that is made possible because of the extraordinary flexibility of a social construction based on the preferences for stability and unity. Furthermore, the lack of a potent pluralist system makes you well aware of the difficult situation modern Chinese pressure-groups find themselves in. There are no visionaries like Sun Yatsen or Mao Zedong in today's China, since the leadership, in the old traditional monocratic way, has managed to suppress any attempt. The ideal of a total lack of other

interest groups than the leadership in power is still conveyed, perceived and legitimised by both the leadership and the people. It is like all social constructions to a great deal in the minds of the people. The tentative conclusion drawn is thereby that the political manifestations and the official ideology inevitably will change, but that the monarchy as the ideal solution will prevail as long as the flexible social construction presented above remain. If that is so continuity and change will continue to be compromised in Chinese political thought, but the continuity in monarchy will not.

8.1 A Final Thought

The monocratic tendency is not unique for Chinese political thought, but it is still indicative of the strength of its social construction. When trying to define traditional and modern Chinese monarchy I have not managed to refrain from comparisons with the western monocratic tradition. In this thesis I have hinted that I find it unlikely that any kind of egalitarian political system, based on something like western democracy or socialism with participatory political institutions, can ever take hold in a society where the concept of monarchy is accepted, legitimised and firmly entrenched in the minds of both the rulers and the ruled. It would therefore be interesting to compare the developing progresses of two specific social constructions, one consisting of Chinese monarchy based on correlative cosmology and later communism, and the other one consisting of a pre-selected western Christian autocracy which later has changed into western Christian democracy.

My assumption is that the lack of democratic tendencies in the Chinese social construction is related to monarchy as the main political solution. The Chinese people has lacked a direct contact with the central force of Heaven, or a God in the Western sense, since all spiritual and moral information has been transmitted through the holder of the mandate of heaven. The correlative cosmology has given people a chance to find comfort in gods positioned in the heavenly hierarchy corresponding to the individual's position in the earthly hierarchy, but direct contact with the central force of the universe has never been possible. The channel to the ultimate truth was not opened by the communist thoughts either. The opening was still as big as the eye of a needle and could only be reached by the morally superior, i.e. the party elite.

Western Christian autocrats, on the other hand, have rarely laid claim on the absolute authority over the ultimate truth. It was early on shared by the clergy and later it was possible even for the common people to have a direct personal contact with God. Even if the hierarchical structures are still apparent in the modern western world it has for a long time been possible for the masses to attain a personal relationship with the ultimate truths. Can this in part explain the different ways of interpreting concepts like democracy, pluralism, individualism, and leadership?

Appendix A

Table of Abbreviations

CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCELD	Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary
CR	Cultural Revolution
GMD	Guomindang, or the Nationalist Party
ROC	Republic of China
PRC	People's Republic of China

Appendix B

The Dynastic Cycles: Major Periods in China's History

Xia	2200 – 1750 BC
Shang	1750 – 1040 BC
Western Zhou	1100 – 771 BC
Eastern Zhou	771 – 256 BC
Warring States	403 – 221 BC
<i>Qin</i>	221 – 206 BC
Han	206 BC – AD 220
Period of North-South disunion	220 – 589
<i>Sui</i>	589 – 618
Tang	618 – 907
Five Dynasties Period	907 – 960
Northern Song	960 – 1127
Jin (Ruzhens)	1115 – 1234
Southern Song	1127 – 1279
<i>Yuan (Mongols)</i>	1279 – 1368
Ming	1368 – 1644
Qing (Manchus)	1644 – 1912
The Republic of China	1912 – 1949
The People's Republic of China	1949 –

Note. The simplified pattern of the dynastic cycles have in this appendix been accentuated in the following way. The chaotic and decentralised periods are written in ordinary text and size, e.g. Eastern Zhou, and the Warring States. The strong unifying powers are written in bold italics, e.g. Qin, Sui, and Yuan. The more stable and enduring dynasties are enlarged and in bold text, e.g. Western Zhou, Han, Tang, and Ming.

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