

Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy in Republican China

The Political Thought of Zhang Dongsun

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Zhang Dongsun (1886-1973), a leading scholar of Western philosophy in the Republican period, has been relatively neglected in Western scholarship on twentieth-century Chinese intellectual history.¹ Likewise, he has received little attention in Chinese academic circles—until recently. Zhang Yaonan (1995, 1998), Zuo Yuhe (1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b), and Ke Rou (2000) have rescued him from long neglect, recognizing his significant contributions to studies of philosophy and culture, especially his theory of knowledge, or “epistemological pluralism,” as he called it. It is barely known that Zhang was also a political commentator whose valuable insights into some of the polemics of his time made him a significant figure in educated circles. In particular, his views on socialism, capitalism, and democracy were diagnostic and reflective of some enduring themes in modern China, such as development, cultural change, political reform, and social transformation. These themes relate to wider questions about China’s past, present, and future and ways of achieving national salvation. As a public intellectual, Zhang was wrestling with the problems of politics, culture, and economics—problems similar to some of those facing the Chinese government and political activists alike in the contemporary period. Not only was his thought significant in his time, but it is also relevant to present-day issues of economic and political reform in the PRC.

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Zhang Dongsun belonged to a generation of post-May Fourth intellectuals who shared a profound concern over China's problems and future but who were deeply divided on political and cultural issues. At different times and in differing ways, he articulated socialist, capitalist, and democratic ideas in an attempt to understand those problems and to search for solutions. The hallmark of his thought was an emphasis on the role of production and growth in the development of modern China. In his view, capitalist production was the answer to China's poverty, the development of capitalism was a necessary precursor to socialist revolution, and capitalism in some form was equally important to a socialist state.

There are other distinguishing features of Zhang's thought. One is his complex conception of democracy, which he viewed as a culture of an entire society, a perfection of living, an ideal, and the norm of politics that offered the best hope for China's future. While the post-May Fourth intelligentsia was split unevenly into liberals and Marxists (not forgetting the anarchists, cultural conservatives, and others), as if socialism and democracy were antithetical concepts, Zhang stood out in denying that there were any fundamental contradictions between the two. Moreover, he insisted that all political doctrines, not excepting socialism and democracy, were capable of continuous improvement through revision. He can be credited with the notion of "revisionist democracy," sharing the honor with party colleague, fellow philosopher, and close friend Zhang Junmai.² In addition, he was one of those liberal intellectuals who advocated a third road, or "middle politics," between China's two major parties as well as between Anglo-American democracy and Soviet socialism. Last, he held the view after World War II that the democratization of China was not an internal affair alone but part of a world tide that could be assisted by an international democratic force—an exceptional view in an age of Chinese nationalism.

Zhang Dongsun was an advocate of cultural synthesis and harmonization. He welcomed the introduction to China of all kinds of Western ideas and would assimilate all that was good in East and West, emphasizing the benefits of cross-cultural fertilization. He critiqued some aspects of Chinese traditions and respected others but never became a New Confucian (*xiantai xin rujia*) as Zhang Junmai did. In a way, Zhang Dongsun was typical of those who came to learn about a

whole range of foreign “isms” with varying degrees of understanding and wanted to have the best of all possible worlds. While accepting modern socialist thought, he rejected class struggle and was initially critical of Marxism. And while subscribing to a Western conception of democracy, he was not enamored of the Anglo-American systems, as he understood them. As the Chinese communist movement grew apace during the Anti-Japanese War, he showed a notable change of attitude toward Marxism, in which he began to take an active interest. His political thought matured in the 1940s, when he attempted a fusion of socialism, capitalism, and democracy, advancing the notion of gradual “socialistic democracy” (his English) as the long-term solution to China’s ills.

Politically, Zhang Dongsun was, until the 1940s, a loyal critic of the Chinese Nationalist Party (Guomindang [GMD]), a cofounder in 1932 of a minor party (the National Socialist Party), and a supporter of a united front against Japanese aggression. He later became a leading member of the Chinese Democratic League, serving as its general secretary in 1946. By then, he had come to sympathize with the communist movement, eventually siding with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the civil war. His procommunist stance attracted Mao Zedong’s attention. Early in 1948, Mao, recognizing Zhang’s reputation and influence in the Beijing area, enlisted his help in negotiating with Fu Zuoyi (the Nationalist general commanding the troops in Beijing) over the peaceful “liberation” of the city, a mission that he accomplished (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 413-21).

Zhang had but a short political and intellectual life under the Mao regime. In September 1949, he was appointed to the new Political Consultative Conference, later becoming a member of the new Central People’s Government Council. But in 1952, when he persistently argued against Mao’s foreign policy of “leaning to one side,” he was accused of collusion with U.S. imperialism and, as a result, expelled from the Democratic League. In 1958, he lost his teaching position at Beijing University. In January 1968, during the Cultural Revolution, he and his eldest sons were arrested and imprisoned on charges of having been agents of U.S. imperialism prior to “Liberation.” On 2 June 1973, he died in Beijing’s No. 6 Hospital at the age of eighty-eight, after feeling vindicated by U.S. President Richard Nixon’s historic visit to China the year before (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 438-48). Of course,

Zhang did not live long enough to witness the momentous changes that have taken place since the launch of Deng Xiaoping's "Four Modernizations" program. But as China forges ahead amid growing demands for political reform, his views on socialism, capitalism, and democracy find contemporary resonance.

*ZHANG DONGSUN'S EARLY THOUGHTS
ON SOCIALISM AND CAPITALISM*

Born in 1886 in Wuxian county of Jiangsu province to parents of Zhejiang origins, Zhang Dongsun received a traditional education before going to Japan in 1904 to study Western philosophy in Tokyo's Imperial University. There, in 1906, he met the reformist leader Liang Qichao as well as Zhang Junmai, then a politics student at Waseda University, and they became close friends. After their return to China, the two Zhangs were associated with Liang's newly formed Progressive Party (Jinbudang), later renamed the Research Clique (Yanjiuxi); Zhang Dongsun served as a newspaper and magazine editor, publishing numerous articles on constitutionalism and other political issues. In 1917, he succeeded Zhang Junmai as editor of the influential *Shanghai Times* (*Shishi xinbao*), which had a literary supplement titled *Academic Light* (*Xuedeng*). In the pages of *Academic Light*, Zhang Dongsun distinguished himself as a political commentator and critic of the intellectual and social currents of the day. Two years later, he launched a new journal—*Liberation and Transformation* (*Jiefang yu gaizao*), later renamed *Transformation* (*Gaizao*)—which would provide a public forum for the socialism-capitalism debate. As editor of the journal, he cut a prominent figure in Shanghai's reformist circles (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 1-13, 85-96). He was not a New Culture iconoclast like Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi.

Socialist thought had emerged as an intellectual current prior to the Revolution of 1911 (Bernal, 1976), but it was not until 1919 that Zhang Dongsun wrote about socialism. Following the end of World War I, with the events unfolding in Soviet Russia in mind, Zhang greeted socialism as a world trend. He perceived the coming of "a third kind of civilization," which provided the context for this new trend. He

theorized about three kinds of civilization. The first kind was “the civilization of religion, custom, and superstition,” which had long been superseded by the second kind—“the civilization of liberty, competition, individualism, and nationalism.” The third kind was the “civilization of socialism and cosmopolitanism,” which made society the basis for thought and morality and the world community the basis for state institutions. In this new civilization, social relations were to be founded on equality, with economic activity aiming at even distribution of wealth. Zhang visualized a universal spirit of “mutual aid and harmonious cooperation” among people and among states around the world. In an expansive mood, he spoke of the “spring rain” that World War I had brought to help germinate the seeds of this new civilization. He also imagined himself basking in the “sunshine” of postwar revolutions, echoing Lenin’s belief that a world revolution was in the making, which would bring about a global transformation. China, lagging far behind the West, was still at a stage somewhere between the first and the second kind of civilization. But Zhang was optimistic about China’s future as he envisaged a reformist postwar order of which it was to be part. There was no need for China to go through the second kind of civilization. Instead, China should be preparing for the advent of the third stage by launching a cultural movement aimed at fostering “a spirit of mutual aid,” “a personality [*sic*] of harmonious cooperation,” “a capacity for self-rule,” and “a communitarian morality” (Zhang Dongsun, 1919a).

Zhang’s vision of a third kind of civilization is reminiscent of the self-avowed Marxist Li Dazhao’s view of “a third great civilization,” promised by Russia’s October Revolution, which would rise to mediate between East and West (Meisner, 1967: 64). It also echoed the late Qing reformer and utopian Kang Youwei’s notion of the “Third Age” (the Age of Universal Peace). Whereas Kang’s Third Age was linked to his ideas about *datong* (great community), derived from the Chinese classic *The Evolution of Li*, Zhang’s socialist thought grew out of his dismay at the Western obsession with materialism. In the immediate postwar intellectual climate, Zhang found capitalism excessively materialistic, greedy, and selfish, a response deeply felt among Chinese intellectuals. For example, Liang Qichao, after his tour of Europe in 1919, reflected on what he called the “bankruptcy of European

materialism.” The sum total of material progress in the past hundred years, Liang noted, had been many times that of the previous three thousand, yet humankind had not become happier but had met with abundant disasters (Zhang Pengyuan, 1981: 187; Levenson, 1959: 199). Of course, the Chinese thinkers were not alone. Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* made a significant impact in the West in that same year.

It was against this backdrop that Zhang viewed socialism less as a socioeconomic system or a problem of livelihood than as a moral code and cultural orientation. In an article published in *Liberation and Transformation* in December 1919, he approached socialism from a philosophical premise, proclaiming, “Socialism is a view of life as well as a view of the world—and the most progressive and most modern view at that” (Zhang Dongsun, 1919b: 4-5). Zhang used the term *socialism* broadly to encompass all strands of socialist thought since ancient times, mentioning Marxism but no specific ancient socialist thought. In the back of his mind were perhaps the ancient Chinese datong tradition and the well-field system. In any case, in socialism he discovered the power of spiritual liberation and world transformation, an issue common to all social classes (Zhang Dongsun, 1919b: 7). The transformation would involve society in its totality, from the individual to the collectivity, and from spiritual to material life. Any thought that recognized this transformative power fell into the category of socialism (Zhang Dongsun, 1919b: 5). In this perspective, socialism was a principle and a spirit of social transformation, not just a social system or an answer to economic inequalities. Zhang viewed it as an orientation toward a new civilization of the third kind as well as a new cultural movement directed against all that was bad in the prevailing social order (Zhang Dongsun, 1919b: 11).

At this point, Zhang had no institutional proposals for attaining socialism in China:

When we talk about socialism now, we don’t mean to begin destroying all the existing institutions. We start from the spiritual in order to spread a new thought, a new morality, and a new view and way of life. That is, we begin by destroying the habits of capitalism in existing society. We don’t attempt to solve China’s problems alone. Those problems must be solved in the same way that the problems facing humankind are solved. [Zhang Dongsun, 1919b: 13-14]

Zhang's inclination to understand all issues of political economy as essentially moralistic and cultural rather than materialist made him a traditionalist in his spiritual concerns. At the same time, like Li Dazhao, he was also internationalist in viewing China's problems as part of the problems of humankind.

But unlike Li, Zhang was not converted to Marxism. That is not surprising. In the early 1920s, only a few Chinese intellectuals became Marxists, as anarchism remained the dominant form of socialism in radical circles, with guild socialism and state socialism attracting the most support (Zarrow, 1990; Dirlik, 1991). Zhang's refusal to convert may be explained in part by his denial that Marxism was the end of socialism. Modern socialism, he wrote, was not the doctrine of a single person but the result of numerous revisions by many thinkers, the implication being that it could be further revised. Yet there was a constant in his socialist thought—namely, opposition to the notion of class struggle. Not only was class struggle unnecessary, it was also bad; while Zhang accepted that social conflict was natural and inherent in society, he believed in social harmony. Moreover, in 1920, Marxism in its popular images was identified with Bolshevism, which provided a model of revolutionary struggle too radical for him. Thus, unlike the May Fourth veteran-turned-Marxist Chen Duxiu, Zhang was not ready to engage in politics. In the spring of 1920, he was invited by Chen to meet with the Comintern agent George Voitinsky in Shanghai to discuss the formation of a Chinese communist party. A preparatory group was set up, but he later withdrew from it (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 126-28).

Before 1920 was over, in a remarkable twist of events, Zhang made a strategic retreat from socialism following the visit to China in the fall by the British philosopher Bertrand Russell. On that visit, Russell gave a series of lectures, some specifically on the China problem. To solve that problem, Russell suggested that two things be done. One was to expand education, the other to industrialize; socialism could wait (Zhang Dongsun, 1920c).³ The suggestion struck a responsive chord with Zhang after he had made an investigative tour of the hinterland, accompanying Russell on a visit to Hangzhou, Nanjing, and other places. From the trip he gleaned a "valuable lesson": to wit, the Chinese people were destitute, and grinding poverty was China's "only disease." He found that although the material life in the treaty

ports was not too bad, the vast majority of the people living in the interior had never experienced “the life of a human being.” Therefore, talk about socialism, nationalism, anarchism, or any other “ism” rang hollow. In a sudden change of mind, he now had no time for ideological rhetoric and, instead, was anxious to search for practical solutions. He declared, “There is only one way to save China, which is to generate wealth. And to generate wealth is to industrialize” (Zhang Dongsun, 1920e: 2).

Zhang’s sudden move away from socialist rhetoric appeared to be linked to the May Fourth veteran Hu Shi’s attack on Li Dazhao in the “problems and isms” debate of the previous year (Grieder, 1970: 181-83). Whereas Hu was “talking politics” in a particular sense (he appealed to his fellow intellectuals to deal with concrete political problems and warned them against the pitfalls of abstractions and vague generalizations), Zhang was “talking economics”—also in a rather particular sense, focusing on China’s grinding poverty. By poverty, he meant not simply indigence, want, and scarcity but also underdevelopment. It was a chronic problem to which there was no quick solution. Zhang pointed out that even the Soviet Union, which had achieved even distribution of wealth in a short period of time under a new economic regime, remained poor and underdeveloped. Tackling the problem of poverty, therefore, was a first priority for China; socialism could wait (Zhang Dongsun, 1920a: 12).

Zhang had been pondering the poverty problem for a long time and had long held that lack of capital formation and failure to develop productive capacity were the main causes of China’s social problems. In a 1913 article, he had blamed poverty on the lack of a capitalist class and deplored the failure of successive governments to foster a culture of investment in commerce, business, and industry. Finding no labor shortage in China, only shortages of factories and jobs, he was confident that the rise of Chinese capitalism would be greatly welcomed by the laboring classes (Zhang Dongsun, 1913: 4-6). Seven years later, he was firmer in his view that underdevelopment was the distant cause of China’s poverty, aggravated in recent times by the immediate cause—the “oppression” of foreign goods (Zhang Dongsun, 1920b: 8-9). Thus, he argued that fighting capitalism was not the answer. To be sure, capitalism was exploitative. But Zhang was now less concerned about exploitation than about massive unemployment. Watching the

sweaty exertion of the sedan man moved Zhang not to pity him but rather to appreciate that the poor man was lucky enough to have a way of eking out a living. Drawing a distinction between Chinese capitalism and foreign capitalism, Zhang blamed the latter for China's economic difficulties and expected the rise of Chinese capitalism to counter its effects (Zhang Dongsun, 1920f).

Not surprisingly, Zhang's retreat from socialism drew instant criticism from the Marxist camp. Some critics were simply angered by his apparent volte-face. Others took him to task on the question of China's poverty and its solution. There was no argument about the need to create wealth through industrialism. Where they differed was over the means. Shao Lizi, the chief editor of Shanghai's *Republican News* (*Minguo ribao*) and a member of Chen Duxiu's Marxism Study Group, rejected suggestions that capitalism, "exploitative and plundering," was the best medicine for the Chinese disease. He accused Zhang of a superstitious belief in "the industrialism of Western material civilization," countering that only industrialization under socialism could nurture a decent human being's spiritual life (Shao Lizi, 1920). Chen Duxiu could not see any difference between Chinese capitalism and foreign capitalism; capitalism per se was bad. Instead, drawing a distinction between capital and capitalists, Chen could see the need for capital formation in China but dismissed the few Chinese capitalists as merely compradors serving foreign interests. He accused Zhang of belittling the laboring classes that could be organized in the struggle against foreign capitalism. He further questioned whether Zhang was in favor of the Euro-American systems, insisting that only expanding education and industrializing under socialism could prevent China from going down the same capitalist path (Chen, 1920).

Replying to his critics, Zhang defended capitalism as the best way to industrialism. Capitalism benefited not only the capitalists but also the common people. Even if harmful in the long term, it was immediately beneficial. Moreover, capitalism was a necessary phase in China's development because of the superiority of "capitalist technology." Zhang no longer thought that a world socialist revolution was forthcoming. As long as capitalism existed in the West, China must follow the same path to industrialism because that was a "natural trend" (Zhang Dongsun, 1920d: 29-30).

Above all, capitalism would accelerate the rise of the new class that must emerge if China was to develop. Here, Zhang was talking not about a new proletarian class but about a new class of “financial lords” (*caifa*, or what the Japanese called *zaibatsu*), to be composed mainly of capitalists, industrialists, bankers, and financiers from gentry-merchant backgrounds. His idea of a new class stemmed from his diagnosis of China’s socioeconomic ills. He saw China as suffering from a combination of four diseases: ignorance, poverty, soldier-banditry, and external force (meaning foreign capitalism). Of these, ignorance and poverty were most deeply rooted in Chinese society, whereas external force was controlling the Chinese economy. By far, soldier-banditry posed the greatest threat to society because of its links to the warlords. This new class was destined to destroy the power of the warlords, some of whom, once reformed, could well become part of it. Zhang was confident that the poor and the unemployed would welcome the rise of this new class because it created jobs, as would foreign capitalists in China whose businesses were not helped by soldier-banditry. What made it so important was that it represented industrialism and capitalist power, without which there could be no escape from the poverty trap. Nor in its absence could there be a strong working class, which was a necessary prerequisite to socialism. Shortening the road to socialism might be possible; circumventing the capitalist phase was not (Zhang Dongsun, 1920d: 23-26).

Notwithstanding his debate with the Marxist camp, Zhang’s view of capitalism and the new class was, in its specific form, also shared by Marxism, which preached first the bourgeois revolution and later the proletarian. As is well known, socialist and Marxist thinkers had argued over Marx’s polemic that socialist revolution could succeed only after the development of capitalism, accompanied by the growth of capital formation and class antagonism—that is, the capitalist phase could not be circumvented, as Lenin claimed. In underscoring the importance of capital formation and development of productive capacity, Zhang was unconsciously employing this polemic. Where he consciously differed from the Marxists was, of course, over class struggle.

Moreover, in defending capitalism, Zhang reflected a view widely held among Chinese liberal thinkers that capitalism was a necessary evil if China was eventually to realize socialism. Liang Qichao, for

one, declared himself to be pro-socialist and endorsed the thrust of Zhang's views. Liang regarded capitalism as both a friend and a foe: a friend because it created jobs and a foe because it was exploitative and an adversary of the working class. The socialist movement in China, Liang noted, was very different from those in Europe and the United States. The latter strove to improve the status of members of the working class who already had jobs. The Chinese movement strove to transform the unemployed masses into modern industrial workers. For the West, the question was whether the workers were well off enough to own property. For China, it was whether there were sufficient industry and enterprises to provide employment. Rewarding productivity, Liang emphasized, was as important as tackling uneven distribution of wealth. It was neither desirable nor possible to prevent the rise of the capitalist class. Once again, the point was made that without a strong laboring class growing out of capitalism, there could be no socialism. Rather than demonize the capitalists, Liang urged that they provide for the well-being of the workers so as to narrow the gap between management and labor. Also aware of the pitfalls of depending on the capitalists, he called for the promotion of a whole range of state-funded public enterprises as well as encouraging workers to receive an education and to form trade unions (Liang Qichao, 1921).

If capitalism was indeed a necessary evil, it must be "improved" while socialism remained the ultimate goal. In the interim, the likes of Zhang Dongsun would find satisfaction in a form of socialism that seemed attainable in the medium term. In 1921, Zhang found guild socialism attractive because it was moderate and reformist, combining the strengths of anarchism and syndicalism, even though it could not be applied to China without adjustments being made.⁴ He also mused over German social democracy, about which he seems to have learned much from Zhang Junmai, who had studied in Germany. If it were a choice between German social democracy and the Soviet model, he would, like Zhang Junmai, choose the latter (Zhang Junmai and Zhang Dongsun, 1921).

In 1925, Zhang Dongsun changed to an academic career, becoming a professor of philosophy at Shanghai's Political Science University, whose president was Zhang Junmai. Over the next five years, he also served as professor and dean of the College of Arts at Guanghua University, also in Shanghai, and president of the China National Institute

at Wusong. In 1930, he moved to Beijing, taking up a new teaching appointment at Yanjing University, an American institution. In the following year, he provoked another debate with Chen Duxiu and others over dialectical materialism and historical materialism. This philosophical debate does not concern us here, but it did mark the height of Zhang's critique of Marxism.

In 1932, Zhang became a reluctant politician when he joined with Zhang Junmai in founding the National Socialist Party:⁵ it advocated nationalism, democracy, and state socialism but had nothing to do with Germany's National Socialists. Zhang Junmai took charge of party affairs in the south, leaving Zhang Dongsun in charge of those in the Beijing area. The two of them gravitated toward state socialism because they saw that the state had a useful role to play in dealing with the national crisis brought to a head by Japanese aggression, as well as in running a mixed economy aimed at efficiency and social justice.

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF ZHANG DONGSUN'S SOCIALIST THOUGHT IN THE WAR YEARS

The national crisis intensified anti-Japanese sentiments, with the CCP and critics of the Nanjing regime calling for a united front in a war of resistance against Japan. Supporting those calls, early in 1936, Zhang Dongsun became the first public intellectual to respond to the CCP's "August First Declaration." On 1 August 1935, the CCP's delegation to the Comintern published an open letter in a Paris newspaper: addressed to all Chinese compatriots, it declared the CCP's determination to resist the Japanese. (The letter was suppressed in the Chinese press by the Nationalist government for a few months.) In an effort to achieve a grand front uniting all patriotic elements, the CCP leadership unveiled a moderate policy pledging to recognize property rights, protect private business, respect individual liberty, implement democracy, and cooperate with all political parties and groups. This policy represented a major change from the radicalism of the earlier phase of the communist movement. Welcoming the declaration, Zhang asked the CCP leaders to be genuine about multiparty cooperation and not to use the minor parties and groups as political pawns (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 328-35).

Thereupon, Zhang became more sympathetic to the communist movement, cooperating with its leaders behind enemy lines in the fight against the occupying Japanese. In June 1938, he attended the opening of the wartime People's Political Council in Hankou. On the sidelines of the council meetings, he met with the CCP delegates Zhou Enlai and Dong Biwu to discuss resistance strategies. After returning to Beijing, he became involved in a series of anti-Japanese activities organized by local communists. Among other things, he assisted the communist Eighth Route Army in procuring war matériel and medicines. Moreover, with the connivance of Dr. Stuart Leighton, president of Yanjing University, he turned that American institution into an underground anti-Japanese base. But on 8 December 1941, following the outbreak of the Pacific War, he was arrested by the Japanese military authorities in Beijing. After being tortured and detained for four months and ten days, he was given an eighteen-month suspended jail sentence (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 336-42).

During the next few years, Zhang had the chance to develop his ideas on capitalism, socialism, and democracy, finishing several book-length manuscripts, including *Thought and Society* and *Reason and Democracy*, both published in 1946. By then, there had been a significant change in his approach to epistemology. Previously, his inclination had been philosophical, reflecting the influence of Immanuel Kant. In the 1940s, it was more sociological, revealing a diminishing interest in metaphysics.⁶ Combining sociology with epistemology, he now studied culture and politics in a wider societal context (Zhang Dongsun, 1947c: 13) and was able to engage Max Weber and R. H. Tawney over their linking of Protestantism with the rise of capitalism. Skeptical of their theory, Zhang argued that capitalism was made possible by the Industrial Revolution. Whereas Lutheranism and Calvinism had contributed to the reformation of the Catholic Church, the motor behind capitalism was technological, not religious. In other words, it was technology, not Protestant ethics, that contributed to the rise of capitalism (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 142). This position led him to view capitalism as a system, a state of society, a modern development, and above all an economic phenomenon—"the economics of individualism"—but not a body of ideas, least of all an ideal (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 144). Contrary to Weber, Zhang did not link the rise of capitalism to any specific religion, metaphysics, or ideology.

Instead, he conceived of capitalism as a specific instrument for growth and development, made possible through the use of new technology.

By contrast, socialism was for Zhang an ideology and an ideal. Even though the term *socialism* was a nineteenth-century invention, Zhang traced socialist thought back to ancient times, linking it with Christianity. Christianity, he wrote, was essentially and theoretically “socialistic” (his English), and all forms of socialism were quasi-religious (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 137). “Socialism is hard-hearted Christianity. Christianity is soft-hearted socialism,” he proclaimed (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 140), agreeing with the nineteenth-century American social reformer C. L. Brace, who had stated, “There is no doubt in many of the aspirations and aims of communism a certain marked sympathy or harmony with the ideals of Christianity” (quoted in Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 144). Thus, in his view, Christianity was not so much an institution as an ideal, and socialists opposed the church as an institution, not the spirit of Christianity. In their values, socialism and Christianity were therefore as one, representing two important facets of Western life. Furthermore, invoking Plato’s *Republic*, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and Thomas Campanella’s *City of the Sun*, he asserted that historically the ideals of social reform were all communistic. His conclusion was that communist thought, like Christianity, was a great tradition of the West that had continued into modern times in a variety of forms, Marxism among them. He foresaw that the capitalist system was unsustainable in the long term, predicting its inevitable collapse under the weight of socialism (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 145-46). In linking socialism with Christianity in Western culture, Zhang was not original. Generations of European thinkers—the Christian socialists—had already done so. Like them, he was concerned with shared values, the equality of human beings, the common attributes of humanity, and social justice, and he ignored the tensions between Christian principles and communist politics.

The metamorphosis of Zhang’s socialist thought was now almost complete. In 1919, he had viewed socialism as a world trend, a transformative power, and a cultural orientation. He had been interested in guild socialism and German social democracy. Now, in the mid-1940s, he dismissed guild socialism as unsuited to China after all, except in the field of education (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 192), and viewed socialism as a socioeconomic system in which the role of the

state was an important one. Having been critical of Marxism, he now came to a deeper understanding of it, acknowledging Marx's important contributions to "scientific socialism" and lauding him as "the master of socialism," equal in standing to Zhu Xi, "the master of Neo-Confucianism," and to Kant, "the master of modern philosophy" (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 146). (Apparently, Zhang found no difficulty in admiring these three different thinkers at the same time.) Yet Zhang's fundamental disagreement with Marxism over class struggle was unchanged, a paradox that may be explained in part by his impulse toward social harmony and in part by his continued opposition to the CCP's violent methods in carrying out its land program. Linking Marx with Rousseau, Zhang was convinced that true socialism was for the good of the entire population and the ultimate end of democracy (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 178).

ZHANG DONGSUN'S CONCEPTION OF DEMOCRACY

Like all liberal, middle-of-the-road intellectuals in the Nationalist era, Zhang Dongsun was opposed to one-party rule and the GMD's political tutelage. There were many problems with the GMD as a political organization, but Zhang was mainly concerned with the theory of political tutelage, which was fundamentally flawed. He asked, "Since the undemocratic system during the period of political tutelage is different from the democratic system that is supposed to be established under constitutional rule, how can the people learn to practice democracy?" (quoted in Fung, 2000: 94). He urged the GMD to introduce political reforms, expressing the view, popular in the prewar period, that should the GMD put in place a democratic system, it could easily win power by the popular vote and provide a model for the rest of the country (Fung, 2000: 134-35).

The conditions prevailing in China in the 1930s, however, demanded a kind of democracy that Zhang and his National Socialist Party colleagues called "revisionist." An exposition on "revisionist democracy" (*xiuzheng minzhu zhengzhi*) was the centerpiece of the lead article, titled "The Words We Want to Say," which appeared in the inaugural issue (May 1932) of the National Socialist Party's organ *Zaisheng* (*Renaissance*) (Jizhe, 1932). According to Zhang's bio-

grapher, the article was drafted mainly by Zhang Dongsun, with the party leader Zhang Junmai as codrafter; there may have been a third collaborator as well (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 293). It is difficult to determine which of the ideas expressed in that article were Zhang Dongsun's and which were Zhang Junmai's. However, given Zhang Dongsun's long-held view that all political doctrines were capable of continuous improvement through revision, it would appear that he strongly influenced the conception of "revisionist democracy" with which Zhang Junmai is often credited.

The term was used to underscore the need for Western democracy to be revised before it could be practiced in China. For all its strengths, Western democracy had shortcomings caused by unbridled capitalism and rampant individualism. In the revision process, Western democracy was to be stripped of all that was not good in it. For China, revisionist democracy was, in the words of Zhang Junmai, "a third type of politics," which demanded a strong and efficient government capable of dealing with the national crisis. It would protect civil liberties and property rights, develop a mixed economy, establish the rule of law, and govern by drawing on the elite from different fields and professions. It would also seek a balance between individual rights and state powers (Fung, 2000: 138-41; Jeans, 1997: 235-40).

But Zhang Dongsun's greatest contribution to the democracy discourse lay in his conception of democracy as "a culture with characteristics that include politics in a broad sense" (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 1), an idea that he articulated in his two books *Reason and Democracy* (1946a) and *Thought and Society* (1946b). There are three major themes in this conception. The first is that democracy is not merely a political method and a system of government but also, and more important, a culture and a way of life based on reason and a constellation of values. Those were the values of the Enlightenment—notably liberty, equality, freedom of thought and speech, progress, individual rights and responsibilities, and so on—which could be inculcated in society even in the absence of formal democratic institutions. Zhang linked democracy to rationalism, calling the two the "invaluable treasures of Western civilization." An earlier attraction to the vitalism and irrationalism of the French philosopher Henri Bergson did nothing to diminish his faith in reason.⁷ Taking a cue from Bentham's dictum that the mark of being a rational agent is to judge

one's own utility, Zhang held that only if people act with reason can society be democratic, free, and just. Democracy, in turn, promotes the rationality of man and woman, and it also promotes world peace because the actions of democratic states tend to be guided by reason (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 166-68).

Liberty and equality are important values. Zhang conceived of liberty as a positive and noble concept. Like John Dewey, he took individual liberty to mean "growth, ready change when modification is required" (Dewey's words); like Western liberal thinkers, he also insisted that individual liberty should not lead to actions that harmed others. Thus, he spoke of "heavenly limits" to personal freedoms through the exercise of self-restraint to prevent those freedoms from degenerating into licentiousness (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 126). His notion of a "natural balance" between freedom and duty—natural in the sense of being the result of voluntary self-regulation, not external coercion—reflected his concern with social responsibility and social harmony. In his value system, the freedoms of thought and speech are basic and essential. A government that does not respect those rights is undemocratic because a democracy is "government by free discussion," involving a dialogue between the rulers and the ruled, which permits compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 143). At the same time, he warned against licentiousness and abuses of personal freedoms, which are actions not based on reason.

As regards equality, Zhang conceived of it negatively as the absence of inequality. To him, inequality meant artificial privileges created for the enjoyment of some people at the expense of others; to be equal was to remove those privileges by reasonable and democratic means. Zhang owed his ideas to Rousseau, who saw two kinds of inequality in humankind: one natural or physical, the other moral or political. The former, which comes with birth, one has to accept; the latter, which is created after birth, can be changed. Here, Zhang saw a nexus between equality and democracy, sharing the view of the American evolutionary zoologist E. G. Conklin that only democracy "permits a natural classification of men with respect to social value, as contrasted with all artificial and conventional classifications" (quoted in Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 129). He was convinced that a democratic system alone gave meaning to the principle of equal opportunity.

The second theme in Zhang's conception of democracy is that democracy is an ideal, a perfection of living as opposed to an inherently flawed but workable way to practice politics; it can be reached only incrementally and is capable of continuous improvement through revision and gradual change. Again, Zhang invoked Rousseau, claiming that if one took the term *democracy* in the strictest sense, there never had been a real democracy (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 166). He also echoed the South African historian A. F. Hattersley's declaration that "democracy is a matter of degree and that no complete expression has yet been given to democratic ideals" (quoted in Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 143). That is, democracy sets the highest standards for democratic institutions, but the standards are not fixed and can only be reached gradually; the higher the standards, the more democratic the institutions. A little democracy is better than no democracy at all, for that little will accumulate and amount to a great deal over time (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 144). Zhang did not think that the United States and Britain had reached a high degree of democracy, rating them at a mere 40 on a scale of 100 (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 170). This was an extremely harsh judgment, which he failed to justify. But he made it clear that when he talked about democracy in the postwar period, he meant a way of life, a spirit, a principle, and an ideal, not the Anglo-American systems (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 166).

The third theme is that democracy is the norm of politics, not just one political system among others; conversely, autocracy and dictatorship are a "political malaise." Zhang traced this theme back to the eighteenth century, when Rousseau developed the social contract, the notion of consent, and the general will (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 167). He also acknowledged Kant's metaphysics of morals as contributing to making democracy the norm of politics. Thus, to be democratic is not only to reject the adversarial relationship between the rulers and the ruled and to implement the general will but also to treat humanity as an end in itself, never simply as a means, as Kant insists (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 175). Considering these three themes, one can understand why Zhang maintained that democracy offered the best prospects for Chinese politics and culture.

Clearly, the sources of Zhang's democratic thought were Western, not Chinese. Unlike some cultural conservatives of his time, Zhang did not feel compelled to invoke the Chinese classics or to delve into

Neo-Confucianism in search of “the seeds of democracy” or proto-liberal and proto-democratic elements to justify his democratic demands. He knew only too well that the Western notion of liberty, predicated on personal liberation and legal protection of rights, was lacking in the Chinese tradition, as was the Western conception of equality. He cautioned against confusing the Western idea of reason with the *li* of Neo-Confucianism. The School of Reason in the Song period, he argued, preached an “intelligible order” (his English), distinct from the moral and the natural order. In the Chinese tradition, there was only *xingli* (heavenly endowed principles), not *lixing* (rationality). Neo-Confucianism, he went on, rested on an ethical basis, linking *li* (principles) with *li* (propriety or rites). This resulted in *tiaoli* (order), which was consistent with the Chinese tradition of conflating the moral order with the natural order (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 83). Understanding democracy in Western terms and as alien to the Chinese tradition, Zhang was not concerned that there could be a cultural barrier to the development of a new democratic Chinese culture.

Yet Zhang was critical of wholesale Westernization: while he favored assimilating all that was good in Western culture, he was by no means a slavish admirer of Western ways. In his view, the best of Western culture lay in the domain of public administration and political institutions, whereas the best of Chinese culture lay in aesthetics, the philosophy of mind, nature, and self-cultivation. Where it was deficient, China should learn from the West. In the learning process, however, the “autonomy of Chinese culture” ought to be maintained. This was no paradox to Zhang because he, unlike some cultural conservatives, did not dwell on the differences and conflicts (or potential conflicts) between East and West; he instead focused on their complementary capabilities, sanguine that cultural harmony would result from cross-cultural fertilization, mediation, and intercourse. In the meantime, notwithstanding his admiration for Neo-Confucianism, he did not become a New Confucian like fellow philosophers Liang Shuming, Xiong Shili, and Zhang Junmai. He rejected the nineteenth-century *ti-yong* dichotomy, which artificially differentiated between the Chinese essence (*ti*) and the Western function (*yong*), because the idea of Western *yong* was fundamentally flawed: it ignored values outside the field of science and technology. Western culture was superior precisely because it was “a culture of reason,” in contrast to

China's ethics-based culture (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 124; 1946b: 188). Zhang found that in modern times, Chinese culture had lost much of its value, save the Neo-Confucian philosophy of the mind and self-cultivation. Yet his pursuit of cultural harmony propelled him to search for cultural similarities, equivalents, or commonalities between East and West.⁸

Thus, Zhang remained a moralist in a Confucian sense. To be democratic was not to be selfish, he wrote, condemning selfishness as the root cause of chaos in China and in the world at large. Selfishness was not merely an individual problem but also a problem for all classes, political parties, races, and countries the world over. To be democratic was to prevent selfishness by using people's power. Democracy was, for him, a system of ethics that set standards for human conduct, as well as a tool for self-regulation and self-discipline, not a weapon with which to attack other people (Zhang Dongsun, 1945).

The fundamental differences between Chinese and Western political thought did not elude Zhang's understanding. He summed up those differences as follows. There was no "philosophy of individuality" in the Chinese tradition, only the idea of the "integral whole" to which the individual belonged. Confucianism, with its emphasis on the family and collectivity, viewed society as an organism, which it was the role of the individual to serve. In the Confucian tradition, there was a notion of rites but no notion of rights. In this view, there was no separation of politics and education, no sense of individual autonomy, as society was but "a macrocosm of the family." Space was a relative concept in Chinese thought that underscored the importance of the hierarchical order. The emphasis on status and hierarchy ignored the equality of people and rendered impossible a Western conception of progress built on personality and individual autonomy. Nor was there a linear conception of time, as Chinese viewed change in a cyclical manner within a periodic order. And in political life, change meant cyclical succession. The common people, when oppressed, demanded replacement of one official by another, not democratic change. Furthermore, Chinese had a very special notion of Heaven (*tian*). On this account, Heaven, the ruler, and the ruled formed a triangular relationship in which the emperor, the "Son of Heaven," was Heaven's representative on earth and the mediator between Heaven and earth. There was no autonomous space between the monarchy and the populace.

Unlike Europe, China did not have the institution of the church, which had played an important role in Europe's constitutional and democratic movements (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 107, 181; 1946c: 101-3).

Zhang also noted the absence of an industrial revolution, the lack of modern statehood, underdevelopment, and civil strife as factors inhibiting the growth of democratic forces in China. The long history of China was but a history of dynastic change, and postimperial China remained hostage to its past. He was unequivocal in his belief that democracy was antithetical to the Chinese historical tradition, and it was precisely for that reason that China must democratize (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 186). The question was, how?

HOW COULD DEMOCRACY BE PRACTICED IN CHINA?

First of all, Zhang Dongsun wrote, it was important to lay a cultural foundation for democratic change by accepting the Western conception of democracy with its emphasis on individualism, liberty, equality, progress, and reason. In the long term, however, China was most in need of development. Zhang used the terms *production* (*shengchan*) and *increasing production* (*zengchan*), which must be interpreted broadly to mean industrialism, growth, and development. He was positive that development would amount to a Chinese industrial revolution, unleashing the very forces that had made Europe democratic. Development would also help ease the tensions between the center and the periphery as well as between the rulers and the ruled. He seemed unconcerned about uneven development. Rather, he worried about "bureaucratic capitalism," which was linked to a few very senior and powerful government leaders (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 183).

For a country with a huge rural population, agriculture was as important as industry. Zhang could see the need for land reform, accepting the notion of "land to the tiller" in Sun Yat-sen's socialist thought and sympathizing with the CCP's recently revised and more moderate land policy. But he insisted that land reform must be linked to production and that only the land of the absentee landlords should be confiscated. His anti-class struggle impulse led him to the conclusion that the ultimate solution to the rural problem lay not in the liquidation of the entire landlord class but in agricultural development

fostered by science and technology and by collective farming. A significant increase in rural living standards, combined with village self-rule, would contribute to the long-term democratization of China (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 181-83).

Zhang pinned high hopes on the role of the intellectuals in the democratization project. The intellectuals were the modern equivalents of the traditional literati (*shi*) that sought public office but maintained the imperial tradition of remonstrance as loyal critics. Calling on the intellectual elite to take on this "historic mission," Zhang commended them as the paragons of reason and morality, the conscience of society, and the only sector of the population with honorable aspirations. To carry out their mission, they nevertheless needed to rid themselves of old bureaucratic habits and mentality and to receive "special training" so that they could mix and cooperate with the rural masses in opposing exploitative landlords and corrupt officials (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 177-78, 183, 186).

Here, Zhang displayed the elitism so characteristic of Chinese intellectuals who felt duty-bound to speak for the masses, even though they were traditionally loath to mix and work with them. His emphasis on the preeminent role of the intellectual elite in the absence of a strong middle class is reminiscent of the ideas of the late Ming Neo-Confucian Huang Zongxi (1610-1695), who had argued for strengthening the scholar-official class to create a supporting infrastructure between state and society similar to Montesquieu's *corps intermédiaires* (de Bary, 1993). Zhang was aware of their inadequacies, particularly their lack of political and financial muscle, their traditional view of officialdom as the only career path, and their dependence on the government of the day. But he underestimated their political amateurism, lack of organizational skills, and social conservatism while overstating their morality, rationality, and capacity to lead.

The intellectual elite alone would not suffice to democratize China, however: they would need the help of an international force. In this regard, Zhang contributed significantly to the democracy discourse by suggesting that the democratization of China was not a purely internal affair. Writing in the postwar context, he conceived that China's democratization could be assisted by an international organization devoted to promoting world peace and democracy around the globe. World peace, he reasoned, could be secured only by all countries

becoming democratic and being rational and only if leaders of Western democracies had the moral right to assist autocratic regimes in achieving a transition to democracy. This would amount to interference in the internal affairs of another state, a very sensitive political issue in China in an age of anti-imperialist nationalism. Subscribing to the theory of limited state sovereignty, Zhang would justify such interference on moral grounds: autocracy and dictatorship were a “political malaise” that should be eradicated from the world. In the last phase of World War II, China had become a member of the “Big Four,” in good company with the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Zhang was hoping that leaders of Western democracies would jointly bring strong moral pressure—even some political and economic pressure, but not military threats—to bear on the Nationalist government, encouraging it to embark on the road to political reform (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 193-94).

The Nationalist government was most in need of a system of checks and balances, political reform, a rule of law, and so on. But Zhang dismissed the Western-style two-party system as unsuited to China on the grounds that frequent alternation of the party in government would cause political instability. He questioned the suitability of Western-style constitutionalism and general elections, arguing forcefully for a coalition government, as advocated by the Democratic League. His argument was that in a coalition government, the minor parties and groups, combined with the CCP, would provide a system of checks and balances on one hand and would cooperate with the ruling GMD on the other (Zhang Dongsun, 1947b, 1947d). Such a coalition captured his notion of “middle politics,”⁹ which emphasized the role of the “third force” as well as multiparty consultation and elite cooperation, a notion shared by many middle-of-the-road intellectuals.

Middle politics, however, had no room in the real world of Chinese politics. The Political Consultative Conference held in January 1946, which Zhang attended as a delegate, failed to resolve China’s political problems. As the civil war was renewed with a vengeance, the idea of coalition government withered on the vine. In November, when Zhang Junmai participated in the GMD-controlled National Assembly, boycotted by the CCP and the Democratic League, Zhang Dongsun, who did not trust Jiang Jieshi, bitterly parted company with his longtime friend. (They were never to meet again.) This rift split the Democratic

Socialist Party (the National Socialist Party, newly renamed after merging with a North America-based group) into two factions, with one led by Zhang Junmai and the other, the self-styled reformists, led by Wu Xianzi and Zhang Dongsun. It was against this background, compounded by the prospects of a CCP victory in the civil war, that in 1948 Zhang Dongsun published a book titled *Democracy and Socialism* in the monograph series of Shanghai's influential nonpartisan liberal journal *Guancha* (*The Observer*).¹⁰

DEMOCRACY AND SOCIALISM (1948)

The Chinese historian Zuo Yuhe (1997: 218-26) has argued that the purpose of the book was to expound the author's theory of the "unity of democracy and socialism," in terms of their shared values, compatibility, and linkages. Zhang Dongsun set out to do so by probing the ideas and practice of liberalism, democracy, and socialism and their historical development in Europe and by delving into the histories of the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and the Soviet Union. He asserted that in the West, the aims of democratic movements over the centuries had been identical with those of socialist movements and that Europe had seen but one long, continuous movement for liberty, equality, and justice. The lofty ideals of liberty, equality, and justice were "beautiful things floating high in the sky," which had no meaning at all until "brought down to earth." In this light, Zhang interpreted the modern history of the West as a history of movements aimed at translating those ideals into reality, sometimes successfully, sometimes not (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 25-28).

A more careful reading of the book, however, reveals that its importance lay elsewhere than in expounding the unity between socialism and democracy, as if Zhang had achieved a breakthrough of synthesis by bringing them together. Instead, it is significant because he insisted that capitalist methods should be used to build the materialist base while moving toward a socialist system of distribution and because he attempted to blend capitalist, socialist, and democratic ideas into a political ideal.

To elaborate, let us return with Zhang to Marx, whom he credited with efforts to bring the "beautiful things floating high in the sky"

down to earth. Zhang considered Marx to be “the most enthusiastic revolutionary thinker,” who distinguished himself by understanding socialism scientifically and by working assiduously for its realization in the West. Marxism, Zhang proclaimed, was democratic. Now delinking socialism and Christianity, he denied that Marxism was quasi-religious, insisting that it was in fact scientific and practical (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 70). Viewing the mode of production as historically determinative, he put forward a “technological interpretation of history” (*weiqi shiguan*), which held that the motor of human history was people’s ceaseless desire to improve their material life and to pursue happiness. That is, production improved the material life, and consciousness and will resulted from productive agency. Zhang’s technological interpretation of history was concerned with innovation and the application of new technology to production. Here, one can see the marks of Marx’s influence. Marx held that class contradictions were a constant in human history. In like manner, Zhang posited that those contradictions were not continuous from the beginning of society but stemmed from specific modes of production and the social relations that grew out of them (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 30-32). There is little difference between his technological interpretation of history and Marx’s historical materialism that he once critiqued.

Zhang went on to argue that production was the single most important “intermediary agent” that helped “bring the lofty ideals of liberty, equality, and justice down to earth.” He advocated a kind of planned economy that used material incentives and respected private property rights. He found that the economies of some capitalist countries were also planned to a certain extent. Even in a socialist state, he argued, some form of capitalist development was necessary, as the Soviet Union demonstrated in its First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932), and it was possible to build state capitalism on private capital (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 47-57). Yet Zhang’s preferred model was not the Soviet system. Nor was it the socialism of the British Labour Party toward which some Chinese liberals gravitated. He favored the Eastern European model, especially that of Czechoslovakia (Zhang Dongsun, 1947a), although there is no evidence that he was knowledgeable about the Eastern Bloc states.

Increased production was imperative for China, but the imperatives of production might require paying a short-term price: some sacrifice

of both liberty and equality. In this, Zhang was not conflating liberty with equality. He simply thought that what the Chinese people needed badly was not a high degree of liberty but a significant rise in living standards. If liberties were so excessive that production suffered, then they had to be curtailed (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 65). But Zhang would expect the curtailments to be temporary, as development would eventually redound to democracy. As a trade-off, he wrote elsewhere, he would insist on “cultural liberalism,” meaning a spirit of tolerance and the freedom to criticize—“the lifeline of cultural-intellectual development.” Drawing a distinction between “political liberalism” and “cultural liberalism,” he anticipated the collapse of the former under the weight of a planned economy and viewed the latter as the last line of defense (Zhang Dongsun, 1948c).

Zhang’s conclusion—that capitalist development was of major importance to a socialist state and that true democracy was for the entire population, not for the proletariat alone—was persuasive. He left his readers to infer for themselves that China’s future lay in “socialistic democracy” (*shehui zhuyi de minzhu zhuyi*), a notion he had broached two years before (Zhang Dongsun, 1946b: 184). Socialistic democracy was gradual, nonviolent, and production oriented, representing Zhang’s political ideals that assimilated the virtues of socialism, capitalism, and democracy. It is worth noting that *Democracy and Socialism* was published at a time when Chinese liberals were pondering a new kind of liberalism and a new kind of democracy as they debated the relation between liberty and equality and China’s transition to socialism (Fung, 2000: 317-30). A significant contribution to that discourse, the book was favorably received in liberal circles (Zhang Yaonan, 1998: 358) and may have influenced some middle-of-the-road intellectuals as they faced the prospect of CCP rule.

With the accession to power of the CCP imminent, Zhang was hoping that the change of regime was not going to be simply a change of dynasty. In a supplement to *Democracy and Socialism*, he insisted that the communist revolution must be tied to production and peaceful reconstruction. All previous revolutions in China had been unsuccessful because they had failed to liberate the productive forces from traditional fetters, and when production was blocked, the popular demand for a better material life gave rise to revolution (Zhang Dongsun, 1948a: 82-84). In a separate article, also intended as a supplement to

the book, Zhang argued that economic equality could not be achieved simply by even distribution of wealth. Nor did it mean a leveling down of the rich; rather, it meant a rise in the level of the poor, which was possible only with economic growth. What distinguished a real revolution from a fake revolution was the capacity to increase production. Whereas a fake revolution sought power for power's sake, a real revolution ushered in a new era of growth, unleashing individual as well as collective energies for productive purposes (Zhang Dongsun, 1948b).

Zhang had come to believe that Mao Zedong's notion of New Democracy (Mao, 1967: 339-84) was consistent with his idea of socialistic democracy, thus reaffirming the view prevailing in some quarters that Mao was not bent on realizing socialism, let alone communism, in the foreseeable future. The sentiment was growing among Chinese liberal elements that the CCP deserved to be supported (Fung, 2000: 315-16). As a leading member of the procommunist Democratic League, Zhang would expect to play a role in Mao's New Democracy, hardly realizing that Mao's conception of democracy was entirely different from his.¹¹

CONTEMPORARY RESONANCE

As noted previously, Zhang Dongsun had but a short intellectual and political life under the Mao regime and was one of the many intellectuals who had suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution. Yet a study of his political thought as it evolved during the Republican period may help us understand similar issues in the PRC since Mao's death, despite the obvious differences between the two eras. More than half a century earlier, Zhang had grappled with the very same problems that are now confronting the Chinese government and political activists alike. His ideas might have a message for both.

One of those problems concerns economic growth and capitalist development. Zhang had articulated a view widely shared by the Chinese liberals of his time—that capitalism was a necessary evil and the answer to underdevelopment and that until the Chinese economy reached the stage of development marked by the rise of a new capitalist class, socialism was premature and infeasible. He did not negate socialism but simply made it a stage after capitalism. His emphasis on

increasing production after the communist revolution left no doubt as to the imperatives of growth, irrespective of the social system. Equally significant was his insistence that capitalist methods should be used to build the materialist base while moving toward a socialist system of distribution.

In the post-Mao period, Deng Xiaoping also insisted that so long as China remained underdeveloped, there could be no wealth to distribute and socialism could mean little to the people. In fact, one of the reasons why Deng embarked on the economic reform program was the need to improve the lot of a billion impoverished Chinese, hitherto unhelpt by Beijing's traditional central planning system, and to solve the problem of rural unemployment, which the Ten-Year Plan (1976-1985) had neglected. Deng recognized the dynamism of "Asian capitalism"—particularly the "little Chinese" economies of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Singapore—and also appreciated the technological changes that had been transforming world capitalism (Naughton, 1995: 61, 63, 77). Deng's notion of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" rested on the assumption that lack of wealth, not its uneven distribution, was the cause of China's grinding poverty. Accordingly, Beijing's ideologues spoke of China as being at the primary stage of socialism, which justified capitalist development. The Dengist doctrine that a few need to become rich first and that the trickle-down effect will eventually benefit everyone is consistent with Zhang's idea that economic equality does not mean a leveling down of the rich but a raising of the poor.

Another issue of contemporary relevance with which Zhang had wrestled concerns restrictions on liberties to foster growth. Zhang had argued that if personal freedoms became excessive and thus impinged on production, they would need to be curtailed. That curtailment was analogous to the restrictions on human rights imposed by the current Beijing leadership during the process of economic reform. But there is a difference. For Zhang, such restrictions were meant to be temporary because growth would redound to everyone's advantage and lead to democracy sooner or later. He also held on to "cultural liberalism" as the last line of defense. For the Beijing regime, the restrictions will last as long as the CCP holds on to power with the aid of sustained economic growth.

A third issue relates to the preeminent role of the intellectual elite in the democratization project. Zhang had viewed the educated class as the conscience of society, the paragons of reason and morality, and the motor of political change. Likewise, dissidents in the PRC, such as the political scientist Yan Jiaqi, the physicist Fang Lizhi, the student leaders of Tiananmen in 1989, and many others took on the self-appointed mission of saving China. They were far from prepared to empower the ordinary people as they demanded that economic reform must broaden the scope for political participation for at least some sections of the population—that is, for members of the educated elite such as themselves.

Zhang's statement that democracy is the norm of politics from which any departure is a "disease" was as powerful as any contemporary democratic proclamations. Yet, while readily prescriptive, Zhang was short on institutional proposals through which a democratic culture could be created and inculcated—a common problem with China's public intellectuals. A few decades later, the pro-democracy activists in the post-Mao period displayed the same weakness (Nathan, 1997: 81).

In his later years, Zhang had come to accept some of Marx's basic beliefs but remained opposed to class struggle. His notion of socialistic democracy was gradual and nonviolent. Today, the Beijing leadership still upholds, at least in theory, Marxism-Leninism, but for all intents and purposes, the CCP is no longer interested in class struggle; its main concern is social stability while seeking to sustain economic growth. Zhang had argued that social conflict was best resolved through the democratic process, thus ensuring social harmony. In other words, democracy helps rather than undermines social harmony and stability—a view not easily accepted by the CCP leadership.

Another idea of Zhang's that the CCP leadership will not accept is that Chinese democratization is not a purely domestic affair and that the international community has the right to assist. Even if this assistance amounts to interference in the internal affairs of another state, it is justifiable on moral grounds. Today, democratic activists both inside and outside China similarly lack any qualms about enlisting international support for their political demands.

Finally, Zhang's political thought might have a message for both the government and the political activists. For the government, his

vision of socialistic democracy is a reminder that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” must include democracy, albeit gradually and incrementally. For the dissidents, Zhang’s idea that democracy is constitutive of culture based on a constellation of values is a reminder that those values must be inculcated in society, even in the absence of formal democratic institutions. Contemporary PRC activists have devoted much more attention to the functions of democracy than to discussing democracy as a culture and a way of life. The Democracy Wall activist Wei Jingsheng linked democracy to human rights but also viewed it as a prerequisite to rapid economic growth (Seymour, 1980: 54, 63, 146). Fang Lizhi, an equally firm defender of human rights, conceived of democracy as an instrument for removing corrupt leaders, implementing decisions smoothly, reflecting public opinions, and serving the interests of all classes and nationalities (Nathan, 1997: 82). And Yan Jiaqi was at his best when he spoke of democracy as the “politics of procedures,” the “politics of responsibility to the people,” and a mechanism for peaceful transfer of power (Bachman and Yang, 1991: 105-6, 151-57). China’s dissidents have yet to develop fully Zhang’s notion of democracy as a culture pervading all aspects of society and to practice it as a way of life and a perfection of living.

NOTES

1. Apart from a biographical sketch (Boorman, 1967: 129-33), the only English-language work on Zhang Dongsun of which I am aware is a chapter in a book concerned with ideological conflicts in modern China (Chi, 1986: 157-77).

2. For a scholarly study of Zhang Junmai’s political life up to 1941, see Jeans (1997).

3. Russell went on to write a book titled *The Problem of China* (1922), in which he suggested that China should undertake three tasks, in order of priority: the establishment of an orderly government, industrial development under Chinese control, and the spread of education. With regard to the second task, he argued that industrialization under state socialism, or rather what Lenin called state capitalism, was more suited to a country that was economically but not culturally backward (Russell, [1922] 1966: 242-45). There is little in English about Russell’s visit to China, but for a scholarly study of its impact on China, see Feng Chongyi (1994).

4. Around this time, a series of articles on guild socialism was published in *Jiefang yu gaizhao*.

5. Zhang Dongsun later claimed that he did not consider himself suited to a political life and that he had joined the National Socialist Party only after Zhang Junmai had promised to dissolve the party as soon as the Guomindang abandoned one-party dictatorship (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 4-5).

6. In the science versus metaphysics debate of 1923, Zhang Dongsun sided with Zhang Junmai in arguing that science could not resolve the spiritual problems of human life (Zuo Yuhe, 1998: 203-14).

7. In 1917, Zhang Dongsun translated into Chinese Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, which appeared serialized in the Shanghai newspaper *Shishi xinbao*. In 1922, he went on to translate Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and published it in book form (Zuo Yuhe, 1999a: 10; Chi, 1986: 158).

8. Zhang's attempts at finding commonalities were sometimes contrived and convoluted. To cite just one example, he wrote that although the Western notion of individuality and the Confucian notion of ethics (*renlun*) had different meanings, they were close in that both were social concepts (Zhang Dongsun, 1946a: 47-48).

9. Although not developed until 1947, the notion of middle politics had its origins in the war period, when the minor parties and groups constituted a third force movement mediating between the Nationalists and the Communists and demanding an interim coalition government (Fung, 2000: 230-59; Jeans, 1997: 201-21).

10. The publisher and chief editor of *Guancha* was Chu Anping. For a study of this journal and the liberal views expressed by its writers, see Wong (1993).

11. Mao would maintain the absolute leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the dictatorship of the proletariat. After the initial period of New Democracy, there would be no place for the national bourgeoisie. The new communist regime was not the coalition government for which the minor parties and groups had fought; the CCP had no intention of sharing power with the Democratic League or any other party. Economically, the mixed economy of New Democracy was a prelude to the economics of Maoism. Socially, the proletariat was to be the dominant force, reducing the national bourgeoisie to insignificance, if not to a class enemy. Furthermore, New Democracy was a far cry from the "cultural liberalism" and individuality to which Zhang attached so much importance. For Mao, it was merely an instrument in a strategy designed to achieve political hegemony.

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