



Shaohua Hu. *Explaining Chinese Democratization.* Westport, Conn., and London, England: Praeger, 2000. x + 194 pp. \$59.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-275-96553-2.



Reviewed by Vincent Kelly Pollard

Published on H-Asia (July, 2000)

Shaohua Hu's well-written *Explaining Chinese Democratization* explains large-scale social processes in an interesting fashion. Hu earned his first two degrees at Beida (Peking University) and his doctorate at American University. Currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science at Colgate University's Department of Political Science, Dr. Hu has been a research fellow at the Institute of World Economy and Politics and earlier at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Among other publications, Shaohua Hu's professional articles appear in *Asian Profile*, *Asian Thought and Society*, *World Affairs*, and the *Journal of Contemporary China*.

Summarizing Hu's core argument, this review also raises related issues and uses several of the endnotes to introduce relevant literature. Any criticisms are stimulated by an engaging read. Students of modern Chinese history, sociology and politics will want to grapple with Hu's well-written *Explaining Chinese Democratization*. It is tightly written and should be read closely with a finger in the chapter endnotes.

Democracy, as Hu operationalizes the concept, emphasizes "majority rule and minority rights," combining "realism and idealism" and thereby, in his rendition, drawing on both Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham (p. 7). Postdictive explanations of democratic transitions and anticipation of democratic changes in Asia, Latin America, Africa, Europe and the Americas lead to a question about China's historical alternatives: Why have none of China's twentieth-century governments committed to liberal democracy? Hu passingly asserts that the Republic of China was "Asia's first republic" (p. 2). Actually, two late-nineteenth-century candidates -- earlier, shorter-lived republics in Taiwan and the Philippines -- also vie for primacy. Thus, an elective historiographic debate emerges between three rival accounts whose truth-claims are rarely evaluated at the same time.[1]

Hu then proceeds to make the more important claim that "[i]n modern China, a republic is meant to be democratic, but it actually amounts to a dictatorship without monarchy" (p. 14, n. 2).[1] In light of the mixed record of Leninist- and

Leninist-influenced ruling parties managing democratic transitions, how well will the Communist Party of China compare? Or as Bruce Dickson's less optimistic comparative study of the PRC and Taiwan asks, under what kinds of conditions can the Communist Party transcend its Leninist past?[2] Before dismissing this possibility out of hand, recall how unlikely 1960s-era social scientists and historians considered political reform in the Soviet Union.

To solve this puzzle, Shaohua Hu's *Explaining Chinese Democratization* develops an ambitious genetic account (p. 12). Methodologically, Hu's "Introduction" (pp. 1-19) explains, it is a developmental sociological account, historically tracing continuity and change in a Chinese synergy of local and international democratic trends and antidemocratic countertrends. 642 chapter endnotes testify to Hu's bibliographic effort. Thus, a search for socially uncommon "cuestick-to-billiard ball causality" is diversionary and irrelevant.[3] Instead, Hu singles out and integrates five important dimensions in the process. These five facets are as follows: historical legacies, local forces, the world system, socialist values and economic development (pp. 12-15). A chapter is devoted to each. And all must be kept in mind simultaneously in making assessments at any given historical juncture.

Professor Hu lays his normative cards on the table, making it clear that he supports the democratization of China (pp. 5-7). The expansion of the state, in Hus perspective, justifies the introduction of democracy in the modern world (p. 7). By democracy, Hu means rule by the people in a system based on individual freedom -- but not a social laundry list definition of democracy implying almost all kinds of good things under the sun (p. 5). Hu's definition also excludes adjectival variants like peoples democracy -- popular among twentieth-century ruling classes unwilling to allow nonruling parties to contest for state power.

And Hu acknowledges that democracy is not a panacea for all social problems (pp. 152-157).

Back-of-the-envelope stereotypes of Confucianism are notoriously facile. Against Western scholars' tendency to dismiss Chinese political culture as uniformly authoritarian at the local level, Raul S. Manglapus, twice Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines and activist-in-exile during the martial law era (1973-1986) there, cited China's decentralized government and the appointment and election of village officials. Meanwhile, William Theodore de Bary draws our attention to twelfth-century Song Dynasty Chinas community compact (*xiangyue*) with its emphasis on mutuality, reciprocity, and cooperation among community members as illustrative of the persistent tension between Neo-Confucian communitarian ideas and Chinese imperial rule. That tension persisted into the twentieth century.[4] Hu's chapter on "Historical Legacies and Democracy" (pp. 21-41) teases out countervailing tendencies in historical Confucianism. Despite its opposition to "despotism" (p. 24) and advocacy of "active participation in politics," "civic virtue" and "egalitarianism" (p. 25), Confucianism," in Hu's summary, "misleads people into pinning their hopes on enlightened rulers," stresses "familism" to the detriment of "individualism and patriotism," downplays "tensions between social reality and human ideals" (p. 26), unrealistically relies "solely on morality" and "provides few realistic mechanisms to prevent rulers from abusing power."

In light of these offsetting tendencies, Confucianism is characterized as "a-democratic." For Hu, Confucian tradition is not necessarily democratic -- nor anti-democratic (p. 27).

Hu's chapter on "Local Forces and Democracy" (pp. 43-68) focuses on agency and the role of leadership. His chapter on "The World System and Democracy" (pp. 69-95) emphasizes structure and argues that for most of the twentieth century and particularly at crucial junctures of Chinese histo-

ry, the world system did not favor democracy. A state capitalist perspective may make this easier to understand.[5] This chapter also prompts me to suggest a fine-grained geographic, i.e., spatial, refinement of this investigation of the impact of 'local forces' on democratization in China. Just because China is not federalist under the current PRC Constitution, is that any reason to expect democratization not to vary by province? Is the Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region likely to remain an exception or a harbinger? For example, should distance from Beijing lead us to expect a deepening of democratization in the southern provinces? And if some provinces democratize sooner than others, is distance best characterized as a necessary but insufficient condition for democratization?

In an endnote conceptually borrowing from Arend Lijphart in light of China's ethnic diversity, Hu suggests consociationalism (p. 160, n. 51) as a preferred alternative to the present system. Hu's proposed consociationalism is directed to issues associated with minority ethnic groups within borders administered by the PRC in 2000. However, one senses its implications for the future of Taiwan -- briefly mentioned by Hu at least six times (pp. 8, 11, 79, 136, 154 and 157). For example, in what organizational contexts will Taiwan's continuing democratization likely resonate positively in PRC domestic politics? Will prospective voters in the PRC sense that representative government has potential as a vehicle for reducing corruption, i.e., exploitation of public resources for private gain? How closely does Hu's "consociationalism" match the April 2000 Taiwan-PRC "confederation" advocated by Taiwan's President-elect Chen Shu-bian and a similar proposal by one of the defeated Taiwanese presidential candidates three months earlier?[6] Korea, yet another Confucian society undergoing democratization, represents a possible transborder political influence.

To this reader, Hu's chapter on "Socialist Values and Democracy" (pp. 97-120) suggests that

successive ruling party commitments to socialism with Chinese characteristics and, more recently, a socialist market economy do not necessarily open the road to democratization.

Political violence in April 1927 revealed the egregious ineptness of international actors like the Executive Committee of the Communist International as it reaped the fruits of a disastrous united front recommended to the Communist Party of China. Not that Leon Trotsky didn't warn against the peril, but Chiang's slaughter of trade union cadres in China's urban areas that year cut off one possible direction of development for the CP. Just three years after 1927, the by-then-exiled Trotsky noted, "The Chinese Communist Party, however, is now extremely weak. The number of its worker-members is limited to a few thousand. There are about fifty thousand workers in the Red trade unions." [7]

Counterfactually, if so many trade union cadres sympathetic to the aims of the Communist Party had not been killed in 1927 by the Guomindang/Kuomintang and its Green Gang allies in Shanghai and other urban centers, what likely pressures might this organized sector of Chinese have been able to bring to bear on CP leadership in later years? How much might an active organized labor union presence in the Party have offset, blunted, weakened and maybe even defeated tendencies towards what Tang Tsou came to call "totalism" or *quanneng zhuyi* in China?[8] Since 1927 marks a fork in the road in the Party's history, this hypothetical question deserves consideration in order better to understand what did happen. Unless one insists that history is only made by broad, impersonal structural forces, then the physical elimination of a potential counterforce to subsequent Communist Party leadership arguably made a difference.

In a chapter on "Economic Development and Democracy" (pp. 121-143), Hu notes the Philippines and Thailand as possible exceptions from the generalization that economic development

must precede democratization, possible implications of which are not drawn out for China. But along with India, perhaps those two countries offer alternative pathways. Therefore, we might productively turn the implicit question on its head and ask, "Is democracy the missing link in the fight against poverty?"[9]

Hu's concluding chapter ("Explanation and Prediction") recapitulates the core argument of the book (145-161). In asserting his developmental account, Hu rejects "end of history" and "clash of civilization" interpretations of China. In this respect, futurists and others will also appreciate Professor Hu's characterization of Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama: Although historical trends influence possible alternative futures, in Hu's view Huntington conflates the future with the past; Fukuyama, the future with the present (pp. 154 and 160, n. 46).

Despite the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Tiananmen Square tragedy of 1989, Hu remains optimistic. "China," he predicts in a chapter endnote, "will become democratic by 2011." Age demographics underpin some of his optimism. "The generational change," Hu continues, "will deprive the Communists of any justification for one-party rule" by that date (p. 160, n. 48). Perhaps subsequent developments in China will support Hu's prognosis, or perhaps his is an overly optimistic telescoping of coming events. Alternatively, will this leadership generation grow more desperate as they advance in age? For example, will the way they handle relations with Taiwan advance democratization in China? Or will war with Taiwan in the decade ahead retard democratization in China?

More important than answers to these specific questions is Hu's developmental orientation and approach. (See also [2], below.) This is a major strength of the book. In contrast, monocausal explanations of why China has not democratized are often framed in time periods too brief to have broad historical cogency. While some readers may

quibble with nuances with or challenge specific factual claims and political inferences, they would do well to consider working within Hu's explanatory framework.

Hu's "genetic" approach seems applicable to studying democratization outside the PRC. Three developments make the Taiwan example particularly interesting: 1) Taiwanese voters have twice elected a president -- in 1996 and 2000; 2) The ruling Kuomintang/Guomindang gave up executive power after a successful electoral challenge by the Democratic Progressive Party in 2000; and 3) With an increased number of representative democracies and the telecommunications revolution, the domestic milieu for foreign policy making in several dozen countries have become more receptive to Taiwan's democratization in 2000 than in 1971 when it walked out of the United Nations after the PRC was admitted -- or 1979 when the U.S. withdrew formal diplomatic recognition.

The case of Taiwan aside, even if the greater number of representative democracies is generally more congenial to China's democratization, direct political intervention by the Government of the United States in political processes of the People's Republic of China risks counterproductively eliciting anti-foreigner sentiment from citizens and leaders of a country where memories of humiliation by colonial powers have a basis in nineteenth- and twentieth-century history and are daily reconstructed in governmental statements, educational system and mass communications media.

Also, if the PRC moves decisively toward representative democracy, is presidentialism the default choice in Hu's perspective? If so, is the default choice the best one? In the light of twentieth-century presidentialisms penchant for devolving into authoritarianism in Nationalist China and elsewhere, is a presidential executive the best alternative for the People's Republic?[10] Advocates of democratization need to address these questions with a broad understanding of the paths ac-

tually followed by presidential democracies. Otherwise, they may find themselves more successful than they wish. Instead, positive and negative lessons from parliamentary and presidential federal systems like India, Canada and Mexico may be deserve close scrutiny. The terms of this kind of discussion often imply that democratic transitions are only or usually managed from above. But does that have to be the case? For example, low-level but persistent organizing by Chinese workers in the 1990s suggest a question: Will an independent and organized Chinese labor movement provide a different kind of impetus towards a broader Chinese democracy in the twenty-first century? If so, then China may be teaching the rest of the world profound lessons about beneficial social change.[11]

Moreover, "local forces," to which Hu devotes a chapter, include human leaders. What kind of leader or leaders might succeed under what kinds of circumstances in pushing democratization forward in China? Since leaders of democratic transitions tend to be tossed aside in the process, who will volunteer for the role of sacrificial lamb? Clarifying this point would facilitate assessment of Hu's forecast of a more democratic China by 2011.

A closely related task, suggested by my reading of Machiavelli,[12] is to specify the kinds of circumstances under which an unstable newly democratized China might remain democratic. "How difficult it is for a people accustomed to living under a prince to preserve its freedom, if by accident," in Niccolo Machiavelli's summary, "it has acquired freedom, as the Romans did once they drove out the Tarquins, is demonstrated by countless examples that can be read in the annals of ancient history"

Praeger might have provided a better index for Hu's book. Except for personal names, there are no Pinyin entries. And in light of Hu's impressive chapter endnotes and "Bibliography" (pp. 163-188), a "Names Cited" index for scholars cited

in endnotes would be a labor-saving improvement. The index (pp. 189-194) does not list their names unless they happen also to be discussed in the body of the corresponding chapter. An appendix with Chinese characters, Pinyin and translations might also have enhanced Hu's book.

Answering some of the questions raised in this review entail writing an additional book or books. *Explaining Chinese Democratization* belongs on the reading list for graduate democratic transitions seminars and for special-topic upper-division comparative politics classes. I look forward to Hu's next book.

Notes

[1]. Springing from the Philippine Revolution of 23 August 1896, for example, the Malolos Republic (1898-1902) was the fourth of four revolutionary governments. Even as it was overtaken by the Spanish-American War, constitutional delegates of the Malolos Republic wrote and discussed the *Constitucion Politica* for representative government during September 1898-January 1899 and published this document; the Malolos Republic was subsequently crushed by the United States in the Philippine-American War of 1899-1902. And to the north, some historians claim pre-eminence for yet another contender -- the Republic of Taiwan in 1895. If this debate were pursued, clear definitions of republicanism would be as helpful as facts in sorting out the competing claims.

[2]. See Bruce J. Dickson's *Democratization in China and Taiwan: The Adaptability of Leninist Parties*, Studies on Contemporary China (Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Dickson concludes his final chapter: "Given the different paths of evolution of the KMT and the CCP as ruling Leninist parties, there is little ground for hope that the CCP will be able to repeat the KMT's successful transition from Leninism while remaining in power. Democratizing reforms are unlikely to come under the sponsorship of the CCP; instead, they are likely to come at its expense" (p. 253). Against those who would

smudge the differences, Ambrose Y. C. King wrote in 1994, "[T]he KMT is Leninist only in structure. It has its own ideology, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's San Min Chu I (Three Principles of the People), which is rendered as Nationalism, Democracy, and People's Livelihood" (Ambrose Y. C. King, "A Nonparadigmatic Search for Democracy in a Post-Confucian Culture: The Case of Taiwan, R.O.C.," In Larry Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, textbook edition [Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994], p. 135). Somewhat along the same lines, Ramon H. Myers writes as follows: "There is, however, one salient dimension that makes the PRC's limited democracy different from that of Taiwan's. China's elites and intellectuals emphasize the creation of a 'socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics.' Authorities in Taiwan accepted a 'democratic revolution' that enabled critics to introduce Western democratic practices" (Ramon H. Myers, "China's Limited Democracy: Following the Taiwan Model?" *Miller Center Report*, vol. 15, no. 1 [Spring 1999], p. 20).

[3] Cf. Vincent Kelly Pollard, "Scientific Inference in Qualitative Comparison of Foreign Policy: Assumptions, Design and Methodology," In *idem*, "Executive Power in Foreign Policy Making: Stretched Organizational Pluralism and Social Process in the Philippines and Japan," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Hawai'i at Manoa, August 1998), ch. 1, p. 39.

[4]. See Raul S. Manglapus, *Will of the People; Original Democracy in Non-Western Societies*, Studies in Freedom no. 4 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1987), pp. 54-55. See William Theodore de Bary, *Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 58; see pp. 58-64 and 158-161.

[5]. In a nicely documented work with an unnecessarily narrow title, Hobson and Tabor use the analytic tools of libertarian Marxism to dis-

cuss the origins and evolution of state capitalism in the Soviet Union from 1917 till the mid-1980s; see Christopher Z. Hobson and Ronald Tabor, *Trotskyism and the Dilemma of Socialism*, Contributions to Political Science no. 215 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988). For a bibliographic essay summarizing the less-prominent libertarian trend and two other twentieth-century streams of state-capitalist analysis, see Vincent K. Pollard, "State Capitalism," In Jonathan Michie (ed.), *Readers Guide to the Social Sciences* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000, forthcoming).

[6]. For excerpts from President-elect Chen Shu-Bian's April 2000 confederal proposal and a similar proposal made by an unsuccessful Taiwanese presidential candidate, see Conditions for Confederation Remain Unmet, *Taipei Times*, 22 April 2000; Cross-Strait Thaw Unlikely, *The China Post*, 28 April 2000; and; Chinas Position on the Nations Status, *Central Daily News*, 28 April 2000; all reprinted in *Taiwan Headlines*, online edition <<http://www.taiwanheadlines.gov.tw/book/199911br.html>>. Grounds for optimism that Beijing might consider a consociational proposal favorably are cited in Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Nationalism and Beijing's Taiwan Policy," *Issues and Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2000), p. 95.

[7]. Leon Trotsky, "A Strangled Revolution and Its Stragglers," #17: "The Chinese Question at the Sixteenth Congress of the C.P.S.U." (Prinkipo, 26 August 1930), In *Problems of the Chinese Revolution: With Appendices by Zinoviev, Vuyovitch, Nassonov and Others*, Ann Arbor Paperbacks for the Study of Communism and Marxism (First published, 1932; Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1967), p. 298. See Harold Robert Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*, [First ed.] (London: Secker and Warburg, 1938); or *Chung-kuo ko ming shih: I Lo-sheng chu*, Liu Hai-sheng, translator (Shanghai: Hsiang tao shu chu, 1947; reprinted, 1974).

[8]. See Tang Tsou, "Interpreting the Revolution in China: A Venture in Crossfertilizing Histo-

ry and Social Science Theories," rough draft for talk at the faculty luncheon of the Department of Political Science, The University of Chicago, 13 May 1994. "The regime type and the relationship between the state and society," in Tsou's understanding, "are two separate dimensions of a political system. The regime type may remain the same but the relationship between state and society may undergo important changes." Because scholars using the 1930s-era notion of "totalitarianism" usually blurred that distinction, Tsou moved away from the concept. Tang Tsou's paper has been published posthumously as "Interpreting the Revolution in China: Macrohistory and Micromechanisms," *Modern China*, vol. 26, no. 2 (April 2000), pp. 205-238; accompanying Tsou's essay are Zhiyuan Cui's introduction (*Ibid.*, pp. 194-204) and further commentary by Marc Blecher (*Ibid.*, pp. 239-247); prepublication copy, courtesy of Zhiyuan Cui.

[9]. This question is not new. It was the theme of a recent conference held in Stockholm, Sweden. See International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Support, "Democracy and Poverty in Focus --IDEA's Democracy Forum, 8-9 June," <<http://www.idea.int/press/pr000531.htm>>, press release.

[10]. See, for example, Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (eds.), *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). The "federalist movement of 1920-1923" in China probably deserves greater attention; see Seymour Martin Lipset (ed.), "China," *Democracy in Asia and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998) p. 61.

[11]. Despite the history of self-organization by Chinese working class people during the twentieth century, this possibility was dismissed out-of-hand as a product of Western education by Harry Wu -- dissident and Laogai Research Foundation official (Harry Wu, response to my query during Question-and-answer session following his lecture at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 21 March

1997; my rejoinder was that Chinese history prevented me from agreeing with his answer).

[12]. Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, transl. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella, Worlds Classic paperback ed. (Published posthumously, 1532; Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 16, p. 62.

Copyright (c) 2000 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-asia>

Citation: Vincent Kelly Pollard. Review of Hu, Shaohua. *Explaining Chinese Democratization*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. July, 2000.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=4330>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.