

Lieutenant General Liu Yazhou

ON ADVANCE TOWARD THE WEST

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*[Liu Yazhou is the son-in-law of the Communist Party elder Li Xiannian (1909-1992), a former Chairman of the People's Republic, is an air force officer. Most of his positions seem to have been in the political branches, and 2010 became Political Commissar of the National Defense Academy. He is well-known for his unorthodox political and military analyses. The essay below appeared in a Hong Kong magazine, apparently published without Liu's permission. It aroused much comment for its advocacy of democratic reforms in China, not so much for the sake of democracy itself but because democracy is a means to national strength. The structure of the argument is curious. Most of the essay is focused on showing how the western areas of China, with their access to Central Asia, are vital to China's security and prosperity. In Central Asia China contends with the United States and Russia, but its main long-term rival is Turkey. China has money and power, but Turkey as the advantage of "soft power," and China needs to be able to match Turkey's cultural appeal. The argument for democracy comes in only in the last few paragraphs. A country that relies only on money, which China has plenty of, is a "backward and stupid nation." The Turkic minorities in western China are disaffected and cannot be controlled solely by force or material interest. The "survival of the nation itself compels us to undertake political structural reform"—a euphemism for increased political freedom and participation.]*

China's western regions are a huge vacuum. Not only is our strategic direction toward the west, but the west also holds the fate of our generation. Its geographical position (nearly the core of the world) is a powerful influence. We should regard the west as territory to be recovered in our advance, not as a border region.

### **Land and Sea Defense in a New Era**

A hundred years ago, there was a great debate within the Manchu Qing government: should we stress land defenses or sea defenses? The situation at that time was this: The western powers were threatening the Celestial Kingdom from Shanghai. In 1874 radical Japanese societies sent troops to Taiwan; but before this, in 1871, Czarist Russia had sent forces into Xinjiang to recover what they considered to be ancient territory. So there was a debate over whether to stress sea defense or land defense. Li Hongzhang [1821-1901] led the sea defense faction, while the main representative of the land defense group was Zuo Zongtang [1812-1885].

The sea faction's view was that in the past few decades foreign enemies had attacked from the Eastern and Southern seas. The western areas were securely under Chinese control. "Xinjiang protects Mongolia, and Mongolia defends the capital area." But the logic of Zuo Zongtang and his land faction was clearer and more serious than that of Li Hongzhang and won over [Empress Dowager] Cixi [1835-1908, the effective ruler of the country since the 1870s], who had the final word in decisions.

History today completely vindicates the stand taken by Zuo Zongtang, since "history always sides with the winners." Li Hongzhang was implicated in the defeat in the Sino-Japanese war of 1895 and so for a century has had to bear an exaggeratedly bad name. His name in fact sometimes serves as a synonym for defeatists and traitors.

However, if we go back and review the history, we can propose another hypothesis concerning sea versus land defense. When Zuo Zongtang marched west, yearly military expenditures exceeded 10 million ounces of silver, one seventh of the income of the Qing court. Without the help of the merchant Hu Xueyan, the court would not have been able to sustain this and would have been forced to default on its loans. The expeditions cost money even after their success, more than 30 million ounces of silver to sustain the occupation forces.

If that money had been spent on sea defenses it could have supported 20 war ships, forming the strongest navy in east Asia. Despite the weakness and corruption of the Beiyang army [modernized Chinese military forces stationed in the region around Beijing], Japan would not have had sufficient force to defeat us and there would not have been a Sino-Japanese war, which resulted in the destruction of the Beiyang army, the cost of 200 million ounces of silver, and the tragedy of the loss of Taiwan.

Can we say that the Manchu Qing government won the war for Xinjiang, but lost a decisive war for the country itself?

But in any case, we can't make hypotheses about history. In the eyes of the Manchu Qing government, that money was needed for Xinjiang; while it could have gone to maintain the upper hand against the Japanese at sea, it was thought possible that the war with Japan might be postponed for 10 or 20 years. At that time Li Hongzhang thought that the recovery of Xinjiang was the "conquest of territory far away that would be a drain on our resources for hundreds of years." In those days the northwest indeed was a drain, the recovery of Xinjiang requiring huge yearly expenses to sustain.

However, who would have thought that this drain in the desert would today become a vital El Dorado?

Today Xinjiang's role in China is far from restricted to concerns of territorial security. It is an irreplaceable source of natural resources. It has an extremely great strategic significance for China's resource security. It is an especially important springboard. To the west lie the lands of Central Asia and to the south, through Pakistan, lies the route to the sea, to the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Hormuz.

We can appreciate the supreme importance of Xinjiang when we see it as the access to petroleum and natural gas in the Middle East and Central Asia. It is a way to get around the traditional choke point of the Straits of Malacca. The road to Central Asia and Europe runs through Xinjiang, linking China to these vital areas as well as itself containing vital resources. Territory of such strategic significance is rarely seen in the world today.

Therefore, China today is faced with a new choice of land versus sea defense. We must face this question: What describes our strategic situation? Urgent in the east; important in the west; or east and west equally important; or calm in the east, urgent in the west?

I think that to answer China's question we must follow the compass of the times. We must focus first on land defense and only then be concerned with the sea boundaries. Concerns about the western regions and the southeast coast are certainly linked together. However, if there is trouble in Taiwan there will not necessarily be trouble in the west; but if there is trouble in the west, there will certainly be trouble on Taiwan. Taiwan and the mainland share a common culture, so even if there is trouble, in the long term they will come together. Xinjiang and Tibet are multi-ethnic regions. If they should be lost, there is very little probability that they will ever be recovered.

A western strategy is based upon a consideration of the national interest and it includes imponderable components. Our strategy for modernization began from the east, with reform and opening encouraging the development of the southeastern coastal regions. For two decades the southeast coast has been the motor of China's development, an area of undeniable concentration of wealth. Greater China, with China as its core and encompassing Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao has become a major economic sphere. I once called this region the "renminbi belt." China's economic center is there. But China's vital weakness is there as well. There is no chance for defense in depth. The East is China's most important economic region and is also the largest region to defend against outside attack. The United States has built its "first island chain," as if to put shackles around our neck. Taiwan has been a lively crisis area for these past many years. Isn't there a reason for this? There might be a change of atmosphere in the straits. Suppose America and Taiwan decide to bombard Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong, or even launch a raid against the Three Gorges dam. This makes obvious how poor our strategic situation is in the east.

China's first steps for modernization were taken on the sea; but if we are blocked at sea we have no power to move forward. There is no way out in the east, and so we must devise strategy for the west.

### **Resource Security: the Lifeblood of a Great Power**

If someone asks today, How did Qin unify the six countries of the east—the answer would certainly be: because Qin implemented the legal reforms of Shang Yang. <sup>[1]</sup> After the law reforms, Qin was a nationalist state able effectively to deploy the full resources of society. But even earlier, Wei had also reformed its laws, promoting a rich country and a strong army. So how come Wei was unable to unite the other countries, but, indeed, after its reforms went on to suffer defeats?

Indeed, let's consider how Germany rose rapidly and then went on to lose two world wars. Here we can find the solution to the problem posed by Wei. We need only to unfold the map and look at it carefully. We discover that Wei's geographical situation was exactly the same as that of Germany, except that the threats came from opposite directions. Both Wei and Germany were located at the center of several strong powers. There's an amazing similarity to the way Germany lost two times and the way Wei lost two times: both lacked the means to defend their own territory in depth against enemy attacks. But Qin had at its back western vassal states. It was able to attack forward and to preserve itself if it had to retreat—much like the Soviet Union.

Why is Xinjiang important? Think of the rise of Wei during Warring States times; think of the rise of Germany in Europe.

Zuo Zongtang once said: "China can flourish only when it is covered in the northwest."

In the 2000 years since the First Qin Emperor united China, China has enjoyed three golden ages. 1. During the Han dynasty, the Martial Emperor [reigned 141-81 BC] expanded along the frontier, doubling the size of China's borders. 2. The Zhenguan era of good government under the Tang (629-650). 3. The Kangxi [r. 1662-1722] and Qianlong [r. 1735-1799] eras in the Qing dynasty, when the area of the border regions doubled again. These three eras have one characteristic in common: indisputable control of territory in the west. The Chinese revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began in the south, developed in the west, and was decided in the northeast. It looks as if the road to China's rise is necessarily in the west. If there is energy in the west, the east is enlivened as well.

In addition to its strategic location, Xinjiang also has reserve resources to support China's development in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century.

A great power absolutely needs secure strategic resources. The reason for Germany's defeat, aside from its unfavorable natural location, was its need to import its main strategic resources. A great number of these had to come by sea but the ocean was completely locked up by the British empire.

China today relies more on natural resources than it ever has in its history. If a country as large as China, with its scale of population, makes any move whatsoever, it is bound to have an influence on the interests of other countries. As China grows in wealth and power it will come into conflict with others. There is a limit to the world's resources: if you have more, I have less. When [Bill] Clinton visited a Chinese automobile plant he stated that the development of China's car industry would in the future constitute a threat to the resource security of other countries.

Today, China has suddenly become the country whose citizens abroad are the prime targets of kidnapping. How come? It is because China is a late-comer. The places where resources are richest, where it is easiest to open up new mines and plants, where transportation is most convenient—these places have all been taken. What are left to China are the most unstable, insecure areas—for example, Sudan and Nigeria in Africa. All of these are areas that have been abandoned by the west.

China, however, must rush to establish a foothold in these highly insecure regions because China faces a severe shortage of mineral resources. Today the major reason for Chinese leaders to go on visits abroad has to do with concerns about resource security. Resource diplomacy has become the most important component of Chinese diplomacy in general. This is the kind of treatment a late-comer is bound to receive.

Right now 60 percent of China's oil comes from the turbulent areas of Africa and the Middle East. Most of China's oil comes in by sea, about four-fifths of it through the Straits of Malacca. This is the "Malacca Straits difficulty" that restricts China's resource security. The arteries bringing in China's oil are all under the eyes not only of the American navy but also, for that matter, the Indian navy as well. China's vulnerability in the matter of resources is obvious.

There is only one region where there is a wealth of mineral resources, no major threats, where foreign citizens do not have to fear kidnappers or terrorists—even more importantly, where transportation and communications cannot be controlled by foreign powers: that is China's territory of Xinjiang in Central-South Asia.

This area, in the backyard of the former Soviet Union, is not only rich in oil and natural gas, but also is wealthy in the possession of the technology necessary for extraction. Xinjiang has the capacity to refine and transport oil. There are

multiple channels of transportation with links in the pipelines so that oil can be sent to anywhere in the country. Most importantly, because of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Russia's weakness, it is a precious area that has not already been taken over by the early-arrivers.

Xinjiang is landlocked, with no seaports, so all of the oil can be transported through pipelines.

In theory, the pipelines in Central Asia must lead to the nearest seaport. Those toward the west go through Iran and the seaport is in Iran. Those toward the south go through Pakistan to ports on the Indian Ocean.

But the problem is, while the route through Iran is the closest, the situation in Iran is unstable. It lacks the necessary political security and there is political conflict. The southern route must go through Afghanistan and Pakistan, and this is an even more unstable region.

Therefore, there are limited choices concerning the oil and gas resources in Central Asia.

One: Transport northern oil to the south: The oilfields in the eastern part of Central Asia can send their product through southern Siberia, but it will have to go through multiple stations, increasing the expense of transport.

Two: Ship oil and gas to the north. Gas and oil from Central Asia will pass through Russia, where it will be refined and then shipped to the west.

Three: Eastward through China. After the pipeline enters Xinjiang, it can be connected to the already existing network of pipelines and so directly to satisfy the needs of that large household.

The first two routes were set up during the Soviet era. Because of this they avoid Chinese territory. All of the gas and oil resources in Central Asia must make use of Russian pipelines and ports.

Currently the stable development of pipelines in Central Asia relies on routes established by the Soviet Union. This is not something the Central Asian states are happy about because it gives Russia the ability to guide their development. But the situation is hard to change in the short-term. This also shows the pressing need for long-term investment in the pipelines, despite the large amounts of money required and the difficulties that we are bound to encounter. We need to take the long view and plan for the good of our grandchildren.

A great power's concentration of its efforts on controlling its petroleum industry and economic lifelines (especially oil pipelines) will to a certain degree put it in a passive posture. This accounts for the multiplicity of ways the Central

Asian states use to acquire the means to transport petroleum and the multiplicity of ways China adopts to acquire petroleum resources. This represents a major interest for all parties.

### **China's Presence in Central Asia**

Thanks to our ancestors, we have ownership of this special territory. When we look closely at a map of China, our eyes focus on the western regions. Some people say the map of China looks like a rooster. I say, rather, that it looks like a hawk. As he spreads his wings, he reaches out toward the Pacific Ocean in the east and toward Central Asia in the west. But when he takes flight, he engulfs the entire world. If we say the east is his head, the west, then, must be the center of his body. Without this center he cannot fly. The geography of this center is very special: vast deserts and plains. It is guarded by Tianshan, the Altai Mountains, the Golden mountains: two basins contained by three mountains. This region, far from the sea, is like an iron spearhead pointed toward the breast of Central Asia. The geography in itself is a decisive element in the Central Asian environment. The United States and other empires of the past dreamed of controlling this "Central Asian corridor."

There is great cultural charm to this region. There are only four cultures in world history that have endured for long periods, have been broad in scope, and profound in influence: Chinese culture, Indian culture, Greek culture, and Islamic culture. There is no fifth. There is only one region where all of these cultures have come together—in the west of China, and nowhere else.

By custom, people group Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan together with Xinjiang into the Central Asian region. This is a rich piece of cake given to today's Chinese people by Heaven.

Central Asia is the center axis of the world's oil supply: in the south it is close to the Middle East; in the north it abuts oil fields in Russia and Siberia; in the west it links to the oil fields in the Caspian Sea, one of the largest potential reserves in the world. . . .

Resource cooperation between China and the Central Asian states began in the 1990s. But in the past few years, given the speed of China's growth and the initiatives taken in the region by Russia and the United States as a result of their shortages, China has begun massive activities promoting consumption in that region. Central Asia is rapidly becoming the major target of Chinese foreign investment.

### **Central Asia: A Hinterland**

There have been historical attempts by England to penetrate the region, but traditionally Central Asia has always been Russia's hinterland.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a Heaven-sent opportunity for other forces to enter the region. At present, apart from China, other countries with their eyes on the resources of the region include: the United States; Britain; France; Germany; Italy; Turkey; Canada; Japan; India; Saudi Arabia; South Korea; Russia; Argentina; Hungary; Oman; and the United Arab Emirates—in all, more than 20 countries and 50 companies. The work is concentrated on the exploration and development of petroleum resources and the refining of petroleum.

The most lively actors in this fight are China, Russia, and the United States—these three great powers.

These oil and gas fields are located in small countries. Great powers gain access through pipelines, forever transforming the way in which petroleum and natural gas are transported. China has built and is currently building pipelines in Central Asia and has already worked a transformation of the transportation system for mineral resources in the region. China and the Central Asia already have achieved a high degree of interlocking economic linkages.

Today the situation in Central Asia is advantageous to China in several ways. While Central Asia is surrounded by Russia, NATO, the Islamic world, and India, it is huge in area and the influence of any one power is limited. Right now a chess game is in progress among all the forces in Central Asia, and as one force waxes the others wane. There is not yet any force able to control Central Asia by itself and the region has not become enclosed in any particular bosom. Rather, all the forces are in motion.

Among China's rivals, traditionally the most influential in Central Asia was Russia. But Russia is undergoing a long-term process of weakening. Especially since 2008 there has been a financial crisis brought on by the fall in the price of petroleum, putting Russia in a passive economic position. For geographic reasons America and the European Union are limited in the attention they can give to investment in the region. China, on the other hand, enjoys great advantages.

Today China has quietly adopted a westward development strategy. This does not simply imply economic investment. China has been pondering for a long time how to protect its interests as a great power in the western regions.

In terms of geopolitical strategy, Central Asia bestrides the road from East Asia to Europe. Historically this was the Silk Road; and today the second main highway linking Asia and Europe passes through there. Xinjiang is the core of the



corridor linking Kashmiris, the Uighurs, and the Tibetans. It is vulnerable to splittist activities by groups both within and without. China and Russia have been engaged in a long-term chess game in the region. There is need for detailed thought about the complexities of this region, taking the long view.

The first issue is the nationality question in Xinjiang. There are ten ethnicities indigenous to Xinjiang and Central Asia. Most of the inhabitants believe in Islam and are of Turkic extraction. Their customs and way of living are similar. There is a deep sense of national identity and great ease of communication among them. The advantageous factor is that they all derive great benefits from economic cooperation with China. An implication of this is that if some day the domestic ethnic question is not handled well there will be repercussions outside the country. If the ethnic question is poorly handled, then all the nationality groups in the surrounding area will look on China with hostility.

Islam in the five Central Asian countries is mostly of the moderate variety with few extremist tendencies. A portion of the Muslims in Central Asia have become secularized and there are no obvious differences in lifestyle between them and non-Muslims. Nonetheless, the question of ethnic identity and political stability remains a worry.

Historically, the ethnic situation in Central Asia was highly complex and it was not easy to distinguish one group from another. Later, however, the Soviet Union made distinctions among the nationalities. Territorial conflicts developed among them and ethnic conflict in any of the Central Asian countries will have repercussions in the others, giving rise to contradictions among the states. Political power in most of these states sprang from the former Soviet ruling clique. Dictatorship can guarantee short-term political stability but in the long-run complications are bound to develop. Central Asia is the area where color revolutions can most easily occur.

The recent turmoil in Kyrgyzstan embodies in a classic way the Central Asian syndrome of political instability: conflict between the Kyrgyz in the north and the Uzbeks in the south and insufficient legitimacy and representativeness of the regime. Similar problems seem to exist in all the Central Asian states.

From a certain perspective, with the ethnic question added to the lack of a democratic political system, Central Asia is faced with balkanization.

The Caucasus in the western reaches of central Asia is regarded by Russia as one of its areas of core interest and so receive a high degree of attention. The Caucasus has indeed become another Balkan powder keg. The reason it has not yet exploded is because Russia exerts a great deal of pressure there while at the same time there is no third party that can openly resist Russia. However, if Iran's power should expand outward, there could be explosions in Kurdistan and

Turkmenistan and the current stability in the Caucasus may be destroyed. The reverberations will be long-lasting and will affect Central Asia.

China's problem is on its borders, and the problem on the borders is Xinjiang. If Xinjiang is unstable, there will be no protection for China's interests in Central Asia. Xinjiang should not be regarded as a border but as a vital interest. It should be given much attention with efforts to study in the broadest manner the ways successfully to ameliorate the ethnic contradictions and the tendencies toward separatism. For the sake of all of our posterity we need to be far-sighted to the maximum degree and have the wisdom to resolve the ethnic contradictions.

### **Aside from the Power of Money, What Power Do We Have**

Given its long-term economic growth, China has an unprecedented ability to invest strategically to foster the national interest, to the point of arousing the envy of the bosses in the western developed countries.

However, the accumulation of money implies the strengthening of our hard power, with no implication that soft power will also increase along with it. There are a great many difficulties that cannot be resolved simply by piling up money. A worrying phenomenon in Chinese society today is a tendency from top to bottom to think that money can answer anything. This focus on short-term advantage and the logic of money completely ignores long-term consequences . . .

China's investment in Africa is an example of this. It has become very rare for Chinese merchants inside the country to give money directly to officials in order to gain advantages. But the degree of social control and governing capacity available to African governments cannot be compared to that in China. Money will satisfy the officials there, but not the common people. There are frequent tribal conflicts and terrorist outbreaks. With the money they receive the bellies of those officials simply become bigger and bigger, but the ordinary people and the businesses in the region learn to resent the Chinese.

When western countries come into similar African countries they generally patiently try to establish communications with the officials while trying to curb their rapacity, without at the same time omitting to search for effective ways of getting into local society. They pay attention not just to the economy but also to culture and politics. Whatever is based merely on money will be blown away in the first storm. While China is itself a third-world country, it is often inferior to the west in handling relations with other third world countries.

In Central Asia our line of vision runs first of all to the competition between the United States and Russia. But if we

would look farther, I'm afraid our main rival would be neither America nor Russia but, rather, Turkey.

Russia has military strength but not economic strength. It has even less moral or cultural appeal. The United States is not lacking for anything, but Central Asia is way on the periphery of its "sacred war for freedom and democracy." It has no intention to occupy Central Asia. It's not the same for Turkey. Turkey does not have sufficient military or economic strength, but it has great cultural and moral appeal deriving from its ethnic affinity with the peoples of the region.

In politics and ideology Turkey is the best model of secularization and democratization in the Islamic and Turkic worlds. Culturally Turkey identifies itself as the fatherland of all Turkic peoples. While it cannot be considered rich, it has made generous cultural investments in Central Asia, establishing universities, libraries, and other cultural and educational institutions, importing the Turkish system of spelling, promoting Turkish secular culture, recording in its government records the names of all overseas students of Turkic ethnicity.

Within twenty years the "Turkish corridor" from the Adriatic sea to the Jade Gate Pass will see the proliferation of Turkish music and Turkish movies and television programs. Among the students going to study abroad, some will go to western countries but a comparable number will choose to go to Turkey.

No doubt the markets in the five Central Asian states are filled with Chinese goods, with merchants of the Han and Uighur nationality selling Chinese-made commodities. But this is the consequence of Central Asia having become an outlet for Chinese manufactures and a source of natural resources for China. While Turkey is a rival of China's in Central Asia, China has the upper hand economically and especially in regard to natural resources. But in the hearts of the people, it is Turkey that has the upper hand.

To rely solely on the power of money not only provides no way to protect the long-term national interest; neither can it protect the stability within our borders.

A nation with a superstitious reverence of the power of money is a backward and a stupid nation. This applies both to domestic tranquility and standing in the world. A nation that has advantages both in economy and in culture and ideas is a truly flourishing nation. That is a nation truly worthy of respect. That is a nation that has an appeal to others.

Competition between nations is a competition on all fronts. It is a comprehensive competition involving all possible factors. Military and economic might alone definitely do not decide the fate of a nation. The decisive element is the form of the civilization itself. The survival of the nation itself compels us to undertake political structural reform. In human society, a decade is sufficient to see the rise and fall of political power. A century can see the rise and fall of a

society, or a civilization. The transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democratic regime is necessary within a decade. China will undergo a great transformation. Political structural reform is the mission given us by history. We may not retreat.

The easy reforms have been in place for a long time; what's left is the hard part. We need to charge forward. The Soviet reform was an attempt to begin with what was difficult, moving on to what was easy. They have already passed the hardest part. But the hardest part for China is still to come. At all times the Soviet experience serves as a mirror for China. The failure of the Soviet Union came mainly from domestic factors. It was not overthrown by a world war but fell apart in the competition among systems. A system that does not permit the citizenry freely to take in to the greatest degree that which will encourage the greatest possible creativity from the citizenry, that will not allow its most representative people to hold positions of leadership—that system is bound to fail.

All of the problems of the Soviet Union at that time were systemic problems. The elites could not continue to live as they were accustomed; the lower levels could not continue to be ruled as they had been in the past. The Soviet Union also used to stress stability, taking stability as the goal and treating the preservation of the status quo as the way to preserve stability. Stability trumped everything; money answered all things. The result was the intensification of contradictions: and on the contrary everything worked together to overthrow stability.

A far-sighted, responsible nation must absolutely not have a superstitious trust in the power of money.

What it may rely on first is the strength of concepts. The basis for traditional Chinese politics rests on Shang Yang; it was crudely put together by the First Qin Emperor and put in its finished form by the Martial Emperor of the Han. The setting up of Confucian techniques as the sole cult amounted to a cult of the Emperor. It is just because of this background that over the past hundred and more years China has erred by taking half steps toward western-style political reforms. Reform in other areas has been enormously effective, but once it reaches the area of politics it finds it hard-going and culminates in episodes of violence. The reformers become incapable of acting and there is defeat all over the field. Deng Xiaoping wanted to implement political structural reform and made a decision to go ahead with it. But as the situation developed political reform proved to be inconsistent with the traditional structure of power and a consequence was nation-wide chaos.

Another thing it may rely on is the strength of the institutions. The secret of America's success is not in Wall Street or in Silicon Valley. The real secret is long-term rule of law and institutions backed by the rule of law. American institutions have been said to be a “system designed by geniuses that fools are able to operate.” A bad system can cause

good people to do bad things, and a good system can cause bad people to do good. I'm afraid democracy is something of extreme importance. Without democracy there can be no long-term rise. The transmission of democratic thought transcends national boundaries; nor is it limited by history. China's elites must have the courage to seek out a system for posterity that suits China's national character. They need not be martyrs, but they must be pioneers.

Another thing it may rely on is the power of truth. Truth is knowledge and knowledge is strength. China is not lacking for truth, but lacks a soil capable of nurturing truth. In the west at the time of the great bourgeois revolutions the ideological tempests resulted in the storm of revolution. In China during the Great Cultural Revolution the storm of revolution extinguished the fires of thought. We are short of the kind of reflection that is so necessary in the contemporary era. If thought is vanquished, truth has no place to dwell. Today we are able to express our own opinions; but the world is not led by opinion but by thought. Opinion is not power; only thought is power. Without thought, how can there be a "liberation of thought"? The most obvious trait of the Cultural Revolution was: argument is not permitted. No argument was allowed on any issue pertaining to the fate of the nation. The only things that can be discussed publicly are small issues. We can argue about issues that actually could be handled without discussion. It is the big issues that need to be discussed. When Deng Xiaoping initiated the debate on the criterion for truth, that aroused the hearts of Chinese people. That debate planted the seeds of independent thought among the people. The main component of national strength is the ability of the people to think and discuss.

*Phoenix (Fenghuang)*, 5 August 2010

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[\[1\]](#) Shang Yang (or Gongsun Yang), 390-338 BC, reformed the laws and rationalized the administrative system of the state of Qin, leading to Qin's becoming the most powerful of the Warring States of ancient China.