

# Democracy in china

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Democracy (Standard Chinese: 民主, mínzhǔ, literally "people main" or "civilian driven") was a major concept introduced to China in the late nineteenth century. The debate over its form and definition as well as application was one of the major ideological battlegrounds in Chinese politics for well over a century. It is still a contentious subject. Andrew Nathan wrote in his 1985 study that "the Chinese have aspired to democracy as they understand it for a hundred years, have claimed to have it for seventy, and for the last thirty-five years have lived in one of the most participatory societies in history Qing dynasty

The first introduction of the concept of modern democracy into China is credited to exiled Chinese writer Liang Qichao. In 1895, he participated in protests in Beijing for increased popular participation during the late Qing Dynasty, the last ruling dynasty of China. It was the first of its kind in modern Chinese history. After escaping to Japan following the government's clampdown on anti-Qing protesters, Liang Qichao translated and commented on the works of Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Hume, Bentham and many other western political philosophers.

He published his essays in a series of journals that easily found an audience among Chinese intelligentsia hungering for an explanation of why China, once a formidable empire of its own, was now on the verge of being dismembered by foreign powers. In interpreting Western democracy through the prism of his strongly Confucian background, Liang shaped the ideas of democracy that would be used throughout the next century. Liang favored gradual reform to turn China into a democratic constitutional monarchy. Liang's great rival among progressive intellectuals was Dr. Sun Yat-sen, a

republican revolutionary. Sun felt that the democracy would be impossible as long as the Qing monarchy still existed.

Democracy was part of his platform, the Three Principles of the People (三民主義) - the principle of the people under 1 nation (nationalism), the principle of the people's right (democracy), and the principle of the people's livelihood and well-being (civil, decency and respect). Like Liang, Sun agreed that democracy, or at least universal suffrage, could not happen overnight in a country with high illiteracy rates and lack of political consciousness. Sun's Three Stages of Revolution called for a period of " political tutelage" where people would be educated before elections can occur.

Responding to civil failures and discontent, the Qing Imperial Court responded by organizing elections. China's first modern elections were organized by Yuan Shikai for Tianjin's county council in 1907. In 1909, 21 of 22 provinces, with the exception being Xinjiang, held elections for provincial assemblies and municipal councils. Requirements were strict; only those that passed the imperial exams, worked in government or military, or owned 5000 yuan of property may vote or run for office.

This essentially limited the electorate to the gentry class. Hundreds of thousands voted and the winners were overwhelmingly constitutional monarchists, followers of Liang Qichao. The provincial assemblies elected half of the 200 member national assembly, the other half was selected by regent Prince Chun. All of these assemblies became hotbeds of dissent against the Qing as they were protected by freedom of speech. Republic of China

On mainland China When the 1911 Revolution began, it was the provincial assemblies that provided legitimacy to the rebels by declaring their independence from the Qing Empire. The national assembly also issued an ultimatum to the Qing court. Delegates from the provincial assemblies were sent to Nanjing to publicly legitimize the authority of the provisional government of the Republic of China founded on 1 January 1912. They later also formed the provisional senate. The limited acts passed by this government included the formal abdication of the Qing dynasty and some economic initiatives.

In late 1912, national elections were held with an enlarged electorate, albeit still small proportionally to the national population. Sun's Nationalist Party dominated both houses of the National Assembly. Song Jiaoren, the incoming Nationalist prime minister, was assassinated in March 1913 before the assembly's first session. A police investigation implicated sitting prime minister Zhao Bingjun while popular belief was that provisional president Yuan Shikai was behind it. This led to the failed Second Revolution against Yuan. Victorious, Yuan forced the National Assembly to elect him president for a five year term then purged it of Nationalists.

Without a quorum, the assembly was dissolved. After Yuan's death in 1916, the National Assembly reconvened until it was dissolved again the following year by Zhang Xun's coup attempt to restore the Qing. Prime Minister Duan Qirui refused to reconvene the National Assembly, opting instead to hold elections for a new assembly more favorable to him. As a result, a rump of

the old assembly moved to Guangzhou to start a rival government in southern China.

In northern China, 17 provinces elected a new assembly dominated by Duan's Anfu Club in 1918. This new assembly was dissolved following Duan's defeat in the Zhili-Anhui War of 1920. President Xu Shichang organized elections for a third assembly in 1921 but with only 11 provinces voting it never had a quorum and thus never convened. That was the last attempt to hold national elections until 1947. All assemblies were dissolved after the Nationalists' Northern Expedition. The formation of the Nationalist single-party state in 1927 implemented the late Sun's "political tutelage" program which forbade elections until the people were considered properly educated. All other parties were kept out of government until 1937, when the impending Second Sino-Japanese War led to the United Front and the formation of the People's Political Council which included the smaller parties.

In 1940, partly in response to tensions in the United Front, Mao Zedong offered the new Communist Party doctrine, New Democracy. New Democracy was an intermediary stage unlike western parliamentary, electoral democracy but not yet communism. After the war, the Nationalist's "political tutelage" ended with the promulgation of the Constitution of the Republic of China. The 1947 National Assembly and 1948 legislative elections were boycotted by the Communists which held most of northern China. As a result, the Nationalists and their junior coalition partners, the Chinese Youth Party and China Democratic Socialist Party, won. On Taiwan

When the ROC government retreated to Taiwan in 1949, only those three parties of the ruling coalition and, in the 1980s, independents (Tangwai) were allowed to run for office. The province was under martial law until 1987. The 1979 Kaohsiung Incident was a major blow to hopes for democratic reform, but Chiang Ching-kuo pushed for reform of the Nationalist Party and opening it to Taiwanese. Since the early 1990s, there has been strong electoral competition between the Nationalist Party and the Democratic Progressive Party. In 2000, Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) of the DPP was elected, leading to the first peaceful transfer of power to an opposition in Chinese history. People's Republic of China

The Communists which created the People's Republic of China, equate democracy with "dictatorship of the proletariat"[citation needed]. Consequently, they saw no need for elected governments so they established the people's democratic dictatorship. Starting in the 1980s, they allowed village elections to take place. All higher levels of government are indirectly elected with candidates vetted by the government. As a result, the highest levels of government contain either Communist Party members, their United Front allies, and sympathetic independents. Opposition parties are outlawed. According to the majority of western and western-influenced perspectives see democracy, which they perceive as a synonym for total freedom, to be very important. As such, western society tends to criticise the CPC government for being arguably anti-democratic.

The CPC has every now and then reciprocated by criticising the so-called 'imperialists', inequality and 'bourgeoisie' that they've perceived in the west

and in western-influenced nations. In 1989, the Chinese Democracy Movement, student demonstrators expressed demands for democracy. Despite their call for democracy, Chinese people of many pro-CPC and/or anti-democratic perspectives have since the late 1800s expressed philosophical reasons purportedly supporting why they believe democracy is in some ways incompatible with traditionallist Chinese culture.