

論文

An Exploration of the Concept of the Modern Nation State: The Case of China

NIU Geping*

With the imbalance of the development in world civilizations, modern political philosophy was mainly developed in the Western World and dominated by Western thought. Chinese society, though considerably late, has also been going through a modernization process. Notwithstanding a conspicuously different historical background, the modernization process in China seems to have been guided by Western theories. After the establishment of The People's Republic of China (PRC), the social formation of Chinese history was explained according to the Marxist dogma. 2000 years of history from the first Qin dynasty to the last one, Qing, were regarded as feudalism. About 100 years of history, from the first Opium War of 1840 to the establishment of the PRC were said to be half feudalism and half colonialism; and with the establishment of the PRC China was declared a socialist country. The aim of this paper is not to criticize this ideological interpretation of China's political history, but to examine to what extent one particular concept of western political philosophy, i.e. the modern state concept, can be applied to the special case of China. The first part will examine the conception of modern nation state, starting from Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation*¹; the second part will discuss the case of China which can, at least to some extent, be viewed as a counterexample to Weber's definition of modern nation state. The core of my argument is that while ancient China already had some characteristics of 'modern nation state', it must nonetheless be recognized that modern China cannot really claim to be a modern nation state.

Part I: What is a modern nation state?

1.1 Max Weber's *Politics as a Vocation*

1.1.1 The definition of a modern nation state

In his text *Politics as a Vocation*, Max Weber defines the modern nation state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'². Several paragraphs later he added to this definition that 'the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence'³.

This definition of the state gives more importance to the means (the use of violence) than to the end or role of state power. The reason why this is so, according to Weber, is that the ends of those who strive for state power might be quite different; it may be either to serve some specific social ideal or simply for the sake of power, that is to say to enjoy the feeling of prestige that power gives. Furthermore, the roles played by the state cannot constitute one of its defining characteristics, since the specific roles of the state always change and they might also be fulfilled by other non-political organizations. Thus, according to him, only the means, the use of force or violence is the indispensable dimension of political power, even though it might not be the only means used by the state and is not necessarily used at all time.

The word 'monopoly', implies that only the state can resort to violence legitimately, and that all other associations or individuals within the territory have no right to use force without the authority of state. However, Weber's explanation of the idea of legitimacy is not very clear. According to him, the justifications

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* 立命館大学大学院先端総合学術研究科 2007年度入学 共生領域

grounding this legitimate use of violence may be different depending on the form of domination. It may be the authority of tradition, as in the case of a paternalist monarchy; the authority of charisma, as in the case of the popular ruler chosen by a plebiscite; and/or the authority of law, as in the case of administrative domination. It can be inferred that in all these cases the authority of state power comes in a sense from the people's willingness to obey. However, Weber also acknowledges that in reality people's obedience might flow from various motives and interests, among others, the fear of vengeance or hope of reward.

From the start we can identify three problems with Weber's definition. One, since to use force is only the means of state power and not its only means, and since violence as a means is by no means reserved to 'politics', no matter how necessary it is, it cannot be sufficient to define the concept of state.

Second, since by definition a means is always a means to do something (more or less) particular, Weber didn't make it clear what is the role and function of state violence as a means. Another German scholar Carl Schmitt focused on this problem. According to Schmitt, force is used to fight foreign enemy and to keep internal peace. But Schmitt's argument is essentially different from Weber's. Unlike Weber who seems have presupposed the existence of legitimacy in the use of force by the state, Schmitt argues that it is only by using force that the state gains its legitimacy, a point to which we will return later on.

The third difficulty: it seems that once the state is established no use of force without its permission can be legitimate, or at least if such a legitimate use of violence without the permission of the state is possible, then the political entity in question is not a modern nation state. However, were the violent revolutions that marked the history of modern Western Europe totally illegitimate? It seems that they were not at least in the mind of those who carried them out. Given that Weber's proposition that the legitimacy of the state is mainly from people's willingness to obey, doesn't this provide counterexamples as far as this point is concerned?

1.1.2 Administrative centralization

However that may be, after defining modern nation state with the exclusive use of (legitimate) force, Weber's discussion turns to a no less indispensable means of political domination: administration. Centralized bureaucratic administration is an important characteristic of the modern nation state. In a modern nation state, the government has complete control over all the means of administration, both the executive staff and the material resources it may require. The executive power of administrative officials is delegated from the government.

The historical significance of Weber's definition of the modern nation state is revealed in the establishment of absolute monarchies in Western Europe through the princes' expropriation of the relatively independent political power of feudal lords. Weber pointed out that political power must maintain its domination through the government of society, that is, the administration. He says: 'All states may be classified according to whether they rest on the principle that the staff of men themselves own the administrative means of administration, or whether the staff is 'separated' from these means of administration'⁴ In Europe, as Weber mentioned, the feudal lords originally possessed politically usable goods of all sorts and autonomously governed their fiefs, and consequently, the prince had to share his domination with them. The modern nation state was essentially established through administrative centralization in the hand of the prince, this led to the de facto lost of nobles' political power since they could no longer govern. 'To this end the state has combined the material means of organization in the hands of its leaders, and it has expropriated all autonomous functionaries of estates who formerly controlled these means in their own right. The state has taken their positions and now stands in the top place.'⁵

While Weber wisely supplements the characteristic of centralized administration to his definition of modern nation state, which only emphasizes the means of state violence, it is, however, dubious to classify the

feudal lords' status as administrative staff. The feudal lord was essentially the one who has political power no matter whether he administrate his fief by himself or delegate the task to his followers; his right to administrate was derived from his political power. And it is not clear at this point that in 'modern nation state' (which means the European monarchs at this point) whether the administrative staff, though in an different way from that of the feudal lord, has political power or not. As Weber also mentioned in his discussion, officials who manage finance, war, and the law of the prince obtained political power through their administrative role even though their legitimacy comes from the authority of the prince.

While Weber's definition of modern nation state corresponds relatively well to the achievements of the absolute monarchs of Western Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, his later discussion of administrative rationalization and party politics refers to some equally, if not more, essential characteristics of modern nation states and make clear the transitional nature of these monarchies in modern history.

1.1.3 Party politics and administrative rationalization

Weber in his essay describes the later evolution of modern nation states, from monarchy to the rule of modern party politics which came with the advent of plebiscitary democracy and universal franchise.⁶ He points out that modern party politics means that competing parties strive for power through peaceful campaigns in the market of election votes. Modern party organization is centralized in the hands of those professional politicians who substantially control the financial means and personnel of the party 'machine'. These people are essentially capitalistic political entrepreneurs, seeking profit through political control. According to Weber, they have no firm political principles; only what captures votes matters. Candidates are democratically selected and platforms fashioned in party conventions according to the chances of grabbing votes. Extra-party intellects may also become candidate when they are viewed as having a great appeal value at the polls. Party members expect that the demagogic effect of the leader's personality will increase votes which will lead to positions and power. However, charisma is only acceptable to the extent that it does not jeopardize the existence of the party.

Another characteristic of modern nation state, accompanying party politics, is the separation of the administration from political control. Weber pointed out that, determined by the purely technical needs of the administration, modern bureaucracy gradually evolved into a highly qualified professional labor force with a high sense of status honor. Even in the period of absolute Monarchs, this trend was already clear. Paradoxically, Weber said, with the prince's ascension to power, there was simultaneously a gradual abolition of the prince's autocratic rule, in favor of a rule of the expert officialdom, especially in the areas of finance, war, and law. However, the ultimate separation of the administration and political control was not achieved before party politics came into being. In fact, it was a way to counter the disturbing effect of the spoils system of party politics which turned over a large number of official positions to the followings of the victorious party. Finally, on the one hand, civil service reforms brought to an end the spoils system and dilettante administration and made technically administrative positions lifelong functions associated with pension rights; on the other hand, the administrative public servant's profession ceased to be political, engaging in only impartial administration, not politics.

In short, Weber's descriptive theory provides some illuminating insights on the essence of modern nation state. As for the application of his theory, on the one hand, it seems that Weber tried to provide a universal definition on the modern nation state, which is supposed to be able to determine whether a country is a modern nation state or not; on the other hand, paradoxically, he repeatedly points out that what his theory describes are mainly occidental phenomena. He seems therefore to be implicitly denying the possibility that in other parts of the world essentially similar political institutions could have been established spontaneously. Hence, in

order to apply Weber's theory to non-occidental polities, it seems necessary to reformulate it in a more abstract way.

1.2 Further exploration of Max Weber's state theory

There clearly is some inner tension between Weber's definition of modern nation state on the one hand and his description of party politics on the other. It seems that the definition and administrative centralization describe better the success of absolute monarchs in 16th and 17th century Western Europe, while party politics and administrative rationalization are accomplishments of a later period of Western politics after the fall of such monarchies. In fact, party politics is to some extent the negation of absolute monarchy. However, in the process of centralizing state power, whether princes built a strong bureaucratic system with officials who came from strata outside of the nobility, as in France and Germany, or drew them from the nobility, as in England, may have made a big difference in the transformation of the state. While on the continent nobles lost their power and ceased to govern, in England the 'gentry', as Weber pointed out, voluntarily held the offices of local administration in the interest of its own social power. 'The gentry has saved England from bureaucratization which has been the fate of all continental states'.⁷ And it seems that the difficulty which afterwards Germany and France faced to develop a modern party politics, compared to England, was closely related to their relatively powerful bureaucratic system.⁸

Party politics and the separation of administration from political control constitute in fact an essential change in the nature of modern nation state. While to attain power might be the real concern of the soulless party, in order to get it, the party must take into account the varied interests of those who not only are politically active, but also provide finance to it, as well as of the not less varied interests of those who can only provide votes. Through party politics, the party's ruling power becomes no longer absolute and gains an intermediate character.⁹ Unintentionally, party politics played the role of keeping the cohesion of society by imposing a compromise between the demand of diversified and sometimes opposite interests. In a democratic country it becomes less possible that a group's interest will prevail over those of all other groups. While moderate conflicts of interests become more visible, severe, destructive conflicts tend to be avoided.

On the other hand, the separation of state administration and political control further promoted and consolidated the process and administrative rationalization. By avoiding the arbitrary control of those who have power the administration became more rationalized and efficient; by limiting the power of those who administrate, systematic corruption became less possible. The rule of law became the norm as far as the administration was concerned. Administration without the interference of politics made society stable, while the politics without impediments from inefficient administration made policy more effective.

In short, the coming into being of modern party politics was not equivalent to the absolute negation of the former period. It was rather an evolutionary transformation. With party politics the fact that the state is a unified political association which monopolizes the legitimate use of violence did not change; similarly with the separation of administration and political control the characteristics of administrative centralization did not change either. Rather, party politics is the institutional improvement that essentially allowed the possibility of the existence of plurality of political forces within the state,¹⁰ while the separation of administration and political control solved the problem of bureaucratic inefficiency inherent in absolute state power and thus made political control more effective. If we think of 'modern' in this more abstract sense, Max Weber's theory reformulated in this way may be used to examine the process of state building in non western countries.

1.3 Carl Schmitt and the national characteristic of modern state

Though Weber's definition pertains to the 'modern nation state', it seems however that what he is actually

talking about is the 'modern state'. Weber did not really explain why modern states are 'nation' state. As mentioned earlier, Weber described the use of violence as an indispensable means of political organizations, and defined the concept of modern nation state with this peculiar means. However, in this whole discussion Weber doesn't really explore the question of when and why state violence will be used. Another German scholar, Carl Schmitt, on the contrary, focused on the question of the use of violence and simultaneously gives us a plausible hypothesis concerning what gives to the modern state its 'national' character.

Carl Schmitt says that the definition of political can be obtained by defining its specific criteria. 'The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.'¹¹ And the role of the state is to define and fight its enemy. Schmitt argues that the possibility of conflict must always be kept in mind. However, the enemy or foe is always a public rather than a private enemy. And war is neither the aim nor content of politics because war presupposes that the political decision as to who the enemy is has already been made by the state. The state, the politically united people, is supreme, or sovereign in the sense that the decision about the critical situation, about who is the enemy always resides with the state.

With Schmitt, territory became a distinctive feature of modern nation state. As for territory, though Weber defined the state as the monopoly of legitimate use of violence within a given territory, it seems that he only mentioned it and took it for granted. According to Schmitt's theory, however, what seems clear is the fact that in Weber's classical European nation state, the friend-foe distinction coincides with the territorial distinction, and modern nation state became a territorially defined political entity. The state is 'an organized political entity, internally peace, territorially enclosed, and impenetrable to aliens'¹². Those who are outside the state territory are potential enemies; those who are inside are members of the nation, citizens of the state.¹³ It can be conversely inferred from Schmitt's theory that, the sovereign could monopolize the use of violence and hence be supreme also because there are in principle no enemies within the territory. Given this importance of territory for nation state, it seems that neither Nazism nor Communism aim exactly at becoming nation states since what is crucial for them is rather racial or class difference, both of which are not primarily related to physical space and a specific territory.

Schmitt's theory also presupposes the existence of an international community and its focus is the existence of a nation state within that community. 'The political entity presupposes the real existence of an enemy and therefore coexistence with another political entity. As long as a state exists, there will thus always be in the world more than just one state.'¹⁴ Actually, we can argue that the coexistence of a multiplicity of states is a necessary condition of what makes each state a nation. To some extent, the national character of a modern state lies rather in its being a distinct and independent political entity within an international political community and not so much in the ethnic homogeneity of the state as usually claimed. The ever-changing situation of competition and the interrelationship among these nations state exert a huge pressure on each one of them and constitute great concerns to leaders. In this way it plays an important role in the evolution of political structures within each state.

In short, by legitimizing state power through its role in defining and fighting the enemy, Schmitt's friend-foe distinction provides a different perspective (from that of Max Weber) which allows us to further understand the 'national' character of modern state. From this point of view, Schmitt's theory can be regarded as an important contribution to the development of state theory, in spite of its role in some occasion of supporting the Nazi and fascist movements.

Based on Weber's theory and some aspects of Schmitt's contribution, we may draw four characteristics of modern nation state: the first is the monopoly of legitimate violence and centralization of state administration; the second is party politics and administrative rationalization; the third is that modern nation state is a territorially defined political entity; and the fourth is the existence of international community. The second part

of this paper will examine the political structures in ancient as well as modern China, and try to evaluate, according to our understanding of Weber's as well as Schmitt's state theory, to what extent China could/can be considered as a modern nation state.¹⁵

Part II Was/is China a modern nation state?

2.1 Ancient China

2.1.1 The political structure of ancient China from Qin dynasty to Qing dynasty

Around 2000 years ago, the first dynasty Qin was established in Chinese history. Qin, originally one of the seven strong nations fighting each other for supremacy during the Warring States Period, finally succeeded in conquering all others and unified the whole country. After the unification of the territory, it also unified Chinese characters, currency, and measuring systems. What is more important is that it abolished feudalism, set up prefectures and counties, and established a centralized pyramid-like hierarchical bureaucratic system to govern the whole country. From then on until the last Qing dynasty, though more and more elaborated, China's political system essentially remained unchanged.¹⁶

In ancient China, to put it in a simplified way, officials with the authority from the emperor, constituted the ruling class, and the people were ruled. The majority of the people was made of independent peasant households, living in rural areas. Those who lived in towns and the capital (where the local and central government were located) were mainly handicraftsmen and merchants. Because ancient China was essentially an agricultural society, professional craftsmen only played a supplementary, though indispensable role in the economy; in rural area most peasants also did handicraft to live a self-sufficient life. There was in ancient China a special kind of people called Shi (士), the intellectuals, who majored in the study of the ancient literature of Confucianism, which was the spring of state ideology. State officials were mainly recruited from this Shi class. Social prestige varied depending on the type of 'occupation' one pursued. Moving down from high to low, we find first intellectuals, then peasants, craftsman, and finally merchants. But in fact, the decisive difference of social status lied not in the difference between these 'four occupations (四業)', but in the distinction between officials (官) and the people (民), that is, the rulers and the ruled. Most officials, more exactly, their families, were big landlords, or wealthy peasants, whose children could get better education and become candidates for state officials. Due to the state policy of restraining commerce, the fortunes got from commerce were not always safe; big merchants usually bought land (and also state positions) in order both to change their social status and to secure their wealth. Given the idea that in front of the emperor everyone was part of the people (officials came from the people before they became officials), the possibility of change in social status (either big or small) in principle was open to everyone. Because of that and of the complementary character of social roles, the "people" in ancient China had in a sense become very homogeneous.

In ancient China's political thinking, the emperor's power was from the Sky or Heaven (天, a vague conception of the unintelligible but omnipotent power governing the whole cosmos), and thus absolute. The people had no political power whatsoever; before the emperor, however, everybody was basically equal, like children before their father. Those in power, the emperor and his officials, would never hesitate to use force in case of need. But they also knew that power is over the people. That is they viewed themselves as a boat; it can float on water, but it can also overturn if the water becomes too turbulent. In order to keep power, they had to take care of the people. Because of this, the concept of equality among the people was also a concern for the ruler. Correspondingly, what the people expected were good officials only. And usually uprisings were not against the emperor but against corrupted officials who failed to deliver justice. In most cases, uprisings would be ruthlessly put down, but in some cases, the rebellion could peacefully be dissolved and its leaders became

officials appointed by the emperor against whom they originally rebelled. When an old dynasty became too corrupted and weak, rebellious leaders would fight for the supreme power. And it was a common sense in China that those who won the war would legitimately obtain power and be declared emperor while those who lost would be declared bandits.

Stability (or, to put it perhaps more exactly, changelessness) was the most striking characteristics of ancient China's political system. The cyclical mechanism of dynasty change was the reverse side, not the opposite, of the stability of ancient Chinese society. When a new dynasty was established, its first initiative was to construct its own bureaucratic system in order to control the whole society and then to redistribute land almost equally to all peasants. With this strong government guaranteeing order and the provision of public services, society became more and more prosperous. However along side with the increase of people's wealth and the strength of the nation, officials in power also increased their private wealth through corruption. While the corruption of those in power became more and more rampant, the government became less and less effective. The gap between rich and poor grew and the poor were often depressed and pushed into desperate situations. Uprisings became frequent, the nation fell into civil war, and the dynasty would be finally be overturned by a rebel army. The leader of that army became the new emperor and a new dynasty came into being, which gave rise to a new cycle of prosperity, corruption, rebellion and dynasty change.

Changes of dynasties were regular events in China's history, among which two were caused by invasions of outsiders, from Mongolia and Manchuria respectively, two nomadic nations. Both adopted the Chinese political system after conquering the country and established their own dynasties (Yuan and Qing), and were assimilated by the Chinese society over which they ruled. During a long 2000 years history, society was controlled by an almost changeless bureaucratic political system headed by an emperor who had absolute power. Once established, this system facilitated the flourishing of ancient Chinese civilization. During its most prosperous periods, like the Tang dynasty, the country was quite open to the outside world. However in the later part of its history, the system became increasingly ossified and decadent. Closeness and even seclusion defined its characteristic policy toward outside world. The whole society suffocated under the huge and rigid bureaucratic system, and the progress of civilization suffered a severe set back.

2.1.2 Was ancient China a nation state?

Following solely Max Weber's basic definition of the modern nation state (the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory), it seems that China already was a 'modern nation' state some 2000 years ago when the first dynasty Qin was established! Both ancient Chinese emperor and modern Western monarchs were social formations that came after feudalism. Power was concentrated in the hands of king/emperor who controlled the whole country with the help of a bureaucratic system. However, what is clearly different is the transitional nature of European monarchies compared to the very much prolonged and seemingly changeless ancient Chinese empire. In Europe, princes came to power mainly through administrative centralization which allowed them to expropriate the political power of the nobility, sometimes even without directly touching their privileges which progressively became nominal. The state's power continued to grow while serving the need of economic development (by establishing a national market and promoting domestic industry and export). In China's long history, the centralized bureaucratic system was established and reestablished again and again, by various individuals who came to absolute power through pure force. The society they governed remained an agricultural civilization. In Europe, the prince aimed to act as the leader of the nation, and to obtain their legitimacy from the will of those governed. In China, the emperor regarded his power as absolute, never hesitating to use force in case of need. While the tendency to separate administration from political control became clear in European Monarchies, this never came to be a

question in ancient China. We may say that European monarchies were in kind of unstable equilibrium soon to be replaced by a more stable political formation of party politics, while the ancient Chinese bureaucratic politics finally reached a stable equilibrium which to a large extent hindered its political evolution.

Moreover, it seems that ancient China from Qin to Qing can not be exactly defined as a nation. In fact, the Warring States Period before the first Qin dynasty seemed more similar to the period of monarchies in modern Europe. Both forms of political organizations came at the end of feudalism and initiated a transition towards a new era. The seven big warring states in that period are more like nation states; power was concentrated in the king's hands with the help of officials who mainly ascended from relatively humble social strata, especially from the new Shi class (士階層)¹⁷. Dealing with other nations (protecting themselves from invasions and trying to expand their territory) was one of their most important concerns,¹⁸ which, apart from domestic power struggle, constituted the greatest cause of domestic social, economic and political reforms. However, after the establishment of a unified state, China became so speak the whole world. There were no competing nations outside China. Outsiders sporadically attacked China, but they were regarded as barbarians, aliens. The concept of territory was very vague and changes of state border seemed a constant event. Protecting the country from outsider invasion was one function of the state but not the crucial one. The government cared more about the consolidation of its power inside China than about asserting national interest against outside invader. To the people who are used to the dynasty cycle, while showing loyalty to the incumbent government is important, it is also wise to change their loyalty to a new one when dynasty change, even in the case that the new dynasty was established by outsider who invaded China. During 2000 years of history, China has had more of a cultural existence than a national one.¹⁹ This tradition may help to explain why the last power holder of Qing dynasty, empress dowager Cixi argued to utilize all of the countries resources to appease foreign powers; why Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek insisted on defeating domestic communist insurgents before fighting the Japanese invader, and why it is so easy for many Chinese to take another nationality while at the same time it is so difficult for them to totally erase their Chinese (cultural) identity to become assimilated²⁰.

In short, ancient China from the first Qin dynasty to the last Qing dynasty was by no means a 'modern' 'nation' state, notwithstanding the fact that it had attained some characteristic of a 'modern nation state', that is, the monopoly of legitimate violent and centralization of state administration.

2.2 Is modern China a modern nation state?

Everything changed when outsider once again knocked on China's door in the mid 19th century. This time it was not nomadic nations but Western industrialized colonial powers who entered China with their commodities protected by their modern navies. This time it was going to be not only the end of a dynasty but that of an out-dated civilization. The period from the First Opium War until the ultimate success of the communists is essentially a transformation period, and for this reason will not be discussed in this paper.

2.2.1 The political structure of the pre-reform socialist period

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the government first took over all banks and industries controlled by the former government in the cities, and redistributed the land equally in rural areas. Then the socialist movement was launched. Rural areas were collectivized and a centrally planned industrialization initiative began in cities. To assist in the central-planning of economy, a strict household registration system was established. It confined each individual to a certain social status which determined access to jobs and levels of welfare policies. With the effort and sacrifice of the whole nation, a relatively complete industrial system was established. Meanwhile the evil of nation-wide complete control by the government manifested itself in disasters such as those caused by the Great Leap Forward, in the chronic

inefficiencies of public-own factories, in persistent depression of agricultural production, in overall shortage of aggregate supply, in bureaucratic formalism in public sectors, and above all in the stagnation of the low standard of living.

With the establishment of the new socialist system, the social structure was becoming very clear: the party/government was the real leader in the industrialization cause; the working class constituted its mainstream and peasants supported this cause by providing food and raw materials. However the political system itself was not so intelligible. It seems that existed in China all the institutions of a modern nation state: a constitution, a congress, a government, a judicial system, an election system, and a party. system Furthermore it is clearly written in the constitution that all power belongs to the people who exercise it through the National People's Congress and at local level through local people's congresses. In reality, the congress is de facto powerless compared to the government, the elections system rather superficial, the constitution not really guaranteed, the ruling party not a real one in the Western sense. It is the communist party alone who had the right to control the army and to nominate one candidate as head of the nation for the congress to elect. And it is those government officials (who at the same time are party members) who really have power and rule the country. The political system in China is a de facto bureaucracy rather than a democracy as is written in the constitution. The legitimacy of the government came mainly from the civil war and later on from its leading role in the development of the country.

Theoretically, the party was defined as the vanguard of the working class which is the ruling class and which rules the country in alliance with the peasant class. In order to keep its power, it seems necessary to establish a strong armament industry, including nuclear weapons, to wage war against foreign enemy in case of need, and to prevent potential domestic threats from gaining too much strength. All these efforts were undertaken under the ideological guise of proletariat-and-bourgeois class struggle. If there was still a little sense with defining foreign capitalistic governments as representatives of the bourgeoisie, there is no sense at all to describe potential domestic enemies as a bourgeois class since the bourgeoisie never really developed into a class before the new China (PRC) and almost completely disappeared with the establishment of a nationwide socialist economy. Ironically, even power struggles within the party were carried out under the slogan of class struggle, and many times, due to the confusing nature of the description, it was members of those 'inferior class', (intellectuals and those who, themselves or their parents or relatives, were before 1949, either a big land owner, or a bourgeois or, even worst, a member of the Kuomintang government or the Qing government,) who became the real victims of these conflicts.

Historically there was only one movement that cannot be unambiguously put into the category of pure power struggle: the Culture Revolution of 1966-1976 launched by Chairman Mao (who had then partially lost control over the centralized government) 'to fight those who inside the party and in power but practicing a route of capitalism'. Despite the same bizarre argument of 'bourgeoisie's route', It seems that the people very soon understood the intention of Mao and recognized government officials as the target of the revolution. Since the real problem was that of the political institutions while the enemy was defined as individual members of the ruling group, the movement was doomed to fail. Almost all those in power were polemically criticized with passion and with socialist slogans and the society nearly fell into anarchy. The Culture Revolution gradually subsided without any real improvement of the democratic institutions and not even any correction of the fundamental deficiencies of the administration, but with a lot of people deeply hurt and even more bewildered and disappointed not knowing what really happened to the nation.

2.2.2 The political structure of the reform period

After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping took power. From 1979 onward the government started reforming the

economic system. First, collective organizations in rural areas were dissolved and the land was again redistributed to households equally but without giving them the ownership. Later on, in cities, different kinds of measures were taken to improve the efficiency of state-owned enterprises mostly in vain. At last, the government decided to establish market economy. Private enterprises and foreign investment were encouraged. Most small-and-middle-size state-owned enterprises, even some large ones, were either sold out or went bankrupt. Consequently, the large amount of public wealth gradually disappeared and the old welfare system that rested on it collapsed and no new one was successfully established to guarantee the citizens' basic right to existence. Individuals were freed from strong government controls but immediately their destiny became prey to the vicissitudes of unregulated market economy. A large numbers of workers lost their job. The disorganized small households in rural area became increasingly marginalized from the development of society. Millions of peasants rushed into cities becoming a conspicuously disadvantaged group of peasant workers. Economic prosperity was achieved at the price of an ever larger gap between rich and poor, as well as environmental deterioration.

However, the political system of the country remained basically the same. Only the ideological propaganda changed, from class struggle to economic development. The party no longer defines itself as the vanguard of the working class, who clearly became one of the disadvantaged groups during the reform. The government managed to use every argument available to legitimize its power including economic development, social stability, nationalism (at least to a degree), Confucianism, and even neo-liberal economics. There were several bouts of large-scale ideological propaganda including Deng Xiaoping's theory of socialism with Chinese characteristic, Jiang Zemin's three representatives theory and Hu Jintao's scientific development theory and Harmonic society theory. However, due to their ambiguous political stance, these propaganda initiatives seem not so effective.

Together with the disappearance of class struggle theories, disappeared the idea of absolute enemies. In foreign affairs, the government became less aggressive. In case of emergency, it could issue strong verbal protests or even make some military gesture but seemingly without real intention to act, and might sometimes try to manipulate the people's nationalist passion to indirectly threaten a foreign government, usually being very careful that nationalist passion remained under control. Internally, the government is clearly more enlightened and less oppressive than before, as long as its political power is not directly threatened.

As for the people, some, especially those who are disadvantaged, feel as if they have had a long dream and upon waking up found that nothing had really changed. Most people in China, no matter whether they are better-off or worse-off, are not completely satisfied with the government. It seems that what they especially hate is the corruption and what they really want is still an honest and effective government who can address seriously social problems.

2.2.3 Is modern China a modern nation state?

Modern China (the PRC) is clearly modern if time is taken as criteria. However the answer to the question whether its political system is in theoretical sense modern or not is still ambiguous. As discussed above, notwithstanding the strikingly different profiles between pre-reform and post-reform period, the nature of modern China's political structure essentially didn't change; what may have changed is only the way of governing, that is to say the move from central-planning to 'market economy'.

Moreover, in spite of the modern form of its political institutions, we can see that the political structure of modern China is not totally different from that of the ancient China. The continuity manifests very much among others things in the political culture of the country. More than anywhere else, this continuity lies in the bureaucratic political structure. In political systems of this kind there is only one dominating political force,

bureaucratic officials, either under the name of the emperor's officials or that of the party. One fundamental characteristic of such system is the fusion into one group of those who have power and of those who administrate. The old regime only changed its appearance to fit in the new industrial civilization.

The answer to the question with which we started seems clear:

First, a modern nation state in its complete form should be a polity which succeeds in maintaining its stability and unity while allowing a plurality of social forces to express themselves. We can say that people living in a modern nation state manage to maintain both disagreement and stability. In China, however, it is essentially still one party that monopolizes political power.

Second, in modern nation state, bureaucratic administration is independent from political power and this in turn, as Max Weber showed, leads to the rationalization of the administration. In China, however, those who have power, the party, are exactly those who administrate the state. Because of this close relation between political power and state administration, corruption in China is a systematic phenomenon rather than an individual one. Moreover, since there are no competing political forces which, as a byproduct of power struggle, could provide needed information about the country's situation, the way for the party to learn about the situation in China is mainly through the administration. However, those administrators of lower level are usually not motivated, or at least it is not in their interests, to provide true information to central government. This lead to the result that, even when the party leaders may have realized that a problem exists, they sometimes cannot exactly know the situation.

Third, a modern nation state should assert and promote its national interest through interacting with other states in an international community. In pre-reform China, national interest was superseded by the class struggle concern, which in foreign affairs made the country either overly intimate with certain countries (socialist ones) or overly distant towards other countries (capitalist ones), often to the disadvantage of national interest, and in domestic affairs to a large extent damaged the unity of the nation by arbitrarily dividing the people into a proletariat class and a bourgeois class. In the reform period, national interests were also sometimes encroached due to the government's unwillingness to acknowledge the difference between national interests and the interests of the party.

In conclusion, it seems that modern nation state is a state that has reached a kind of 'unstable equilibrium' which allows it to solve the new political problems in a comparatively peaceful way, and which leaves room for further evolution of the political structure. However, in China, there seems to be a dilemma, in that stability always becomes the big concern whenever the question of democracy is raised. Actually, it seems that modern China has not yet totally escaped the curse of the dynasty cycle. Given the nature of China's political structure, there is certain limit for the party's role in promoting economic and social progress. Theoretically, market economy will naturally lead to the appearance of different economic and social interests which will ultimately ask for political power. In order to keep the status quo, that is, the one party political system, what the government can do, if it does not want to reverse its market economy policy, is to join hands with those who are requiring power. However, this might change the free nature of market economy and make the government no longer capable of fairly regulating the market and restraining the 'side effect' of market economy. The economic development and social progress might be eventually hampered by this kind of bizarre market economy. In order to solve these problems, it seems that it is time for China's political structure to speed up its modernization process.

Conclusion

In short, this paper in part one examines Weber's definition of modern nation state and some aspect of

Schmitt's conception of political, and tries to summarize several characteristics of modern nation state: 1) monopoly of legitimate use of violence, 2) party politics, 3) administrative rationalization, (Weber), 4) clearly defined territory, 5) existence of international political community (Schmitt). The second part inquires into the case of China to see whether China qualifies, according to Weber's (as well as Schmitt's) definition, as a modern nation state. The results of the exploration, however, are somewhat paradoxical. Ancient China, from the first Qin dynasty to the last Qing dynasty, already satisfied a central element of Weber's definition of modern nation state, the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force, and in this way resembled somewhat the absolute monarchies of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe. However, unlike European absolute monarchies which like nation states, were territorially defined, and members of an international community, ancient China was not really a nation but an empire, without constant, equal, and competing neighboring states. Internally, ancient China was trapped in a recurrent dynasty cycle and it seems that there was no real possibility of transformation from absolute ruler system to modern party politics. On the other hand, modern China under the Communist Party's rule modernized to some extent with the introduction of modern political institutions. Yet, modern China's political system does not really satisfy all the essential characteristics of modern nation state, essentially because of there is not really a multiplicity of political forces. Moreover, due to the non-separation between the party and the bureaucratic system and to some extent the loss of representativity by the party, a mechanism similar to the old dynasty cycle of prosperity, corruption and collapse seems to re-appear. The paper concludes that in order to avoid that danger, it is imperative for China to reform its political system.

As mentioned at the beginning, modern political philosophy has been largely Western-centered, and the modernization process of China (for over 100 years) has been mainly directed by Western ideas. Within the ultimate goal of answering (in the context of political philosophy) the question of how to modernize China's political system in mind, this paper is a preliminary attempt to explore the extent to which the conception of modern nation state drawn from Western political theory can be applied to the special case of China. Though Weber's theory constitutes by no means the exclusive current understanding of the modern state, his definition of modern state as exerting the monopoly of legitimate violence is nonetheless well known and widely accepted. Schmitt's conception of the political provides important insights into the understanding of modern nation state from the perspective of international relations. Thus it may not be too inappropriate to use these two authors' work as the examining the relevance of Western theory. And though it seems hasty to present more than 2000 years of Chinese history in a few pages, given that this paper is not an historical discussion it might be sufficient for its goal which is an understanding in terms of political philosophy.

Though this study can be regarded as an academic exercise of theoretical application in the case of China, the paper does not wish to obtain any normative conclusions (It actually cannot, as the paradoxical result discussed in the preceding paragraphs already show). The real conclusion of this exploration might be a methodological, that we cannot simply answer the question whether China corresponds to Weber's definition of the modern nation state or not. Put it in another way, the conclusion is that Western theory of modern state can not simply be applied to the case of China. Though formulated in a universal language, modern political philosophy was actually made in the West to deal with its specific situation. And China cannot simply follow the model of the West. No matter how the reform the present political system of China should take place, it must be something particular in the consideration of specific conditions relative to Chinese history. On the other hand, the paper by no means reaches the conclusion that Western theories are irrelevant or useless in the case of China. Notwithstanding its particularity, it is a matter of fact that the West has gone ahead in the process of modernization in the history of human society. Modern political philosophy developed in the West does contain some dimension of universality which can be applied to other part of the world. Hence, in order to

explore its own way of development, it seems necessary not only to inquiry on modern political philosophy which have a clear Western background and try to abstract its universal aspect which might be utilized to deal with the case of China, but also to further examine the specific historical situation of Chinese society, among others, through studying the works of other positive social sciences.

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Notes

- 1 See *From Max Weber : essays in sociology* / tr., ed. with an introduction. by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. - London: Routledge & K. Paul , 1964, pp.77-128.
- 2 Ibid, pp.78.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid, pp.81.
- 5 Ibid, pp.83.
- 6 Weber distinguishes two phases of party politics. The first stage was that of parties of notables and rule of parliament members. In the second stage, it became a well organized party 'machine' for election campaign in modern democracy.
- 7 Ibid, pp.93.
- 8 Tocqueville, in his *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, highly praised the political liberty in England and pointed out that in the old regime before the French Revolution the central government had succeeded in destroying all intermediate powers through administrative centralization; the bureaucracy formed a class; and people's submission to authority was complete. Though there were two passions, hatred of inequality and to live free, which motivated the revolution, the French Revolution hadn't really accomplished its end, which is equality in freedom. Though the monarch was overthrown, his bureaucracy still lived; on the relics of the old regime, the revolution built a more extensive, detailed and absolute government.
- 9 Weber mentioned the significance of lawyers in Western politics since the rise of parties. In fact, lawyer's specialty in pleading effectively the cause of interested clients coincidences with the party' role to fashion a demagogic leader and a platform to woo the masses in modern democracy.
- 10 Actually we should define modern political system, in a more abstract sense, as 'plurality of political forces', rather than party politics, since the existence of party system does not necessarily guarantee that the multiplicity of political forces will be adequately represented though it does guarantee that there is more than one political force.
- 11 See Schmitt. *The concept of the political*, translation, introduction, and notes by George Schwab; with Leo Strauss's notes on Schmitt's essay translated by Harvey Lomax; foreword by Tracy B. Strong. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 26.
- 12 Ibid, pp. 47.
- 13 In fact, modern nation state in the West, descending from absolute monarch, well maintains this territorial characteristic and the mental concept of territory is still quite strong. One manifestation of this mentality, for example, is the fact that foreign workers are still regarded as potential enemies.
- 14 See Schmitt. *The concept of the political*, pp. 53.
- 15 Though it might be relatively reasonable to evaluate the case of China with some more abstract and general understandings drawn from Weber's theory on specific 'occidental phenomena', there is one difficulty we cannot really escape. In Weber as well as other western authors' theory, the conceptual and chronological aspect of the term 'modern' coincide naturally. While we use western theory to examine the case of China, there might unavoidably be confusion as far as the usage of the word 'modern' is concerned. The only way at present time might be simply pointing out that we are using the term 'modern nation state' in only its conceptual sense to examine the case of China which had its specific history different from that of the West.
- 16 Wang, Yanan, in 1949, before the establishment of the PRC, argues that traditional Chinese political system is bureaucratic politics; however, he still clings to the Marxist dogma that feudalism is the pre-modern social formation of world history. While some modern Chinese scholars, like Liu, Yongji, have given up this dogma and pointed out that feudalism in ancient China had formally finished after the establishment of Qin dynasty.
- 17 The coming into being of a new Shi class is an important factor in explaining the social transformation of ancient China from the Feudalist Zhou dynasty to a new social formation. See *春秋史 / 童书业 ; 童教英导读*. - 上海 : 上海古籍出版社 , 2003.4.
- 18 See Bell (2006).
- 19 See some similar discussion by Dreyer (1993).
- 20 In fact, Chinese are less reluctant to become a citizen of America, Canada, or Australia, which will make them feel better to be able to enjoy a more civilized culture, and which allow them fell less embarrassed than changing their nationality to a more national country like England, France, or Germany, even worse Japan.

An Exploration of the Concept of the Modern Nation State: The Case of China

NIU Geping

Abstract:

This article examines the concept of the state in modern western political thought and uses China's political system as a case study to evaluate the relevance of this concept outside of the Western world. The first part of the article looks at the thought of Max Weber and Carl Schmitt. Weber defines the modern nation-state as a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within governed territories, and he explores nation-state characteristics, such as the concentration and rationalization of administrative powers and party politics. Carl Schmitt's definition of political also offers a significant development to state theory. Schmitt emphasizes the territorial characteristic of the modern nation state and the importance of the international community. The second part of the essay applies the political theory of Weber and certain contributions of Schmitt to an analysis of the political structure of ancient as well as modern China. The conclusion reached is that while ancient China in many ways had already developed some characteristics of a nation state, it must, nonetheless, be recognized that modern China, because of its one-party political system and its non-separation between state administration and political control, does not possess the attributes of a modern nation state.

Keywords: modern nation state, Max Weber, Carl Schmitt, China, modernization of political system