



Chinese Democracy

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Concepts such as democracy, so central to modern life, turn out to have divergent meanings in different societies. In the People's Republic of China from 1978 to 1981, a "democracy movement" appeared as the harbinger of liberalization following two decades of strict Maoist rule. Andrew J. Nathan argues that Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Communist Party, while they have continued to liberalize both economic and intellectual life since 1981, believed that the radical democratic premises of the democracy movement would harm China's national strength and cohesion. Nathan shows that the radical leaders of the democracy movement called for both free elections and a free press; the Chinese leadership could accept neither. Consequently, Chinese democracy, whatever its populist basis, will not correspond to an American's definition of the term.

Nathan's evaluation of the democracy movement is enlightening, but his book probes much more deeply into questions of Chinese political culture. He shows how Liang Qichao (1873-1929), a key intellectual and journalist, could never accept that democracy might serve as a means to mediate between conflicting individual and collective interests. Instead, Liang Qichao saw democracy as a means to compound that natural harmony between the state and the individual that had been always a primary tenet of Confucianism. Most Chinese political leaders of the twentieth century have shared Liang's premise and have not recognized the need to protect individuals from the state.

On the basis of this important insight from intellectual history, Nathan explores the particular problems between the individual and the state, the role of the press, and the place of elections in China during the 1970's and 1980's. This is a book with special appeal to those readers interested in politics and China.

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