Connect documents from *The Chinese Human Rights Reader* (Stephen C. Angle & Marina Svensson, Eds. 2001. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe) to themes in Andrew Nathan's *Chinese Democracy* (1985. Berkeley: Univ. of CA Press). Selected Document: "The State Is Not the Final End of Life," by Gao Yihan (1915), pg. 81-87.

Human Rights and Democracy in the Context of a Weak Chinese State

It is debatable when the Chinese state was at its weakest point, but after China's intellectuals became aware of this weakness they put much ink to paper to elucidate visions of national and state strengthening. Since the closing decades of the Qing, the Chinese state could be seen on an upward trajectory toward the aspiring superpower it is today, but individual civil and political rights may have been leapfrogged in the process. If human rights were not strong (nor loudly demanded) in the late Qing, neither was the state; the standard view since the PRC formed is of a state with society firmly in its grips, stronger, but without fully allowing the people's potential to be realized. As read in Nathan's comparative accounts, democrats then and now saw rights as central to the potential of both the people and the state, but disputes lay in how the strengthening of both could be balanced. In the rush to contrast Chinese conceptions of rights with those of the West, Nathan may have overlooked figures like Gao Yihan, who clearly foresaw that the state might grow in strength without expanding the people's rights. Gao's 1915 essay would not be out of place in the 1980's section of *Chinese Democracy*, wherein the democracy movement became more of a state confrontation than something proposed to make the state stronger.

Where Liang Qichao and his contemporaries generally saw the cultivation and empowerment of the Chinese people, perhaps even democracy itself, as a means to the end of a strong, modern state, Gao cautions against a seductive "statism" taking hold of the Chinese imagination. Putting the state's interests before those of individuals and the people as a whole is a inversion of the proper hierarchy, like "walking on behalf of the horse" or "flying on behalf of the bird (pg. 87)." The state, Gao reminds his readers, was created by people for the realization of the people's well-being. It should advance citizens' rights, not take them away.

Gao thus echoes Liang's most idealistic phase in the late 1890's, before losing faith in his fellow Chinese ex-pats in the modern societies of Japan and the U.S. Yet Gao's idealism is

tempered by the tumultuous reality of the 1910's, and his concerns are precisely Liang's goals. For contrasts with a Western notion of individual rights, Nathan repeatedly draws attention to Liang's belief that individual rights were not only compatible with state power but, like Gao's view, constitutive of it. Both Liang and Gao agree that the state must use its power to turn China's subjects into citizens, but the latter sees more potential problems in this symbiotic relationship. Writing little more than a decade after the "high point" in the belief that the state and individual could and should be in harmony (1902, Nathan pg. 55), Gao already sees the potential for the Chinese state to conflict with and actively suppress individual rights. Gao warns his statist peers, "[W]henever a state's powers (*guoquan*) have been too great, the state has never failed to invade the people's powers (*minquan*) (pg. 86)." While perhaps meant in reference to Yuan's dalliance with his own dynasty, it could be applied as well to any of the grand modernization projects which followed (and continue). If the Republic had hoped to harness the power of the Chinese people to revitalize the Chinese state, Gao seems to anticipate, while the Liang shown to us by Nathan does not, that the state would need to create unity by force to extend its reach into the interior, periphery, rural areas, etc., suppressing dissent and growing its power by force, not popular assent and collective action.

In the eyes of the state, China could have state power and order or human rights and democracy, but not both sets. Which is more desirable still affects Chinese social unity and stability, among the few things virtually all Chinese of the post-revolutionary early and late 20th century wanted and denied themselves. Liang's idealism seems less naïve in Nathan's observation, pg. 101, that even by the 1980's "[m]ost intellectuals..." still assumed that "true democracy should lead to unity and harmony." Gao, by contrast, is less concerned with democracy, unity, or harmony than his accurate prediction that the increased strength of the Chinese state might be realized despite humanistic goals of individual and collective well-being.

Commentary: compare and contrast Perry and Nathan's methods—if you did not know they were both political scientists, would you think they were in the same discipline?

Perry, Nathan, and Political Science's Disowning of Narratives in Favor of Rational Choice Analysis

Elizabeth J. Perry's *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China* and Andrew Nathan's *Chinese Democracy*, viewed as a whole, share a place on the methodological fringe of contemporary political science, as the discipline has increasingly used historical narrative as mere background for formal modeling of decision trees and sophisticated statistical regressions to test hypotheses of causal relationships. As a qualitative research method, the role of historical narrative is reserved almost exclusively for "process tracing," with any details not vital to the causation story left out. Thankfully, neither Perry nor Nathan adheres to such strictures, as both clearly consider the advancement of general knowledge and understanding to be worthwhile.

On closer inspection, these books' chapters span different sub-disciplines of comparative political theory and political behavior (popular participation), with different empirical approaches to studying each. Both rely to some extent on interviews to build their cases, but the years in which they did their research precluded conducting them in the PRC. This and the historical narrative approach generally render both studies probabilistic "plausibility probes" below the rigorous

standards of positivism, which presumably few reasonable historians or political scientists subscribe to anyway. It appears that Perry used interviews inversely proportional to the extent Nathan dug through archives, though newspapers were much more accessible for Nathan.

Perry's main concern, settling into the mode of hypothesis generation rather than theory confirmation (pg. ix), is to show the applicability of her predatory/protective framework in a series of cases spanning an unusually wide time span. Minimal concern in the conclusion with cross-contextual comparison of environmental subsistence needs as a cause of rebellion and revolution shares limited space with brief consideration of peasant rationality, though both are thematically present throughout and treated in more detail in the chapters. Placing survival (def. pg.3) front and center as the driving force behind peasants' decisions to become bandits, to rebel or revolt against the state, has strong implications for rational choice as a “theory of everything”. Nathan's attention to the survival of the Chinese state and nation by means of empowering the population lends itself obviously to studying intellectuals of a much higher class, though by the 1980's upward mobility clearly did not give every college student the rational interest in self-preservation not to challenge the CCP party-state and its very unique concept of democracy. Instead, he focuses precisely on leaders with a keen sense of self-sacrifice for a cause too distant to have much chance of success. These vanguard democrats make mobilizing calls for collective action which were surprisingly

successful despite the fact that they led mostly to collective surveillance and imprisonment rather than to the provision of a “non-excludable, public good” like democracy.

While rationality is explicit in Perry's book, it is only implicit in Nathan's study of groups and individuals thought to be far more calculating. These could thereby be examples of integrating historical topics of interest into the social sciences, on one hand, and historicizing/contextualizing a topic of foundational, even canonical concern for political theory, on the other. As one not fond of rational choice analysis, I find it reassuring that the approach can seem out of place at times in Perry's book (as in Kuhn's critique as being overly “functionalist”), that much in Nathan's text transcends it. In both cases, a political scientist of the dying breed of “area specialists” would be envious of both authors' ability to focus on what actually happened, rather than the current necessity to establish explicit theoretical concerns at the core and driving force of the text.

Chinese politics, for the continuing difficulty of conducting interviews on sensitive, political topics and the tradition of strategically tampering with PRC statistics, has been shielded from the quantitative methodological turn railed against in the political science discipline's own “Perestroika” movement, closely connected to UCI. With increased penetration of mass surveys and other global indices in the past two decades, however, China's status as the last bastion of valid archival work may also be giving way to the trend toward being more and more persuasive to a smaller and

smaller audience of trained social scientists. Perry and Nathan's books obviously still generate more general, scholarly interest than a work like Acemoglu & Robinson's *The Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, whose advanced models of revolution span multiple, impenetrable pages in the language of rational choice, but they are also clearly of a past generation. In short, while neither of these books bears the faintest resemblance to articles in the leading political science journals, they don't lack for methodological or theoretical rigor. Instead, they clearly have an advantage in readability and appeal across disciplines.

Are we in familiar or unfamiliar terrain here? Do Perry and Lee approach labor activism in a manner that's very similar to or quite different from the approach Perry (herself) and others we have read have taken toward rural rebels and/or intellectual participants in moves to democratize China?

Perry & Lee Labor in Similar Industries as Previous Readings

I find several common threads in labor activism and other forms we've examined. By contemporary standards, the claims made by urban workers toward factory owners in *Shanghai on Strike* seem very similar to asking for the right to a bare subsistence, and the intertwined role of unions, gangs, and the early CCP suggest a similarly rebellious or revolutionary nature. The first two might be categorized as rebels, interested mainly in their own material gain, while calling the CCP anything other than revolutionary would be disrespectful. Presumably few workers faced outright starvation, as did the Nien rebels, but rights had to be taken by force rather than simply invoked in each case. While one's native place served as a foundation for early attempts at organization, emphasizing exclusion of outsiders rather than intra-industry solidarity or unity across skill levels, the early 20th century offered plenty of foreign incursions which created an incentive for collective resistance. Parallels abound between an unduly extractive government under

foreign influence and the foreign or state-owned factories in locales where officials lose the balance between development and self-enrichment.

While leaving a role for nationalism to unite workers across these lines in such situations, Perry's suggestion that the British American Tobacco Company (BAT) was actually subject to *more* strikes precisely because it paid higher wages and was far more successful as a company than its domestic competition (pg. 164) is interesting—anti-foreign nationalism may then have paled in comparison to the tendency for workers to ask more of, and be more likely to receive what they demand from, more capacious higher authorities. This point is similar to that of Ho-fung Hung, who found that confrontations were peaceful and proactive when the Qing state was prosperous, reactive and violent when state capacity was overwhelmed by disasters and popular demands. Absent any example of employee demands bankrupting a company, we can assume that Chinese factories were making both a literal (of their workers) and figurative killing, ripe targets for organized rebellion from within or with the help of gangs.

By the time of Lee's research in the mid-1990's and early 2000's, by contrast, there

is much less expectation, along Marxist lines, that class struggle or revolution will improve the situation of workers. The revolution is a distant memory, and workers are expected by the CCP and barons of industry to be grateful for the advances in their lifestyles which the people's republic has provided, even if they fail to attain in reality. These workers are *citizens* with legal rights which closing or corrupt SOE's have infringed, which private companies in the “sunbelt” need to recognize. Decentralization in Lee's era of focus tolerates a systemic problem for local governments to respond to both incentives for development but also personal accumulation. Such widespread problem could still allow one to imagine workers rallying together to address it in a revolutionary manner, but the more pressing needs in both the north and south appear to be very concrete notions like job security, payment of back wages, and what we Americans call “benefits” to which citizens of most other countries—ranging from industrializing to post-industrial—feel unabashedly entitled. These are the same right-based terms used by Nathan's democrats in the 1980's, but realization of workers' demands would, of course, fortify the current regime rather than overthrow it with political liberalization.

A further point of comparison lies in which social forces were conservative and whether workers' demands coalesced around skill levels. Perry notes that “artisans” and skilled workers, fitting global patterns, were more likely to lead workers' movements, even though they already received far higher wages and had far better working conditions than those poor souls sweltering in the unskilled “leaf deparments,” cotton mills, or competitively indebted rickshaw-puller market. “Number Ones,” foremen, and those who recently received more training were naturally caught in the middle of labor disputes, but Perry does not often suggest that their loyalties were pulled particularly strongly in factory owners' direction. Rather, sharing the same geographic origins and owners providing housing, especially in the case of Subei rickshaw pullers and their bosses (pg. 226), smoothed over hierarchical relationships which should have been in conflict far more often. One expects that the prevalence of sojourners who expected to return to their farms rather than staying in the city were more often low-skilled than not, so the difficulty of sustaining their interest in local disputes probably maintained an opening for gangs to have laborers' collective action “channeled” through them (pg. 50). While migrant workers today are far more

literate and less underage, it is still in the authorities' interest that native place ties remain strong, workers keep a distinct hierarchy among themselves, stay focused on completing job tasks rather than thinking about their rights in legal terms, and blaming strikes or violence on dark elements in society rather than the workers themselves.

In summary, these two books would make a fine Chinese companion to Zinn's *People's History of the U.S.*, though there is far less glorification of heroes, owing perhaps to stronger gang and political party membership of strike and labor leaders generally, for Perry's era. If labor and general political strife could ever be united in any geographic region, any ruling regime inevitably tied closely to its business class would find itself in serious trouble.