of a “veterans’ law” would have made a difference in ameliorating discriminatory treatment toward veterans. Whereas the case study approach used in many chapters yields valuable empirical information, it also raises the inevitable question of the extent to which conclusions can be generalized in a country as diverse and vast as China. One wonders, for example, if veterans in more provincial regions of China were treated with as much contempt as the veterans that Diamant describes in his case study encountered in Shanghai.

Some of the themes that emerge from this volume are addressed in the introduction, but others might have been summarized in a concluding chapter. It is apparent that the endeavor to establish legal structures serves an instrumental function for the Chinese Communist Party, providing a regularized outlet for the expression of discontent. The Chinese legal system has developed in incremental steps, in the face of tremendous challenges. Nonetheless, its steady institutionalization confirms the position of the legal formalists that the codification of law, even if imperfectly and partially implemented, is important. A number of contributors also emphasize the role of legal structures in providing a structural underpinning for a transition to a capitalist economy. Gallagher, in particular, argues that the specific provisions of the 1995 Labor Law and the implementation of a labor contract system have delegitimized the social contract of the Maoist era, and undercut workers’ ability to file grievances through legal channels.

In summary, this book is a valuable contribution to research on contemporary China. It can and should be read by individuals with a specific interest in Chinese legal studies, as well as by those with a general interest in state–society relations in the Chinese context.


— Andrew Mertha, Washington University St. Louis

Much of the scholarship on democratization in China falls into roughly two camps. Some argue that democracy in China is or will be a bottom-up process. Others aver that it will be an elite-driven top-down phenomenon. Bruce Gilley is firmly in the second camp. He argues that democratization is likely to occur as China’s more moderate and liberal leaders recognize, in the face of “a multiple meta-static dysfunction,” the tenuous hold they have on China and move toward democratization as a means of minimizing their losses.

In the first section of the book (“Crisis”), Gilley discusses the challenges faced by China (Chapters 1–3), as well as possible trends toward democratization (Chapter 4). His description of China’s ills is set in extremely sharp relief. Chapter 4 is an improvement, and its more optimistic picture of China is more nuanced.

The middle section (“Transition”) provides the linchpin for the analysis. Gilley weighs different democratization scenarios, concluding that China’s leaders will most likely institute radical systemic change in response to economic and social crises. Here, he makes three useful, albeit largely self-evident, points. First, there seems to be a general consensus among the top leadership that the economic and social status quo is untenable (although this does not mean that they are in favor of democracy; the People’s Republic of China [PRC] always took an activist approach to governance). Second, it seems likely that substantive political reform will be more evolutionary than revolutionary and will involve at least some degree of elite cooperation and accommodation. Third, the army is unlikely to allow itself to be pushed into another situation like that in 1989 when it was ordered to shoot indiscriminately at Chinese civilians.

These reasoned claims are overwhelmed by other, more controversial ones, however. The implosion of the political center is not likely to lead to chaos, writes Gilley: “[I]ndeed, the social atmosphere would likely be quite the opposite, recalling the heady feelings of mutual respect and love—a veritable Woodstock—that broke out during Tiananmen” (p. 141). This analogy betrays a misunderstanding of Tiananmen, particularly the very undemocratic rise of radicals like Chai Ling and Wu'er Kaixi. Nor is Xinjiang or Tibet likely to be satisfied with a “high degree of autonomy.” Arguably, they are likely to exploit the turmoil to secure their independence. Gilley also underestimates the problems of disentangling the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a post-CCP system: “China should be in a good position on all counts. A caretaker government could quickly deploy the old CCP system for new purposes” (p. 138).

The final section (“Consolidation”) lays out the challenges that the new regime will face once the euphoria of regime change wears off. It contains chapters on the political challenges facing consolidation, the nature of post-democratic economic and social life, and China’s kindler, gentler foreign policy and international behavior. It is a somewhat futile exercise to evaluate these longer-term predictions and prescriptions. The cavalier and presumptuous tone of this section, however, may be off-putting to some.

Gilley writes with flair and his prose makes for engaging reading. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental problems with his argument. First, in the shift toward democratization, everything hinges on what he describes as “the pact” encompassing “the motivations the parties have for embracing it,” one normative (“the . . . belief that democracy is the best thing for the country” [p. 129]) and the other instrumental (“[a]ny attempt to recentralize power or repress protest would lead to fissures and breakaways because it would be illegitimate” [p. 129]). I agree with Gilley that the normative explanation is probably the
“weaker of the two” (p. 129). However, his “instrumental” motivation is nothing more than a restatement of the normative one, that is, that only democracy is “legitimate.” Such an a priori explanation of why China is likely to democratize courts tautology.

Second, Gilley identifies elite-led “retreat” as the principal dynamic of China’s democratization. Although there is some merit to the argument, he avoids the far more intractable problem of how to extend this to the local levels. Indeed, he does not even ask the fundamental question of how local elites must necessarily follow the lead set by Beijing, especially if they perceive such democratization as against their immediate interests. Of course, some local leaders may go along, as he implies, but given the complexity of China’s increasingly decentralized political infrastructure, there is a high probability that such efforts at elite-led democratization would run into a collective-action problem of a gargantuan scale. This is something the author assumes away by asserting that local governments will welcome a de jure federalism from what he curiously describes as “the unitary state in which virtually all power resides in Beijing” (p. 167).

Third, predicting what will happen in China is a thankless task because of China’s oft-demonstrated unpredictability, from the makeup of the next Politburo Standing Committee to how the country might democratize. But Gilley insulates himself from this by asserting that “[o]ne of the risks of writing a book about the future is being wrong. The other risk is being right too soon” (p. 249). In so doing, he makes it practically impossible to falsify his claims.

Finally, there are a number of dubious statements in the book. Some are problems of interpretation. Gilley seems to fundamentally misunderstand the Hundred Flowers movement: “Democrats made a last-gasp effort in 1956 [sic] to force the CCP to make good on its promises” (p. 19). On the same page, he labels Deng Xiaoping a “sycophant” of Mao Zedong. Others are factual inaccuracies, such as the “strike hard” campaign beginning in 1995 (it started in 1983). There are also several instances where Gilley seems to contradict himself, or at least confuse the reader: “Today [the army] thinks independently of the Party” (p. 111) but “China’s military has never been an independent political force” (p. 112).

Moreover, there is a dearth of the author’s own personal observations of China, and as a result, the book has a strange at-arm’s-length quality. In some cases, it strains credulity altogether: “When you step across the border into Guangdong from Hong Kong—Cantonese societies both—the joie de vivre of life in a free society is replaced by the torpor of life under dictatorship” (p. 46) is but one example. Such an observation is simply baffling. The same is true with the statement that “[t]he rule of law and the legislative and judicial organs were respected and workable in the late PRC era” (p. 138). And his overreliance on Chinese intellectuals as representative barometers of Chinese society adds to this disconnectedness.

At best, then, China’s Democratic Future demonstrates a modest breadth of knowledge without the depth necessary to make it a credible scholarly work, even if the intention of the book is to constructively shake up the conventional wisdom by overstating its case. It might be appropriate for some undergraduate or graduate course syllabi as a thought-provoking, book-length think piece, but not as a serious scholarly analysis.


— Victor Shih, University of Chicago

In this fascinating monograph, Scott Kennedy explores the nature of state–society relations through the lens of business lobbying. He begins his work by criticizing existing approaches in comparative politics, which often try to fit various countries into a few standard models of state–society relations: pluralism, corporatism, clientelism, and monism. Given the complexity and dynamism in China’s economy, Kennedy makes the astute observation that no single model suffices to describe the complex business–government relations in China. As he puts it succinctly, “countries do not just have one political economy, but multiple political economies” (p. 160).

This work adds momentum to a new wave of studies that makes the point that Western obsession with a few signs of democracy has led to a neglect of the giant sea change occurring in China. Instead of focusing on a few exotic specimens of flowers, these studies—works by scholars like Dali Yang (2004) and Bruce Dickson (2003)—provide strong evidence that a forest has grown up in the meantime. Kennedy’s work fits squarely in this literature that challenges the traditional ideal types of state–society relations. According to this author, although business associations do not generally have autonomy, they nonetheless manage to influence government policies in a variety of ways.

Kennedy then makes an innovative theoretical turn by focusing on firm and sector characteristics to explain the variation in lobbying activities in steel, consumer electronics, and the software industries. These characteristics include firm ownership, firm size, profitability, organization, geographical location of production, ownership of the sector, economies of scale, firm concentration, production intensities, level of pollution, product homogeneity, and price elasticity. Instead of focusing on ideal types, he moves the discussion forward by examining the causal effect of these variables. His material reveals that these firm characteristics are clearly important. Here, however, the reader might appreciate a better specified causal framework that links these characteristics to various specific outcomes. Although there are quite a few variables that might matter, a few