

Cheng, Lestz, Spence, eds. *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*. New York: Norton, 1999.

10.4 ZHANG ZHIDONG ON THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, 1898

Zhang Zhidong (1837–1909), the leading *qingyi* scholar,⁴ sought to combine Chinese and Western learning in a way that would enable China to launch reforms without losing the essential qualities of the Confucian political and cultural way. In 1898 he published *Quanxuepian* (Exhortation to study) a highly influential work designed to boost the reform cause, which was issued by the Guangxu emperor for distribution to all officials and students. It was Zhang Zhidong who coined the expression “Chinese learning as the foundation, Western learning for application” (*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*), a phrase suggesting the material aspects of foreign culture were valuable to China only when fitted to a philosophical and ethical matrix that remained Chinese. After chapters devoted to national unity, travel,

4. Outspoken scholars of the *qingyi* or “pure-opinion school,” who voiced reform sentiments.

study of foreign technologies, and the need to learn from Japan, Zhang turned his attention to government.

CHAPTER VI, CENTRALIZATION OF POWER

There is a class of Chinese in the country just now who have become impatient and vexed with the present order of things. They chafe at the insults offered to us by foreigners, the impotency of the mandarins in war, and the unwillingness of the high officials to reform our mercantile and educational methods: and they would lead any movement to assemble the people together for the discussion of a republic. Alas! where did they find this word that savors so much of a rebellion? A republic, indeed! There is not a particle of good to be derived from it. On the contrary, such a system is fraught with a hundred evils. These evils we will now demonstrate. The first thing necessary in a republic is a Parliament, and it is said that China ought to establish a House. Against such a proceeding we say that the Chinese officials and people are obstructive as well as stupid. They understand nothing about the affairs of the world at the present time, are utterly ignorant of the details and intricacies of civil government. They have never heard of the demand for foreign schools, governments, military tactics, and machinery. With such men as members, what a brilliant Parliament it would be! A vast amount of good would come from such a hubbub as this assembly would make, with perhaps one sensible man in the lot, and the rest a set of fools! Then the power of adopting ways and means, etc., is vested in the Lower House. Legislation and matters of that kind are effected by the Upper House. To obtain a seat in the Parliament the candidate must possess a fairly good income. Chinese merchants do not possess these qualifications. They are not wealthy, and the experience of the people in legislative matters is very limited. Now, if any important measures were to come up for discussion, army supplies for instance, in a Parliament constituted of these unqualified members, a deadlock would ensue at once. Discussion or non-discussion would be all the same, for these M.P.'s would be ignorant of the matter in hand; they would have no knowledge to carry the appropriation bill, and no money to pay the appropriation if the bill were carried. A useless institution, indeed!

Then it is said that under a republic the Chinese can establish mercantile companies and build factories. And what is to hinder them from doing this under the present Government? There is no law to hinder the launching of such enterprises. The truth is that the merchants of China are skilled in trickery, and we have again and again cases where bogus shares have been put on the market to defraud people. If there were no official power to restrain and punish these evil-doers, the company alone would realize any profit; but where would the shareholders be? Or if a manufactory was started, and there were no official power to check the counterfeiting of trade-marks, or to quiet the brawls of the workmen, who would intervene?

The same may be said about the establishment of schools. Our laws have ever encouraged the opening of colleges, schools, and benevolent institutions by wealthy *literati*, and why ask for a republic to bring about this end? But supposing these were established, and there was no official power whatever which would confer rank on the graduates or grant their stipends; with no hope of rank or stipend, who would enter any institution established on this basis?

Again, it is said that we ought to institute a republic in order to drill troops to resist the encroachments of foreigners. But we have no arsenals or dockyards, and if ships and arms were purchased abroad, they could not be brought into a Chinese port if China was a republic, for in that case there would be no officials, and they could not be classed as "official material." An army formed under these conditions would be a noisy, cowardly flock of crows, utterly incapable of fighting a single battle. But taking for granted that this Falstaff regiment could exert itself, who would levy supplies if there were no official power? And who would go security for a foreign loan if there were no government?

We confess that China is not a powerful nation, but the people under the present government get along very well by themselves; if this republic is inaugurated, only the ignorant and foolish will rejoice. For rebellion and anarchy will come down upon us like night, and massacre will seal our eternal grave. Even those who establish the republic will not escape. Murder and rapine will hold sway in city and village. The burning of churches will follow, and under the pretext of protection, the foreigners will send troops and men-of-war to penetrate the far interior of our country and slice off our territory to be foreign dependencies, which we, perforce, submissively grant. This talk about a republic is very agreeable to the adversaries of China.

Years ago the Government of France was changed from a monarchy to a republic. The common people rose against the upper class, because the rulers were vicious and the Government cruel. Our Emperor is exceedingly humane, our laws are not oppressive, and it is folly to introduce these democratic ideas to bring manifold calamities upon China. We have studied the philosophy of these republics, and find that translators of foreign books have wrongly interpreted the word "republic" by *Min Quan* [literally "people power"]. For the people in the republics of the West only have the right to *discuss* measures, and not to carry these measures into execution. Americans resident in China inform us that the ballot-box in their country is greatly abused for personal ends, and Chinese admirers of the American Republic have not minutely examined its defects.

There are many to-day who have only a smattering of Western ways, but who speak confidently of the "power of personal liberty." This is preposterous. The idea is derived from the books of the foreign religion, which say that *Shangdi* [God] bestows upon each individual certain mental and spiritual faculties, and that every man in consequence possesses intelligence and knowledge which enable him to act freely. This means, say the translators, that every

human being has a personal liberty. A greater mistake was never made! All the empires and republics of the West have governments of some kind, and the duties of officials, soldiers, and workmen are clearly prescribed. They have also lawyers and judges. Both officials and people are bound by the laws. What the Court recommends can be debated by the Parliament, but what the Parliament decides can be vetoed by the Court. How then can we say that men have personal liberty? Every market town has its elder to keep the peace, every band of robbers its chief. So every Government has its rules. If each individual possessed this "liberty," every family and village would serve its personal ends. The scholar would always sit at meat and do nothing else, the farmer would pay no taxes, the merchant would grow rich beyond bounds, the workman would raise his own wages, the *sans culotte* would plunder and rob, the son would disobey the father, the student would not follow the teacher, the wife would not obey the husband, the low would not defer to the high, the strong would force the weak, and mankind would soon be annihilated. There is not such custom even among the heathen. The English word *liberty*, which means "just in everything and beneficial to all," is mistranslated. The "Liberty Club" that now exists in foreign countries should be called the "Debating Society." If we wish to make China powerful and capable of resisting foreign nations, we must cherish loyalty and righteousness and unite ourselves under the Imperial dignity and power. This is the unchangeable truth of the past and the present, both in China and abroad. If it be urged that we give up the idea of a republic, but establish the Parliament, we reply that our present system is, to all intents and purposes, a republic now. The ancient custom practically meets the case. If the Government encounters difficult questions the Great Ministers are called upon to help settle them; and the people can apprise the rulers of their needs and wants through the appointed channels. The present Dynasty is open and above-board in its dealings, and if our Chinese subjects are loving and loyal there need be no fear that the Emperor will not find out about them and supply all their real wants. The people have the right of discussing questions now, although the rulers retain the prerogative of settling them. This is done with references to the best interests of all. Why is a Parliament demanded then, when we already have this institution in effect? If it were established, pray where would the members come from? Let us wait until our educational institutions are in full swing, and the capabilities of our men are tested by daily experience, and then consider the matter. The present is not the time.