NZ: Hello. Good morning. Thanks for everyone—to everyone for coming. So, I thought I would open by talking a little bit about my own experiences of studying in the United States which started almost 20 years ago. And how that experiences have—how those experiences have led me to this topic in the research. So I was born and raised in China. I came to the U.S. when I was 22 for grad school. And as I begin to study the literature in comparative politics and more specifically on Chinese politics, I thought some of the assumptions and theories about Chinese politics were a bit simplistic on—in comparison to my experiences of living in China. So the main thing about this, sort of what was bothering me a bit was that the largest label we apply to Chinese politics is the term "authoritarian". And because we categorized it as an authoritarian system, so everything Chinese—related to Chinese politics in society and culture has to have this key characteristic that we attribute to authoritarianism in the American understanding of world politics. And that is all fine but, you know, what is missed in this understanding, in this body of knowledge is how people, individuals and groups, and elites and
masses in the public who live in these political systems actually think and conceive, perceive. How they actually see the political system, how they think about it, how they discuss it and debate about it, how they reason about it and then how they come up with an action plan, right? That they act, then they act upon. So this whole process of where political agency is exercised, human process is exercised is missed in our understanding of China’s authoritarian political system. So, of course, sure, you know, it is a one party system and it does not have the kind of checks and balances, the institutional set up we are more used to here. But, you know, understanding—and we truly want to understand an authoritarian political system. But if our understanding of the culture of the internal processes of the political actors in that system is missing, that understanding is incomplete and even debilitating on our policies and, you know, on the practical level and on the more academic level, our theories and concepts based on those simplistic assumptions would not be very useful. So that's how I set out to think about how to do research on that—will shed light on the thinking and reasoning processes on, in of people who live in Chinese politics. So, the limitations we have in the West, I think more specifically in the United States about authoritarian systems I think actually came from several sources. First, historically speaking, our studying, our academic studying, research on authoritarianism really begin in the 1930s with the rights of fascism in Europe as well as Stalinism in the Soviet Union. So when we look at the academic research on authoritarianism, the first wave of that and those are the—were the main subjects of studying and China was heartily in the fold, O.K. So from that point of view, you know, our understanding of China now as an authoritarian system and so forth. And so China had primarily been the receiving end on the application end. So the—our concept and theories about authoritarianism were conducted on Italy, by studying Italy, Germany, and Soviet Union and then were simply applied to China. So that's the historical reason. And also there is also something specific about the American political culture. So the United States as we know is the country built on strong tradition and culture of rebellion against any kind of authoritarian tendencies or authorities and so forth. So, our culture here does not have empathy for authoritarianism. And at the same time with the Cold War starting in the 1950s, America was pushed to the front line of fighting tyranny and authoritarian systems and so forth and so on. So ideologically there is a very strong tendency of thinking, you know, authoritarianism you just should not exist, right? You should not be here. The—our knowledge system, our intellectual community, our epistemological community have that kind of tendency that that's the lens we use to look at authoritarianism, right? Methodologically speaking, most of the studies we have now about authoritarian political culture have been conducted from the 1950s. And from the 1950s as we know in social sciences, quantitative analytical tools begin to be used more, more heavily—no, more frequently, excuse me. So, most of the research we have done on political culture was done with surveys, right? And most of the surveys were designed to really study democratic political culture. And so, one of the seminal works on political culture is called the civic culture where the researchers surveyed people in five countries in the U.K., U.S., Italy, Mexico and Germany. And the goal—so, the book was published in 1963 with the research done in 19, in the 1950s. And, you know, they stated out very clearly in the beginning that the goal of this project is to study what kind of political culture needs to be in place to sustain strong democracies, right? So that was the mandate for the intellectual community during the Cold War which is very, very understandable. But the problem with this approach in regards to
research on authoritarian political system is that our understanding of authoritarian political culture is the byproduct of this research projects designed to study democratic culture. So a typical question in these surveys would look like this, right? How often do you discuss politics with people around you, right? So, if the number is high, it means that you have stronger democratic tendencies or stronger belief in democratic practices. And if the number is low, then it means that you have authoritarian tendencies, right? So that kind of research design in a very, very fundamental way set up authoritarian political culture as antithesis of democratic political culture. So, anything that is not as democratic as we like, then we throw it into the residual category and call that authoritarian. So that's—and based on that our theoretical, the mold of our analysis in our theorization often takes the form of a counterfactual kind of way of thinking, right? So, a very popular way of reasoning about Chinese politics, for example, in our community here is this. This is not happening or this is happening in China because something democratic is missing. So for example, there are human rights abuses in China because a civil society is missing there, right? So it is often sort of a counterfactual way of reasoning about the political systems there from our point of view. But the thing is, these things are happening in China, Chinese politics mostly because of the things that are there and last because of the things that are not there. Yes, right? So, we need to take a look at the Chinese political culture how it works from the insider, from the inside in order to gain a fuller understanding of that. So, my thesis for the book is that the authoritarian political culture and the democratic political culture actually are very—have two common functions by providing two sets of core values to the people who live in the political culture. These two sets of values are legitimating values through which the political culture convinces the public of the political legitimacy of the form of the government they have right now. And the second set of values is, are the engaging values through which the political culture provide tools and resources for regular citizens to engage the state in order, so that they can get services and goods, political services and goods from the state. So, with these two sets of values in place either in democratic political system or authoritarian political system, the political system would be pretty stable if these two sets of values are effective and functional, right? So, you believe your government is legitimate and you can get what you want from it, right? So, most people would actually be quite content with the status quo. So, I'll use about 10 minutes or so to explain to you what those two sets of values are in Chinese political culture which came from the Confusion tradition. And then I'll also give you some examples on how these values are still shaping up contemporary political development in China today. So the legitimating value in a Confucian tradition is a concept called "The Mandate of Heaven", right? So, in our modern day politics, that concept that sounds so antiquated, it sounds like it belongs to the history. But actually it's a pretty modern idea. So, a little bit of background on Confucius. So Confucius lived between the 7th and the 6th century B.C. And when he was alive, the Zhou Dynasty was—that the Zhou royal house was in governance, was governing China. And the Zhou royal house came to power about 300 years before that at around 10th century B.C. And before the Zhou's came along, the Sha house was in power, right? So, basically when the Sha begin to decline, you know, you think about Chinese politics at that time, they did not have the modern or modern telecommunication, right, [laughs] technology, it would just be the very—and China at that time was about one third of the size as it is now, but still it was a large piece of land, right? So the central government just couldn't really be able to control everything that was going on. So gradually—so Sha was in
power for few hundred years and be, gradually began to decline. And Zhou was a tribal power in the West of Sha. So, through battles and wars, the Zhou house begin to gradually take over lands and people that formerly belonged to Sha, right? So, now the political challenge for the Zhou house is that it needs to convince these people who previously, for hundreds of years who previously were allegiant to the Sha to shift their political allegiance and, you know, and become part of the Zhou dynasty, right? So the argument they made to these people was this: A legitimate government should be a government that takes care of its people. It should not be exclusively based on lineage, right? So your blood and the royal blood is still be part of it. But in the—at around 10th century B.C., performance was already the most important criteria of political legitimacy in the Chinese political culture. So Mandate of Heaven argument goes like this, you know. The mandate—so, so the, the emperor is the son of heaven and heaven it this know of all and knowing, know it all entity out there, right? So whatever the government is doing, heaven sees. And if you're doing a good job taking care of your people, it would know and it would give you the mandate to rule. Yes, right? But if you do not do a good job, it's going to gradually withdraw the mandate. It would send you warnings at first through natural disasters. You know, you'd have famine and blooding and all—not blooding, sorry—flooding and all those kinds of things. And in the very end, if the government is not benevolent to its people, then the people have the right to rebel. So this is the contract in Confucianism before, between the government and the people and the society. So the Chinese Communist Party is still using this argument. So I, oh—let me just back track a little bit. So, you know, for us, the lesson to learn here is that in Chinese politics for 3,000 years, political legitimacy did not hinge on regular institutionalized alternation of power. It was just not part of the thinking, instead it hinged on whether the government was benevolent to its people whether the government was able to perform well to take care of peoples' livelihood to, you know, under their governance, people will have a good life. So in China's dynastic history, every two, 300 years actually, you know, when the government gets really corrupted, people would rebel. So that's the alteration of power in the Chinese way, right? So the Chinese political history has been evolving in the cyclical pattern and changing power every two to 300 years, you know, roughly speaking. So, today, the party is still using that argument, right? So, if we think about China's economic miracle in the past of 30 years, right, the party still is able to make this argument to the people that, you know, under the Chinese Communist Party, life has got better for most people, right? And we are doing everything we can. We're lunching anti-corruption campaign. Now, we, that we realized there's a lot of corruption we're—when we realize that our economy was overheating, we are slowing it down, right, the development. So the party as—argument is mostly to the people follow this line. Does that make sense to you guys? O.K. So, in one of the chapters in the book, I analyze that the Party Congress Reports from the 1980s all the way to now. So, about every five years, the party would have a National Congress. And the report is the speech delivered by the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. And it's similar to the State of Nation Address in the U.S. So in this report, the speaker talks about, you know, their past achievement, their current challenges and then their plan of action in the, for the next five years. So, it's a very, very important document. So what we see there is that in the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party was still using Marxism to explain almost everything. Their past mistakes were because the leaders at that time were not adhering closely to Marxist doctrines, right? And what they're going to—doing in the next five years is because, you know,
Marx said this is how economy and society works. So, everything was explained from a Marxist point of view. And the party's legitimacy was firmly grounded in Marxist doctrines. And people, that very word of “people” appeared very infrequently. And when they did appear, they appeared as placeholders like in larger terms like people's army, people's dictatorship, right? People's Congress. And so, so the term “people” did not have any real meaning at that time in 1980s. In the 1990s, in the Party Congress Reports, the, the relationship between the people and the government became more reciprocal, reciprocal. So basically the argument made was that, you know, the party takes care of the people and because of that, the people should trust and embrace the party. But the relationship was still a very heavy top-down relation. You know, the verbs that were used was, you know, the people instructs the party, leads the party re—no, no, sorry, the other way around. The party instructs the people, leads the people, represents the people's interest and so forth. So people had very little autonomy in that, that discourse.

Now, in the 2000s, so in the past 10 years, this has begun to change completely. So, people begin to have its own—people begin to be used in possessive forms, so people begin to have its own content, people's initiatives, people's vitality, people's livelihood. And then the priorities role—the verbs, you look at the verbs, the verbs are very sort of indicates a supportive role of the party. So the party should help people to materialize their initiatives and protect their, you know, their rights and then so forth and so on. So, by analyzing how this word "people" is used and the verbs and the subjects and so forth and so on, we can actually really see that a silent revolution had indeed taken place in C.C.P.'s ideology. Because it is still officially a Marxist Party, right? So, the party in Party Congress Report, it cannot say, oh we're, you know, we're embracing Confucianism now. So, Confucianism or Confucianist is not mentioned anywhere in the Party Congress Report but people's livelihood, Mandate of Heaven, and these kinds of ideas have completely entered the center stage of the legitimating arguments of that—that the party makes to its people and to the world. Now, engaging that values, the second set of values basically in the Confusion tradition are—the emphasis that the Confusion tradition puts on human affection, right? So in American politics, we like to think of politics as a rational and institutionalized and so forth and so on. So affection and sentiments, these things should not even enter the political arena. In the Confusion tradition, it's quite the opposite. So, here is the belief that, the belief is that we are born with affections to our parents, to our family, to people who love us, right? So, affections are natural human being. And there—and if we are put—if we act on our affection to other people, that is how we fulfill our social obligations and duties, right? So, because I love my parents, I would naturally want to take care of them. I don't need any legal code that compel me to do that, right? And because you love your friends, you would want to naturally help them out when they're in need, right, right? So, politically what that means is that in—so personal relations become very important political resources in political practices, right? So, if I need to start, to get—if I need to get a license for a new business, I can call up my friend in the city hall and say, “hey, can you speed this up?” Right? So, we tend to see this as corruption in American politics. But in Chinese politics, the, there is a cultural tolerance or even encouragement for this kind of behaviors because, hey, you're friends, of course, you want to help them, right? So therefore, nourishing, maintaining, you know, personal relations becomes culturally acceptable or even encouraged. If you do not, venture out to help your friends when they're in need, you would be seen as stone hearted. Do we actually have a word in Chinese that says, gosh, you're so stone hearted, you do not have a
human heart, right? How can you not help me? So what this means is that true, you know, the Chinese political system compared to, you know, American democracy is more arbitrary, is more closed, is not as accountable and transparent as the American political system. But, in formal politics—so everybody lives in this web of interpersonal relations. So, through interpersonal relations with the insiders of the state, people can still get their, their—what they need from the government. So political goods and services, right? So, it's a different way of stratifying political and social resources as we have it here but nevertheless, that is the engaging value very much in operation in Chinese politics. So, in one of the chapters, I used some survey data to look at how people see, right, informal politics. Again, in American politics, we tend to see informal politics, networking, all those things as the antithetical, you know, the opposite side of good democratic politics. But in China, the—following several variables actually are all process of late correlated to each other. So, people's trust in the central government, their political efficacy, right, on the one hand, so these are the typical matters we use to measure people's kind of buy in into the formal political structure. And on the other hand, people's belief in their own informal resources that is, you know, yeah, I know people in the government and now I can get things done and their belief in how effectively the public, you know, not only themselves, but people in general can use those resources to get things done. All these four variables are positively correlated to each other. What that means is that they're in the Chinese minds, there is no tension between, you know, the formal political side and the informal political side, right? And this finding corroborates with some really important findings that—on Chinese politics that came out in the past 10 years. So, several researchers conducted surveys with the newly emerging capitalistic class in China, right, in the middle class and upper middle class. The thinking is, you know, along the American way of thinking that, you know, when the middle class and the capitalistic class, you know, emerged, these people would be really definitely against the communist regime and the Communist Party. It turns out it's quite the opposite. The newly capitalistic class made their wealth through their informal connections with the insiders of the government. They got what they wanted and what they needed in order to take advantage of the tremendous opportunities during China's economic reform. So they're quite actually supportive of the status quo. The status quo has actually served them very, very well. So again, you know, our hypothetical sort of assumption about the political role of the emerging middle class in China again is—turns out to be out of context and actually, you know, too simplistic in that way. So, to wrap up, I think in this book, what I try to do is to explain these key features of the Confusion political culture to the readers as well as to show how this culture though, it originated more than 2,000 years ago still is an actionable political culture in today's Chinese politics. People still follow—these key values and beliefs still are guiding people's perceptions and cognition, understanding, as well as behavior on—the behaviors in Chinese politics today. All right.

AM: Thank you.

NZ: You're welcome.

AM: What I'd like to do if it's O.K.—
NZ: Sure.

AM: —is I wanted to bring up five, roughly five things that I learned, that I valued, that I love about your book and then maybe from those see what you think.

NZ: O.K.

AM: And then next I ask a few questions and maybe test to me your hypothesis with some recent development. And actually asking you about what's happen since the book came out. And I think—

NZ: O.K.

AM: I think a lot of things have changed. And it'll be interesting to see how that relates to your thesis.

NZ: O.K.

AM: But I wanted to start with five things or so. Like I said that I love, that I learned, that I really value about this book. And so, the first couple have to do with just the nature of Confucianism or the nature of Confusion thought. And my own engagement with Confucianism is not in my research. And my research is mainly in 19th and 20th century and of course Confucianism would figure in, in certain ways that my research doesn't really explicitly delve into those questions. And so my engagement with Confucianism is more in teaching. And my like History three ten class that I teach, I think it's called East Asian Cultures in Civilizations. But I really—I make Confucianism a center of the course and we look at China and Japan and Korea. And through teaching that class for many years, I've just—I learn so much every time I study this philosophy. And so, your book got me thinking about a couple really important things. But I think are really important as we think about our own politics as well. So the first thing is to understand in Confucianism how a very old value system something that's, you know, 25 hundred years old. And it's based absolutely in hierarchy that the only relationships between people, the only possible relationships between people are ones of hierarchy. And there's the five classic relationships that you mention here when I—between parents and child, between ruler and administer, between husband and wife, between older and younger siblings and between friends. And then we think, how could the friends part be based on hierarchy because we're all equal. When I'm friends with someone, we're absolutely equals. Until you start to think more deeply about each of those friendships and you realize the ways that there are still hierarchies even in friendships. And there are certain friends are older than you and certain friends have more experience in this and you are—or vice versa. And Confucianism is based totally in hierarchy and yet—which we kind of recoil that and I think that we assume that these discussions of hierarchy immediately get us to unfairness and abuse. But in fact to see how in Confucianism morality is—morality comes from hierarchy and it comes from the part of hierarchy that we don't always think about which is how you treat people below you. When we think about hierarchy, I think our tendency is always to assume the hierarchy is about the
person above pushing the person below around and making demands, unfair demands on the person below. And at the heart of Confucianism, which is based on these affectionate bonds is the idea of how you treat people below you, not only above you. And the idea is simply that as you grow—go through life and grow, then you end up on the different end of different hierarchies. And by being at the bottom of certain hierarchies for the time you learn how to behave when you're at the top of these hierarchies. Anyway, point being to see how this very, very old value system that's based totally on hierarchy in the, on the face that would seem so foreign to us is such a powerful moral system. Every time I teach it in this class, I'm just more taken by that. The part of—the second thing I was going to mention is the part of Confucianism which is absolutely, again, absolutely rational where Confucius in pretty much, you know, as many words says, this is about us right now. This is our people. This is our world. This is our time. We're either going to solve these problems that we have with our ways and with our thinking or we're not going to. And you're either going to have a regime that solves these problems and is benevolent and lives on. Or we're going to have a regime that can't solve these problems and exacerbates these problems and will be overthrown. And no one's going to save us. No god is going to bless us. That's not in the system. It's about us, our time, our world. And again, I think that, that nature of Confucianism also comes out in some of those things that you were just talking about, results and performance and legitimacy. And so, I really like this term “action” that's in your title. And I really—I read the whole book and I think I didn't really quite understand what that means until just today. How will—how would we understand the government by understanding the people who live there and how they navigate it, how they critique it and how they are fonded in it, in the ways it works? So those are kind of general things but then to turn to three more or so from your book, your point in your introduction about assumptions, about the triumph of democracy. And our assumptions that all old ideologies like authoritarianism are just destined to fail those or as you said, they're heading for the dustbin of history. And so, a year ago or so, I would have read that and I would've thought, this is intellectually, intellectually a good point. That intellectually I understand that assuming the triumph of democracy is problematic. You know, over the last 25 years of post-cold war thinking about how democracy is the system that won and how we won the Cold War, that's not really done very much for us. That hasn't gotten us anywhere. Obviously within the last year, we can really see the value in questioning these assumptions about the triumph of democracy. Because of—if it ever did triumph, it's not triumphing right now. And so, these I—this is the sense that that's the idea that won and that these old ideas will just be thrown out is clearly flawed. And then like I said you—the way that you presented it just now brought even more depth to that point which is—I mean, of course I knew these things—I hadn't put them together in this way, which is that our sense of authoritarianism was western authoritarianism. And then I love how you said that this is just applied to studying China. It makes perfect sense and I really never thought about that way. That's related to it, to another point that I really like in your second chapter. And these probably talk about the problem of not understanding authoritarianism very well. And Andrew Nathan makes this point that authoritarian systems have been with us longer, have ruled more people, and for all we know may rule more people in the future than democratic systems. Therefore, we better understand this. We better keep trying to understand this even if as you were saying, it sounds distasteful to say authoritarianism. But once you use this word, once you characterize Chinese politics, always,
always, always as authoritarian, you know, it's natural to have that reaction, to have a negative reaction to it. And so, even regardless of whether it's working or not Nathan makes this point that again, since it's been around for so long, since it's definitely with us in the present and it's probably with us in the future, we better get to know it better than we do. There was data that you were citing. So this isn’t exactly from Professor Zhang’s book but it's super interesting data that she's citing. And I'm going to read a passage, so I hope you'll bear with me while I read this passage. But it also gets to some of the assumptions that really over term—overturn some of the assumptions about the authoritarian tradition in Asia or in China. And it has to do with the World Values Survey data that came out in 2008. And I remember seeing this and I think I didn't pay much attention to it. And I definitely didn't see what you brought out here. So, I'm going to read these three or four sentences. But this—if you're following along, you'll see what I mean about how this really overturns assumptions that we have about authoritarian Chinese people and democratic equality-loving Westerners. And so, the World Values Survey finds that alleged, alleged Chinese cultural traits such as the yearning for dependency relationships, a fear of social chaos and emphasis on face and personal ties and a strong attachment to family, a strong attachment to family and deference to authority figures. In that group, the P.R.C. does not score high. The very qualities that we would assume are Chinese aren’t common in China. The alleged Chinese cultural traits aren’t happening in China. It has to do with how we imagine, oh, that's what Chinese people think. Compared to Americans and Canadians, for example, more Chinese parents emphasize qualities of independence, hard work, and imagination for their children's education. More Americans and Canadians profess a desire to make their parents proud in a strong sense of nationalism. O.K. Now it's sounding like I just switched the nouns around. I mean it's sounding like, I mean, the opposite of what we're used to that all those Chinese—what if all these authoritarian Chinese values are well and good in western society? And what if all the independent, hard work values are the dominating ones in Chinese? And then finally the last part of this passage is it says, it says ironically, Chinese are less inclined than Americans to agree that greater respect for authority would be a good thing and are more ready to endorse competition than Americans. So, we had better get to understand the system in a more complicated way. If the values the so-called authoritarian system is breeding are the ones that we think democracy is breeding and the values that we think democracy is breeding are actually breeding the values that we would think would be in authoritarian society, we better spend more time on this. So that was also very valuable. And then I'll just mention one more point and then I'll see what you think about these points of mine. And it has to do with another just fascinating idea that we should—given that we’re often confused about the values and democracy and authoritarianism, what if we just throw all those terms out and all those assumptions out? And what if we simply look at governments and judge them by how well they do?

NZ: Yeah

AM: And so you talk about this idea of philosophical anarchism, treating all governments as non-legitimate. Let's not pretend that if you have an election and some small group of people vote that’s, that that's a legitimate result. Let's just pretend like they're all—assume they're all
non-legitimate, simply see which ones work and then proceed from there. Now I think there's a problem to that because I think that—

NZ: Yeah.

AM: —part of what you're saying has to do with moral role and moral ties and affection, ties of affection. So I think that a very cold standard like that, you know, we contradict that approach. But I've gone in for a while with this one. I want to see if I brought up anything here that you wanted to—

NZ: Of course.

AM: —look at.

NZ: Yes. How much time do I have for this?

Moderator: Just, well for questions about 10 after.

NZ: OK. So about 15 minutes. Well, thank you very much for these great observations. I think I'll just go through them one by one. The hierarchical relations in Chinese politics and you're indeed right that what is emphasized in these hierarchical relations is not only that, you know, people in the inferior should show respect and so forth and so on but more importantly it is how the more powerful, the superior one should always think about taking care of people that they're supposed to be taking care of. And if you don't, the moralistic public opinion and criticism and so forth and so on would just be so severe, you can hardly stand it. And there are daily rituals still in Chinese society and everyday life that reinforces these, that reinforce these ideas and so forth and so on. You know, throughout my own educational experiences in China all the way to college, you know, every class—so, one class lasts for about an hour. So every class in the beginning, when the teacher walks into the classroom, everybody stands up and says good morning or good afternoon to the teacher. So that's a reminder to the teacher that, you know, you are the—so many people raise back to you in this way, so you should do a good job, right? So that's just a very, very simple example. And the same thing, so there are many, many things in the, in that society and culture that are just daily reminders of you. You may know Daniel Bell who was a Canadian I think of origin, American trained political thinker who actually moved to China and lived in China for I think at least 10 years or so now. He has published some of the earliest books on how Confusion political thoughts applied to contemporary Chinese context. So, I'd be in touch with him and he just had a seminar in Tsinghua University called Just Hierarchy. So how hierarchy, how political hierarchy can be just and can be perhaps even more just and effective than nonhierarchical political relations. And I think his next writing project is actually on that topic. And, you know, my first meeting with Daniel Bell, he asked me a very blunt question. He said, “Why do you have to have the term authoritarian in the title of your book?” Why do you have to categorize it in, you know, as authoritarian, as non-democratic and so forth and so on? My reply was—at first, I didn't know how to respond to that. And then I said, you know, because that's how it is done in the
American academia, right? So I was just following the line and hoping this is going to click with—but the point he's making is something you are saying, here, you know, what if we throw out all these labels? I mean, now as—I think the dichotomous black and white image we have constructed about democracies and non-democracies is understandable given the Cold War context, you know? So how authoritarian, it has become a subject of academic study in the past few decades, in the past century. But now, as we gain more complex understanding of these other political systems and not only China, South Korea, right? How do you—in what ways is it democratic and what ways is it not democratic, right? The Middle East, right, Latin America, all these new democracies. I think this dichotomous view actually does us more harm than benefit. Perhaps it is time for us to reconsider, you know, how these kind of labeling—what this labeling is really doing to our, to the assumptions and theories and so forth and so on that we often use as our point of departure, right? So, you know, so I'm jumping to point 4 here. The Chinese political practitioners for hundreds of years certainly did not think, oh, you know, by practicing these things, we're being authoritarian, right? So this label of Chinese politics being authoritarian is not an authentic label in that way. It is a label that we plastered on them and uses to see them. It is helpful in some ways, it does shed light onto some things but at the same time it also hides a lot of complexities and nuances and push them into the background, right? So number two, about the rationality and pragmatics in Confucianism. That is a very, very important point that I mentioned—not being in that book that but in my more recent—you know, one of the mystery of China's contemporary development is it's how you could just have turned around, right? It, it went through those crazy years, the culture revolution, a great leap forward, right? That very, very radical ideology, ideologically dogmatic years for three decade then Mao died and Deng came to power and said, oh, that's over. We're going to do economic reforms now. We're going to open up our doors to the west then bring in their investment. How could they have done that? How could they have just turned around within one or two years? So in the 1980s, the keyword in quite bit of academic study on China, on economic reform was the pragmatic term but nobody has really adequately explained pragmatism in Chinese political—in Chinese politics and pragmatics made the key characteristics of Confucianism. So, when Confucian, when Confucius came along and began to—he did not just make them up. He was actually simply saying, you know, the first few hundred years of the Zhou dynasty, it was peaceful, it was stable, it was prosperous, essentially because the Zhou founders used this, these political values and based the society on it. And the reason why everybody is fighting now is because you have all gotten greedy, right? You have become individualistic and you all want a larger share. And you are rebelling against the just hierarchy. They're all trying to move up. So his solution was, you know, if we just bring that all back, right, if we just restore the Zhou system of just and harmonious hierarchy and so on and so everything will be fine. So, a, a, I'm sorry, a scholar at a, Schwartz, he's quite—you know, he is a prominent scholar in China's ancient political thought. He actually pointed out to us that Confucius was an empiricist. He was an empirical political scientist. He did not make these things up simply because there were good ideas. He actually based his political thought on what actually happened. So he had a real blueprint of the great years during the Zhou dynasty, right? So what that tells us about pragmatism and rationality in Confucianism is that by the time Confucius came along, the political system was already so set and so established and had demonstrated to everybody this has—can work so well. So that stability, for the stability and
maturity of the Political system was already so obvious that Confucius was not speculating any—what's that word—anything beyond this word, world, right? So he said—and that is still a very popular saying in China today—that we hardly know enough about this world, how we dare speculate about the other world. So he never really questioned the order, the political order, the idea of the, of benevolent authoritarianism. And so, his questions in the analects were all how-to questions, right? How do we make this better, right? So we have these problems, so how do we solve these problems? So, and because of that, there's no God to help us. We are completely self-reliant. And so very—in the very, very beginning of the Confusion political culture, Confucius plays the human being at the center role of their own faith, right? So that I think explains the pragmatic term as I was saying, right, how—so Chinese politics has never really been very dogmatic for a long time. And that also partly explains how all the major religions have all come to China but neither one of them got the whole country converted to, right? So you go to China today, there's Buddhism, there's Muslims, there's Christianity, there's Catholic—Catholicism, everybody came and tried it on. And the Chinese went, yeah, that's good. O.K. So we'll put there, O.K., for people who like it. So the Chinese civilization and culture has this very, very secularism in its very core. So even Marx says it just was one of those, you know, it was very, very applicable and helpful in explaining China's, why China was then put on by these western powers and, you know, imperialism and all that and provided some solutions that could be used by the political leaders at the time. It was their appealing to the intellectual because the communist utopia is exactly identical with the Confucian utopia where everybody contributes to the collective and the collective takes care of everybody when, where everybody, you know—Confucius said if we can take care of the elders of the others as we do our own and if we could take care of the youngsters of others as we do our own, the society would be in perfect harmony. And that is exactly, you know, in the popular mind, that's exactly what communism was promising. So that explains the appeal of that. So I think I have already talked about, a little bit about your idea about the trend of democracy and so forth and so on. In my opinion, I think every single political system is a combination of the democratic components as well as the authoritarian inclinations. And the Confusion tradition has its own democratic ingredients, right? That is people's livelihood is at the core of political legitimacy and if you don't do this, well we have the right to rebel. So I think a more truthful approach to study political systems that are different from ours is really to be truthful to their cultural traditions and be willing to go beyond our own perspectives and lenses to really look for—not to actually avoid, right, like oh, that's—I don't want to get into that, but to actually actively look for the contradictions, the complexities, the nuances that cannot be so easily explained away by applying the authoritarian label to it. And I think a lot of this way of thinking really came, you know, came from the Cold War and when we traced that back, it went to the colonial era, right? Orientalism where the European powers assumed that Asia and the Middle East and Africa was stagnant, non-imaginative, and never changing, you know, including Japan in comparison to this newly arising European continent, right, that was dynamic and innovative and imaginative and so forth and so on. I think in the very foundation of all this, I think that kind of lens is inevitable because we are all—that's how we view the world, right? We start with what we already know, right? And we—that's our point of departure. I think a lot of—some of it cannot be avoided. But hopefully as we become more aware of it, we could there—there could be intellectual enterprises and practices that we can actively engage in order to overcome some
of the unavoidable biases and bring in new knowledge and new insights to supplement our existing knowledge system. So you ask about the more recent development, there's a couple of things, one is that my co-author and I began to analyze some ancient political Confucian text. Because Confucianism really is the storehouse of political knowledge in China that has been accumulated for, you know, 2,000 years. Again, from our point of view, we assume that there is no political knowledge, there is just ideology and dogmas, right? So I simply—I want to actually bypass that controversy and that debate and simply show this is the political knowledge in a Chinese mind and this knowledge is still applied. If we think about how much President Xi Jinping has been talking using these traditional Chinese values and political knowledge and wisdom that that's a true indicator of how that knowledge is still very much in practice. And I think it's going to be put in more practice as China becomes stronger and more confident in breaking away from the Western path. And again, you know, from our point of view when any country tries to break away from our path we go, how dare you, right? Our path is the proven—the only truthful path. But that's not how the other parts of the world see this and simply because they tried to explore their own path is not—that is not automatically a betrayal of the west, of what the west has accomplished and, you know, the great ideas the western civilizations have contributed to human race. I think we do need to overcome that sort of almost, what's that term, knee-jerk reaction, right, about that. Another thing is that I have been reading a lot of—yeah, I'll just—one more minute. Yeah. A lot about, about [inaudible], for example political thinkers from an authoritarian tradition, right, who looks back into that but in modern context look back into that part of their political system and history and their interpretation of it. Because I was saying earlier, I think the American academic community because we do not have our—this country has not had real authoritarian experiences in the way that the Asian countries, the European countries, the Middle Eastern countries had for hundreds of years and because America has been at the front line of fighting all that. So, we have no empathetic, we have no willing to emphasize with any of that, right? So the European thinkers actually have—therefore have many more interesting and complex and intriguing and inspiring analysis of their own authoritarian traditions. And I think those can be fruitfully used to enrich our understanding of authoritarianism in China and in, in the non-Western world.

AM: I'm going to ask one specific question and then we'll open it up for other questions. And so I mentioned all the things I loved about your book, I'm going to mention one thing that really troubled me.

NZ: OK.

AM: And it was a conclusion to Chapter 3.

NZ: OK.

AM: And you talked about Confucian moral disciplining based on optimistic view of human nature makes the act of pursuing self-interest only more discreet, covert, and harder to control.

NZ: Yes.
AM: And your conclusion was that in a Confusion system, perhaps, the abuse of power became, or becomes almost a necessary evil. And that there’s something about an outward moral perspective and Confucianism that make self-interest so—

NZ: Yes.

AM: —and toward a something—

NZ: Yeah.

AM: —that we do it in secret.

NZ: In secret.

AM: And once it becomes something that we do in secret, it becomes more abused.

NZ: Yeah.

AM: And I was sad about this because I always, I always look at these really beneficial ideas of Confucianism. And I just want to ask then, is this the fate of every Confusion influence polit—that by definition then abuse of official power—

NZ: Yeah.

AM: —and abuse of access is just the way it's going to be?

NZ: Yeah. That's a great question. A couple things, one is that I think I'm afraid almost is you think about the former presidents in Taiwan and in South Korea, half of them end up in jail. As soon as they got of their presidential office, there would be investigations into their corruption deeds. And the most recent scandal of the South Korean president is just the new example and the past President Ma Ying-jeou in Taiwan is under investigation now. So in China's own political system, the system understands these tendencies and cultural justifications and tolerated practices of corruption so well, they actually have—the C.C.P. has a very strong institutional organ that cracks down on corruption. But that organ is not an independently judicial organ, it is actually a committee within the Chinese Communist Party. So, you know, it is still part of the authoritarian structure. It, it—so the authoritarian structure means that, you know, everything is kind of a part of this one, right? You cannot have another branch. But not having that means that you just do not have the kind of opposition media, opposition parties, and all those organs that we rely on so much here to check on corruption. That is actually one thing that has brought down every single dynasty in Chinese politics for 2,000 years, right? It got so corrupt and then people just start to rebel. In the early 1950s, when the People's Republic of China was first founded, in a political meeting Mao was asked by someone from a non—he, he was an esteemed intellectual, but not a C.C.P. member. So he asked, “Chinese
politics has just been going through these cycles, right, the cyclical pattern, how are you going to break it off? And Mao said, well, because we have people as the masters in this new regime, right? We have people's court, we have people's congress, and then so forth and so on. So that's how we're going to break it off. Well, it turns out those organs are still part of the party state apparatus and very much, you know, that we openly call them the rubber stamps, right? They, they are organs basically that operates and reinforces this very centralized power mechanism. So I think you have very good reasons to be pessimistic about that. Yeah. That's a good catch.

AM: And we take it off.

NZ: Thank you.

AM: Thank you.

[Applause]

[Music]

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