Confronting authoritarian China:
Thinking about political responsibility

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the problem of political responsibility in the context of authoritarian China. By reappropriating Iris Young's social connection model of responsibility, I contend there is a shared, political, and everyday responsibility for the ordinary Chinese to confront the party-state. Inspired by Williams, Arendt, and Havel, I suggest five concerns central to discharging political responsibility in China: truthfulness, understanding, faith, judgment, and commitment. More concretely, there are three broad strategies to adopt, namely exit, voice, and loyalty, for people from different walks of life to act in accordance with the idea of political responsibility outlined. Holistically, I offer both a normative defense of political responsibility's relevance in contemporary Chinese political life and necessary suggestions to help guide citizens' actions.

Résumé

Cette thèse se concentre sur le problème de la responsabilité politique dans le contexte de la Chine autoritaire. En me réappropriant le cadre de la responsabilité de la connexion sociale d'Iris Young, je soutiens qu'il existe une responsabilité politique, quotidienne et partagée pour les Chinois ordinaires de faire face à l'État à partie unique. Inspiré par Williams, Arendt et Havel, je suggère cinq préoccupations centrales afin d'assumer la responsabilité politique en Chine: la véracité, la compréhension, la foi, le jugement et l'engagement. Plus concrètement, il y a trois grandes stratégies à adopter, à savoir la sortie, la voix et la loyauté, pour que les gens de différents milieux agissent conformément à l'idée de la responsabilité politique exposée. Dans son ensemble, je propose à la fois une défense normative de la pertinence de la responsabilité politique dans la vie politique chinoise contemporaine et des suggestions nécessaires pour aider à guider les actions citoyennes.

Acknowledgements

This thesis grows out of my deep-seated anxieties, disappointments, and speechlessness regarding the current state of the political in China and political theory's relevance to it. I have believed, as I do now, that the notion of political responsibility can bring some substance to resolving the dilemmas posed by the growingly sophisticated Chinese authoritarianism, and I hope I could convince or simply "woo" a few, to quote Arendt's quote of Kant, with this effort.

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To mom and grandpa I dedicate this thesis, who would be very happy to see its completion.

Introduction

This thesis focuses on the problem of political responsibility in the context of authoritarian China. It aims to provide a conceptual framework, both evaluative and prescriptive, for citizens to confront the party-state in a responsible manner. It is an attempt to resurrect political responsibility in an unlikely environment, and to think hard about ways of constructing a moral political life out of the ashes of injustices. More precisely, it asks the following questions: How should we conceive the special political responsibility for citizens in an authoritarian state? What is required for someone who is conscious of the prosperity the authoritarian regime brought about, anxious about the prevalent injustice entrenched in the system, and suspicious of the prospect of meaningful political change on the horizon, to *live* responsibly under such authoritarian rule with others? Since Chinese authoritarianism is the backdrop against which this thesis proceeds, the discussion in this introduction highlights important features of such a political environment to offer a rough sketch of the problems this thesis sets to encounter[1].

It is highly uncontroversial, at least in Anglophone academic and popular discourse, to regard China as an authoritarian state. China under the rule of the Communist Party is a one-party state that prohibits democratic elections, persecutes political dissidents, and harbors relatively few available channels of political change, all of which intensified under Xi Jinping's tenure. (Béja 2019) Authoritarianism as a background condition, or better, constraint, means that political agency is heavily reduced and can only be exercised at great cost. Confrontation with authoritarianism happens on a daily basis for the average Chinese, ranging from censorship of social media contents to random arrests. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to take political responsibility if one wishes to not merely act under the shadow of the party line considering the structural hostility to spontaneous political activities in China.

However, it is impossible to capture contemporary Chinese society in all its complexities relying only on the concept of authoritarianism. The other side of the coin, paradoxical as it

[1] Underlying this contention is a conscious theoretical position: against the mainstream of contemporary political theory which seeks ways of defending, improving, or delegitimizing liberal democracies, this thesis aims at dealing with the specific predicaments of living in an authoritarian state. It should be distinguished from efforts from theorists like Wendy Brown and colleagues (Brown, Gordon, and Pensky 2018) who see authoritarianism *mainly* as a lurking possibility for liberal democracies. The theory of political responsibility offered here is grounded and parochial to meet the particular challenges of confronting a resilient authoritarian China. It also differs from those theorizing political responsibility in a liberal democratic setting. (Gafarov 2019) For a similar exercise in the Yugoslavian context, see Duhacek 2002.

may be, is the growing prosperity and high level of political trust embedded in the society. (Zhong and Chen 2013) After the Reform and Opening Up initiated in the Deng era, great transformations in China lead to enlarged economic opportunities, technological progress, and more extensive contacts with the world. Improvements in life quality among ordinary Chinese citizens are evident and widespread, and the entire range of choices in private life available to ordinary Chinese citizens have grown exponentially. If we, following Young (2011, 37), understand oppression as "the institutional constraint on self-development" and domination as "the institutional constraint on self-determination", then it could be argued that the average Chinese experience is one characterized by an overflow of domination and comparatively less oppression. Or rather, while domination is an iron cage that one simply cannot escape, oppression operates in China more covertly and unequally, leaving some areas of human flourishing relatively unhampered. It is easy, therefore, to feel content about what one already has, insofar as she doesn't take the salient *political* issues of living in an authoritarian state poses seriously. As long as one chooses not to dissent openly and has no concern for politics, the chances are that this depoliticized life is not suffering but quite pleasant. On the other hand, the party-state has never ceased to play hardball with those who dare to call out its autocratic nature. (Fong 2019) Repression is perhaps secondary among the tools of governmentality, but it never goes away. (Yuhua Wang 2014) The softer side of Chinese authoritarianism is the affinity between traditional expectations of regimes and the ongoing effort of legitimizing the party's rule through sustained growth in performance. (Y. Tong 2011) Uninterrupted development along with skillful maneuvering of nationalism in an age of global hegemonic contestation makes the regime appealing to the vast majority of its subjects. (A. X. Wu 2020)

This uncanny combination of successful legitimation, repression, and co-optation (Gerschewski 2013) has important implications for not only the overall stability but also moral and political atmosphere of Chinese society. It leads to continuous alienation from politics for ordinary citizens, the popularization of a reductionist view of politics only as a sleight-of-hand of power, and, consequently, the prevalent insensitivity towards the normative consequences of political affairs. Satisfaction of desires, cynicism towards dogmatic propaganda, and the disjunction that runs in between render other-regarding virtues, including a concern for justice, hollow. (Ci 2014, 12–36) When political freedom is implicitly traded for hedonistic

consumerism, this lack of genuine participation and the lack of power it implies lead to a kind of plausible deniability that renounces the connection between individual citizens and their share of burden in the entrenchment of authoritarian rule. Since participatory or agonistic politics is not meaningfully possible[2], an adaptive preference of viewing politics as only instrumental and calculative becomes popular among ordinary Chinese citizens. Politics, from this perspective, is crudely "who gets what" or, more relevantly, "what I (can) get". In folk wisdom, politics is regarded as either dangerous territories better not set foot in or the promising, lucrative land where fame and wealth are guaranteed. Fairly likely a depoliticized moral skeptic, the ordinary Chinese must bear the lack of a common world where concerted political actions are carried out, which condemns them into a state of loneliness where interdependence in the public sphere cannot be found. (Arendt 1994, 336–37) Human relationships are tainted by a kind of civic mistrust regarding first politics itself, then anyone who's interested in unconventional political stances, and finally any seemingly genuine exchanges about politics. Acquiescence in the consequences of any political events, therefore, becomes a common coping mechanism that makes life easier: out of sight, out of mind.

The persistence of the System [*tizhi*, 体制] in Chinese political and social life adds another layer to the problem. Encompassing not only the official apparatus of the party-state but also quasi-state social organizations, state media, state-owned enterprises, public schools, and so on, the System is a gigantic, easily palpable presence with murky boundaries. Insiders and outsiders alike interact with elements of the System on a daily basis, and the perks of affiliating with it goes beyond mere economic stability to social prestige, interpersonal connections, and political security. Despite years of liberal reforms, it is still hard to get ahead in Chinese society without becoming an insider or at least a loyalist, and it is impossible to achieve significant social changes without some cooperation with the System. The upshot is as disinterested as one may be, it is a necessity to engage with the System if any meaningful social goals are to be realized. One implication is that the System is not *pure* evil: whatever social progress there may be in China, it is likely that part of the credit goes to someone in the System as well despite the acquiescence such engagements often presupposes[3]. Another is that any kind of political

[2] The "mass line" [群众路线] policies the CCP boasts are decidedly different from genuine bottom-up participatory politics.
[3] The experience of Chinese scholars/intellectuals in general and political scientists in particular is demonstrative of this

liberalization entails a radical material, institutional, and cognitive reconfiguration regarding the System. The enormity and comprehensiveness of such daunting transformations and the investments people already put in the System make imminent democratization, or any political reform of the sort, unlikely despite evidence of popular support for democracy[4]. (Z. Wang 2007)

Yet the System is different from the omnipotence of totalitarianism. It is misleading to talk about a "stringent logicality" of Chinese authoritarianism that Hannah Arendt finds in the two famous variants of totalitarianism. (Arendt 1994, 355) On the contrary, the very perplexing and contradictory realities of authoritarian China defy such logical rigidity. Part of the moral crisis in contemporary China owes its existence to this vacancy in viable ideologies: while the traditional socialist narrative cannot explain satisfactorily why China goes through its economic booms, a rosy teleology of modernization theory is unfit to account for either its failure to democratize or the unequal distribution of developmental gains. Nationalism, another salient candidate, is often interpreted in a way that overlooks the great ethnic diversity within China as well as the party's infamous destruction of China's historical legacies. The benefits and costs of living under authoritarianism partly explain China's polarized ideological spectrum, surprisingly without a strong anti-regime faction. (Pan and Xu 2018) Thus, people are justified in having different attitudes toward the System due to partly its socialization effect and partly their divergent experiences within in. Thus, theorizing political responsibility is hard business because it has to allow for reasonable attachment with the System while noting that some form of resistance, even not directed at dismantling it per se, must also be present.

As this introduction shows, Chinese authoritarianism conditions the pursuit of political responsibility. Although being politically responsible is hard in an authoritarian context, such political realities also render political responsibility timely, irretrievable, and inescapable. The rest of the thesis deals with this problem in greater detail. The first chapter offers a conceptual framework for defining political responsibility in authoritarian China. Building on Young's social connection model, I propose a shared but not distributed, political and not moral, and

practical dilemma of living under the shadow of authoritarianism. (Noakes 2014; Perry 2020; Reny 2016)

[4] It is impossible to discuss in detail the voluminous and divided literature on China's political future. In this thesis, I take this trend of closed opportunities for huge structural change as a given without further specification. In general, I side with John Chin (2018) on a pessimistic view of Chinese political development. For a perspective on elite politics, see the exchange between Joseph Fewsmith and Andrew Nathan (2019). However, it should be noted that my view is purely empirically driven; it doesn't imply that I don't support democratization *should it take place*, although I do have a hard time imagining *how it would take shape*.

everyday while not supererogatory understanding of political responsibility. Chapter two aims at theorizing more precisely what this responsibility entails. Drawing inspirations from Williams, Arendt, and Havel, I argue that five vital concerns, namely truthfulness, understanding, faith, judgment, and commitment, are central to taking up political responsibilities. The third chapter discusses viable strategies and potential pitfalls of being politically responsible in practice. Adopting Hirschman's tripartite formula of "exit, voice, and loyalty", I suggest three broad possible modes of thinking and action that may contribute to meaningfully taking political responsibility as well as how they may fail if carried out without judgment and reflection. I end the thesis with some concluding remarks on the insufficiencies of this account of political responsibility and the implications of the current political predicaments on my arguments.

Chapter One: Defining political responsibility in authoritarian China

This chapter offers a conceptual justification of political responsibility in the Chinese context. I start with a general reflection on how responsibility as a concept is conventionally used. Then, building on important insights from Arendt and Young, I offer some theoretical revisions to accommodate the particular political dilemmas regarding structural injustices common citizens face in authoritarian China. Finally, I suggest three crucial points of emphasis in this conception of political responsibility: it is shared, not distributed; political, not moral; everyday, not supererogatory. These markers allow me to probe deeper into the literature on political responsibility to make my position more robust.

1.1 Responsibility and its three uses

Responsibility denotes many things. In ordinary language, we seem to discuss responsibility most often in three separate yet related ways[5]. To begin with, a person should take responsibility for the consequences that she somewhat considers or is considered to have played, or not played[6], a causal role[7] in bringing about. It is first and foremost evaluative,

[5] Another train of thought links responsibility with capacity, but my impression is it's not as common sensical as the three I listed. For an overview of the "rich voices" of responsibility as life-planning, affection, and apology, see Sohn 2010, 7–11.

[6] This is the case of (culpable) negligence: by virtue of not participating in the causal chain of events, a person can be said to be responsible for the eventual result. David Miller mentions this as an example of "moral responsibility" in opposition to "causal responsibility"(Miller 2001, 455–56) , which I think is a mistake. A causal relationship is still implied in here even though it is the lack of prior action that gives rise to the ground of holding someone responsible.

[7] This is not the place to engage in how causation and liability should be defined. I simply wish to show that this sense of responsibility concerns the connection between one's action(s) and some consequence(s). Whatever the metaphysical nature

although we also, more often than not, attach a normative dimension to it: to have incurred *culpable* responsibility entails a moral failure, and failing to act on it counts surely as morally blameworthy. (Goodhart 2017) This understanding of responsibility as it relates to actions and their consequences is not infrequent in political theory literature. Weber in his famous lecture "Politics as a Vocation" mapped his ideal vision of modern politicians, one dimension of which is to embrace an "ethic of responsibility". (Weber 2004, 83) A responsible politician acts in light of the foreseeable consequences, good or bad, of their actions; they understand fully an overall evaluation of outcomes is required before any action whatever their convictions. (Satkunanandan 2014) It is also manifest in Philip Pettit's discussion of freedom as fitness to be held responsible. (Pettit 2001) Although his theory is general, it has clear political implications: political freedom presupposes the capacity to be held responsible in politics.

Weber's theory, however, points to another sense in which we conceptualize responsibility. It shows that specific responsibilities are connected to certain roles and positions. A politician may be required to observe an ethic of responsibility, but its content and structure can be drastically different from the responsibility of, say, a gatekeeper. Responsibility arises due to the expectations of the functions and moral values the role assumes. Therefore, it is not triggered by a set of actions and their consequences; instead, it expresses the normatively correct course of actions required of the agent in question. Role-specific responsibility can be politically relevant as well: political responsibility may be demanded through and in virtue of the social roles one finds oneself in. (R. Zheng 2018) This notion of responsibility is banal yet normative. Although we often plainly call the fulfilment of such responsibilities "doing one's job", failure in doing it can incur justified blames from others. Of course, the banality of responsibility diminishes if the jobs are extremely demanding: firemen are praiseworthy for putting out wildfires *despite* it simply being their jobs. What's more, *consistently* doing one's job implies another virtue, the virtue of what's often called "work ethic": being able to deliver in a timely, efficient, and uninterrupted fashion.

This brings us to the third use of responsibility. Someone is considered "responsible"

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of such connections, people often *feel* justified to talk about responsibility. Williams's famous example of the truck driver who runs over a kid by accident is instructive of how such problems may be complicated. (B. Williams 1981, 28) For a discussion in the context of responsibility, see Lu 2018, 48–50. For a critique of this intuition, see Lavin 2008, 4–8.

because of a certain disposition: they act consistently when facing situations where actions are needed. They can always be counted on to take on the burden which may or may not be a direct consequence of their previous actions, and they also have a better sense of when, and how, to act. As Young aptly has it, "a responsible person tries to deliberate about options before acting, makes choices that seem to be the best for all affected, and worries about how the consequences of his or her action may adversely affect others." (Young 2011b, 25) Such responsibilities rise and fall with the occasion and can be separated from specific roles. (Haydon 1978) A responsible person who drives buses for a living may, if equipped with proper skills, jump into the pool to save a drowning child. We also label individual actions as responsible, which shows a one-time good judgment and the courage to step up. This notion of responsibility is almost always a virtue except perhaps for the worrying relatives and friends: taking responsibility in this way undoubtedly has risks and can very realistically get people into trouble which they often could stay out of. Nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that the world would be a better place if there are more people with this disposition. To stretch this notion of responsibility to politics, it seems uncontroversial that any political community would be better off if its members were responsible citizens, villagers, and so forth.

1.2 From Arendt to Young: bound by political responsibility

The three folk senses of responsibility all have important political use. However, they don't exhaust the basis on which political responsibility can be grounded. Arendt in some of her writings has hinted on a conception of *political* responsibility that finds its root solely in membership[8], most clearly in the essay "Collective Responsibility": "There is such a thing as responsibility for things one has not done; one can be held liable for them…I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group (a collective) which no voluntary act of mine can dissolve." (Arendt 2003, 147–49) For Arendt, citizens of a state do not have political responsibility due to their actions, let alone their active participation in collective crimes. Instead, they are burdened with political responsibility, and could also be judged with regards to its fulfilment, insofar as they are born into this state and its state of affairs. Arendt poetically formulates this principle also

[8] For a survey of Arendt's concern on responsibility as it relates to disclosure and political actions, see G. Williams 2015.

in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: "It [political responsibility] means hardly more, generally speaking, than that every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors." (Arendt 2006b, 298) As long as we inherit the political legacies of our predecessors and are granted the capacity to orient such antecedents to new beginnings, we have the responsibility to take up the challenges posed by the historical contours of our political communities. (Alweiss 2003) The only way to resist this political responsibility is to "leave the community, and since no man can live without belonging to some community, this would simply mean to exchange one community for another and hence one kind of responsibility for another." (Arendt 2003, 150)

Perhaps most important to this discussion is Arendt's distinction between responsibility and guilt. "Guilt, unlike responsibility, always singles out; it is strictly personal." (Arendt 2003, 147) Guilt hinges on what one actually did whereas political responsibility is simply decided by membership. Taking political responsibility is different from being *personally* responsible, which always relates to guilt. "Morally speaking, it is as wrong to feel guilty without having done anything specific as it is to feel free of all guilt if one actually is guilty of something." (Arendt 2003, 28) Although Young finds this distinction useful, she disagrees with Arendt's assertion that responsibility can be attributed solely based on membership and calls it a "mystification". (Young 2011b, 79) "Instead, the political responsibilities derive from the social and economic structures in which they [people in general] act and mutually affect one another, and political institutions are an important means of their discharging those responsibilities." (Young 2004, 376) In other words, participation in the mutually shared social structures among all citizens is both necessary and sufficient for them to be bound by political responsibilities regarding their origins and fulfilment. (Gunnemyr 2020; Young 2006, 119)

Both Arendt's and Young's notions of political responsibility, then, take issue with the traditional "liability model" which suggests responsibility should be understood in the sense of guilt, that is, that it can only be derived from personal, blameworthy actions[9]. (Young 2011b, 97–104) This is significant for Arendt because the many Germans who didn't participate in the

[9] Beck challenges Young's interpretation of Arendt arguing that, among other things, Arendt's political responsibility can also imply blame. (Beck 2020) I think this conclusion is sound, although it does seem to me Arendt also consistently wants to differentiate guilt and responsibility and gives different evaluative stances to the two situations (see the above paragraph).

Holocaust themselves were nevertheless burdened with political responsibility. For Young, an alternative "social connection model" is needed to conceive of political responsibility for what she calls "structural injustices", which takes place when social processes enable the systemic domination of a large group of people when "many individuals and institutions [act] to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms." (Young 2011b, 52) Basically decent and ordinary people who nevertheless participate in social structures that eventually produce systemic injustices, according to this model, *also* bear political responsibilities. The social connection model stresses not *direct causality*, which cannot be obtained when actions are mediated by an intricate web of social institutions, norms, and interactions and results are often overdetermined, but the *social embeddedness* shared by all through their participation in the reproduction of background conditions that lead to structural injustices. (McKeown 2018; Payson 2012) Political responsibility in this model does not isolate only the most liable agents; instead, it claims victims also bear responsibilities, judges the background conditions of specific structural injustices, is more forward-looking than backward-looking, emphasizes people's shared responsibility, and can only be discharged through collective actions of individuals. (Young 2011b, 105–13)

Young's notion of political responsibility spares no one and doesn't confine itself within the border of the nation-state. (Young 2011b, 123–51) Nevertheless, Young's theory can inspire our thinking about political responsibility shared by citizens of a state as well. True, Young's work on responsibility is first aimed at dealing with problems of global justice, which differentiates her project from Arendt's "almost neo-Platonist" obsession with the *polis*. (Young 2011b, 80) However, if we do focus on dealing with the structural injustices happening within a nation-state and we acknowledge, as Young would like us to, the pervasiveness of social connections in this particular political community, Arendt's membership principle would seem much less implausible. The following sentence describing her social connection model can almost be viewed as a paraphrasing of Arendt: "Our responsibility derives from belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects." (Young 2011b, 105) To try to steer a middle way, political responsibility in a nation-state can be justified as stemming from state membership that enables more extensive, and certain exclusive forms of, participation in the

production, reproduction, and revision of the nation-state's social structures[10]. Membership, then, is not simply a *metaphysical* or *legal* state of belonging; instead, it implies more active and deeper interactions with one's fellow citizens in general than with people from afar; it is also deeply *sociological* and *agential*. Citizens of the same nation-state share a richer political responsibility because they are more intimately entangled in their shared structures. This political responsibility is unavoidable insofar as we participate in the social structures that hold the state together *and* continue to produce structural injustices. (Young 2011b, 86, 92)

In this sense, political responsibility arises both because of and in the form of a disposition of responsiveness. (Lavin 2008, 17–18, 61–119) The shared political predicaments, to be responded to by citizens and mediated through collectively enabled social structures, are the source of political responsibility; the specific ways of demonstrating this responsiveness are how it can be discharged. Taking responsibility through the social connection model means recognizing one's and others' situatedness and how these particularities are connected, which would lead to a constant revision of received wisdom on what an embodied agent of responsibility is. (Beausoleil 2017) This is not to deny that cultivating such responsiveness is hard. While Young suggests four conventional barriers to taking political responsibilities, namely reifying mutable human actions, denying connection, hanging too tightly on the demands of immediacy, and asserting "it's not my job", Schiff uncovers three more deep-rooted causes of problematic forms of narratives that underplay our responsibility: thoughtlessness, bad faith, and misrecognition. (Schiff 2014; Young 2011b, 154–70) Overcoming them can help to enhance responsiveness and is thus synonymous with taking political responsibility.

The social connection model of political responsibility is favorable for our task, finally, because it smoothly incorporates the three general senses of responsibility I suggested before. First, it stresses participation in structural injustices as a precondition of responsibility. Actions that *eventually* produce unjust effects, although mediated by a web of complicated structures, render agents politically responsible. Second, it elucidates how the role of citizen binds all of us in a specific type of responsibility: the political responsibility of addressing structural

[10] For an objection of this interpretation, see Michael Goodhart's footnote 41 at Goodhart 2017, 179–80. However, my point is not (primarily) to engage in the interpretive question of "getting Young right"; even if Young actually wishes to highlight participation in particular injustices, it is still the case that when all the social connections a nation-state enables are considered, nearly no one can be spared from them all. More on this in the next section.

injustices within the state. Finally, as structural injustices encompass a wide range of social practices, a disposition of responsibility is called for to sufficiently address these prevalent issues of justice. Surprisingly and satisfactorily, then, this notion of political responsibility covers all the conventional uses without overstretching its reach.

1.3 Reorienting Young: Chinese authoritarianism in the social connection model

Applying Young's social connection model straightforwardly, however, runs into problems in the Chinese context. Young explicitly distinguishes structural injustices from two other kinds of moral wrong: "the wrongful action of an individual agent or the repressive policies of a state." (Young 2011b, 52) It seems if state-related repressive policies can account for the injustice, then there's no structural injustice to begin with and thus no use for her novel model. Authoritarianism is of course replete with repressive policies issued by the state. Therefore, it seems an authoritarian regime like China hardly qualifies as a proper subject to study under the lens of structural injustice in Young's view from the start.

However, I want to investigate more thoroughly Young's typology of injustices. I think that authoritarianism *as such* (that is, not its specific repressive policies but as a subtype of regime) should be understood as a particular kind of structural injustice not reduceable to repressive state policies. It is a political regime that consistently produces and reproduces unjust, repressive policies where the citizenry, due to both structural constraints and their tacit agreement, stay oblivious and contribute to tyrannical results. Authoritarianism in general and its specific variant in China, the all-encompassing System, survives thanks essentially to the repressive apparatus of the state but also through structural interactions where individuals, organizations, and historical processes work together. (C. Lu 2017, 100) Ordinary citizens' blameless participation in the System is central to its existence; the System simply cannot function if only its repressive organs operate while its citizens don't play along. It is Chinese citizens' obedient behaviors that make it run at all. Authoritarianism taken as a whole, then, sits awkwardly between a standard sense of structural injustice and injustice as merely repressive policies because the injustice in question is neither a structural phenomenon nor a set of decisions made by agents of authority but rather the regime itself. Because of the indispensable role of common citizens and the complex structural dynamics involved, I venture to say Chinese authoritarianism is indeed a case of structural injustice, although an atypical

one[11]. I see it as a structural injustice that gives rise to multiple instances of institutional as well as interpersonal injustices where the "structural complicity" of individuals through *de facto* acquiescence of preexisting social conditions predominates. (Aragon and Jaggar 2018)

Compared to Young's paradigmatic cases, Chinese authoritarianism is distinct in at least three senses: First, unlike examples of persistent racial hierarchy or global labor sweatshops, the entirety of the Chinese population faces domination by the party-state and the System. As much as the distribution of domination is unequal, it is nevertheless all-encompassing. Therefore, System insiders and outsiders alike are dominated in China, making it difficult to pinpoint a group of "perpetrators" in the traditional sense[12]. It resembles how Havel describes the enslavement of both the greengrocers and the prime ministers in a post-totalitarian society, "for everyone is his or her own way is both a victim and supporter of the system." (Havel 1991b, 392, 2018, 33) Second, the entrenchment of authoritarian rule significantly curtails the reasonable amount of political agency an ordinary citizen can exercise vis-à-vis one living in a liberal democracy[13]. Freedoms of speech, association, and press are strongly inhibited, especially when the party-state itself is targeted. Empirically, contentious collective actions in China remain sporadic and localized while the party-state continues to tighten its grip. (Cai 2010) Finally, the prospects of the System's coming collapse remain dim. A great transformation of China's current political and socio-economic structures is unlikely, which makes any conscious efforts of dismantling the Leviathan hopelessly quixotic. Therefore, there is a profound gap between Young's theory and the Chinese realities: whereas members of society, especially those evidently privileged by certain structural injustices, can be called upon to collectively strive to effectively undermine these structures with *some* success, the very structure of authoritarianism defies such efforts in a daunting and systemic way. It effectively victimizes (almost) all Chinese, hinders their capacities to act, and renders their resistance

[11] Young also suggests that "[s]tructural injustice is not as horrible as systematically perpetrated genocide; I think of it as 'ordinary' injustice." (Young 2011b, 93) A totalitarian system, then, would not count as structural injustice because it is too horrendous. One may reasonably question whether Chinese authoritarianism, with its repressive policies on ethnic minorities, especially the Uyghurs, counts as "ordinary". I bracket this question for now and revisit it in the conclusion.

[12] This is not to deny that in specific contexts the perpetrator-victim distinction still makes much sense. For example, when thinking about gender domination in China, women and other gender minorities are clearly at a disadvantage compared to (heterosexual) men. Communist party members also enjoy greater structural advantages compared with party outsiders. The point is rather that it is not hard to find other contexts where such "perpetrators" are also dominated (sometimes without an identifiable entity or group) and that virtually everyone in China is dominated due to the nature of its regime.

[13] A similar problem was signified by Arendt in the Nazi German context and Young concurred on this. See Arendt 2003, 45; Beck 2020, 7; Young 2011, 92–93.

meaningless if the end-goal is the System's downfall.

If Chinese authoritarianism poses challenges to the applicability of Young's social connection model in this context, then certain revisions in its outlook must be made for it to make sense, especially regarding its focus on collective action whose ultimate aim is the dismantling of structural injustices themselves. This updated model must fit three desiderata.

First, it must accommodate the divergent roles and positions people take vis-à-vis the System. Call it the *plurality of positionality constraint*. In the Chinese context, it means that both regime insiders and outsiders should be able to find *some* viable actions to be politically responsible. Due to the pervasiveness of the System, it is simply unrealistic to uphold a wide range of meaningful and transformative professions and social occupations without dealing with and showing some (limited and perhaps disingenuous) allegiance to the existing political authority. (S. Liu and Halliday 2011) It is an inevitable fact in China that someone who wants to help fellow citizens by way of public service would have to join the party to advance to positions with substantial power, an investigative journalist must endure censorship and observe official "red lines" in publishing muckraking pieces, and a college professor who studied political theory yet landed in a position at a "Marxism Studies" department, the *de facto* indoctrination and propaganda branch in all Chinese higher education institutions, has no option but to teach dogmatic Marxist-Leninist interpretations and, according to recent developments, Xi Jinping thought. Moreover, these real-existing figures, despite their aversion to certain practices of the party-state, may nevertheless believe, all things considered, that the System yields more benefits than not. However, this doesn't mean those who accept positions in the System and, accordingly, some norms and duties associated with them, cannot discharge political responsibility *at all*. Insiders act responsibly when they transcend the mere dictates of their official capacities, including exposing the truth, showing understanding to disagreeing parties without responding in soundbites, having faith in a common humanity, using scrupulous judgment regarding political actions, and upholding commitments of not doing evil and taking necessary risks. These concerns will be discussed in the next chapter.

Second, it should make explicit attainable ways of taking up political responsibilities under authoritarianism without resorting to open defiance in the form of collective actions. Call it the *realistic action constraint*. In other words, it must leave room for subtler forms of being

politically responsible. Havel considers "living in the truth" the fundamental response to the political evil of post-totalitarianism. For him, the manifestation of such living "can be any means by which a person or group revolts against manipulation: anything from a letter by intellectuals to a workers' strike, from a rock concert to a student demonstration, from refusing to vote in the farcical elections, to making an open speech at some official congress, or even a hunger strike, for instance." (Havel 2018, 44–45) None of these acts count as a straight-out concerted attack on the System itself, and as the third chapter of this thesis will show, there are considerably more modes of actions that can fulfill the requirement of being politically responsible. These acts are also political in nature because they have the potential of transforming, no matter how incrementally to start with, interactions between citizens and their expectations regarding such encounters.

Finally, it must elucidate paths of being politically responsible despite unpromising prospects of democratization and liberalization in contemporary China. Call it the *protracted authoritarianism constraint*. The question "what is my role in changing the system" (R. Zheng 2018) must be asked alongside the perhaps more pressing and certainly more sobering question of "what part of the system, if any, can really be changed". A theory of political responsibility would be patronizing and practically unhelpful for agents in authoritarian contexts if it is assumed that regime change is on the horizon and therefore is the *only* relevant matter at hand. It simplifies the authoritarian experience and the unique tasks it poses, which include not only a quest for fundamental structural changes but also the necessity and inevitability of living *with* authoritarianism during the process. This existential question becomes second in importance and is effectively sidestepped in light of a linear vision of history, one that claims either democracy will emerge any time and we should start planning for authoritarian China's afterlife (e.g. Liu 2018) or democracy is imperative to *any* meaningful change there is and we shall be concerned with defending this *Weltanschauung* predominantly (e.g. Ci 2019). On the contrary, a focus on how political responsibility can be discharged even under ongoing unfavorable conditions at least has the potential of demonstrating how certain changes *can* be possible. As Williams reminds us, "[u]topian thought is not necessarily frivolous, but the nearer political thought gets to action…the more likely it is to be frivolous if it is utopian." (B. Williams 2008, 25) Prescriptions on political responsibility in an authoritarian context, then, must prioritize

working *within* this framework no matter the hope of going *beyond* it.

The aims of political responsibility, in this sense, are not necessarily connected to regime change but rather some other relevant political values and projects. It goes beyond a pursuit of justice *per se* to include also the cultivation of certain interpersonal relations in a perpetually dark time, and the focus of theorizing is shifted from a coming future to a staying present of tyranny. (Stivers 2004) Instead of waiting for a Godotian democratic future, theorists also have an imperative to focus on the here and now, on how acts of responsible manners are actually carried out under realistic constraints and despite the inevitable moral conflicts along with their necessarily unsatisfactory resolution in a (specifically) non-ideal world of authoritarianism. The point is to be prima facie sympathetic to those who are struggling and will continue to struggle in authoritarian China for taking political responsibilities and recognize the profound difficulties they face *despite* their lack of open advocacy for (instant) regime change.

A distinction between political responsibility and political obligation can be instructive here. What fundamentally differentiates political responsibility and political obligation is the object to which such duties are owed. Political obligation is owed to the regime or government one finds oneself under. That is to say, an individual is politically obligated to follow the dictates of the state either as a citizen, a resident, or a passer-by[14]. The existence and nature of political obligation are often discussed together with the legitimacy of the regime. If the state is scathingly unjust, then no political obligation may normatively hold (Scheffler 2018, 9), even though the state still *demands* obedience. An authoritarian state often asks for a high level of compliance precisely because it fears subversion, and contemporary China is a staggering example with its state-of-the-art surveillance technologies and stability maintenance apparatus. Political responsibility is different; it is owed to the political community one finds oneself in and its members generally. More precisely, being politically responsible in China means not that one is fulfilling their obligations toward the party-state or the System, but rather doing their part as a member of the shared political world that defines their blessings and sufferings as Chinese. Instead of asking "should I obey this seemingly unjustified order or legal code", a more relevant question in authoritarian China should be "considering my bonds with my fellow

[14] This of course only concerns the general obligation of obeying the law; other political obligations like a duty to join the army or a duty to serve in the jury are conventionally only applicable to legal citizens.

citizens and the predicaments we collectively face, what should I do to better live with them?" Therefore, it also covers a wider spectrum of actions than what political obligation is concerned. Ceasing to respond passively to the dictates of the party-state when thinking about political obligations, citizens in a framework of political responsibility react positively to their concrete practical dilemmas where the party-state itself becomes, significantly still, the background condition[15]. The calling of responsibility is not undermined but enhanced in this unfavorable political setting precisely because the party-state is an illegitimate or morally compromised authority, which makes citizens ultimately accountable only to *themselves* in politics.

1.4 Shared not distributed

In this and the following two sections, I discuss three contrasting pairs of characteristics to further clarify the notion of political responsibility I use. To start with, I see political responsibility in China as a *shared* one without the need to investigate its proper distribution.

To be clear, I do not deny that people can incur personal responsibility in the entrenchment of the System in general and the authoritarian political regime in particular due to their actions. (Stilz 2011, 191) They can be blameworthy on an individual level due to the specific part they played in the System's injustices. (Beck 2020, 14) Moreover, I don't think it's implausible to normatively demand greater political responsibility to rectify the injustices of the System from those who have greater personal responsibility for its continued survival. (Neuhäuser 2014) Those who are relatively privileged in the System may also have greater responsibility. (Cudd 2006, 195–97) Crucial social groups and organizations, including but certainly not limited to the Communist Party, also bear responsibility, which extends, accordingly, to their members. (Stahl 2017) But I don't think this personal responsibility, understood through the traditional liability model as an accurately calculated portion of accumulated injustices, should be the *only*, or indeed *primary*, basis on which political responsibility should be construed in authoritarian China[16]. It is not *wrong* so much as not particularly *relevant*.

There are two reasons behind this position[17]. First, it is extremely difficult to determine

[15] For an alternative view that conceptualizes political obligation from a pragmatist perspective and bridges the difference I see between the two concepts in question, see Fossen 2014.

[16] I think this is also Young's position when she says her conception of responsibility "does not assume blame, guilt, or liability as the primary way of assigning responsibility." (Young 2011b, 40–41) She does seem to posit a too stringent contrast between the two ways of thinking about responsibility as commentators often note, but nothing about the current model prevents her from including (though not *inviting*) issues of blame provided they stay in the proper place.

[17] Another reason may be, to re-appropriate a Weberian insight, that excessive concern over the distribution of responsibility

what share of personal responsibility each individual actually owes in a socio-political complex as intricate as China[18]. While it may be straightforward to point out that political leaders governing Xinjiang are personally responsible for, to put it mildly, discriminatory ethnic policies, it becomes difficult to ascertain the personal responsibility of, say, a worker in a state-owned enterprise in Shanghai on the same subject. She clearly has some responsibilities since her output adds to the profit to the enterprise, although there's no wrongdoing in her *doing her job*. The source of responsibility is, characteristically, obedience alone. (Abdel-Nour 2016) Since SOEs in China contribute enormously to the party-state's revenues and often have party branches to oversee their productive activities, these corporations are, by no small measures, a part of the System. But it would seem absurd to her (and to me) if someone accuses her of participating in human rights violations; she is, in this sense, blameless. (Atenasio 2019) Focusing on personal responsibility predominantly means focusing on the powerful and expecting them to change, perhaps based on a sudden revelation. Negotiating with the devil by offering practically nothing is not very tempting for it to comply; to hope that moral burden alone will induce those responsible to change is utopian. It would make sense to retroactively account for the responsibility *and* guilt of individuals after a regime change, but to push too hard on this point drastically misreads contemporary Chinese politics.

This relates to my second reason for seeing political responsibility as shared while not probing further its distribution. Distributing responsibilities means that given the gravity of the consequences, the perpetrators, so to speak, are held accountable due to the share of their *contribution*[19]. I think this view does not entirely capture the authoritarian reality, that is, these perpetrators are also, by default, *victims*[20]. On a personal level, authoritarian subjects incur responsibilities through participation in certain injustices mediated by the Systems and its

prioritizes a kind of calculative thinking over a more comprehensive moral consciousness. (Satkunanandan 2014) I think this is also an underlying theme in Young when she frequently casts the liability model in doubt.

[18] Although it is not impossible *a priori*. For example, Tamara Jugov and Lea Ypi's paper on how responsibility can be assigned based on degrees of epistemic opacity, or lack of vocabulary to decipher injustices, is an instructive first step, but it still is but a (small) piece in the puzzle. (Jugov and Ypi 2019) I leave the work to future interested scholars to pursue it.

[19] Distribution also often entails zero-sum partitioning: when one party is assigned more responsibility, the other party's responsibilities decrease. I don't think this is sound, and my main objection to Atenasio's paper is on this (implicit) assumption of his: situating more responsibility on blameworthy subjects (entrepreneurs of global garment businesses or Xinjiang's party secretary) doesn't mean "blameless" subjects (fashion consumers or the Shanghai worker) are not responsible at all. This is central to Young's notion of structural injustice. See Atenasio 2019, esp. 154-162, for his view.

[20] This is why I think, *contra* Abdel-Nour, that subjects of an authoritarian state like China also have remedial political responsibility: these subject owe such responsibility to *themselves collectively* to rectify injustice. (Abdel-Nour 2016)

various political, social, and cultural dynamics but also through suffering injustices. While the perpetrating, so to speak, side operates differently in each scenario, what the victimized side produces remains constant. This duality implies that they are connected universally by a responsibility through a common experience of suffering and such political responsibility is owed to their fellow citizens. It is hard to see how the intensity of suffering directly translates to the amount of responsibility one should discharge[21], but this view certainly shows how the distributive paradigm doesn't suit neatly with this notion of political responsibility: the suffering of one person doesn't diminish if another suffers more. Since it is the structural condition of prevailing injustices that connect citizens of authoritarianism, focusing on the shared nature of responsibility seems more appropriate than stressing its distribution.

1.5 Political not moral

Three reasons come to mind to differentiate this overtly political notion of responsibility from an essentially moral one. First, in discharging this responsibility, each individual is, and should consider themselves to be, acting within and in response to their shared *political* predicament of authoritarianism. Political responsibilities owe their existence to this common background of domination and thus cannot be deduced in a decontextualized, *pro tanto* manner. (Vázquez-Arroyo 2016, 14–20) Political responsibility in authoritarian China is political because it embodies a way of confronting the silently accepted rules of the game without endorsing the illusion that one can obtain moral self-sufficiency when living under it: to survive in or alongside the System is to be continuously influenced by it. Finding refuge in a kind of quasi-liberal, atomic imagination that one's success and fame are completely self-owning is superfically reassuring but also deeply ignorant of the political realities. The specter of a depoliticized and thus heavily distorted liberalism is haunting China with its fascination of an individualistic notion of responsibility that suggests everyone can and should be concerned *only* with their own personal life trajectory. (Lavin 2008, 3–18) This view discounts profoundly how authoritarianism both generally constrains the available range of choices and favors certain members disproportionately, either by offering ostensible privileges or reducing the likelihood of arbitrary intervention.

[21] On the one hand, the more suffering one has, the more one should be responsible for publicizing such suffering to make others aware. On the other, this runs the risk of not blaming but demanding too much from the victims.

Nevertheless, the liberal-republican distinction between the public and the private is quite useful in this context insofar as private interests, which are never in short supply in this context, can easily subsume concerns that are public in nature. Therefore, this notion of political responsibility is political since it aims at fostering relations between *political equals* instead of mere kindness, civility, and toleration in the private sphere. (Holmes 2008, 105) In this sense, it is not enough that people are treated in a reasonable manner; the reason behind this demeanor should also be that they are regarded as fellow *citizens*. It wouldn't be a certain demonstration of political responsibility if I don't turn you in to the cyberpolice after you posted politically sensitive opinions because you are my friend or I'm generally a compassionate person. Instead, thinking in a *politically* responsible way implies the reasoning behind my behavior is that I don't think the cyberpolice enjoys the authority it claims to have in this case or, more simply, because I don't think this is the proper way of treating a fellow citizen. This is not to deny that moral reasoning under authoritarianism is often complicated and messy: people don't want their close ones to be punished unjustly almost never primarily because they think of them as citizens first and they shouldn't. My point is that an ideal of citizen-to-citizen relations should be what motivates and guides this notion of political responsibility and collapsing it into morality in general risks missing what's at stake: the capacity of interacting with random peers without *assuming* lack of trust, kindness, and respect. This capacity surely doesn't exhaust what civic relations should mean: it is supposed to include also, among other things, the ease with which one can interact and engage in heavy polemics about public matters without baseless attacks on characters. (Vázquez-Arroyo 2016, 3–4) But again, it is not reducible to a general manner of treating acquaintances; instead, it has an undoubtedly political foundation.

Finally, the political in political responsibility highlights the potential *political* implications of actions in China's contained yet still diverse public sphere. The consequences of being politically irresponsible are grave. Denying political responsibility means effectively abandoning one's identity as a citizen, which not only demonstrates the moral defects of hypocrisy and waywardness but also a particular disregard of the health of the political community's civic life in solidarity. (Ci 2014, 4–5) A China with no whistleblowers like Dr. Li Wenliang would be searching endlessly in vain for even the tiniest bits of truth; a China replete with snitches who report to the authorities all "deviant speeches" would return to a state of

totalitarian terror. In the Chinese context, it is almost instictive to regard the idea of "political implications" [*zhengzhi houguo*, 政治后果] as straightforwardly political implications for one's personal fate, that is, what would the party-state do to me if I were to take actions. Another no less perverted, collectivist understanding of the term suggests only the public images, interests, and political careers of the higher-ups should be duly considered. Its grammar often gives rise to questions like: "Haven't you realized the political implications for such-and-such leaders, departments/organizations, or your motherland?" Both interpretations must be rejected. The idea of political implication I have in mind is less indiviudalistic than the first use and more grounded than the second. It concerns the quality of interactions between the state and society, the powerful and the weak, and purportedly equal citizens. Taking political responsibility in authoritarian China, then, amounts to taking seriously the possible disruptions and degradations one's seemingly innocent choices may have towards this fragile and imperfect civic life. (Holmes 2008, 82–86) Tradeoffs are indeed inevitable, but they should not be made whimsically, selfishly, or self-deceptively. They are political in nature because, for better or worse, they have an impact on the however limited shared space of existence belonging to all.

1.6 Everyday not supererogatory

Lastly, I contend that the conception of political responsibility discussed here revolves around everyday practices, not exceptional actions and heroic figures. To be sure, this is certainly not to discredit the role of all-out regime dissidents in China like, most famously, Liu Xiaobo. Apart from his active participation in the 1989 Tiananmen protests, Liu, among others, drafted the "Charter 08" advocating comprehensive political reform in China, which leads to a Nobel Prize in Peace and an eleven-year sentence in jail. (Cheek 2015, 263) As Havel notes in his foreword to Liu's translated anthology, Liu's main contribution in putting the Charter out in the open is precisely that: demonstrating that the naked truth can be publicly naked. The document also cemented connections between like-minded people in all walks of life more firmly. (Havel 2012) In recent years, Xu Zhangrun, a law professor at the prestigious Tsinghua University, underwent suspension from teaching, detention, and house arrest, for speaking out against Xi Jinping, the mishandling of the coronavirus crisis at its onset, and other political issues in China in a series of open letters. Professor Xu's courageous moves were met with severe consequences, although he is not banned from reading. He apparently finds inspiration

from Arendt's essay "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship" (Barmé 2019) and his actions certainly resembled the sense of judgment that Arendt has in mind. (Veg 2020)

There are more examples like these and the commonality between them is the prominence of the individuals involved. They are elites, and their modes of thinking and action elitist. Elitism has its place in profound political changes like democratic transitions, as a glimpse of relevant compararive politics literature would attest, but it is not very useful for cultivating dispositions of responsibility among ordinary citizens: think of the Shanghai worker and how she would react if someone compares her to a subject of Nazi Germany[22] and tosses her a link to Arendt's essay. While an intellectual perspective is important, it cannot foster political responsibility for all. To ask everyone to take responsibility in a supererogatory way is to misconstrue reality; to assume everyone will do so is to miss the heroism. (Goodhart 2017, 190)

What about extraordinary actions by ordinary citizens? Hayward, when discussing dismantling racial structural injustice, asserts that only disruptive politics can be sufficient for making people aware of their ignorance. (Hayward 2017) I concede to this point: if the end-goal is to take down the System, then yes, people would have to organize, disrupt, and then rebuild. Structural authoritarianism (as opposed to political tyranny) in China will be very unlikely to disappear without coordinated, organized effort from ordinary citizens. But the specificity of Chinese authoritarianism (under Xi) makes such mobilization extremely risky and practically impossible. Without playing down the heroism of those who challenge the mandate of the party-state in direct confrontation collectively, it is not very prudent to suggest a path this radical when the conditions are so hostile. As important as it may be, political responsibility under such circumstances *cannot* include a duty to resist in the sense of consciously, continuously, and collectively subverting the regime[23]. (Cudd 2006, 198–99) Such

[22] Whether this comparison is fair in itself is, of course, another (legitimate) topic.

[23] This latter qualification is important because it puts me effectively in the same camp as Delmas, who sees resistance as expressing "broadly, an opposition and refusal to conform to the established institutions and norms, including cultural values, social practices, and laws". (Delmas 2018, 10) As I will show, my theory of political responsibility is entirely compatible with this understanding. I deviate from her more radical conceptualization that "[r]esisting injustice involves refusing to cooperate with the mechanisms that produce and sustain it." (Delmas 2018, 16) But such deviation is only needed if cooperation is understood as unprincipled collusion or thoughtless obedience, which I of course do not endorse. Ann Cudd's position on resistance, however, is less compatible with my view and poses a challenge. She suggests "[a] person or group resists only when they act in a way that could result in lessening oppression or sending a message of revolt or outrage to someone." (Cudd 2006, 192) In other words, resistance is present only when consequently oppression decreases or epistemologically the message of anti-oppression is straightforward. Anything falls short of both criteria for Cudd is not resistance and also not morally praiseworthy. (Cudd 2006, 193) I think this is a flawed position. I hope to show in the next chapter how this is so, especially regarding the intricacies of Chinese authoritarianism.

resistance certainly demonstrates immense courage and an admirable sense of responsibility. But I think there can be some less demanding ways of discharging this political responsibility through "creative participation" in unexpected venues. (Micheletti 2011)

Thoreau's position in his well-known "Resistance to Civil Government" is illustrative here. It strikes me that his practices of undermining injustices, those of refusing to serve in the army, vote in elections, or pay his taxes as well as being willing going to jail for the latter, are actually quite radical compared with how people normally react. But he doesn't go further than this[24], because "[t]hey take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad." (Thoreau 1992, 677) Thoreau's attitude is especially relevant because it shows how making one's peace with political evils might be as important as, though certainly not *prior to*, taking issue with them. "If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too." (Thoreau 1992, 674–75) Living everyday lives under authoritarianism is a suffering in itself, and seeking political responsibility to remedy the suffering is minimally transformative. After all, it is the everyday activities people engage in that constitute the authoritarian state. (Abdel-Nour 2016) Looking at ways of being politically responsible in everyday settings is, as Esquith suggests, "a more commonplace story about mapping the rivers and roads of a new territory…[yet] it does mean that we must be prepared to look in some unfamiliar places, and step out onto the road before it has been fully paved." (Esquith 2010, 4) In the remaining two chapters, following this spirit, I will take on this journey, muddling through and paving the road ahead simultaneously.

Chapter Two: Vital concerns: truthfulness, understanding, faith, judgment, and commitment

In this chapter, I move from what grounds political responsibility to what taking political responsibility entails in authoritarian China. What exactly can be included in a theory of political responsibility that finds its basis on a shared, political, and everyday vision? I propose

[24] Although Thoreau did take an active part in mobilizing for the abolition movement, this text unequivocally demonstrates his aversion to politics and the idea that there's no *duty* to participate.

five vital concerns necessary for proper discharging of political responsibility: truthfulness, understanding, faith, judgment, and commitment. These five concerns organically structure political responsibility in authoritarian China that signifies a quest for justice as well as each individual's capacity as citizens. They are bounded in scope and moderate in orientation, yet the political implications of embracing such concerns *en masse* can be truly transformative.

2.1 Truthfulness

In China, where truths are hard to find, highly disputed, and discredited as an ideal in a depoliticized political atmosphere, the hope to reinvigorate meaningful and mutually illuminating dialogs is to start with pieces of truthfulness, facts existing all along yet regularly ignored due to ideological prejudices or difficult to access because of official censorship[25]. While truth-telling is itself an act of discharging political responsibility, the hope also crucially lies in its potential effects of cultivating the belief in the necessity of such responsibility. The value of truthfulness is thus highly situated: I don't purport to offer a comprehensive view on the place of truth in politics[26], but instead focus on why in the Chinese context the concern of truthfulness is indispensable for discharging political responsibility.

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams defends a gloomy conclusion: it is impossible to convince a sincere amoralist through any ethical theory. If she is beyond the realm of ethics, then philosophy, understood as the art of rational discourse, can provide no Archimedean point. (B. Williams 2011, 30) Therefore, the task of philosophy cannot be to yield an ethical theory that aims at converting non-believers or even offering certainty to those already on board; instead, it would be better off by suggesting "critique[s] of ethical beliefs and ideas" to those who have already asked the Socratic question of "how should I live". (B. Williams 2011, 19) In this vein, China seems precisely a case where political ethics as opposed to the egoistic concerns of strictly personal, material interests and the "degenerate realism" of

[25] Major findings suggest the Chinese authorities not only selectively censor information but also fabricate opinions. (King, Pan, and Roberts 2013, 2017; Lorentzen 2014) For us, however, the main problem with censorship is not so much the inability of *directly* accessing sensitive information (concerned people are likely to find bypasses anyway) but rather the scant *visibility* (as opposed to existence and even availability) of certain information, narratives, and opinions on the Chinese Internet. People tend to concentrate on more culturally familiar sources of information even given full access. (Taneja and Wu 2014) The fact that certain truthful coverages cannot be publicly disseminated in mainstream Chinese media delegitimizes them for a particularly skeptical audience that tend to view all negative standpoints on China as "foreign propaganda". The same goes for a cluster of anti-regime dissenters who trust nothing coming from mainstream Chinese media. The structure of censorship, then, fosters unhealthy contrarian attitudes for both sides, hindering meaningful dialogs.

[26] For different views on the place of truth in politics from Arendt, Havel, and Williams, see respectively Arendt 2006, 223–59; Havel 1991, 247–48; Williams 2004, 206–32.

total rationalization of political realities does not rank as high. (Havel 1991b, 98–99; Yan 2021)

Fortunately, many Chinese do not oppose incorporating ethical concerns in politics as such but rather are ambivalent about the practical benefits of doing so. (Ci 2014, 216) Since "our and other's convictions have to a great degree been the product of previous historical conditions, and of an obscure mixture of beliefs (many incompatible with one another), passions, interests, and so forth," (B. Williams 2008, 12–13) these convictions could be influenced, in various degrees, by being exposed to different perspectives and *facts*. Encountering previously unknown moral views, explanatory frameworks, and evidence of facts can lead to a cognitive "crisis" that disorients and potentially reshapes one's ethical outlook on what concerns matter in politics. (Schiff 2014, 28–29) Efforts of narrating past injustices can also invoke a sense of responsibility and inform distinct approaches of redress. (Temin and Dahl 2017)

In an authoritarian context, telling the truth or adopting narratives that depart from official propaganda is in itself an act against tyranny. (B. Williams 2004, 207–9) For Havel, "[i]n the post-totalitarian system, therefore, living within the truth.....has an unambiguous *political* dimension. If the main pillar of the system is living a lie, then it is not surprising that the fundamental threat to it is living the truth. This is why it must be suppressed more severely than anything else." (Havel 2018, 40) Telling the truth naturally constitutes the core of discharging political responsibility because it challenges the seemingly predominant ideology through demonstrating individual agency. (Falk 2018) There's always hope that by publicizing truthful accounts they "will help to overcome the alienation and exclusion felt by those who have suffered from wrongs, and……therefore, re-legitimise the polity." (Holmes 2008, 235)

I agree with Havel that telling the truth itself can have emancipatory consequences and always entails profound courage. Specific and concrete arguments about truth can go a long way, perhaps longer than ideological contentions. (Havel 1991a, 80–82) Havel's contribution also signals how the public and the private can be linked through a notion of individualized responsibility that locates public concerns at its center. (Gümplová 2014) I don't think Havel's insight is directly relevant to the contemporary Chinese context[27], however, since he believes

[27] This qualification is important because his discussions certainly relate more directly to the generation of Cultural Revolution or even Tiananmen, among whom a quest for (their own) justice through *politics* is very much embedded in their memories. (Kleinman 2011, 269–72) I seriously doubt how much of this holds true among the younger Chinese.

telling the truth is mostly about stating the obvious and revealing what's already common sense to all the repressed in saying "the emperor is naked". (Havel 2018, 39) The problem in China is not so much about educated condonement[28] but rather *genuine ignorance* and the *cynicism* it breeds: official censorship and propaganda combined with delicately crafted narratives make it genuinely difficult to be educated about the plight of various oppressed individuals and groups. The same critique applies to Arendt as well when she asserts the opposite of factual truth is solely the blatant lie. (Arendt 2006a, 245) Making known the unknown can constitute a much-needed antidote to the widespread cynicism among Chinese nourished by the seemingly subversive political satire because the latter merely plays with what's already common knowledge or at least what's conceivable. (Shao and Liu 2019) Rational and persuasive presentations of evidence can also potentially avoid the problem of conflating facts with mere opinions. In other words, what's at stake particularly in the Chinese context is to go beyond the commonly shared reservoir of factual knowledge and to make manifest the sufferings, injustices, and evils in Chinese politics not yet universally recognized. *Pace* Arendt, the truth-seekers and truthtellers do *act* despite not being in a situation where "everybody lies about everything of importance". (Arendt 2006a, 247) When something of importance is not disseminated widely in public, countering this silence is itself political action *par excellence*. (Sari 2018) To circle back to Havel, telling the truth *is* discharging political responsibility.

Moreover, truthfulness matters because people's moral sensibilities can be provoked, transformed, and applied into actions if they encounter a broader range of factual truth. A notable difference between Chinese and Czech (and East European in general) post-Stalinisms is that in the latter the regime's moral bankruptcy[29] was certain. On the contrary, the majority of Chinese citizens still display an exceptionally high level of trust in the party-state[30]. (Tang

[28] To clarify, there are certainly cases of educated condonement in the Chinese academia, where the principle of "academic freedom with disciplined publication" [学术有自由，发表有纪律, *xueshu you ziyou fabiao you jilü*] has long been the norm. One salient example would be China's IR scholars, many among whom regard their responsibility mostly in providing "post hoc justification and legitimation" for decisions made by the higher-ups. (Y. Zhang 2007, 111) But this is not the same for the ordinary Chinese who rely on domestic sources where certain information cannot be accessed and critical perspectives are often discredited or marginalized.

[29] I take moral bankruptcy to be distinct from ideological bankruptcy, which is evident in the Chinese case. (C. Chen 2016, 96–125; Ci 2014, 24–36; Nathan 2003) As much as the party-state's ruling philosophy is incoherent and decidedly pragmatic, the elasticity it offers may be precisely why it is so successful in pushing for economic growth and convincing the bulk of its population of its legitimacy while also adopting selective yet repressive measures when needed.

[30] Although recent findings suggest a downward trend in political trust at both local and central levels, the level of discontent still seems manageable. (D. Chen 2017; L. Li 2016, 2020; Wu, Li, and Song 2020) Meanwhile, the long-term effects of the Covid-19 outbreak on political trust are still too early to call. (Y. Lu, Pan, and Xu 2020; C. Zhang 2020)

2016) This suggests the lack of prevalent perceptions of political injustice among the ordinary Chinese. Claims of moral and rational truth on political matters resonate poorly among the Chinese audience for different reasons in the East European context: while the public as Havel has it is skeptical about the prospects of political changes because they suspect nothing will improve *empirically*, in China a dominant demography don't seem to believe in the *theoretical* notion of political improvement at all. (Havel 2018, 60) Therefore, a realistic estimate suggests a necessary detour, one of communicating facts *without* invoking moralizing and potentially condescending undertones to influence the perspectives of such skeptics. It is also less demanding than Schiff's position where responsiveness finds its root in the acknowledgment of "our ontological condition like plurality, freedom, and contingency." (Schiff 2014, 37) Without agreements on basic facts, it seems utopian to aim for convergence on ontological questions. The ethic of truthfulness, then, should come logically prior to any other substantive political concerns that may hold robust in the Chinese context.

But what is the content of this ethic? Here, we may turn to Williams. For him, truthfulness incorporates two separate yet interrelated virtues: accuracy and sincerity. Accuracy suggests "do[ing] the best you can to acquire true beliefs" and sincerity denotes ensuring "what you say reveals what you believe." (B. Williams 2004, 11) In other words, fulfilling accuracy entails striving to make one's understanding align with the truth and maintaining sincerity requires faithful expression of such understanding. The pursuit of truth's accuracy is an "investigative investment" where one has to navigate between two kinds of objectivity, the external constraints of making sense of things beyond our immediate circle and the internal constraints of overcoming false consciousness. (B. Williams 2004, 125) Accordingly, achieving sincerity is not merely making assertions that correspond to one's beliefs, since there is more than one way to do that; withholding certain information or framing the assertion ambiguously, for example, can lead to deception without strictly telling lies. Only making truthful claims in and of itself is not enough; it is imperative to provide all the necessary and relevant truth for building trust among members of society, too. (B. Williams 2004, 96–100) To be truthful in exchanges on political matters is to be aware of both dimensions: apply rigorous and appropriate methods to guarantee one's beliefs align with facts and make sure one's presentation of such beliefs is relevant and not misleading contextually. (Havel 1991b, 13–14)

One must also be willing to accept inconvenient facts and refrain from the temptation of denialism. Concretely, this means to salvage as much truth as possible from rumors, speculations, and anecdotes with one's judgment through conversing with a diverse pool of interlocutors and consulting multiple sources. It also entails reflecting on one's internal and external constraints on obtaining the truth instead of comfortably accepting familarity.

In this vein, adhering to the value of truthfulness is of paramount importance also for those who already, in varies forms and degrees, disapprove the System. Dissenters living both within China and overseas often have a good idea of the manifestations and ramifications of the *repressive* policies of the party-state. Nevertheless, they may well be equally blind to, for example, how the quality of life has continued to genuinely improve for the majority of the ordinary Chinese. The anachronism of cold-war era imaginaries can easily lead those who oppose the regime to ignore evidence that demonstrates signals of positive changes and even lash out on anyone who delivers such messages as offering communist propaganda[31]. This static view of China is hard to sustain and the cognitive dissonance that is the cost of such ideological purity can be enormous. It also risks pushing those who are sympathetic to the upsides of the System further away from critically reflecting what's lost, which consequently feeds the nationalist suspicion that paints the critics as unpatriotic, prejudiced, and condescending. To be politically responsible for society's attitudinal transformations in China, one must be willing to listen to the lived experiences of the people on the ground before trying to revise, challenge, or even refute their anecdotal knowledge of what China and the world are like with other facts. This entails thee need to examine alternative, sincere *stories* told by fellow citizens and the element of truth in them indicates another concern to be examined, one of understanding.

2.2 Understanding

Facts don't speak for themselves and cannot be separated from narratives. As much as fresh pieces of truthful evidence can create disruptions for ordinary Chinese, they may still fail to critically revisit their sensibilities because they lack the necessary conceptual tools. For those who want to be politically responsible, this creates a barrier of being epistemologically connected with arguments that share the same truthful foundations but radically different

[31] On the other hand, these dissidents may also exaggerate the political evil in China to justify their opposition. (Ma 1993, 376–77) The ugly face of this problem amounts to an extremist version of self-Orientalization.

interpretive frameworks. Ideological differences remain salient even when people have established factual consensuses because how these facts are pieced together, rendered (ir)relevant, and assessed ethically also matters. Therefore, another concern related to coming to terms with such sincere clashes in political views is needed, the concern of understanding.

Arendt explicitly exalts understanding in her exploration into the nature of totalitarianism and its differences vis-à-vis its predecessors, including classical tyranny, imperialism, and one-party dictatorship. (Arendt 1994, 307–60) There is a modern dilemma in understanding, claims Arendt, related but not limited to totalitarianism in that we seem to lose the proper language of making judgments because of the loss of reliable yardsticks. The result is often a mental condition of "stringent logicality", the perversion of the deductive analytic method into "a premise in the logical sense, that is, into some self-evident statement from which everything else can be deduced in stringent logical consistency." (Arendt 1994, 317)

Two implications come to mind out of this discussion. The first is that understanding Chinese authoritarianism is always going to be harder than it seems. A pigeonholing game of "authoritarianism with adjectives" is prevalent in political science where a recent addition is the oxymoron of "democratic authoritarianism". (Brancati 2014) Perry's seminal review essay suggests that models of totalitarianism and pluralism are outdated for analyzing Chinese politics and notices the helpful trend in seeing China through state-society relations. (Perry 1994) Yet the state and society in China are also inextricably intertwined, giving rise to the gigantic grey area in between as well as multi-layered links among semi-autonomous organizations and official party-state institutions. (Kang and Han 2008) Thus, understanding contemporary China is essentially an exercise of navigating among competing descriptive and explanatory frameworks without squaring fully with any[32]. The second is that given the complexity of the Chinese realities, it is more than natural for people to hold diverse and contradictory views towards the regime and politics writ large. Against this reasonable plurality of opinions, one central task of understanding is to not fall into the trap of "stringent logicality" and readily make too uncharitable interpretations of others' ideas. It does not follow that by

[32] This point begs the controversial question of whether there is a distinct "China model" of economic growth, postcommunist reform strategies, or more recently and ambitiously, governance. (Bell 2016) An adjudication between competing positions on this matter, however, is not necessary for recognizing that China defies simplistic explanations. The insufficiency of existing frameworks is enough for emphasizing that understanding China requires tremendous attention and patience. For one such exercise aiming at unpacking the exceptional and the expected in Chinese academia, see Tenzin 2017.

endorsing greater regulations on the private financial sector someone necessarily supports the party-state's monopoly of financial activities, or that those who praise China's collectivist anti-coronavirus campaigns are insensitive to the implications of unchecked state penetration and mobilization through extra digital surveillance. Only by immersing oneself in open-hearted conversations aiming at true understanding can one go beyond caricatured differences, establish trust and common grounds, and probe deeper into meaningful differences of opinions.

Nevertheless, understanding must be differentiated from unconditional concurrence with either the current political conditions or dissenting political views. It is an effort of coming up with *explanations* for ideological positions and political views that are not ours, from which a proper *justification* for such positions may still fall short to be issued. (B. Williams 2011, 166–67) Realizing that some Han-nationalists who support iron-fist policies on Muslim minorities came to this position due to the devastating tragedies of Uyghur nationalist-related terrorist attacks doesn't mean agreeing with them or even taking the relativistic view that "they have a point". Rather, although their position identifies a genuine problem to be confronted, namely the threat of militarized Uyghur nationalists to social stability (for all ethnicities), this should not lead us to accept their framing of the tension and proposals of potential solutions *as such*. While understanding does push people to reflect on the relative and perspective nature of political beliefs, it cannot reasonably lead all the way to relativism. As Williams notes, "[s]ome people have…believ[ed] that a properly relativistic view requires you to be equally well disposed to everyone else's ethical beliefs. This is seriously confused, since it takes relativism to issue in a *nonrelativistic morality of universal toleration*." (B. Williams 2011, 177, emphasis added) Having a responsibility of not dismissing outright different political opinions should coexist with being prima facie confident about one's own considered judgments, especially when one is genuinely confident about the truthfulness of the empirics where such views are based. Having such confidence is the only way we can escape absolute certainty and pure decisionism in guiding our political visions in an ethical manner. (B. Williams 2011, 187–88)

However, it is not right to regard understanding as entirely insulated from a possibility of seriously or even fundamentally disrupting our own political outlooks. On the contrary, understanding *with* confidence entails putting our partial perspectives into closer scrutiny and reflection and being willing to engage in rational arguments on ethical questions. (B. Williams

2011, 189) For Williams, being exposed to alternative perspectives often undermines one's ethical knowledge. But that's not necessarily bad, because simultaneously "we may gain knowledge of other kinds, about human nature, history, what the world is actually like. We can gain knowledge about, or around, the ethical. Inside the ethical, by the same process, we may gain understanding." (B. Williams 2011, 187) True, as Arendt concedes, at the end of the day an effort of understanding "may do no more than articulate and confirm what preliminary understanding…sensed to begin with." (Arendt 1994, 322) But this is not a vicious circle; instead, by surveying the interpretive frameworks that one disagrees with throughout, one can be more confident about their own positions and realistic about potential avenues of persuasion. Arendt resists labeling more valid opinions as "truth", and some commentators take problems with this. (Beiner 2008) Without attributing truthfulness to *doxai*, what's important is that in-depth engagement with diverse opinions from both real and imagined others have a real chance of *improvement* in the quality of one's own understanding. (Pashkova and Pashkov 2018)

This concern for understanding as central to taking political responsibility in the Chinese context because it pertains specifically to how certain "statist" narratives in contemporary Chinese discourses are dismissively rejected by their ideologically liberal counterparts. Such narratives are founded on solid facts and reflect legitimate concerns of certain segments of the Chinese society. There is no doubt that the party-state has played an indispensable role in China's post-reform developments. China's socialist past, characterized by extensive state interventions, a collectivist ethos, and the self-conscious search for indigenous wisdom, also shapes China's path to an "alternative modernity". (C. Lin 2006) While the statists are mainly those who align ideologically with China's New Left[33], even the Chinese liberals aspire for a strong state (without favoring the present one), viewing it as both an instrument of pushing for social reforms and a necessity for greater Chinese international influence. (H. Lu and Galway 2018) It is more than fair to interrogate the statists for the consequences of their rationalization of the party-state's ideology. (Veg 2019b) But it would be both politically and intellectually myopic to insist that their concerns regarding state sovereignty, (re)politicization, and context-specific pragmatism are not reasonable *to some extent*. Refusing to recognize the relevance of

[33] For an overview of the standpoints of the New Left, see Anshu, Lachapelle, and Galway 2018. The "statists" also drew inspiration from Leo Strauss's and Carl Schmitt's anti-liberalism. For an overview, see Marchal and Shaw 2017.

statism or engage in a project of mutual understanding would only lead to an intensification of existing echo chambers and destroy any space for constructive yet critical conversations, leading to a state of obliviation toward political responsibility, too. Thus, doing away with the prevailing ideological cynicism in Chinese political discourses and the unhelpful reductions it produces is a necessary first step in achieving fruitful understanding. (Seppänen 2016, 52–55)

2.3 Faith

In "Truth and Politics", Arendt made a perceptive observation on the negative effects of continuous exposure to propaganda as "a peculiar kind of cynicism—an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established." (Arendt 2006a, 252) The problem is not the inability to discern truth or habitual conflation of lies with truth, but rather the total collapse of the distinction between falsehood and truth in mind. She diagnosed categorically that "for this trouble there is no remedy." (Arendt 2006a, 253) Since understanding is based on candid exchanges of opinions which cannot be without a solid factual basis, the two concerns detailed above are doomed if Arendt's thesis fits the realities in China.

Indeed, cynicism understood as a complete disregard of truthfulness is prevalent among Chinese. However, this doesn't imply cynicism is totalizing and inevitably leading to a "crisis of human identity" (Havel 1991b, 62). As Steinmüller notes, ordinary Chinese adopt different moral personae that go with the environment and the distinction between truth and falsehood never gets obliterated in their minds. (Steinmüller 2014) A pragmatic attitude of denying the relevance of facts in certain social interactions is more of a coping mechanism required to fit in, to get by, and to carry on with life under authoritarianism. (Havel 1991b, 78) Despite pervasive immorality, ordinary Chinese do not lack the sense to discern what's beyond the sanction of morality or fail to undersand that moral judgments should be made based on credible facts. (Yan 2011) It is because of the existing socio-political constraints that they have to live within a "divided self" and continue to suppress the expression of their moral consciousness in favor of practical concerns that instruct otherwise. (Kleinman 2011, 285–88)

What may overcome the structural constraints and bring out the best of the ordinary Chinese, I propose, is the concern of faith as an ontological vision denoting an everyday struggle of moral liberation. First, it entails a faith in the capacity or potentiality of behaving like a proper citizen for the average Chinese in a safe environment. Second, it includes a faith

in the basic faculty of moral reasoning and judgment of fellow Chinese citizens no matter what their relationships vis-à-vis the System are. Finally, it postulates that incremental and gradual changes matter since such actions from below can reorient substantively the collective political consciousness of the community and may even, in extraordinary times, lead to grand transformations. Interactions that illustrate and embody this concern are likely to remain localized, discrete, and episodic, yet the underlying implications of such an ontological stance, one that emphasizes sharedness, interdependence, and potentiality, I contend, are especially relevant in foregrounding a political ethic for actions.

I take this to be a Havelian position, a moralism with a distinctively weak ontology about human's innate agency in action and thought[34]. (Hammer 1995; Steger and Replogle 2005) The concern of faith closely resembles what Havel once speaks of as "hope", which he "understand[s] above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world." (Havel 1991a, 181) It is not that Havel's hope is entirely metaphysical and devoid of empirical grounds; indeed, the vibrant activities in Czechoslovakian civil society under Husák serve as a solid point of reference of where the perception of hope originates. Nevertheless, empirical evidence alone, while sobering, can also be misleading in that it doesn't take human potentiality into account fully. The transformation of the Czechoslovakian society from being "apathetic, skeptical, and demoralized" to "display[ing] a genuine civic-mindedness", for example, caught Havel himself off-guard as a reminder of not taking for granted that "the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its only true face." (Havel 1991a, 109) To be sure, there could well be convincing social scientific explanations of why human behaviors differ in the dark days of Leninist rule and the immediate aftermath of the Prague Spring. Yet this magnificent change would not have happened if people embraced cynicism and defeatism to their heart, that is, if they had entirely given up on the hope that their struggles matter in bring about the good they cherished or abandoned such good altogether. This hope, and the individual responsibility it calls for, is fundamentally tragic. (Deneen 1999) Rather than suggesting the best is yet to come (but destined), it proposes that without resolute faith nothing *will* ever come. If political

[34] Havel's ontology goes beyond only the individual and flirts with the transcendental Being in a quasi-theistic sense. For the concern of faith, it is enough to focus on how he views humanity and its future without investigating, for example, the theological implications of his position.

responsibility is to make a difference, we have to presuppose that it will somehow.

Jean Elshtain suggests the authentic hope of responsibility in Havel encompasses three dimensions: trust, openness, and solidarity. (Elshtain 1992) Trust is key to unpacking the concern of faith here[35]. I'm thinking about trust as in the reciprocity of exchanging sophisticated, morally informed arguments about politics sincerely among people with different social roles and ideological preference in authoritarian China. At the root level, this implies a faith in the communicability of the notion of political responsibility fueled by a collective consciousness that its overall fulfillment is far from satisfactory. (Ci 2014, 17) The sense of urgency it expresses, the connection of accountability between actions and their consequences it makes, and the basic civil, mutual respect it presupposes can be embraced by people with different political sensibilities. The relevant process proceeds in two steps. First, the notion of political responsibility serves as the core of a common moral language that allows citizens with different identities to recognize the shared political predicaments they are facing and opens up a venue for exchange of opinions. Then, in this precious discursive space reveal to the participants, more concretely and directly, the possibilities of having constructive political engagements that contribute to a deeper understanding of how authoritarianism exacerbates political polarization through the proliferation of false dichotomies and ideological reasoning. In this way, political responsibility and the concern of faith become mutually constitutive: a self-awareness of responsibility prompts one to continuously initiate good-faith conversations with others despite real-life setbacks, and the confirmation of such faith through interacting with other interlocutors further solidifies one's sense of political responsibility as well as enlightens practical strategies of discharging it under the existing circumstances.

Having faith in the potentially sincere communications with each other despite the straitjacket of identities and formal positions does not dismiss people's natural defensiveness when encountering political views radically different from theirs. It highlights instead people's willingness and capability to overcome these externally imposed barriers *if and as long as* interpersonal trust rescues them, even only momentarily, from their ideologically enclosed comfort zone. Indeed, the defensiveness runs both ways in the nonsensical talking points

[35] Openness is captured by the notion of "understanding" in the above section, and solidarity, as I argue in the final section of this chapter, is somewhat anachronous in authoritarian China and should be replaced by "commitment".

employed by interlocutors, both pro- and anti-regime, on Chinese politics who make out-of-context comparisons with the sole purpose of winning an argument. The problem only worsens when uncomfortable facts are glossed over simply because of an assumed "malicious intent" based on their positions in the System or the financial support they receive from an overseas organization. Underlying these common modes of actions is an absurd structural determinism that ideological stances are reducible to people's relative positionalities vis-à-vis the System: "where you stand is determined by where you sit[*pigu jueding naodai* 屁股决定脑袋]".

Despite its prevalence, this is an unhelpful position to take in the Chinese context, because it denies the existence of genuine moral and political disagreements[36] as well as forecloses the possibilities of political deliberations, without which the two concerns outlined previously would not work. Instead, the value of genuine intersubjective recognition of individuality should be placed at the center of realizing the concern of faith through association with others. (Brinton 2012) Associational life under authoritarianism is likely to be either underground or heavily penetrated by the state. (Saich 2000; Spires 2011) When taking the former shape, it is often temporary, contingent on state permission, and limited in scope. (D. Fu 2017a) In this context, transforming the default mentality of mutual suspicion into substantive trust and respect requires first a leap of faith and an openness to pluralism. The mode of action required here is behaving "as if" no objective constraints, identity or political, exist and treat each other solely based on equal citizenship or comradery. The glue that holds people together must in a considerable degree concern the value of carrying out dialogs and debates despite differences of opinions. In other words, participants must consistently have faith in the associative activity of exchanging ideas *per se* without being keen to settle for a predetermined set of ends.

It is probably true that the concern of faith is unlikely to pay off in the short term[37]. Relationships need to be built and sustained. Preconceived notions and biases would have to be carefully challenged, reevaluated, and sometimes destroyed. Conflicts of moral and political

[36] This is contrary to the position of Ci Jiwei, who contends the central problem of China's moral crisis is "not intractable conflict between different conceptions of the good held with equal intensity but rather the hollowing out of what used to be a shared conception of the good and of the kind of self embedded in it." (Ci 2014, 185) *Pace* Ci, I believe value pluralism has replaced the mere fading away of socialist norms as the main social reality of morality in China among both intellectuals and ordinary people. (R. Huang, Gui, and Sun 2019; Mulvad 2018; Pan and Xu 2018; Shan and Gu 2019)

[37] Of course, here the payoff is measured by the discernable political goals of pushing for institutional transformations narrowly defined. Despite the lack of those, the recognition of individuality and capacity for moral reasoning among participants and the content of exchanges certainly count as positive feedback or payoff broadly speaking. (Brinton 2012)

visions will constantly occur and potentially lead to ugly confrontations. Yet the implications of having faith in the potentiality of changes in mindset, that is, having faith in faith itself, can be *unexpectedly* profound. A neo-Tocquevillian argument can be made in observation of the element of surprise in the East European revolutions: external shocks may induce a long-aggrieved crowd to act collectively against the authority, and the need to be true to oneself has the potential of turning individual efforts into coordinated and organized defiance. The powerless and satisfied can revert to the opposite under suitable conditions that cannot be predicted *ex ante*. (Kuran 1991) The path to achieving greater political freedom and autonomy in contemporary China can no longer be as straightforward as Havel's imagined insurrection of greengrocers scraping signs of propaganda, and the hope seems unambiguously grim for any substantial political change at the moment. But when the concern of faith is preserved among those who strive to take political responsibilities in daily interactions, the probability of long-term changes in public opinion and political awareness, despite being "hidden, indirect, long-term, and hard to measure", is also likely to increase. (Havel 1991b, 270) In this vein, taking political responsibility means investing for the long run in the hearts and minds while starting from the here and now in believing that basic civil virtues can be cultivated, if not simply reignited, in all. What's present and apparent is not the entirety of truth, and this seemingly postmodern position should be detached from a vulgar realism that can only see the domineering side of the System without realizing the power of "social dreaming, moral responsibility, and courage." (Terentowicz-Fotyga 2019, 350)

2.4 Judgment

The three concerns outlined above offer normative grounds of taking political responsibity through deliberation, persuasion, and belief. Yet there still is a disconnect between theory and practice writ large, between understandings of the past and the present and changes oriented toward the future. The coming two sections present two concerns that can fill this lacuna: judgment and commitment. I discuss judgment here and leave commitment to the next.

The preeminent thinker of judgment in contemporary political theory is undoubtedly Arendt[38]. Here I draw from her but also depart from a reading of her that situates judgment

[38] Another example would be Isaiah Berlin's essay "Political Judgment" (Berlin 1997, 40–53), which is mainly concerned with the judgment of prominent politicians against political rationalism. For an Arendtian perspective on how statespersons

solely or primarily in the realm of aesthetics and the life of the mind. In other words, my aim is to construct, if not to reconstruct from Arendt faithfully, a notion of judgment that informs political actions in Arendt's *vita activa*. (Benhabib 1988; Çelik 2013; Steinberger 1990; Taylor 2002; Vogler and Tillyris 2019) Before that reorientation, however, an outline of Arendt's theory of judgment is necessary. Here I rely mostly on the posthumously published *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, widely regarded as Arendt's most comprehensive treatment of the subject and a prelude to the unwritten third and last volume of *The Life of the Mind*. (Arendt 1981, 1982) This is not meant to present a definitive reading of Arendt's thinking on judgment[39]; Rather, my aim here is to demonstrate the relevance of her account of judgment to discharging political responsibility in the Chinese context with necessary critiques and refinements.

According to Arendt, judgment in Kant is coexistent with the sense of taste and different from the use of reason, which deals with the cognitive and the universal and can be applied to practical, moral issues straightforwardly. Judgment, on the other hand, deals with *particulars* and depends on the "sociability" of us as human beings. (Arendt 1982, 8–10) We are able to make judgments and extract meaning out of them because we live in a community of human beings. This conceptualization of judgment is closely associated with understanding, a faculty of independently evaluating the matters at hand without subsuming them under preconceived theories. (Arendt 1994, 313–23) Therefore, publicity is inherent in all judgments: even if they are not *communicated*, they still aim at persuading others and are thus *communicative*. The parallel between judgments and opinions are obvious and so are their political implications. (Arendt 2006a, 237–38) The subject of judgment for Arendt's Kant includes both apolitical works of beauty and more political artifacts of historical events. (Arendt 1982, 44–46)

Two faculties are especially important to the use of judgment: imagination and *sensus communis*. Through imagination, we remain a disinterested observer of the object we judge and perceive it through its representation in our minds. (Arendt 1982, 65–68) *Sensus communis*, translated by Arendt as "community sense", denotes our ability to take into account the possible judgments of others in our own judgments to arrive at an impartial conclusion through

should judge, see La Caze 2016. For a discussion of Shklar and Berlin on judgment, see Vogler and Tillyris 2019.

[39] Nor does it address the adequacy and reliability of Arendt's treatment of Kant and their implications. For relevant discussions, see DeCaroli 2007; Degryse 2011; Norris 1996; Riley 1987; Schwartz 2019; Weidenfeld 2013.

reflection. (Arendt 1982, 68–72) With these two faculties, we make full use of an "enlarged mentality" that renders our individualistic judgment from the position of a spectator general and communicable when we are both objectively detached (i.e. not being actors in history or creators of artworks) and subjectively disinterested (i.e. trying to incorporate all possible and reasonable judgments). (Arendt 2006a, 217) In this way, we are able to acquire complete intersubjectivity in judgment even without actual deliberation. By way of judgment we obtain in our conceptual arsenal the "exemplar validity" of these occurrences; without diminishing their particularities, we begin to think from these examples what true characters are like and the core of them becomes general. (Arendt 1982, 76–77)

This account of judgment certainly has much to do with discharging political responsibility through actions. Judgment is supposedly the middle term "that links and provides a transition from theory to practice". (Arendt 1982, 36) Through imagination, we not only represent but also reproduce reality from a new perspective through "thinking representatively" that sheds more light into how the particulars should be evaluated. (d'Entrèves 2006; Tyner 2017; Zerilli 2005) That the use of judgment is not concerned with actual but only imagined public deliberation is not necessarily anti-political or problematic, as Benhabib, among other followers of Habermas, would have it. (Benhabib 1988) Under this framework of political responsibility, the need of exchanging facts and ideas is already satisfied via the concerns of truthfulness and understanding. The empirical prerequisite of having a reasonable enlarged mentality is fulfilled and therefore judgment can proceed in an informed manner. We are thus equipped with not only imagination but also actual knowledge of the world and how others see it (that is, a kind of empathy) when judging. (Kateb 1999) There is an important value in the individualistic nature of judgment, because as is the case with political responsibility, political judgment must be carried out and, in retrospect, amenable to be held accountable individually. (Garsten 2007) Through the judging activity, we seek fair public confirmation by affirming our own freedom. (Zerilli 2005) When properly exercised, judgment can offer a moderate and realist insight into human existence that incorporates a concern for the world and navigates skillfully between and beyond dogmatism and nihilism. (Vogler and Tillyris 2019) It is a stance of modesty and determination, of recognizing human's finitude of actually reaching *the* truth without giving up on the relevance of that notion in orienting human affairs. (Arendt 1982, 33)

Through individual judgment, then, we can decide impartially while claiming with certainty that we are deciding *for* ourselves in a community of equal, political beings. (Degryse 2011)

The problem, however, is that Arendt repeatedly emphasizes that judgment cannot offer *any* practical guidance for actions[40]. This tension represents the existential clash between the onlooker/spectator and the actor. (Arendt 1982, 46–65) The disjuncture between judgment and action in Arendt's Kant is significant and puzzling even if we take political action to be primarily discursive. (Bernstein 1986, 231) On the one hand, it seems the actors in historical events do not have the proper distance to engage in reflection, that is, making present of the absent to ponder disinterestedly the implications of the events. (Arendt 1982, 52–59) Therefore, only the spectator can judge; or rather, only the judgment of the spectators can be impartial and thus matters. (Lederman 2016; Yar 2000) On the other, in aesthetic judgment it is clear that both the creators and the spectators have the proper *faculty* of taste to judge for themselves. What distinguishes them is merely the capabilities of productive innovation and originality belonging only to creators, but both are equally able to exercise their taste and appreciate the beauty of the artworks. Here, taste gives guidance to the faculty of "genius" in the process of actualizing products of culture. (Arendt 1982, 62–63) A bounded imagination of judgment seems to guide the creators, through which she reflects on the possible judgments and bring into existence what will be met with approbation. (Tyner 2017) To suggest that the artists and, by extension, any human actors, face additional constraints to judge properly vis-à-vis spectators is fine; to maintain that they don't judge, however, amounts to intellectualizing[41] the concept of judgment in an implausible way. (Biskowski 1993; Weidenfeld 2013)

This puzzle manifests itself more clearly when Arendt discusses how Kant judged rebellions and wars despite his aversion to conflicts and notes that "[t]hese insights of aesthetic and reflective judgment have no practical consequences for action." (Arendt 1982, 53) Arendt, following Kant, suggests that although the principles of action dissuade any participation in collective unrest, the principles of judgment lead to approbation of the event based on its world-historical significance of promoting progress. (Arendt 1982, 48–51) Two problems follow. First,

[40] "It [the impartiality that guides judgment] does not tell one how *to act*. It doesn't even tell one how to apply the wisdom, found by virtue of occupying a 'general standpoint,' to the particulars of political life." (Arendt 1982, 44)

[41] Intellectualization is not the synonym of depoliticization, since what's public is what's political and Arendtian judgment surely has this public dimension, but rather an effort against placing judgment in relation to political action *qua* non-discursive action. (Steinberger 1990; Taylor 2002)

it seems that after all proper judgment is predicated on a preconceived universal, here a metaphysical ideal of progress, which runs the risk of subsuming too easily the particulars of historical episodes under a grand narrative[42]. Second, there is an explicit divide between actors and spectators of history, which is marred with both empirical and normative problems. Empirically, bystanders of events can join forces with the already active participants to accelerate the process of "progress" and the decision to participate is surely predicated on their opinions. Judges of political events, put simply, are also political actors. (Kateb 1999, 145–46) "There can be no absolutely passive judgment, no spectators who think it impossible that they will become involved in the matter they are judging." (Marshall 2010, 377) Normatively, the recognition of this divide and its ontological rigidity means essentially abandoning one's share in collective political enterprises despite paying lip service to its goals. It signals a kind of hypocrisy and an open evasion of the responsibility of making hard choices when confronted with moral dilemmas in politics. Arendt does note that Kant invokes the idea of "mankind" to demonstrate the unity between actions and judgments, but this passing thought gives no clue to how the judging spectators could make use of their judgment to *act better*. (Arendt 1982, 75)

These two problems are not equally vicious: progress and its constraints on making open-ended judgments can be offset by appealing to their communicability, that is, any substantive understanding of progress must be in line with a reasonable application of the enlarged mentality that considers what co-members of the present political community would judge. (Degryse 2011; Schwartz 2019) Progress can be interpreted as the inherently social and local ideal of exemplarity. (DeCaroli 2007) However, the absolute distinction between spectators and actors is harder to resurrect. If disinterested and impartial judgment is a privilege enjoyed only possibly by those who watch from the outside and the future, then political *action* (not *judgment*) is in danger of surrendering to decisionism[43]. Without a functional approximate of

[42] As noted by Beiner, Arendt herself later in the *Lectures* takes problem with this notion of progress and instead honors human dignity as the most important trait of the disinterested spectator. (Arendt 1982, 77; Beiner 1982, 125–27) Kateb made a similar point. (Kateb 1999, 141–42) This seems to indeed differ from Kant, who, according to Riley, honors *telos* in politics, although that *telos* is not "progress" but rather Kantian morality. (Riley 1987, 385–86) Thiele also points out that Arendt prioritizes the value of narratives in and of themselves without reducing them to the a priori "progress". (Thiele 2005, 708–9) Therefore, the fixation on progress is Kant's but not Arendt's problem.

[43] In recent scholarship, the notion of "principle" is favored to suggest Arendtian action, although unpredictable, is not entirely without bounds. (Cane 2015; Gao 2018; Muldoon 2016; Totschnig 2019) This can be a promising project of resolving the tensions around actions and ethics, yet how exactly political judgment ties into the formation, renewal, and implementation of such principles is still quite elusive, especially considering Arendt herself seems to agree with Kant that principles for action and those for judgment should be kept distinct. (Arendt 1982, 48–51)

any banister, we have political actors who can't and don't judge, which is precisely the problem Eichmann faced: because he cannot think, he cannot judge; because he cannot judge, he cannot act properly against the prevailing public opinion surrounding him. (Arendt 2006b, 294–95)

Furthermore, the distinction between informed and uninformed, practical and impractical, prudent and imprudent judgments loses its *practical* significance[44]. (Beiner 1982, 137–38) This may be acceptable for aesthetic, but surely not for political judgment[45]. As Thiele observes, even if the exemplar validity of judgment cannot possibly issue in principles or rules, "[n]onetheless, it orients one's moral compass, and may well indicate what *not* to do." (Thiele 2005, 710) Here, a shift of focus in the temporality of judgment is needed. If human dignity resides in the particularities of ourselves *qua* individuals, then it must be the case that we can not only appreciate the spectacles created by those before us or by us before; it must also find a place in our potentiality to act in anticipation of and in accordance with proper judgment. Political judgment need to be *participant*-, *action*-, and *future*-oriented also. Enlarged mentality, imagination, reflection, and community sense still loom large in this revised mode of judgment; they just need to be put into the right use, that is, to guide actions aiming at discharging political responsibility, even if prior judgments can only imperfectly approximate the retrospective ones.

If the subject of judgment should not be limited to historical deeds alone, then what else can be in its purview? How can we bridge the gap between theory and practice, the spectator and the actor, with political judgment in the Chinese context? Two problems of judging the particular come to mind: the particularity of China as an authoritarian country and the particularity of specific scenarios as venues of action. To make judgments about China's authoritarianism, its specific features must be taken seriously and wrestled with. Part of the task here is to thoroughly investigate the concepts and images we use when discussion Chinese politics: What does propaganda or brainwashing mean in the Chinese context if political socialization is partly controlled by the party-state but also intensively aided by spontaneous

[44] Arendt suggests, following Kant, that what distinguishes valid from invalid judgments is whether the person concerned is within the public realm and "judging", which is too equivocal to be helpful in differentiating between different (and potentially varyingly valid) judgments. (Arendt 2006a, 217) The idea of exemplar validity does better, but the disconnect between judgment and action is still unaddressed.

[45] Zerilli makes the compelling case that validity of judgments doesn't depend on empirical assent from others or a stringent rationality that "compels" rather than "persuades", yet this lack of certainty in reaching conclusion should lead us to believe neither that everyone is equally capable of judgment nor that all judgments, as long as they (are claimed to) incorporate views of others, are all valid. (Zerilli 2005, 168–72) Reasonable disagreements in judgment surely exist, but not all such disagreements can be reasonable (not to mention "valid") even in a specific context. (Steinberger 1990, 816–17)

efforts of allying with the System? Do the Chinese have a unique understanding of what development, fairness, and prosperity mean? Is the alleged antagonism between civil society and the state the best framework to decipher the mystery behind China's state-society relations? Another outreach of judging Chinese authoritarianism has to do with comparing China and other states. Misperceptions of facts of foreign states with both excessively positive and negative connotations have serious implications for domestic and transnational politics. (H. Huang 2015, 2021) An evidenced-based approach here doesn't preclude normative inquiries, yet for judgment to make sense, the reliance on existing value standards cannot be absolute and the enlargement of one's mentality should not (always) stop short at one's fellow citizens.

A concrete example of the difficulty of judging China's particularities lies in determining the relevance and validity of historical references. Nowadays one is tempted to treat China as a renewed and technologically enhanced version of communist dictatorship, aspiring world-conquering empire, East-Asian developmentalist state, or bloodthirsty fascism. All of these labels capture important aspects of the "real" China, yet none of them brings out the entire range of complexities. Attaching these labels often is not exercising judgment but evading from it or subordinating it under a perverted moralism or even a sign of intellectual laziness and political opportunism. (Vogler and Tillyris 2019) These sweeping political indictments also inform us rather poorly about how individuals confronting such realities should do. As Tyner comments, "[w]hile historical exemplars might help us comprehend how *else* an actor or group of actors could have behaved in the world based on what else has happened in the space of appearance, these exemplars cannot help us understand the present, insofar as the present has to be 'confronted…on its own terms.'" (Tyner 2017, 531–32) Rather than being obsessed with finding China's historical (or contemporary) counterpart, it would be better if we make full use of our common sense from the ground up and start with the particulars. (Thaler 2011) This also ties neatly with the concerns of truthfulness and understanding: only when the wholeness, accuracy, and authenticity of the empirical world is preserved can we firmly ground our normative reflections in solid empirics and only when we strive for a better understanding of other's perspectives can we fully achieve a balanced enlarged mentality. Instead of focusing on fetching historical references as shorthand to evoke controversial parallels and debating their appropriateness, it would go a long way if each party focuses on what the reality looks like

exactly when making judgments on how to conduct themselves vis-à-vis China.

Judging China judiciously and representatively, however, still offers no clear-cut guidance on how actions should be taken in the specific scenario one finds oneself. The crux of proper political judgment goes beyond appreciating particulars and their divergence from seemingly self-sufficient universals and centers on living and dealing with contradictions or *aporias*, i.e. the inherent conflicts within the phenomena observed that cannot be resolved theoretically but only via unprincipled compromises. Sustaining an NGO advocating for worker's or women's rights probably entails bribing local officials and swearing allegiance to the "socialist worker state". Publishing books means accepting the inevitable censorship and self-censorship as well as other "hidden rules". Pushing for legal reforms in contemporary China also has to recognize the leadership role of the communist party. Tradeoffs like these are difficult, tormenting, and inevitable, too. It is too much of a truism that only the hard cases necessitate the concern of judgment. Uncertainty and lack of confidence are too real to almost coerce people into indecisiveness and inaction. More damning is the fact that decisions do not offer any comfort of a guarantee, and the particulars of the situation must be attended to each time it emerges. However, the desire to enlarge one's mentality in processing the matter at hand cannot devour the equally important requirement of seeking *closure*. We must come to a decision, through reasonable soul-searching with our community sense, and then follow through to avoid both a pending paralysis and an unwarranted heroism. (Thaler 2011) Despite the yearning for intersubjectivity, at the end of the day we must come to full circle, at ease, to our very subjective judgments. (Garsten 2007) Because the *aporias* can never be solved, we will never get psychological closure; because a contradiction needs actions to be dismantled in practice, we must, against all odds, judge, decide, and act. It would indeed be a poor response to Arendt's theoretical pessimism to assert that the danger of judgment shall hold us back from politics. (Fine 2008) I would hasten to add that we must also do it consistently, that is, with commitment.

2.5 Commitment

The notion of commitment I propose is quite mundane and unambitious compared with, for example, partisan commitments or communitarian fraternity. (Levy 2017; Ypi 2016) Instead, it refers to "a species of intentions" that constrains behaviors in the public realm for the sake of consistently discharging political responsibilities. (Calhoun 2009, 615) It doesn't prescribe

particular clusters of behavior or dictate a proper range of attitudes; thus, it is not *substantive* but *agnostic* or *open-ended*. Yet it does map the terrain of behaviors conducive to political responsibility; in this sense it is *normative*. (Calhoun 2009, 614–16; Marin 2017, 32–43) Inspired tremendously by Marin's *Connected by Commitment* with which the present thesis shares many assumptions[46], I discuss how in contemporary China political responsibility can be effectively taken by committing to a set of normatively informed tasks. (Marin 2017)

First and foremost, taking political responsibility entails being committed to engaging in individual actions. One of the greatest predicaments of post-totalitarian societies[47], according to Havel, is the decline in a sense of personal responsibility, or, more precisely, a constant skepticism of the utilities of individual actions. (Pontuso 2004, 156–68) Dwelling in such attitudes would lead to the stagnation of the struggle against political authorities and the perpetuation of the ongoing regime. Havel once noted in an interview prior to the success of the Velvet Revolution: "When a person tries to act in accordance with his conscience, when he tries to speak the truth, when he tries to behave like a citizen, even in conditions where citizenship is degraded, it won't necessarily lead anywhere, but it *might*. There's one thing, however, that will never lead anywhere, and that is *speculating* that such behavior will lead somewhere." (Wilson 1991, xvi, emphasis added) To respond to this impasse and discharge political responsibility, concrete individual actions must be taken without waiting for a messianic moment of collective uprising and salvation. (Elshtain 1995) The human potential that cannot be completely deprived by any political circumstance will stay dormant and unable to bear genuine political subjects if actions only bear witness to this predicament of power without attempting to shake the external constraints. (Popescu 2018) A generic resignation in light of the difficulties of action is not acceptable, since all of the above concerns cannot be realized through wishful thinking. Because we do have limited yet substantial, voluntary control over our actions, we are able to fulfill our commitments to acting responsibly by

[46] These include, most importantly, the structural nature of oppression, the fact that individual actions sustain structural injustices, the normative connection between responsibilities/obligations and people's participation in the reproduction of social structures, a less coordination-based understanding of how proper collective responses should be imagined, and the idea that commitment is part of the moral language to address this structural problem at the individual level. (Marin 2017, 1–24) The appropriation of Young's social connection model is also key to our similarities. Unlike Marin, however, I don't conceptualize commitment as a relationship because I wish to emphasize its individualistic and voluntary characteristics.

[47] This loss of personal responsibility, as a result of rationalistic thinking that distances political consequences from those who make political decisions, also haunts democracies, albeit in a slightly different way. (Havel 1991b, 256) See also Lawler 1993.

ourselves and expect for the cumulative effect of individual actions to influence the structural injustices we find ourselves in indirectly through time. (Marin 2017, 14–15)

Nevertheless, actions always run into risks in authoritarian contexts. Here I am not concerned with the universal risk of "a lack of *a priori* assurance of success". (Havel 1991a, 176) Nor am I interested in the default vulnerability people are placed under due to the nature of social connections as such. (Marin 2017, 168) Rather, I'm thinking about the potential adverse political consequences imposed by the party-state on individuals who have the courage to take actions[48]. In this vein, the commitment to taking risks has two distinct yet connected dimensions. Firstly, the risks are profound and unpredictable: actions aiming at discharging political responsibilities, no matter how mundane and minute they may seem, are suspect to persecution by the authorities. These risks are existential in nature: ambiguities in governing speech and behaviors in authoritarian China make it impossible to predict precisely what counts as deviant by the party-state. (Stern and Hassid 2012; Stern and O'Brien 2012) Moreover, risk-taking also has a more personal dimension: trusted individuals may turn their backs and snitch. This is an extension of the general problem of the breakdown of reciprocity in China's public sphere: kindness and civility on one's part are not necessarily always met with responses in kind. (Ci 2014, 21) As much as ordinary Chinese recognize the atrocities of Mao's various political campaigns, they nevertheless continue to report on strangers, colleagues, classmates, and even friends for personal benefits or, less frequently, ideological beliefs. This is reminiscent of Havel's diagnosis of the prevailing "selfishness and careerism" of the Czechoslovakian moral landscape shaped by "the ubiquitous, omnipotent state police." (Havel 1991b, 54–55)

Admittedly, risks of taking political responsibility in contemporary China is not as grave as Havel's Czechoslovakia where simply "[t]o speak out against the rockets[49] here means, in effect, to become a dissident" that would lead to "the complete transformation of one's life." (Havel 1991b, 297) The risks ordinary Chinese face are both *less totalizing* and *more arbitrary*: while the range of actions that usually go untampered with is broader[50], the uncertainty around

[48] From an Arendtian perspective, speech is also a kind of action; in the Chinese context, imprudent speech can surely lead to stern punishment from the party-state, making critical inquiry a not-so-figurative "battlefield". (Davies 2009, 1–4)
[49] This is a reference to the hypocrisy of the Soviet Union's dedication to global peace and the prevalent acquiesceince of it.
[50] This broad trend towards legality is noted by legal scholars, although not uncontroversial. For competing arguments, see Minzner 2011; T. Zhang and Ginsburg 2019.

what will lead to punishment still persists[51]. Nevertheless, as the commitment to individual action suggests, the potential consequences of such actions are also shouldered by those willing to take the leap and rectify the undesirable social and political environment. There is, then, an inherent unfairness to this commitment because those who stay idle and don't own up to political responsibilities are less prone to get into trouble. Yet there's no way around it: in a hostile political setting, any actions are potentially subversive while no action is *generally* politically irresponsible. Because only actions can invite responses and only a chain of responses from others can possibly contribute to any substantive change, the only viable option is to acknowledge the existence of these risks and try one's best to circumvent them without abandoning the pursuit of politically responsible actions. (Marin 2017, 52–53) This is not a call for *welcoming* sacrifice for its own sake but a call for *expecting* sacrifice when it arrives and *fighting* it to the extent possible. If "[r]esponsibility is not only vouching for oneself but taking on the task of neighborliness" (Elshtain 1995, 476), then the only way this "neighborliness" or reciprocity can be obtained socially is to act *as if* it existed already, and the inevitable fate it invites is getting hurt sometimes. In this vein, taking risks *is* the imperative of responsibility.

The flip side of committing to taking risks is to minimize such risks for others, that is, to always be cautiously on the lookout and, at the very least, refrain from doing evil even when incentivized or pressed to do so[52]. That is to say, inaction or silence can also demonstrate commitment to treating fellow citizens in a politically responsible manner when under duress. This is a case of "silence as commission", "a *doing* a non-something or a deliberate, positive decision *not to do* (speak, say, etc.)" (Vieira 2020, 8) that aims at protecting fellow citizens and the common social world in between. It also brings out the main moral of Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that there is a categorical difference between actively committing evil and refraining from doing it oneself even if others are almost always going to. (Arendt 2006b) Structural powerlessness, then, doesn't entirely annul political responsibility. For System

[51] Recent empirical studies have shed some light on how the Chinese party-state strategically represses protests but are far from conclusive. (Göbel 2021; Y. Li and Elfstrom 2021; Lorentzen 2017) Most importantly, protests are only one among the many ways of touching the party-state's nerve and people can face consequences of varying degrees for actions much less serious than participating in collective action. This ambiguity on potential risks is especially prevalent among the regulations of speech and actions more subtly through self-censorship. (Gueorguiev, Shao, and Crabtree 2017; Stern and Hassid 2012)

[52] Of course, this cannot amount to an absolute duty of not giving others away. Severe torture (both physical and emotional), threat of violence towards family members, and prospects of long detentions may all be reasonable grounds to give in. The point is that many Chinese are willing to turn their backs on their fellow citizens for significantly lower costs, including petty material incentives, opportunities for promotion and praise within the System, or a perverted sense of civic duty.

insiders particularly, this means they need to be constantly cautious about whether their seemingly unharmful participation in a grand political project can lead to tremendous atrocities.

One crucial way of demonstrating this commitment is refusing to report on others, especially on the Internet, merely because of a difference of opinions. As Chinese Internet providers are cautious about deviant speech that may attract attention from the authorities, they preemptively censor posts near the limits of acceptability. These contributions are more likely to be safe, however, if no other users report them to the administrators. Excessive reporting behaviors that intentionally exaggerate the nature of others' opinions tend to create a toxic "reporting culture" [*jubao wenhua* 举报文化][53] that shrinks the already restricted free space on the Chinese Internet. Refraining from using the stick of party-state sanctioned tools of censorship, then, is of paramount importance. More mundane, yet no less important, is silence as disapproval or unwillingness to comply when encountering state propaganda. Without the insincere and habitual confirmation of the citizenry, propaganda loses its ability to both signal the party-state's strength and confirm its dominance. (H. Huang 2018) A silent yet potent revolution may indeed begin, as Havel imagined, when greengrocers simply no longer show support for the meaningless slogan of "Workers of the world, unite!" (Havel 2018, 37–40, 85)

The commitment to individual action also implies that a politically informed decision to emigrate or seek political asylum does not itself count as taking political responsibility or cancel it. (Havel 1988, 229, 1991a, 169–70) Emigrés *still* have political responsibilities toward their country of origin because they participated in the System's operation and shared, in many ways are still sharing, the predicaments of living under this authoritarian regime. These past experiences render them, so to speak, bound by political responsibility to their homeland. Of course, the extremely traumatized should not be pressured to relive the political atrocities they experienced. For others, the choice to leave the past behind and seek instead the complete political integration into the new home they find themselves in is also sensible. Yet the unqualified withdrawal from speaking to matters of political importance in China doesn't fulfill the call of responsibility, especially considering they are now under considerably less pressure[54].

[53] For an analysis of how "reporting culture" fueled by fandom led to the extension of China's "Great Fire Wall", see Elephant Room 2020.

[54] Familial linkages at home may dissuade some from speaking out, even from abroad, for fear of the persecution of their close ones by the party-state. Contribution with anonimity, however, can still be possible under such circumstances, including unnamed tips to the media and financial donations to relevant organizations.

While leaving the authoritarian and repressive party-state of China personally can qualify as a legitimate act of resistance, it doesn't have any potential of transforming the political and civil life in China by itself. Yet it also doesn't exclude *in toto* the possibility of taking actions, that is, leaving is not abandoning commitment. (Kirkpatrick 2017, 113–14) There could be "an alternative way to leave, one that emphasizes attachment, engagement, and participation alongside absence and rejection," (Kirkpatrick 2017, 16, 90–93) which eventually can only be manifested in actions that go beyond self-interest. Although various venues of action on the ground are not available to overseas Chinese, there are some important and unique channels that can be used. Discharging political responsibility in a foreign and presumably freer environment can take the forms of narrating experiences of political hardships, lobbying local governments to influence diplomatically China's domestic politics, and facilitating dialogs between interested parties that are difficult to take place within China. The bare minimum of this responsibility may be simply disclosing their lived experiences, presumably only to those they feel safe talking to. (Jugov and Ypi 2019)

Leaving one's home country highlights the first among the three available coping strategies when confronted with discontent theorized by Hirschman: exit, voice, and loyalty. This is the topic of the next and last chapter: what are some of the archetypical approaches of discharging political responsibilities and, accordingly, what are the possible pitfalls associated with them?

Chapter three: strategies and pitfalls of taking political responsibility

This chapter builds on previous discussions and steps further downwards on the ladder of abstraction. Inspired by Hirschman, I postulate three distinct strategies of taking political responsibility in authoritarian China under the banners of "exit", "voice", and "loyalty"[55]. (Hirschman 1970) This spectrum of potential modes of actions congruent with the concerns of political responsibility accommodates people with different relations to the System in their capacities and diverse political orientations. Patterns of actions that qualify as politically responsible can both be empirically observed and realistically obtained, but each strategy also comes with potential pitfalls that may restrict the efficacy of actions taken. The faculty of

[55] Despite Vieira's perceptive thesis that places silence as an equally important strategy as exit and voice in authoritarian contexts since it highlights some of the cracks in authoritarian resilience, I do not include it here since it is not clear individual silence counts as a generic instead of conditional strategy of taking political responsibility. In other words, it seems the utility of silence can only be realized when coordinated masterfully. For her arguments, see Vieira 2020.

judgment may prove useful to offer some guidance for the perplexed who seeks to discharge political responsibility when navigating endless possibilities and limits.

3.1 Exit

The meaning of exit in politics is manifold. Intuitively, it may refer to leaving the country one finds oneself in. (Hirschman 1993) I addressed this briefly in the final section of chapter two, especially regarding how overseas Chinese can still discharge political responsibility in less than demanding ways. Becoming an open dissident who opposes the System from without also counts, although this exceptional way of life falls outside the purview of this thesis[56]. Exit may also refer to, somewhat more figuratively, quitting formal politics or the politically authorized playing field and going underground but not necessarily abandoning politically relevant concerns. (Veg 2019a, 164) This is the sense I'm alluding to. Without interacting through official channels, people can still create their own public spaces to foster spontaneous actions that represent Havel's "antipolitical politics" where the aim is "seeking and achieving meaningful lives". (Havel 1991b, 269, 2018, 61) Nevertheless, such actions serve "a 'political' motive: the hope—vague, indefinite, and difficult to justify—that this course of action is also good for something in general." (Havel 1991b, 320) This is a strategy especially suitable for grassroots intellectuals in authoritarian states who advocate a counter-narrative through concrete actions via their independent networks. It highlights the three main theoretical attributes of exit highlighted in the literature: individualism, antiparticipation, and freedom from a higher authority. (Kirkpatrick 2017, 9) More specifically, it resembles a Thoreauvian "resistant exit", an effort at "removing oneself or one's resources from the public realm with the intent of opposing dominant power relations." (Kirkpatrick 2017, 49)

This reality is nicely captured by Sebastian Veg's notion of "*minjian*" [民间], literally "grassroots" or "among the people" in Chinese. Its meaning is threefold: "independence from state income (self-funded), lack of approval by the state system (unofficial), and a low social marker (nonelite or grassroots)." (Veg 2019a, 8) It demonstrates the pluralization of intellectual pursuits where intellectuals consciously distance themselves from imposing grand, moralistic,

[56] It is perhaps also unfit to describe those dissidents who are still living in China as choosing to exit politics or public affairs because they do not shy away from confrontations with the party-state despite being constantly suppressed. For a review of the dissident community in the contemporary Chinese intellectual landscape, see Cheek 2015, 280–313.

and often monolithic narratives on the people to "enlighten" them or preaching moderate, reformist schemes to the party-state to influence policymaking. Instead, they work from the bottom-up and engage in concrete, focused social projects to both document subaltern voices and transform society from within. By putting their specific knowledge into use, these *minjian* intellectuals tackle less publicized social precarities, align themselves with the "silent majority", and resist being subsumed by the party-state, the market, or China's increasingly depoliticized academic world. (Veg 2019a, 1–22) The diversification of ideational currents and modes of representation also intensifies in this new era, leading to a constant restructuring of the concept of "intellectuals" through self-critiques. (Veg 2019a, 26–51)

To keep pace with the growing plurality in Chinese society, *minjian* intellectuals exert their influence with the help of their specific knowledge in a plethora of areas without much attention to what the party-state preaches. Amateur history enthusiasts in the name of "grassroots historians" continue to commemorate the victims of China's pre-reform political turmoil, collect oral and archival records of historical evidence, and initiate debates on competing historical narratives and interpretations between themselves. (Veg 2019a, 84–122) Artists use their works and exhibitions to draw attention to issues of social justice. (M. Wang 2017) Among them, independent filmmakers who disdain commercialization and feel anxious for the lack of authenticity in their work choose to document the details of China's transformation without too much eagerness to interpret or intervene. (Veg 2019a, 123–63) Documentarians refuse to be clustered as a movement despite their affinities and connections, emphasizing the autonomy, open-endedness, and plurality in the specific worlds their cameras capture. (Pickowicz and Zhang 2016) Other figures, most prominently Ai Weiwei[57], are more vocal about their discontent through confrontational works without taking the party-state as their *sui generis* audience but trying to restore dignity and integrity through approachable gestures. (Callahan 2014; Veg 2019a, 220–24) Independent bookstores and publishers also play an important part in introducing to the general public novel ideas by disseminating books of public interest and organizing events featuring authors and intellectuals. (Cheek 2015, 283; Veg 2019a, 234–44) Underpinning all of these efforts are a sincere concern for the sufferings of the dominated, a

[57] Ai's status and origin are certainly not grassroots; the son of a revoluntionary poet, he is profoundly embedded in China's most prestigious social circles. Yet he is not affliated with the party-state in any way and doesn't engage with it proactively.

dedicated endeavor at building grassroots, informal networks, and an unreserved preference[58] for independence and autonomy from all external factors. Their *modus operandi* is exemplar of "the interplay of structure and agency, radical opposition and embedded action, and individual activity and community building" where long-lasting social progress, including importantly transformations in public awareness, is sought at the margin. (Callahan 2014, 914)

Such grounded engagement of the grassroots intellectuals exemplifies Havel's ideal of anti-politics, the idea that civil society should be refashioned fundamentally as the center of all things political. (Popescu 2012, 105–34) They are able to tackle concrete social problems without bothering with the party-state and transform China's social landscape. Nevertheless, a potential pitfall arises if the negation of official involvement is total and absolute[59]. It lies in the inherent importance of "winning back" the mainstream discourse of China and the inability of realizing such endeavors entirely from without, two points Havel himself recognizes.

When discussing the "parallel culture" where intellectuals not compatible with the official line of cultural products exchanges ideas through *samizdat*, Havel offers an instructive observation regarding the content and quality of publications in both the "first", officially sanctioned culture and the "second", autonomous yet underground culture. "I never take any pleasure in seeing someone from the 'first' culture fall into the 'second'; rather, I am always happy whenever I encounter anything in the 'first' culture that I would have tended to expect in the 'second'." (Havel 1991b, 283) This is based on the premise that "it is the 'first' culture that remains the decisive sphere", which makes the task for the intellectuals to "win back this culture" inherently important. (Havel 1991b, 283) For Havel's Czechoslovakia as for contemporary China, the efforts of grassroots intellectuals cannot be powerful enough if they entirely abandon the "first" culture as a battlefield. It is one thing to be silenced and unable to publish in mainstream outlets; it is another to refuse to publish and reach a wider audience even when situations permit. A moralistic stance of total disengagement is counterproductive to the wider political projects which intellectuals are part of and also reflects a grave misreading of

[58] Yet this preference is difficult to hold due to the ramping-up of China's marketization and state intervention. Recent years have seen many Chinese intellectuals embracing the market and profit on their participation in so-called "knowledge sharing" activities while many others were silenced due to political animosities. Although some intellectuals try to stay critical and independent when taking part in these activities, the structural conditions clearly grow increasingly unfavorable.
[59] In reality, many intellectuals depicted in Veg's work do work "both within the system……and around or outside it." (Veg 2019a, 251) Cheek also notes that for Chinese intellectuals, when they "are not fighting with each other, they are talking to the party-state." (Cheek 2015, 279) Therefore, the pitfall I outline here is more of a reminder than an immanent warning.

China's currently available space of free speech: substantively subversive contents can appear on official publications as long as they do not call out the party-state. (Ownby 2021a, 2021b)

This is not to suggest that all intellectuals should abandon exit and fully embrace voice or even loyalty by officially joining the establishment, as China's "political-engineer-in-chief" Wang Huning, a political scientist-turned top party ideologist, did. (Patapan and Wang 2018) Equally, publishing in the "first" culture by intellectuals is not automatically politically responsible if the article simply reproduces, sugarcoats, or apologizes for the official narrative without critical engagement[60]. The boundaries between the "first" and "second" cultures are also blurred in the age of social media where the relative importance between the two may be shifting. The point is that the "90 percent freedom" of the Chinese public sphere should be used to its fullest extent without the fear that one's intellectual and moral integrity would be tainted as long as one consciously works with the System in some ways. (Cheek 2014) It is the way in which such connections are used, instead of one's position in the insider-outsider dichotomy, that matters. (Marinelli 2012) Establishment scholars[61] voicing their opinions through official publications can nevertheless have significant and positive implications for China's political and social development, as evidenced by historian Xu Jilin and political scientist Yu Keping who, respectively, hailed the ideals of public intellectuals and good governance[62]. (Cheek 2006; Q. Wang and Guo 2015) The need to broaden one's audience and influence the shape of more grand-scheme politics has not dwindled but significantly heightened in the Xi era despite tighter controls on free speech. (Cheek, Ownby, and Fogel 2019, 14–18) No matter how "oblique" these interventions have to be, they should be given voices by their authors in more accessible, popular, and legal outlets whenever possible. (Davies 2009) Exit as a strategy of taking political responsibility is often more powerful when pursued in parallel with efforts of voice, that is, seeking changes through deeper engagement[63]. (Hirschman 1970, 123–26)

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[60] One famous example is the *People's Daily* article penned by Shanghai-based political theorist Wu Guanjun, where he praised Xi for "putting the people in the highest central position" with stale party talking points.

[61] I use "establishment scholar" to describe Xu and Yu since both are professors in prominent state universities despite their shared liberal leanings, which makes them "inside the System" [*tizhinei* 体制内]. It's true that these intellectuals are in fact more or less politically "dis-established" from the party-state due to greater autonomy and professionalization and the degree of this political disembeddedness varies individually, yet they still remain (however loosely) attached to the System unlike the more unambiguously independent figures examined before. (Cheek, Ownby, and Fogel 2018, 113; Hao and Guo 2016)

[62] For some, the jury is still out for the notion of "good governance" since it may lead to greater state capacity without democratic checks, although this is arguably only a potential side-effect. (H. Li 2020)

[63] This point is also exemplified by Thoreau, who not only took leaves from the political and social world but also participated eagerly in the abolitionist movement. (Kirkpatrick 2017, 62–67)

3.2 Voice

Exit and voice aren't necessarily mutually exclusive: exiting a political community may be accompanied by, or even precisely because of, an attempt at voicing one's concerns[64]. (Barry 1974; Dowding et al. 2000; Kirkpatrick 2017, 17–19) But, like Hirschman, I emphasize voice as a distinct strategy from exit, that is, signaling one's discontent while remaining in the political community concerned. (Hirschman 1993, 30) More precisely, the strategy of voice concerns *reformist* instead of explicitly *regime-engaging* claim-making: On the one hand, it denotes a sense of recognition[65] of the overall legitimacy or at least reformability of the regime and the System, either implicitly or explicitly[66]. On the other hand, it acknowledges that something is out of place with the System and needs repairing, to which the public can contribute, sometimes through more or less deviant measures that break existing laws, rules, or norms. Seen from the perspective of the party-state, these attempts at voicing acceptable and non-threatening concerns often constitute "constructive noncompliance"[67] that better informs effective governance and prolongs its rule. (Tsai 2015) In the eyes of the "protesters" themselves, they are participating in what O'Brien calls "boundary-spanning contention" or "rightful resistance", that is, self-restrained yet normatively informed engagements with the authorities aiming at asserting one's legitimate interests or rights[68] through innovative use of permissible means. (O'Brien 1996, 2006, 2013) Besides China's local elections and the petition system as O'Brien shows, many social actors exploit other official channels creatively to challenge the party-state to fulfill some of its own promises. For example, activist lawyers seek to promote human rights causes in courts while environmentalists both sway policy designs directly and take to the streets to assert influence. (Nesossi 2015; Steinhardt and Wu 2016; Stern 2017) Other actors go as far as "repurposing" the party-state's mandate to its own use: some religious organizations inconspicuously expand their practices when taking on social

[64] For Chinese political exiles in particular, their voice also includes a struggle to return. (Ma 1993)
[65] This recognition doesn't have to be sincere. To quote Perry's perceptive observation, "[w]hether or not Chinese protesters, in their heart of hearts, accept the legitimacy of the communist state, they generally act as if they do." (Perry 2009, 20)
[66] Of course, the shape of the party-state and the attitude towards it of those who choose voice, are always ambiguous and ambivalent, respectively. For a discussion on how the Chinese state is perceived by those advocating at its margins, see Stern and O'Brien 2012. For an analysis of the activists' conceptualization of their resistance, see S. X. Chen 2020, 29–58.
[67] While Tsai distinguishes constructive noncompliance from rightful resistance, I emphasize the common legitimacy-affirming undertone of these two types of actions. Therefore, my use of the term is broader than Tsai's original formulation and closer to her more global category of "regime-supporting resistance". (Tsai 2015, 256–58)
[68] Whether protests in contemporary China are fueled by "rights consciousness" or "rules consciousness" is a major theoretical debate beyond my focus. For an important take, see L. Li 2010. For a more recent study, see Zhuang 2020.

service duties advocated by the authorities. (McCarthy 2013) Loud pronouncements or low-pitched murmurs, the space of sanctioned or, at least, unpunished, freedom in China expands considerably because of these efforts and the precedents they helped establish.

The occupation that performs the role of the critical advisers and inherently aims at pushing the boundaries of the possible in China is investigative journalist[69]. (J. Tong and Sparks 2009) Their dedication to social justice motivates their probing into sensitive terrains that can shake the foundations of the System and they frequently feel distressed and frustrated due to the constraints set by the party-state reminding them of the hierarchical relationship between them. While excited about the career opportunities and possibilities to induce social transformations in a rapidly developing nation, these media elites are disheartened when censorship and unwarranted critiques dawn on themselves. (H. Wang 2016, 1–4) Yet despite the boundary-spanning nature of critical journalists' job, there's no apparent antagonism among them against the party-state *en masse*: the idealism behind their quest for truth is often balanced by a pragmatism of promoting gradual, accessible changes, which also informs their daily interactions with the regime. Investigative journalists engage in an exercise Maria Repnikova termed "guarded improvisation" within "fluid collaboration" where they exploit the loopholes in China's fragmented authoritarianism to bring to the front quality and in-depth reports while recognizing the legitimacy of the party to rule, often willingly. (Repnikova 2017, 9–13) These professionals concur fundamentally with the party-state that the mission of their work is to offer constructive criticism and contextualized, bounded suggestions that can help improve governance, which indicates a willingness to compromise in light of political pressure as long as there will be *some* discernable positive results like effective accountability, feedback, and improvement. (Repnikova 2017, 63–74) Self-censorship as a practical strategy is widely employed to shield them journalists and their reports from critical scrutiny that may derail their publication. (Z. Zhang 2013) All forms of resistance are played out within the limits constituted by interactions over time between the party-state and the journalists. (S. X. Chen 2020)

This general attitude of compliance, however, is often subtly yet decidedly transformed

[69] The characterization here doesn't deny the existence of "unruly journalists" who engage in overtly contentious actions besides seeking to publish critical reports as well as those working in China's intricate web of internal media who advise the party-state from a more loyal standpoint, although these groups are not the main focus here. (Dimitrov 2017; Hassid 2008)

during crisis times as journalists seek creative and sometimes transgressive ways to get access to the scene, collect evidence and interview witnesses, as well as evading or even confronting mandates of censorship coming from their superiors or the local and national party-states[70]. (Repnikova 2017, 111–71) In other words, these journalists actively negotiate with and wittingly cheat the institutions and people setting up boundaries on their reporting to make the most of the situation. There is also a generational shift among Chinese investigative journalists, lots of whom contend notions like journalistic objectivity[71] and professionalism are too restrictive and should be replaced by activism and advocacy. (Bai 2013; Hassid 2011; H. Wang 2016, 89–98) Besides taking a sympathetic stance in selecting the topics and portraying their interviewees, these journalists also directly impact social activism both in writing and in person, believing that journalism itself is simply one (often ineffective) means among many which may lead to genuine policy changes and civic engagement since curtailments from above often suppress critical reporting[72]. Some of them went as far as resigning their posts in establishment media to concentrate on activist work alone. (H. Wang 2016, 99–154)

This discussion of Chinese investigative journalism should not be read as repudiating the centrality of the party-state in regulating media behavior or even suggesting "the weapon of the weak" always works[73]. (Svensson, Sæther, and Zhang 2013, 11–13) One paradigmatic example of failure is the 2013 "*Southern Weekly* Incident"[74] which showcases the fragility of the unequal alliance between the party-state and (some) critical journalists. (H. Wang 2016, 162–64) As China's prominent liberal media and most important source of investigative journalism, *Southern Weekly* has long been the epitome of China's economic and social reform and its "new year greetings" have become a journalistic phenomenon. However, the newspaper hit hard rocks when its 2013 new year editorial was hastily and poorly edited by their conservative-minded chief editors under the influence of the provincial propaganda department.

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[70] This is even true amid the Covid-19 pandemic: in the aftermath of the initial outbreak, Chinese investigative journalism has seen a long-awaited (albeit short and contained) rejuvenation of sorts. (J. Zheng 2020)

[71] The meaning of objectivity itself, of course, is contested and context specific. In practice, a self-perceived practice of objectivity in journalistic reporting may be indeed essentially thinly veiled advocacy in China. (J. Tong 2015)

[72] However, recent developments case a more pessimistic picture as the younger generation of Chinese journalists seem no longer as committed to social transformation as their predecessors as a result of the interaction among market forces, political pressure, and subjective perceptions. (H. Wang 2021)

[73] For the constraints on journalistic reporting and tactics used by journalists to circumvent them in the Hu-Wen era, see Repnikova 2013; H. Wang 2016, 53–66. For changes and continuities of control of Chinese media under Xi, see Brady 2017; Repnikova 2017, 206–21. For regional variations, see Cho 2013; Lei 2016; Tong 2013.

[74] The following reconstruction of the incident is based on S. X. Chen 2020 and Guan 2020.

The original article's call that constitutionalism should count as an integral part to the incoming party secretary-general Xi's "China dream" was replaced by a self-congratulatory patchwork piece that asserts "the Chinese are never so close to realizing their dreams". This irregular and untasteful intrusion from above, including the rumor that the provincial propaganda chief was behind it, stirred widespread discontent within the newspaper and, after the disclosure of the events on the Internet, among China's media circle. Open letters were circulating in the cyberspace protesting such appalling infringement on press freedom and professionalism. What's more, hundreds of concerned readers organized for themselves and protested in front of the Southern Media Group buildings for three days before being dispersed. Crucial for this event is not simply the scale of collective action for media freedom, which, as commentators suggest, is paralleled in the history of the People's Republic by Tiananmen only. (Bandurski and Fang 2020, viii) It is also how the protests were ignited not by suppression of factual, investigative journalistic reports of discrete events but by the single-handed editorial changes of an opinion piece against proper procedures. This reflects the extent to which journalists value their professional standards and negotiated yet substantial autonomy and implying profoundly shared normative commitments. In other words, the grievance is mostly symbolic, ideational, and ideological, which partly explained why the party-state perceived it as an existential threat. Nevertheless, the lack of coordination and a too optimistic assessment of the situation eventually led to the unfavorable conclusion of events, despite the journalists' cautious decision of not engaging in the protests or calling out the censorship system itself. The Incident led to a significant break from previously booming journalistic activism, after which the majority of China's "unruly" journalists chose, or were forced, to stay silent.

This leads us to discuss the pitfalls of voice as a strategy. The dark, or rather, gray, side of voice as a strategy is that it always risks being domesticated by the party-state. Boundary-spanning resistance, when compiled through time, may gradually lose its edge and cease to be truly transformative. The negotiated nature of informal rules between protesters and authorities that contributes to a non-zero-sum competition between the party-state and its (self-declared loyal) challengers tilts yet doesn't, and cannot, fundamentally refashion the huge imbalance of power between the two. (Y. Li 2018, 144–54) Innovative means of subversion without organization, institutionalization, or continued and open mobilization can push the limits of

tolerated behaviors, until increased exposure renders them dangerous in the eyes of the higher-ups. (D. Fu and Distelhorst 2018) At the end of the day, it is the party-state that upholds the venue of bargaining and possesses huge discretion regarding the strategies it may use in the form of *de facto* depoliticization through commodification of rights contentions. (Lee and Zhang 2013) The role of the party-state in the entrenchment of various injustices often goes un- or under-examined. The emerging rights consciousness still leaves plenty of urgent issues unaddressed because public conceptions are shaped and delimited by governmental policies and pragmatic estimates of success, not a sense of unserved yet deserved justice. (Lorentzen and Scoggins 2015) Despite its initial edge, rights consciousness can gradually morph into "rules consciousness" constituted by self-censorship and passive submission. (Perry 2009)

To be clear, in no way do I mean to denounce the effectiveness and legitimacy of voice as a strategy of political partiticpation in China. It is an obvious truism that "[e]very step toward political liberalization matters, both for the prospect of a transition to democracy and for the quality of political life as it is daily experienced by abused and aggrieved citizens." (Diamond 2002, 33) The short-term effects of regime resilience may be counterbalanced by greater political transformation in the future through the popularization of rights consciousness, something already evident in China's younger generations. (Duan and Zhang 2021; D. Fu 2017b, 145–53) The risk, however, lies in the increasingly fluid boundary delineating rights and rules consciousnesses, the latter of which often dissuade instead of encouraging contentious collective actions. (Zhuang 2020) The point of contention is not whether instances of boundary-spanning resistance *can* result in genuine and concrete improvements of people's living conditions but rather the extent to which such self-censored actions *may* lead to the *de facto* legitimation of the System because the party-state choose oftentimes to be benevolent[75]. (Vieira 2020) The danger is clearly seen in the decline of critical journalism under Xi Jinping. (J. Tong 2019) It is one thing to voice only within the confines decided by the state due to existing structural constraints but quite another to overestimate the System's elasticity and believe that even *without* mass mobilization fundamental changes can happen, too.

[75] This is arguably the fundamental issue with the practice of "responsiveness", which highlights how the discretionary power of the party-state in practice coopts and overshadows the (institutionalized) agency of civil society. (J. Chen, Pan, and Xu 2016; Meng and Yang 2020; Qiaoan and Teets 2020)

The situation outlined above is a genuine dilemma that social justice activists in China are facing with no easy way out. Initial stages of success can tame future contentious politics, reflecting a hard tradeoff whose implication is huge and far-reaching. To distinguish between "merely making life easier under domination" and "seeking creatively ways of subverting the structures of such domination" can be counterproductive by hindering concrete actions and the distinction itself is also perhaps too subtle to discern. Yet reflexivity requires those who wish to take political responsibility to ask themselves: if authoritarianism continues to persist and even grow, are we really doing enough or doing it right, and how can we do it better? A dose of skepticism of what one is doing for the moment being, then, is healthier than simply "doing the good deeds without pondering where it leads" [*danxinghaoshi mowenqiancheng*, 但行好事，莫问前程]. Perhaps such self-awareness is too much of a luxury when activists are targeted and repressed by the party-state precisely because of their influence from mobilization. (D. Wang and Liu 2020) The question, however, remains intellectually and practically salient as long as the party-state is the most important barrier for taking political responsibilities generally.

3.3 Loyalty

Does it make sense to call "loyalty" a strategy for discharging political responsibilities? To start with, it is kind of a residual category in Hirschman's original theory, doing its work mainly by explaining why voice is favored vis-à-vis exit because of people's sense of belonging or the organization's constraints on leaving. (Hirschman 1970, 76–105) Barry, commenting on Hirschman, went as far as saying loyalty "does not capture a real social phenomenon" because "voice……is already built into the concept of loyalty". (Barry 1974, 95, 98) Trying to go beyond Barry and distinguish conceptually between loyalty and voice, Dowding and colleagues nevertheless focuses still on how loyalty influences the voice-exit dynamics. (Dowding et al. 2000, 476–78) All of these theoretical interventions demonstrate the entanglement between loyalty and voice without considering seriously the possibility of loyalty as a distinct strategy in remedying problems in an existing organization. In particular, there is a modality of loyalty different from either voice or silent inaction, that is, staying on top of events and fulfilling one's duties in a business-as-usual fashion. This particular subvariant of loyalty is my focus.

Contrasting loyalty with voice, I wish to suggest that for certain System insiders whose positions have intrinsic political implications, it is possible to discharge political responsibility

by doing their jobs well without consciously disrupting, challenging, or revising the boundaries of the existing structural constraints they face. This strategy is more demanding than it seems considering how prevalent *irresponsible* behaviors are among state agents who know too well to engage in "performative governance" in China. (Cai 2004; Ding 2020) One magnificent instance is no other than the late Dr. Li Wenliang, a "whistleblower" of Wuhan's coronavirus breakout. (Green 2020) With no political agenda in mind, he merely tried to fulfill his duty as a doctor: to treat patients with suspicious symptoms, to warn friends and colleagues of the potential danger, and to own up to the unfair punishment for "disseminating untruthful rumors". Nevertheless, his actions have spurred political implications beyond what he intended, revealing the weakness of this repressive technocratic state and encouraging many to carry on with the everyday heroism of truth that he resembled. As a loyal member of the Party, he is no dissident[76]; yet the extraordinary choices he made at the onset of the pandemic still render him politically responsible for his fellow citizens without challenging the System *per se*.

Doctors taking *political*, instead of merely professional, responsibility are a rarity, yet there is one occupation in China's authoritarian political system where responsibility is imperative: the judge[77]. As the upholder of justice, judges who fulfill their role responsibilities poorly undoubtedly undermines the rights and political efficacy of those who seek recourse from the party-state. Inappropriate or unfair ruling not only harms justice but also fails to recognize the truth. (Arendt 2006a, 256) Judges don't initiate violent, politically driven repression, yet they do have the capacity to impose undeserved miseries upon the people through bad ruling. On the other hand, a fair judge who decides judicially can discharge political responsibility by upholding legality and integrity, which at the very least improves the well-being of the innocent.

China's judges, and the judicial system in general, are of course not free from external, especially political, constraints. (H. Fu 2013; X. He 2017; Ling Li 2015) Chinese courts are characterized by all sorts of embeddedness. The court is deeply integrated in the intricate web of the "political-legal system" where other institutions including the procuracy, the police, and the political-legal committee of the party all have a say in what it should do. (J. Wang and Liu

[76] His actions are even less provocative than his counterpart in the 2003 SARS outbreak, Jiang Yanyong, who took to foreign media to expose the taboo of speaking out in the Chinese news outlets. (H. Wang 2016, 6–7)

[77] This is also true for (especially criminal defense) lawyers in China, but to a lesser extent: while their professional duties are characterized by bringing justice and fairness to their clients, for some of them liberal political commitments may render their strategy more like "boundary-spanning resistance" that is the epitome of voice. (S. Liu and Halliday 2011)

2019) Formal control on resources and informal influence through administrative procedures severely hamper the independence of courts from local party-states. (Yueduan Wang 2020) Inside the courts, internal, vertical administrative ties and external, horizontal social relations both exert great pressure on how judges carry out their jobs. (Ng and He 2017) Collective ruling through the adjudication committee harms individual accountability. (X. He 2012) Yet it is false and unhelpful to assume judges in China don't enjoy a meaningful level of agency or merely act as functionaries without individual wills. (T. Zhang 2017) This view first overlooks the diversity in China's courts, some resembling traditional "work-units" where top-down supervision is prevalent and others featuring more professionalism and autonomy. (Ng and He 2017, 6–14) It also overestimates the interference from the party-state for Chinese courts when dealing with ordinary civil and criminal cases. (H. Fu 2016) The multifaceted duties of local judges also make extensive hands-on interference from above infeasible and undesirable. (Ng and He 2017, 31–58) Although judges are still overshadowed by the party-state under Xi, the level of "illegitimate influence" after recent reforms, nevertheless, is in decline. (X. He 2021)

As the institutional environment shifts, it is increasingly on the shoulders of individual judges to be responsible for the integrity of Chinese courts. (H. Fu 2016) The bottom line for judges to take political responsibility is to strive to adhere to due process. (H. He 2008) This includes resisting the influence of *guanxi* and bribery on their adjudications and upholding impersonality and impartiality. For individual judges, overcoming the implicit norms and social networks that support corruption is demanding yet necessary. (Ling Li 2018) For officials with more authority in the local courts, pushing for concrete reforms that streamline the process of litigation and enhance the discipline and professionalism of judges is also a viable task. In light of China's recent round of legal reforms, the greater autonomy of judges implies greater accountability and responsibility for them that must be put into use properly. (Yueduan Wang 2019) Seeking alternative and practical solutions to avoid favoritism and resist clientelism is also an act of loyalty as it is entirely coherent with the party-state's mandate of "governing in accordance with the law"[*yifa zhiguo*, 依法治国] that prioritizes routinization, predictability, and procedural justice. (Nesossi and Trevaskes 2017; T. Zhang and Ginsburg 2019)

Judges may also perform a more proactive role in their official capacity to better serve the ideal of justice. This is not a call for "judicial activism", which is theoretically and practically

controversial in the Chinese context as in others. (C. Wang 2006) What I have in mind is a subtler form of intervention in, or rather, rectification of, the process of reaching judicial decisions. It has to do with incorporating concerns habitually or structurally overlooked in the routine practices of the laws. These concerns do not necessarily conflict with existing political and legal rules and can be beneficial for better achieving important goals of social justice. Two issue areas seem especially promising: gender and ethnic minorities. China's legal justice is gendered as in everywhere. Legal scholarship suggests a complicated picture of how gender impacts judicial activities in China: on the one hand, female judges predominantly claim that their judicial decisions are guided by professionalism and objectivity instead of "feminine" values like compassion, empathy, or patience; meanwhile, despite a general homogeneity in judgment, certain behavioral patterns do differ between men and women judges, especially for cases including juvenile and female offenders and sexual harassments/offences. (Shen 2017, 135–76, 2020; Wei 2021; Wei and Xin 2013; Wei and Xiong 2020) This gendered sensitivity, or more broadly, an awareness for gender-related experiences obtainable to men and women alike, can be very helpful in tackling unequally gendered outcomes in legal decisions. It is not antithetical to judicial objectivity but rather contributes to a more holistic view of the nature of such offences. Therefore, judges should, within the proper legal parameters, take into consideration the gendered social realities in their assessment of the cases and their rulings[78]. Male judges are especially key to this effort since their support and respect are essential for their female colleagues to equally communicate perspectives and contribute to the decisions of the collective adjudication committee[79]. (Wei and Xiong 2020) Similar suggestions apply to the stigmatization of certain ethnic minorities as well. One recent finding contends that despite national-level policies for trying minority offenders more leniently, instead they tend to receive disproportionately longer sentences when they belong to an ethnic group associated with crimes like drug trade. (Hou and Truex 2020) Overcoming such prejudice and discrimination against ethnically minority offenders and perceptively blocking the subconscious influence of these social norms in judgment drafting should be on the minds of aspiring responsible judges.

[78] In practice, however, catering to gendered needs is a delicate business. For example, by trying to promote women's rights and welfare in courts, (women) judges in China also unintendedly strengthened patriarchal norms. (X. He and Ng 2013)

[79] On the other hand, it is perhaps also advisable for female judges to abandon the dichotomous view of subjectivity and objectivity and be more assertive in voicing their gendered concerns. This strategy, however, may not resonate well with female judges because they often need the façade of objectivity to be taken seriously by both male colleagues and offenders.

The most important pitfall associated with loyalty for System insiders and outsiders alike is certainly blind and unprincipled loyalty. For insiders, it takes the form of following the directives of the party-state thoughtlessly and essentially surrendering one's moral agency for material or psychological comfort, embracing an unwarranted determinism, and refusing to engage in critical self-reflections. (Schupmann 2014) For outsiders, this pitfall often takes the form of fervent ethno-nationalism that leads to, on the one hand, extreme xenophobia, and on the other, a deep reluctance to accept any criticism of China's cultural heritages, developmental records, and political model[80]. Unconditional loyalty forsakes the ability to judge politically for oneself and renders it impossible for people to contemplate the merits of plausible alternatives not suppressed, or even supported, by the party-state. When loyalty is regarded not as a *strategy* but an *ideology*, it can no longer potentially assist the realization of political responsibility.

This pitfall of excessive, ideological loyalty is closely related to another, subtler problem, the inability to accept the plausibility of the two other strategies for oneself or for others. The range of politically responsible actions fathomable for a System insider shrinks considerably when she ceases to believe exit or even voice is an available option because of self-censorship and unconditional hope for the System to correct itself. Adding to this problem is the unwillingness to sympathize with those who wouldn't accept absolute loyalty and chose to voice their opinions or pack their bags and leave, or both[81]. This is a situation where "[e]xit is here considered as treason and voice as mutiny." (Hirschman 1970, 121) Anyone who dares to speak out their minds or leave the country is labelled "troublemaker" or "traitor" respectively. These two responses reflect a poor understanding of the five concerns discussed in the previous chapter and contribute to the further closing and hollowing out of China's public sphere. Unconditional loyalty, therefore, spells the death of a potentially responsible individual.

3.4 Political judgment and political responsibility

The sections above offer a schematic and rather static analysis of how exit, voice, and loyalty as strategies of taking political responsibility can be pursued in particular capacities.

[80] One of the most important recent developments is the rise of the self-conscious regime defenders dubbed as "Little Pink" [*xiao fenhong*, 小粉红]. (Fang and Repnikova 2018)

[81] The editor-in-chief of the *Southern Weekly* when the Incident happened, Huang Can, is a relevant example. He not only bowed to the party propaganda department excessively and proactively, but also couldn't understand why his editors were pursuing groundbreaking, transgressive journalistic work that may bring him trouble. For an account, see Guan 2020, 77–86.

The assumptions seem to be that the mode of actions is predetermined for someone according to their occupation and that the boundaries between the three strategies are clear-cut. Judgment is still needed, but its task seems relatively simple: to figure out what actions can fulfill the strategies related to one's occupation or social role. (R. Zheng 2018) But this is a misleading interpretation. The assumptions outlined don't hold, for: 1) individuals don't, and aren't only supposed to, act based on their specific social roles but also in their capacities as citizens that demand greater flexibility in certain contexts[82]; 2) the proper actions to take for an individual associated with a specific social role may encompass several strategies simultaneously[83]; 3) the distinctions between the three strategies are also more porous than previously depicted[84]. An adequate understanding of political judgment aiming at discharging political responsibility, then, requires judgments of not only actions that can best achieve a given strategy but the most appropriate strategy or combination of strategies to choose as well. Context-specific tradeoffs and decisions must be made, for which no ready-made guideline can suffice.

One interesting example that can buttress these points is the experience of a former Chinese diplomat, Chen Youwei, at the eve of the Tiananmen crackdown[85]. At a peak Sino-American diplomatic summit where America's China experts gathered to expect a speech from the Chairman of China's National People's Congress at the time, Wan Li, they were frustrated because he was called back home and the substitute speaker lacked candor and substance, which is especially problematic at a time when martial law was already declared in Beijing. To everyone's surprise, Chen, a political counselor in the Chinese Embassy, asked the host, Henry Kissinger, to speak impromptu. He addressed the elephant in the room, arguing that the movement is a "rejuvenation, a kind of tremendous hope" which attests to the inseparability between economic and political reforms and the dire need to curb corruption and abuse of power in China. (Y. Chen 2006, 727) Chen also warned against a potential US intervention of the situation, suggesting it is better that China is left alone to seek its own path of modernization.

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[82] One example that comes to mind is the support for China's #Metoo/#MiTu [米兔] movement, which not only consists of gender-based solidarity but also rights-based call for institutional social transformation. (Z. Lin and Yang 2019)

[83] This is most evident in Veg's discussion of rights lawyers, academics, and petitioners who employ voice as a routine strategy while maintaining their relative autonomy and independence. *Minjian* intellectuals, then, not only talk with their fellow intellectuals but also argue with the party-state as they see fit. (Veg 2019a, 164–203)

[84] Consider again Li Wenliang, whose warning through online chats with friends and colleagues may also count as an indirect and evasive form of voice rather than straightforward loyalty.

[85] The following account is based on Chen's autobiographical recollections. See Y. Chen 2006.

These remarks reinvigorated the event and received huge waves of applause from the audience.

This is a preeminent example of excellent political judgment. Chen's action merits praise not only because of his sympathetic stance to the democratic movement, but also due to his timely decision to intervene and influence the room full of distinguished American China-watchers in China's interest. His words "came from [his] own sense of duty, [his] conscience, and reflected the thinking of the great majority of the Chinese people", which prove to be impeccable in motivation. (Y. Chen 2006, 728) Yet a selfless motivation is not the only reason why Chen's judgment is appropriate; the political consequence of his intervention, that is, the sense of sincerity and concern expressed by him and well received by the audience, also matters profoundly. Chen also took personal risks for his outspoken behaviors during a turbulent, politically sensitive time and although no "unfavorable effects" fell upon him, such bravery is still impressive. (Y. Chen 2006, 728) In addition, his actions illustrated a creative fusion of both voice and loyalty. Without inviting foreign interference, Chen took a stand different from the conservatives in Zhongnanhai that nevertheless resonated with both American and Chinese guests at the occasion. Chen went beyond his capacity as a rank-and-file diplomat without overstepping the boundaries. He did more than what's asked, yet nothing seems out of place.

Moments of decision like Chen's are rare to come by, but they duly illustrate the relevance of the faculty of judgment. Havel himself was exemplar of this faculty when he decided, between enthusiasm and reluctance, to take on both the spokesmanship of the Charter 77 in 1977 and the Czechoslovakian presidency in 1989, because the historical trajectory unfolded as it is for such decisions to concern political responsibility. (Havel 1991a, 134, 2007, 3–6) The perennial "worrying mentality" [*youhuan yishi*, 忧患意识] of Chinese intellectuals makes them always on the lookout of intervening politically when the situation calls for it. (P. Link 1992, 249–55) Prominent investigative journalists resign their posts because of, yet also in protest against, the disappearance of the quasi-free space for critical reporting and struggle to seek alternative outlets on social media to get their voices heard in the Xi era. (Svensson 2017)

Here it is fit to be reminded of the two faces of judgment: judgment as a necessary mental shortcut and judgment as decision-making during critical junctures. As Arendt reminds us, thinking hard about the intricacies of the present always risks pushing us into a mental impasse whose protraction leads to nihilism. (Arendt 2003, 176–78) During dangerous moments when

society's uncritical conformism might lead to destructive consequences, questioning and even abandoning these preexisting values become a necessity. But this destruction itself is not the end of mental reflection. What's needed is judgment, "the faculty to judge *particulars* without subsuming them under those general rules which can be taught and learned until they grow into habits that can be replaced by other habits and rules." (Arendt 2003, 188–89) The update of frames of judgment is constant despite their relative stability in times of non-emergency. It is true that discharging political responsibility usually means that actions are being safely put on "cruise control" and follow a more or less fixed strategy. (Arendt 2003, 189) In extraordinary circumstances, however, the strategy itself must be subject to reflection, revision, and possibly reversal. This sensibility of always standing corrected defines judgment. In this vein, the quest for political responsibility can be embarked fruitfully if stability is not mistaken for rigidity and the particulars are not mechanically processed as illustrations of predefined universals.

Concluding Remarks

In the course of this thesis, I have tried to outline a theory of political responsibility that fits the context of authoritarian China: a shared, political, and everyday notion of political responsibility grounded in the common predicament of domination and suffering of Chinese citizens that encompasses five vital concerns, namely truthfulness, understanding, faith, judgment, and commitment, and can be discharged through the tripartite strategies of "exit", "voice", and "loyalty", which are mediated by proper judgment.

Some important questions, however, remain unanswered: What's the point of trying to be politically responsible if regime change is unlikely? What's the practical difference between educated acquiescence and responsible yet (still too-) subtle resistance? Isn't the notion of political responsibility too fragile to produce meaningful political outcomes? It is unlikely that this thesis would have much (if any) influence on the political trajectory of contemporary China; as an intellectual intervention into real-world problems, however, it does have *implications* that call for justifications. As Ish-Shalom notes, theories are necessarily fit for both (good) use and abuse, and theorists are socially, though not (always) morally, *responsible* for how their theories are interpreted and applied. (Ish-Shalom 2009) By situating political responsibility in a perpetually authoritarian context, it seems the agency of Chinese citizens is too readily

conceded. Can we really go anywhere without first seeking substantial citizen empowerment?

I have three responses, although none of them can be satisfactory if the benchmark is "will this push China to democratize". First, the way in which this thesis discusses political responsibility navigates a useful direction that is markedly different from the predominant grand narrative of "national rejuvenation". Political responsibility is understood no longer as aiding the party-state's ambitions in achieving global hegemony but as shouldering the unavoidable injustices of living under its authoritarian rule. Connolly forcefully contends: "[c]onceptual revision is not…a sufficient condition of political change, but it is indispensable to significant political change. It is part of that process by which events once considered mere facts come to be seen as the outcomes of a political process and thereby as properly subject to public debate and the play of pressure." (Connolly 1993, 203) Therefore, the conceptual reorientation I attempt to make against the popular usage of political responsibility in China is indeed radical; it offers an alternative view of the concept that resists the official discourse's encroachment. Second, this theoretical exploration, with its central emphasis on the concern for truthfulness, may help secure a middle ground where meaningful conversations can happen between Chinese with different ideological preferences. Although it is true (and necessary) that different ideological positions assign different weights to different facts, their competition becomes nasty and dogmatically ideological when they repudiate the validity of certain facts as long as they are not useful for their arguments' sake. (Arendt 2006a, 234) Such efforts amount to bare wishful thinking that blantantly violates the virtue of accuracy in truth. (B. Williams 2008, 156) Bringing all the facts to the table, then, cannot settle ideological debates or even promise to end disputes regarding the credibility of certain facts, but it is a crucial first step, even more so in a post-truth China, to ensure that ideological debates remain in its place. In contexts like this, facts are indeed subversive. (Garton Ash 2010) Finally, since under current circumstances direct and open resistance is likely to be met with violent repression regardless of their causes, a more sensible approach to resolving this political predicament, it seems to me, is to convince those System *insiders* that their political responsibility consists not of participating in such repressive acts but to its contrary. Only when insiders no longer view their loyalty as blind obedience to anything the party dictates can we have hope that they may act according to their better judgments, and unless another Velvet Revolution dawns on China in

a (to me) fantastical manner, it's the best hope we have.

To return to the problem of democratization, I agree fundamentally with Ci Jiwei that China has become, socially, a Tocquevillian democracy to a large extent and that certain entrenched political problems cannot be resolved unless China becomes a democracy. The specter of an impending legitimation crisis will continue to haunt the party-state, perhaps stronger when democracy abroad seems more secure. (Ci 2019, 17–20) It is certainly my hope that China *should* democratize. Democracy, however, requires a prevailing *ethos* to sustain itself. My main objection to Ci's illuminating work is that it assumes since China is socially democratic, Chinese citizens are *predominantly* democrats if we can magically get rid of the state apparatus and its ideologies that distort people's preferences. (Ci 2019, 374–75) But that's a big if, and I worry that being complacent about the normative appeal of democracy among real-existing Chinese citizens will only understate the hard task ahead. It too hastily delegitimizes the huge crowd who reasonably disagree that democracy is already fit for China or have doubts for the unpredictable future of regime change. I will be satisfied if the theory of political responsibility this thesis offers can help *prepare* Chinese to become qualified democratic citizens even without institutional big bangs. In this sense, not being preoccupied with democratization doesn't rule it out in the future. The rest I leave to the working of history.

Yet history has not been a blessing *at all*. For any China observer who cares remotely about freedom, democracy, and justice, this is a dark time. (Pei 2020) Historical injustices including the Great Famine, the Cultural Revolution, and the Tiananmen Student Protest are glossed over, kept away from open discussion, or incorporated in the self-congratulatory official narrative celebrating the party's glorious centennial. Issues related to labor, gender, and religion are heavily, though in different degrees, suppressed. Democracy even within the party is retreating. Institutionalization of the depoliticized daily life is getting deeper, further signalling the entrenchment of authoritarian legality instead of rule of law. The Chinese Internet, once a perceived oasis for liberalization, became an isolated island filled with fake news and hate speech. Investigative journalism is basically dead, college professors can't touch many more sensitive topics, and the publishing industry is met with insurmountable censorship. And there's of course the constitutional amendment that granted Xi Jinping unrestricted tenures, unprecedented in post-Deng China.

And there's more at the "margins". Pro-democratic protesters, lawmakers, and lawyers are arrested in Hong Kong under the National Security Act. To the northwest in Xinjiang, countless Uyghurs are sent to "reeducation camps" to be unlawfully detained and forced to, among many things, "correct" their thoughts, making people wonder whether China has created its own Auschwitz. In light of these recent developments, why should we who care about China's political future still regard, as I did in the first chapter, Chinese authoritarianism as merely a structural injustice without condemning it as an evil regime that should no longer be tolerated?

I must admit I'm internally torn on these pressing issues, because for anyone wishing to take political responsibility in China, they simply *must* be taken into account. The weight of thinking about these issues is nothing compared with living them, but it is still significant. The easier way out is to pretend they are not there, but that isn't, and cannot be, an option. "I try to live in and with the heaviness, even though I am always sorely tempted to flee from it." (Schiff 2014, 6) Schiff's internal reflection was on the injustice of global garment sweatshops, but it suits nicely here as well. Yet living with the heaviness of Chinese authoritarianism can have multiple modalities, and it is still not clear if we take these recent developments into account, which of them can be deemed as properly and *exclusively* responsible.

In line with the spirit of the last chapter, I am inclined to suggest that this tension between different ways of striving to be politically responsible be preserved in the form of thought-provoking aporias. Those concrete efforts of being politically responsible should not be discredited merely because they are not radical enough: they cannot be radical in absolute terms because we are confronting an authoritarian regime with top-notch technologies, innovative ways of governance, and high levels of popular support. To quote Havel, "[t]he political and structural systems that life discovers for itself will clearly always be—for some time to come, at least—limited, half-way, unsatisfying and polluted by debilitating tactics. It cannot be otherwise, and we must expect this and not be demoralized by it." (Havel 2018, 131) The only hope, if there is any, is to carry on the struggle whenever possible at every opening. Doing so in the here and now must also include another commitment, perhaps on behalf of our posterities, that we (or they) will put those responsible for the political atrocities in contemporary China on trial legally, politically, and morally, when the time comes. They deserve their share of retrospective judgment. I hope history will offer the Chinese people this much-needed moment.

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