

Special Feature



Democracy, Globalization and the Future of History: A Chinese Interview with Francis Fukuyama⁺

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Abstract

Francis Fukuyama (弗朗西斯·福山), the famous American philosopher and political scientist, visited the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB) in December 2010. He gave a speech on the Forum of CCTB in which he interpreted in detail his ideas about the financial crisis and recent development of Capitalism. After the forum, he was interviewed by the journal of *Marxism and Reality*, and had a thorough talk on the topic of “Democracy, Globalization and the Future of History”. Professor Fukuyama answered the questions raised by the scholars in CCTB systematically. The following is the content of the dialogue.

Keywords: *Francis Fukuyama, democracy, globalization, history*

JEL classification: *B14, H11, N35, Z13*

Dr Francis Fukuyama is the Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI), resident in FSI’s Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University, United States of America, since July 2010. He was formerly at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of Johns Hopkins University, where he was the Bernard L. Schwartz Professor of International Political Economy and director of SAIS’ International Development programme.

Dr Fukuyama received his B.A. from Cornell University in classics, and his Ph.D. from Harvard University in Political Science. He was a member of the Political Science Department of the RAND Corporation from 1979-1980, then again from 1983-89, and from 1995-96. In 1981-82 and in 1989 he was a member of the Policy Planning Staff of the US Department of State, the first time as a regular member specializing in Middle East affairs, and then as Deputy Director for European political-military affairs. In 1981-82 he was also a member of the US delegation to the Egyptian-Israeli

1. Communal Culture and Political Trust

Li Yitian: Hello, Professor Fukuyama! Welcome to CCTB and thank you for communicating with us. We know you have been interviewed in this way for many times and people often asked “big questions” to you. Nevertheless, I hope to begin our dialogue from some “small questions”. Firstly, as a Japanese descendant born in the United States, why did you choose to be a scholar in humanities? Are there some influences from your family?

Fukuyama: Well, first of all, there are a lot of academics in my family. My grandfather on my mother’s side was actually a very palmary economist in Japan. He in his generation went to study in Germany before the First World War. He helped found the economic department in Kyoto University and he was the President of Osaka Municipal University. Throughout his life he had written something like 50 books. It is interesting to visit your library for works on Marxism. My grandfather actually requested books from the library of the German sociologist Werner Sombart and brought the books back to Japan with him. I inherited from him the first edition of Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*. Also, my father was an academic. He was a sociologist. He worked at Pennsylvania State University. So it is natural for me to be a scholar.

Li Yitian: In your academic career, who are the most important persons to you? If you like, please name one historical figure and a contemporary thinker.

talks on Palestinian autonomy. From 1996-2000 he was Omer L. and Nancy Hirst Professor of Public Policy at the School of Public Policy at George Mason University. He served as a member of the President’s Council on Bioethics from 2001-2004. Dr Fukuyama also holds honorary doctorates from Connecticut College, Doane College, Doshisha University (Japan) and Kansai University (Japan). He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Rand Corporation, the Board of Governors of the Pardee Rand Graduate School, the advisory boards for the *Journal of Democracy*, the Inter-American Dialogue, and The New America Foundation. He is also a member of the American Political Science Association and the Council on Foreign Relations.

Dr Fukuyama has written widely on issues relating to questions concerning democratization and international political economy. His book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, was published by Free Press in 1992 and has appeared in over twenty foreign editions. His most recent books are *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy*, and *Falling Behind: Explaining the Development Gap between Latin America and the United States*. He is also the chairman of the editorial board of the magazine *The American Interest*, which he helped to found in 2005.

Fukuyama: Well, there were three people who were probably the most important. Unfortunately all of them have passed away. My earliest teacher was Allan Bloom, who was my teacher when I was in Cornell. From him, I developed the appreciation of western philosophy and learned Greek so I could read Plato and Aristotle and was introduced to all of the big philosophic questions. The next person who was important was Samuel Huntington, who was my teacher in graduate school, who was a social scientist, who also I think posed some very big important questions that are still being debated. So in a lot of introductory of international relation classes, “the end of history” is contrasted with his classic theory. My third important person was Seymour Martin Lipset who was a great political scientist and sociologist, who was my colleague when I first started teaching, from whom I learned a great deal about American politics and comparative methods.

Li Yitian: If I don’t misremember, Allan Bloom wrote a famous book, *The Closing of The American Mind*, in which he showed his anxiety about the social problems and the future of the United States. You have pointed out that the most serious challenge in contemporary American society is still how to maintain the balance between individuals and communities. As for this issue, how do you consider the changes and stability in the US?

Fukuyama: I think that American society in a certain way hasn’t been stabilized since the end of the 1990s. There were a lot of social dislocations during the 1970s and 1980s, which was reflected in family breakdown, high rate of crime and general lack of social trust among people. But I think that in some ways it peaked in the 1990s. Since then, society became much more orderly. I argue that this is a kind of natural adjustment that people make because they are basically social animals and they want order in their lives. So this is what happened. But I think today we have a different social problem which is “political distrust”. Between the left and the right now there is a great deal of very passionate opposition that has made it very difficult to come to agreement on solving some basic political problems. That is different from the “social distrust” problem in the 1990s.

Li Yitian: If one community with high trust must consist of liberal individuals, do you think the communitarianism can be a better version of liberalism? Amitai Etzioni, the famous professor in University of Washington D.C. and the important advocator of communitarianism said: “A good society is of strong bonds which are balanced by similarly powerful protections of autonomy.” Good society, which is called a real community by him, requires not only liberties but also orders. So it has to take a balance between a pair of basic forces: centripetal force and centrifugal force. The former creates

communal service, mobilization and solidarity, while the latter brings differentiation and individual characters. In this sense, can your politics of “liberal democracy” be regarded as a communitarian pattern?

Fukuyama: Well, I think in a successful liberal democracy, you have a strong cultural sense of community. That is needed to allow people to cohere in society. In the United States, historically, a lot of this sense of community has come out of religion. Americans, you know, are very religious compared to other advanced countries. It is hard to say that everybody shares the same religion, but everybody believes that religion is a generally important part of life.

Li Yitian: In the book of *Trust*, you emphasized especially the importance of sharing common ethical beliefs and rules, common enterprises and goals, and such a communal culture in which people trust each other. However, you also noticed that this kind of integration and collective consciousness have been weakened by individualism and its ideology about “rights”. As for this point, you clearly expressed your worry about the future of the US. Does it mean you also dislike some basic principles of individualism? Many political philosophers have found that “liberty” and “democracy” are of some internal conflicts. What are your ideas about the conflicts? Will they disrupt your ideal of “liberal democracy”?

Fukuyama: Well I think that is a major problem faced by the liberal democracy. Liberal democracy reflects certain cultural values, but it also encourages a system of multiculturalism. And in some ways in liberal society you may face the ideas that undermine the very basis of liberal society in the first place. For a great amount you see this especially when you get to the radical Muslims who live in the European liberal society. They don’t want to permit their children to have a liberty of choice including marriage. They don’t want criticism about this. It is a big internal debate whether in a liberal society you have to tolerate people who are not themselves liberal. I think that Allan Bloom in the book you referred to was most concerned about the problem of relativism, meaning that people who believe that there is no real basis for any deep beliefs or any particular system of values so anyone can make up whatever system they want. This was a real problem in the American society. I don’t think this is a problem that has been solved.

2. Politics of Democracy and End of History

Li Yitian: Let’s come back to the topic of democracy. It must be recognized that there are a lot of definitions about this concept, and people tend to use different ways to define it. If we leave aside the comprehensive conditions for

a full democratic system, but only consider the necessary ones without which a political institution cannot be regarded as “democracy”, in your opinion, what should be included in the list?

Fukuyama: I think first of all we are not talking just about democracy, but talking about liberal democracy. In a liberal democracy you have to have two types of institutions. One type has to do with the rule of law that protects individuals from the State. The State has limits on what they can do to its citizens, even when the majority of the citizens want to persecute the minority. The other type of institution has to do with democracy, so there is a mechanism for holding the government accountable to the people, which in most democracies is some kind of competitive elections. So you can have a liberal non-democracy, that would be like Singapore, let's say. You can also have a non-liberal democracy, that would be like Iran, where they have an election, but they don't respect individual rights. To have a real liberal democracy, you really have to have both of them simultaneously.

Li Yitian: It is not necessary for democracy to elect the best political leaders (e.g., Hitler), make correct political decisions (e.g., the death of Socrates), or bring out the most efficient and effective political actions (e.g., social development in contemporary Greece). However, democracy has strong capability of supervision and self-correction. In a democratic system, even if people elect an idiot or a rascal into office, people can elect him/her out of the office; even if the government decision is bad, people's voice can be heard and the bad policy can be corrected; even if the political process lacks efficiency, it can avoid rush, arbitrary, and randomness. As for the following two statements, which one do you prefer? “Democracy is the best political institution” or “Democracy is not the worst political institution.”

Fukuyama: Well I probably believe the latter. You know in an authoritarian system, you have a much greater possibility of the best or the worst performance acted by the government. So if you have a really good leader like Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore – you know, who makes good decisions, is not corrupt, has a positive vision for the future of your society – the authoritarian system is much more efficient than the democratic one. On the other hand, the authoritarian system, since there is no check on the power of the leaders, if you have a bad leader, is much worse than the democracy, because there is no accountability with which you can get rid of them. In the Chinese history, this was I believe known as the problem of a bad emperor. You know, if you got a good emperor, it was great. But if you got a bad emperor, you are stuck with him for 30 years. It could be a real disaster. So I think in democracy, in a lot of times, you don't get the best, but you also don't get the worst.

Li Yitian: So you think that liberal democracy is the best model of democracy, right?

Fukuyama: Well, if you ask me: is the liberal democracy better than the non-liberal democracy? My answer will of course be “Yes”.

Li Yitian: Your argument of liberal democracy is based on the theoretical structure of “end of history”. As we know, the term “end” in a descriptive sense means “final” or “the last phase.” However, the origin of the word “end” comes from the Greek word “telos,” which means not only “the last,” but also “the best” and “perfect.” Then, as far as your idea of “end of history” is concerned, which do you mean? Is democracy the final stage of political system (no other further political structure will evolve)? Or is it not only the final stage, but also the best one?

Fukuyama: You know, we have a belief in progress, human progress, that there is an evolution on human societies, from hunting and gathering society to furrow society, and to industrial society so far. This is very familiar to every one in Marxist tradition. So people think that we are evolving and the latter systems have solved the problems in the earlier systems. The most advanced countries in the world seem to have market economies and liberal democracy as a political system. This may not be the best. But the real question is what alternatives are there, which offer higher production and happier and better society? So if you look around the world today, it is not clear that there is a better alternative. Certainly most people I don’t think want to live in slavery, or some sort. I think China represents probably the most successful alternative model because it is an authoritarian but successfully modernizing country. I think it is really one of the big issues now whether the Chinese model can provides some competition.

Chen Jiagang: In the way of developing its democracy, China faces huge pressures from inside and outside. In regard to external pressures, some of our neighbour countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand and Pakistan, have been practicing competitive democratic elections. So we were asked by European scholars why China had not practiced liberal democracy, though our economy was better than theirs. They can do it, why can’t you?

Fukuyama: Well, I think the key for this question is whether democracy is a universal value or it is culturally peculiar for western countries. I believe that it is a kind of universal value, because people always want the government to be accountable to them. It not only includes the developed western countries, but include those that you have mentioned. There are many ways to show that the eastern society is suitable for democracy. Indonesia is an amazing example.

It is not only an old country but very poor and ethnically diverse. A lot of people say that it has no conditions for democracy, but in fact democracy in it is successful.

Chen Jiagang: The concept of deliberative democracy that has emerged in the 1980s represents an exciting development in political theory. To some extent it refers to the idea that legitimate lawmaking come from the public deliberation of citizens in political community. Some scholars even opine that it evokes the ideals of rational legislation, participatory politics and civic self-governance. Professor Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, Seyla Benhabb, Jon Alster, James Bomann, John Dryzek, and Archon Fund have made great progress in this field. Professor James Fishkin even applied his deliberative polling in the process of budget reform in China local township governance. So we want to know how do you comment about this late development in political field? What is its significance to China's future?

Fukuyama: Deliberative democracy seeks to return to the conditions of early democracy, in which citizens could participate and interact with each other in a direct way. The problem in modern representative democracy is one of scale: in order to extract opinions from societies with tens or hundreds of millions of people, representation becomes very abstract and viewpoints are expressed primarily by well-organized groups. Oftentimes these groups represent minority interests with strong stakes in an issue, but do not represent the whole of society. So, efforts to build deliberative democracy seek to reinsert an older form of social interaction into the framework of modern representative institutions. While this is a worthy goal, its success thus far has been limited. It works best in a highly decentralized political structure that facilitates small-scale interaction, but is very hard to apply in larger settings.

It is hard to say how deliberative democracy would work in China given that there is no formal democracy to begin with. That is, deliberation makes sense only if the people deliberating have authority to make actual decisions. So while deliberation occurs within the Chinese communist party, this should not be confused with deliberative democracy. It is always better to have more rather than less deliberation, but also better to have more rather than less democratic accountability.

Li Yitian: Suppose Liberal Democracy is the ultimate political forms of mankind, and it will eventually spread to all of the world, then if you want to achieve this goal, which way of spreading is acceptable? When George W. Bush launched the war against Iraq, you know, one of his key reasons was to export freedom and democracy to Iraq and help the Iraqi people build a liberal democratic country. What do you think of that?

Fukuyama: My last book was really about what our mistake in the Iraq War was because I think that democracy spreads because people want it in each society and it is not the result of the American military power. I think it was a tremendous mistake for Bush's administration to think that they could use the military power for those ends. Actually I think that Bush's administration undermined its own efforts to promote democracy by launching the war. Today in Middle East if we use the word "democracy", they think it means American military invasion. You know, they took it as a bad thing.

3. Social Psychology and Philosophy of History

Li Yitian: To a great extent, the reason you consider "Liberal Democracy" as the ultimate political system is because the liberal democracy, in your eyes, can meet the human's deep needs of recognition. Moreover, you regard politics as "the effort to solve the problem of recognition", the history of politics as the one of "struggle for recognition" and the dynamics of politics as "to gain the other's recognition". Are you worried that the left-wings (especially Marxists) will criticize you that you have overemphasized the effect of social psychological factors so that you appear to be a historical idealist?

Fukuyama: Well I think Marxists, just like the modern economists, over emphasized the material factors in human development. I think both of them are important. People have material needs and wants, but they also have ideas and they want recognition of their dignity, they want recognition of the moral ideas that motivate them. I think any historical account that is just materialistic misses a great deal of reality. I mean, you take something like religion. The Marxists say that religion just comes out, it is just a fairy tale that is invented by the capitalists to make the proletariat compliant. I don't think it could explain the suicide bombing in Middle East today.

Li Yitian: Although "recognition" represents a social relationship, it originates from the deep desire in the mind of human beings. That's to say, the real "recognition" must be from the heart of one political agent and reach the heart of another political agent who can feel it really. Therefore, the notion of "recognition" is one category of political psychology or social psychology. Similarly, in your book, *Trust*, you emphasized another kind of political psychology or social psychology. Does it mean you prefer the psychological methods to observe, analyze and discuss the political or social problems?

Fukuyama: Well, you could call it social psychology; you could also say it has to do with ideas and moral values. Human being is more complex than just being materialistic creatures.

Li Yitian: Well, can we understand your ideas in the following way: on the driving force of history you have taken some subjectivist explanations, but on the trend of history your philosophy shows a belief in objectivity (namely, a belief that historical development is bound to achieve some a highest level). The former would certainly be criticized by Marxists, while the latter is of similarities with Marxism. Please say something about Marxism (particularly about its philosophy of history). When you engage in discussions with Marxists, what do you think the greatest challenge is for you?

Fukuyama: It is funny because I don't think it is Marxists that are making this critique most effectively right now. However, one of the big problems in liberal democracy is in fact the question of inequality. You know, all societies have their tolerance to a certain degree of inequality. They tried to minimize it through social policies and redistribution of various resources. However, in the end they did not make it go away. I don't think Marxism has made it go away either. It may be one of those unsolved problems. But at least the Marxists classically pointed out the problem that we need equality, and made it kind of a central concern. So I think it was probably the most important issue they raise.

Li Yitian: Since you think there is “the final form of human ideology” or “the final form of political domination”, does it mean that you are a determinist or teleologist in historical philosophy? It seems that you agree with Hegel and Marx on the following idea: that is, the history of human beings will develop to a perfect social form which can satisfy them fully, and it will stop developing when it gets to the stage. With this historical perspective, how do you evaluate and respond to the critique of historical determinism by Karl Popper?

Fukuyama: I have no consciousness of historical determinism in the sense of Marxism. My recent book on the origin of political institutions is a much more detailed historical account of how human societies evolve in different ways, which is not determinist at all. As a matter of fact there are a lot of accidents and unexpected affects. I don't think it is determinist at all.

In my new book, I argue that political evolution is comparable to biological evolution in the sense that you have different political systems, they compete with each other, and some or more are better adapt to their conditions and may survive. Then if the conditions change, the same institutions can actually become dysfunctional and get political decline. Just like biological evolution doesn't have a certainly predetermined path, I don't think political evolution does either.

4. Observation of Reality and Chinese Problems

Xue Xiaoyuan: This morning, the topic of your lecture in our Bureau is “Global Financial Crisis and the Future of Capitalism”. So my question is what is your opinion about the progress of globalization?

Fukuyama: Well, first of all, I think it is important for us to understand that globalization is not a new phenomena. Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* which was published in 1848 had already pointed out that the global market unified much of the world and there are many people in a single competitive market place. So what we have seen in the last generation is just the acceleration of what’s going on in the last 200 years. I think one of the obvious benefits of globalization has been the possibility of the rapid economic development that is impossible when the society were isolated from one another.

I remember a few Christmas ago I wanted to buy an Apple computer for my son, and it was only about a week before Christmas. So I made an order on the Internet but I really worried about whether it could be sent in time because it was delivered from Shenzhen, China. However, the Federal Express took it to the Washington D.C. where I lived before Christmas. Obviously that kind of economic efficiency couldn’t be achieved without globalization.

However, I think the other side of it is that globalization makes us more vulnerable because we are more interdependent with one another. So the recent economic crisis began from the Wall Street in the American real estate market and then affected the farmers of Africa, and the consumers in China and many other places of the world. I think the problem is that we don’t have a political structure internationally to respond to the economic structure that we have now developed.

Xue Xiaoyuan: German Sociologist Ulrich Beck brought out his theory of Risk Society in 1986. In 2004, he provided another conception, “Global Risk Society”, which means that globalization will broadcast the risks and crises everywhere in the world so that nobody could escape from them. How do you appraise such a theory? What’s your opinion about the relationship between risks and crises?

Fukuyama: I’m not familiar with that risk theory. It does seem to me that it’s true that we face a lot of risks through globalization, but we also have the possibility of a lot of gains. So people benefit while they are vulnerable. The benefits are quite tremendous. Chinese developments and Indian developments are almost unprecedented. I think the critical point is to have a political framework which can deal with the risks and a way in controlling the risks and holding accountable the people who make policies and bring out the bad results.

Xue Xiaoyuan: Currently, Europe is in the trouble of financial crisis. Portugal was predicted as the next “victim”. What do you think about the prediction?

Fukuyama: I think the problem in Europe was created by the Euro. It didn't have a mechanism for disciplining the individual countries, and didn't have a mechanism for countries leaving the Euro. You could go in but you couldn't go out. That creates the big problems. The reason is that the Euro works if every country exercises the same degree of discipline and practices fixed policy. Spain, Greece and Ireland got into big trouble. They have no way in the current system to fix it except through political assistance by rich countries which are facing some barriers. However, I think that the price of the collapse of Euro will be so high that no country can afford it. So the rich countries, like Germany, will finally have to accept the fact and assist the poorer ones.

Li Yitian: Please let me ask some questions about China. You once stated that two opposing economies and cultures will emerge in East Asia: China and Japan. You also said that due to a lack of social trust, although China could quickly take advantage of family relationships to establish private enterprises, China would face more problems than enterprises in US and Japan when it transformed family enterprises into modern enterprises. So China must find its special organizational form in modernization. Today, how do you evaluate these judgments? What is the most appropriate organizational form for China's modernization?

Fukuyama: Well first of all, I don't think that the fact that in China you classically have family businesses and in Japan they developed very large corporations earlier necessarily means that one is going to be economically more successful than the other. In fact over the last 15-20 years, China's economic performance has been better than that of Japan. But I do think that it is probably the case that in order to organize very large-scale economic organizations or companies in China, it is easier to do this in the state sector than it is in the private sector. Further, if you think about the phenomenon of “guanxi 关系”, which is all based on the personal relationship about who you know and who you trust, it at least restricts the set of business contact more than you have in a society that has broader trust.

Li Yitian: For the past thirty years, China has carried out its strategy of reform and opening up. What are the primary means and channels for you to observe and understand China? According to the observations, what are your basic judgments about China's current situation? Based on the judgments, what would you like to say to the Chinese people?

Fukuyama: You know, obviously I don't speak Chinese. So I follow China as a lot of Americans do through newspapers, books and articles. I have a lot of Chinese students. So a lot of what I know about China are from talking to my students and Chinese friends. I think if I could talk to Chinese people right now, what I would like to say is that they ought to relax a little bit, and not to be so insecure about China's power in the world or status in the world. China is rising and it will continue to do that, and further more it is going to change things all that much. So I think China could probably afford to be a little bit more relax about criticism and open up the system more. I mean it was impressive how much China has opened over the last 25 years, but it could be a lot more open than it is now.

Xue Xiaoyuan: The last question. Just now you have mentioned your new book for several times. I am very interested in its concrete content. Besides, in your many works, which is/are your favourite(s)? And why?

Fukuyama: Well the book I am working on right now is a two-volume book. I have just finished the first volume, and it will be published in the United States in April, and its title is *The Origins of Political Orders: From Pre-human Times to the French Revolution*. The second volume will continue the story about the political development up to the present. I have not really started the second volume and it will take some of the years.

Probably the book I like best is *Trust*, the second book I wrote. I had always wanted to look at the impact of culture on economic life and it gave me the opportunity to do that. In a way, although everybody knows about *The End of History and the Last Man*, I actually have given lectures more on trust, because people find that this is a very important topic to them.

Notes

- + We are appreciative of Dr Lai Hanrong's excellent translation.
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