

How the memes of constitutional democracy have transmitted and mutated over time

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1 Constitutional democracy and republicanism can be viewed as memes that spread and evolve much like biological traits. These political ideas, or "memes," propagate through cultural trans- mission, influenced by processes similar to those found in natural selection, such as variation, mutation, competition, and inheritance.

As with biological evolution, the spread and success of these memes depend on how well they adapt to the environments in which they exist. Constitutional democracy and republicanism have evolved by adapting to different historical, social, and cultural contexts. They have varied in form—sometimes emphasizing different balances of power, individual rights, or civic participation. When these ideas resonate with the values or needs of a society, they spread more successfully, gaining traction and influence.

However, just as some biological traits can become extinct if they fail to adapt, memes like constitutional democracy can also struggle or even disappear if they do not fit with or adapt to changing circumstances. For example, in environments where authoritarianism prevails, the meme of constitutional democracy might struggle to replicate, leading to its suppression or modification.

Over time, constitutional democracy and republicanism have competed with other political ideas, such as monarchism, socialism, and totalitarianism. This competition has driven their evolution, with the most resilient forms of these political memes surviving and spreading across different societies. In some cases, these memes have mutated in response to local pressures, leading to new forms of governance that still retain the core principles of constitutional democracy, such as the rule of law, separation of powers, and protection of individual rights.

Interestingly, some versions of these memes have spread even when they have been detrimental to certain aspects of their host societies, much like how

some biological traits can be harmful. For instance, the rapid implementation of democratic institutions in societies without a strong foundation for them can lead to instability or conflict. Yet, these memes continue to replicate and evolve, sometimes in ways that are unexpected or unintended.

In conclusion, constitutional democracy and republicanism, as memes, evolve through mechanisms analogous to those of biological evolution. Their success depends on their adaptability, the environments in which they find themselves, and their ability to compete with other political ideas. Over time, these memes have proven remarkably resilient, constantly mutating and spreading, often shaping the course of history in profound ways.

2 When we treat constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes, we can draw parallels to the way Richard Dawkins initially conceived of memes as mental concepts or ideas. Dawkins' early work on memes emphasized the idea as a replicator—an entity that spreads from mind to mind, evolving over time. However, just as Dawkins' ideas about memes evolved to consider the medium through which these ideas spread, we must also consider how the medium influences the replication and evolution of the constitutional democracy meme.

David Hull, for example, suggested that while memes can exist as ideas within our minds, the medium through which they are communicated and spread plays a critical role in shaping their evolution. In the context of constitutional democracy, this medium might be the political institutions, educational systems, media channels, or even historical documents that transmit these ideas across generations. Hull referred to the medium as an "interactor," highlighting its active role in influencing how the meme evolves, rather than treating the meme purely as a mind-determinant influence.

Daniel Dennett further argued that the meme and its medium are inseparable—memes exist because of the mediums that carry them. Applying this to constitutional democracy, we could say that the principles of democracy and republicanism exist and thrive because of the institutions and cultural contexts that support and disseminate them. Without these mediums—like legal systems, democratic elections, and public discourse—the meme of constitutional democracy would not have the same impact or evolutionary success.

Limor Shifman's work, especially in the context of Internet memetics, pushes this idea further by arguing that the distinction between a meme and its medium is not empirically observable. In other words, the meme of constitutional democracy cannot be fully understood without considering the various mediums—such as books, speeches, and digital media—that carry and shape it. Shifman's approach, which draws from Susan Blackmore's theoretical foundations, emphasizes the importance of studying how cultural ideologies, behaviors, and media influence the spread and evolution of memes like constitutional democracy.

In the broader context, the interaction between the meme of constitutional democracy and its mediums (like political institutions, education, and media) plays a significant role in its evolution. Just as Internet memes evolve through their interactions with digital platforms, the meme of constitutional democracy evolves through its interactions with the various structures and mediums that transmit it across time and cultures. Understanding this interplay is crucial for analyzing how constitutional democracy has spread, mutated, and adapted in different societies throughout history.

3 When considering constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes, we can draw parallels to how memes, like genes, vary in their ability to replicate and spread. Successful memes—those that resonate with individuals and societies—tend to propagate and become more widespread, while less effective ones may stagnate and eventually fade into obscurity. The memes of constitutional democracy and republicanism, which emphasize principles like rule of law, individual rights, and the separation of powers, have persisted and evolved because they have demonstrated a strong capacity to replicate and adapt across different cultures and historical periods.

For these memes to take root and flourish, they first require retention. The longer a meme of constitutional democracy remains embedded within a society or its institutions, the greater its chances of propagation. This longevity can be seen in the enduring principles of democracy that have been upheld in various constitutions and legal frameworks over centuries. However, just as with any meme, the threat to these democratic ideals comes from the potential re-

placement of these memes by others, whether through the rise of authoritarian ideologies or other competing political structures.

Memes of constitutional democracy are transmitted both vertically (from one generation to the next) and horizontally (across different societies and cultural contexts). Vertical transmission occurs through educational systems, familial teachings, and the preservation of historical documents and legal precedents. Horizontal transmission happens when these democratic ideals are adopted by other societies, often influenced by the success and stability of existing democracies.

These memes reproduce by being communicated and imitated—whether through speeches, written constitutions, or the actions of democratic leaders. They can be categorized as internal memes (i-memes), which reside within the minds of individuals who believe in and practice these democratic principles, and external memes (e-memes), which are represented by physical symbols like national constitutions, flags, or monuments.

The spread of these memes can be likened to the spread of contagions, as they can influence large populations, inspiring movements and revolutions. Just as some social contagions—like trends or collective behaviors—spread rapidly through societies, so too can the ideals of democracy and republicanism. This spread can occur through direct adoption or through more subtle influences that slowly shift societal norms toward democratic governance.

Aaron Lynch's framework of meme transmission offers further insights into how these memes of constitutional democracy spread and persist. For example, the "proselytic" transmission of these memes occurs when democratic nations promote their ideals abroad, encouraging other nations to adopt similar systems. The "preservational" transmission is evident in how democracies work to maintain and strengthen their institutions over time, resisting the erosion of their principles. Additionally, the "adversative" transmission can be seen in how democratic societies defend themselves against authoritarian regimes that seek to undermine or replace their values.

In summary, the memes of constitutional democracy and republicanism have proven to be resilient and adaptable, spreading through various mechanisms of cultural transmission. Their success lies in their ability to resonate with human desires for freedom, justice, and self-governance, and their continued evolution reflects the dynamic nature of human societies.

4 When we treat constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes, we conceptualize them as cultural units that are transmitted through imitation, adaptation, and replication across societies and generations. Richard Dawkins initially defined a meme as a "unit of cultural transmission" or "a unit of imitation." This notion encapsulates how ideas like constitutional democracy spread, evolve, and persist within human cultures.

John S. Wilkins expanded on this idea by emphasizing the evolutionary aspect of memes, defining them as units of sociocultural information subject to selection pressures that can either favor or hinder their survival and replication. In this sense, constitutional democracy and republicanism, as memes, compete within a cultural environment, and their success depends on how well they resonate with the values, needs, and circumstances of a society. For instance, these political ideas have endured and thrived in certain regions because they have proven adaptable and beneficial, ensuring their propagation.

The concept of memes as units is analogous to the idea of genes in biological evolution. However, just as genes do not exist in fixed sizes or forms, memes too can vary in scope and complexity. A meme could be as simple as a single principle of constitutional democracy, like the rule of law, or as complex as the entire framework of a democratic constitution. This flexibility in defining a meme highlights the challenges in pinpointing the exact "size" or "boundary" of a cultural idea, similar to the difficulties in defining the boundaries of a gene in biological terms.

Susan Blackmore illustrates this complexity by comparing the memes of Beethoven's symphonies to individual notes within the compositions. Just as one might isolate the first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as a meme, one could similarly view the entire symphony as a single, more complex meme. This analogy applies to constitutional democracy, where individual principles (e.g., separation of powers) can be viewed as discrete memes, or the entire democratic system can be seen as a broader, encompassing meme.

The idea of memes in cultural evolution has faced criticism, particularly in their identification as discrete units. Critics argue that cultural ideas, including those of constitutional democracy, cannot be easily quantified or dissected into isolated units. Nevertheless, proponents like Blackmore assert that, despite these challenges, memes serve as a useful framework for understanding cultural transmission and evolution, much like genes do in biological contexts.

Lumsden and Wilson, in their theory of gene-culture coevolution, proposed

the concept of "cultorgen" to describe the fundamental units of culture. Although this term did not gain traction, Wilson later acknowledged that "meme" serves as a more fitting term for the basic unit of cultural inheritance, emphasizing its role in bridging the natural and social sciences.

Critics of memetics, particularly from cultural anthropology and materialist perspectives, challenge the notion that memes can be treated as unitary entities. They argue that cultural ideas, including those of constitutional democracy, are not identical across different contexts and instances, and thus cannot be reduced to simple, replicable units. Despite these debates, the meme concept remains a powerful tool for examining how ideas like constitutional democracy and republicanism spread, adapt, and evolve over time, influenced by both their internal structure and the cultural environments in which they operate.

In summary, treating constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes allows us to explore their evolution, transmission, and survival in a manner analogous to biological evolution. While the identification and delimitation of these memes may be challenging, they provide a valuable lens for understanding how these political ideas have persisted and transformed across different societies and historical periods.

5 When we consider constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes, we can analyze their development and propagation through the lens of evolutionary influences as described by Richard Dawkins. Dawkins identified three critical conditions for evolution: variation, heredity or replication, and differential fitness. These conditions apply not only to biological genes but also to cultural ideas like constitutional democracy.

Variation: Variation refers to the introduction of new elements or changes to existing ones. In the context of constitutional democracy and republicanism, variation can be seen in the different forms these systems take across various societies and historical periods. For example, the concept of popular sovereignty has evolved differently in the United States compared to France, reflecting the cultural and historical contexts of each nation. These variations allow the idea of constitutional democracy to adapt to different environments, making it more likely to survive and spread.

Heredity or Replication: Heredity or replication is the capacity to create copies of elements. Constitutional democracy replicates itself through education, legal frameworks, and political institutions. When one generation upholds and passes on the principles of democracy—such as the rule of law, separa-

tion of powers, and individual rights—to the next, these ideas are effectively "replicated." This replication ensures the continuity of constitutional democracy across generations, similar to how genes are passed from one generation to the next.

Differential Fitness: Differential fitness refers to the idea that some elements are better suited to the environment than others. In the case of constitutional democracy, certain principles may enhance a society's stability and prosperity, making these ideas more likely to endure. For example, a political system that effectively balances power among different branches of government may be more stable and resilient, increasing the likelihood that it will survive and be adopted by other societies. Conversely, elements that do not fit well with the environment may fade away.

Evolution of Memes: Dawkins emphasized that evolution naturally occurs wherever these three conditions coexist, and that meme evolution is a real phenomenon subject to natural selection. As constitutional democracy memes pass from one generation to the next, they may either strengthen or weaken the societies that adopt them. For instance, a society that adopts effective checks and balances might gain a competitive advantage over one that does not, much like how a population might gain an advantage through superior tool-making skills.

Lamarckian and Darwinian Traits: Unlike genetic evolution, memetic evolution can display both Darwinian and Lamarckian traits. Constitutional democracy can be passed down through direct imitation (Darwinian), or through inference and adaptation (Lamarckian), where a society might adopt democratic principles but tailor them to fit its specific needs and context. For example, a society might observe the democratic process in another country and implement a version of it that suits its own political culture and history.

Memeplexes: Clusters of memes, or memeplexes, such as political doctrines or constitutional frameworks, play a role in the acceptance and transmission of new memes. A memeplex that is successful, like the framework of a constitutional republic, may facilitate the spread of associated memes, such as individual rights and judicial independence. Memes that fit well within this framework may "piggyback" on the success of the larger memeplex, gaining acceptance more easily.

Transmission and Mutation: The transmission, mutation, and selection of these memeplexes are critical in understanding how constitutional democracy has evolved. Just as religious memeplexes can incorporate and harden specific doctrines over time, constitutional democracy can integrate and solidify key principles that eventually become inviolable norms within a society. These norms might include the separation of church and state, the protection of free speech, or the right to a fair trial.

In summary, viewing constitutional democracy and republicanism as memes allows us to understand their propagation, variation, and evolution through cultural and historical contexts. These ideas have persisted and spread because they have adapted to the environments in which they have been implemented, replicating through education and legal systems, and gaining strength from their compatibility with other successful memeplexes.

6 The memes of constitutional democracy and constitutional republicanism, with roots in ancient Greece and Rome, have undergone significant transformations over the past 3,000 years. These ideas, initially formulated in the direct democracy of Athens and the structured republicanism of Rome, have evolved in response to various historical contexts, philosophical developments, and cultural shifts, shaping the governance of societies around the world.

In ancient Greece, particularly in Athens during the 5th century BCE, the concept of democracy emerged as a radical departure from monarchies and oligarchies. Athenian democracy introduced the idea of **demos kratos**—rule by the people—where citizens participated directly in decision-making processes. Although this form of democracy was limited to a small group of free male citizens, it laid the groundwork for the principle of collective governance. Philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle further critiqued and refined these ideas, with Aristotle advocating for a mixed government that combined elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy to prevent any single entity from gaining absolute power.

Simultaneously, the Roman Republic (509–27 BCE) introduced the concept of a **res publica**, or public affair, where power was held by elected representatives rather than a monarch. The Roman system of governance, with its checks and balances, separation of powers, and emphasis on the rule of law, influenced the development of constitutional republicanism. The Roman Republic emphasized civic virtue, where citizens were expected to actively participate in public life, and the idea of **libertas** (freedom) became closely tied to living under laws made by representatives of the people.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, these democratic and republican ideas largely receded during the Middle Ages, with Europe dominated by feudalism and monarchies. However, the principles of rule of law and limited government persisted, as seen in documents like the Magna Carta (1215), which placed constraints on the king's power and laid the foundation for constitutional governance. The Renaissance brought a revival of classical republicanism, particularly in Italian city-states like Florence and Venice. Thinkers such as Machiavelli advocated for a return to republican ideals, emphasizing the importance of civic virtue and warning against the dangers of corruption.

The Enlightenment further transformed these ideas, with philosophers like John Locke, Montesquieu, and Rousseau reinterpreting ancient concepts in light of modern notions of individual rights, separation of powers, and pop-

ular sovereignty. The American Revolution and the subsequent creation of the United States Constitution (1787) marked a significant mutation of these memes, combining classical republicanism with Enlightenment principles to create a system of governance that emphasized checks and balances, federalism, and the protection of individual rights.

The French Revolution radicalized these ideas, promoting liberty, equality, and fraternity, although the subsequent instability led to cycles of republicanism and authoritarianism. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the memes of constitutional democracy spread globally, often adapted to local contexts. However, the 20th century also saw challenges to these ideas with the rise of totalitarian regimes, where authoritarian leaders often claimed to represent the will of the people.

Today, constitutional democracies exist in various forms, from parliamentary systems to presidential republics. The basic principles—rule of law, separation of powers, and protection of individual rights—remain central, though they are constantly reinterpreted in light of new challenges, such as globalization, technological change, and shifting social values. The meme of constitutional democracy continues to mutate, absorbing new influences and responding to changing political, social, and economic conditions, proving its enduring relevance and adaptability in shaping governance across the world.

7 The memes of republicanism have mutated into the memes of constitutional democracy since 1900 due to several key factors related to societal evolution, global political changes, and shifts in ideological priorities.

1. Response to Modern Governance Challenges: The early 20th century presented new challenges that the classical ideas of republicanism struggled to address effectively. As states became more complex, with larger populations and more diverse interests, the simple republican models, which focused heavily on civic participation and virtue, needed to adapt. Constitutional democracy emerged as an evolution of these ideas, incorporating more structured and layered governance systems that could handle the demands of modern, pluralistic societies. This transition reflected the necessity for more robust frameworks that ensured stability, inclusiveness, and accountability.

2. Globalization and the Spread of Democratic Ideals: The 20th century was marked by increased global interaction, which facilitated the spread and mutation of political ideas. The meme of republicanism, when exposed to the pressures of global political dynamics and the rise of international institutions, began to evolve. Constitutional democracy became a more viable and adaptable model in this global context, as it allowed for the integration of diverse cultural and political elements while maintaining a commitment to democratic principles.

3. **Emphasis on Human Rights and Individual Freedoms:** The horrors of two world wars and the rise of totalitarian regimes highlighted the need for stronger protections of individual rights. As a result, the memes of republicanism began to incorporate a stronger focus on human rights, leading to their mutation into constitutional democracy. This shift was driven by the understanding that protecting individual freedoms and ensuring the rule of law were essential to preventing the abuses of power seen in authoritarian regimes. The inclusion of these principles in constitutional frameworks helped to solidify the transition from republicanism to constitutional democracy.

4. **Adaptation to Ideological Shifts:** Throughout the 20th century, there was a growing recognition that traditional republican values needed to be reconciled with the realities of industrialization, urbanization, and social change. The meme of republicanism, which originally emphasized civic virtue and the common good, began to evolve to include the principles of constitutional democracy, such as the separation of powers, checks and balances, and the protection of minority rights. This ideological shift allowed republicanism to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

5. **Reaction to Totalitarianism and Authoritarianism:** The rise of totalitarian regimes in the early 20th century forced a re-evaluation of political systems. The vulnerabilities of pure republicanism, which could be co-opted by authoritarian leaders, became apparent. In response, the meme of republicanism mutated into constitutional democracy, which provided more concrete safeguards against the concentration of power. The emphasis on written constitutions, independent judiciaries, and regular elections became central to this new form of governance, ensuring that power could not be easily abused.

6. **Technological and Communication Advancements:** Advances in communication technologies, such as the internet, have played a significant role in spreading the memes of constitutional democracy. These technologies allowed for the rapid dissemination and exchange of political ideas across the globe, leading to the mutation of republican ideals into forms that better suited the needs of contemporary societies. The ability to share and debate ideas on a global scale accelerated the adoption of constitutional democracy as a preferred model of governance.

8 The transition from authoritarianism to constitutional democracy is a complex and multifaceted process that has taken place over centuries, involving numerous historical, cultural, and political shifts. This transition can be understood through the lens of meme theory, where the memes of authoritarianism, characterized by centralized power and limited political freedoms, gradually evolved and mutated into the memes of constitutional democracy, which emphasize individual rights, rule of law, and political participation.

The Glorious Revolution and the Mutation of Authoritarian Memes:

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England was a pivotal moment in the mutation of authoritarianism into constitutional democracy. Prior to the revolution, England was governed by a form of authoritarian monarchy, where the monarch held significant power, often unchecked by other institutions. The revolution, however, led to the establishment of constitutional monarchy, where the power of the monarch was limited by law and balanced by Parliament. This shift represented a significant mutation in the political memes of the time, as the idea of absolute monarchy gave way to the principles of limited government, separation of powers, and the protection of individual rights.

The Bill of Rights of 1689, which followed the revolution, codified these changes and further entrenched the new memes of constitutional democracy. This document laid the groundwork for modern democratic governance by establishing key principles such as the right to free speech, the right to bear arms, and the requirement that the monarch cannot rule without the consent of Parliament. These ideas spread throughout Europe and later influenced the development of democratic institutions in other parts of the world.

The Spread and Evolution of Democratic Memes:

Following the Glorious Revolution, the memes of constitutional democracy began to spread and evolve, particularly during the Enlightenment and the subsequent revolutions in America and France. In the American Revolution, the ideas of limited government and individual rights were further developed and enshrined in the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. These documents became foundational texts for modern democracy, influencing political thought and practice across the globe.

The French Revolution of 1789 further mutated these democratic memes by introducing the concepts of popular sovereignty, universal suffrage, and the sep-

aration of church and state. Despite the subsequent rise of authoritarian regimes in France, such as the Napoleonic Empire, the revolutionary ideas continued to resonate and spread, contributing to the eventual establishment of democratic governments across Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Challenges and Adaptations: From Postcolonial Struggles to Modern Democracies:

In the 20th century, the memes of constitutional democracy faced significant challenges as authoritarian regimes rose to power in various parts of the world, particularly during the interwar period and the Cold War. However, the post-World War II era saw a renewed spread of democratic ideals, particularly with the decolonization of Africa and Asia. Many newly independent nations adopted democratic constitutions, though the transition from authoritarian rule was often fraught with difficulties, including military coups, civil wars, and periods of authoritarian backsliding.

In the case of Bangladesh, which gained independence in 1971 after a bloody war of liberation, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy has been particularly complex. The early years of independence were marked by political instability, military rule, and challenges to democratic governance. However, over the decades, the memes of constitutional democracy have taken root, albeit imperfectly, with the country now holding regular elections and maintaining a constitution that guarantees certain fundamental rights.

Ongoing Evolution: Democracy in the 21st Century:

The process of transitioning from authoritarianism to constitutional democracy is ongoing in many parts of the world. The memes of democracy continue to evolve as they adapt to new challenges, such as globalization, technological change, and the rise of populist movements. In many cases, these democratic memes have mutated to incorporate elements of direct democracy, human rights protections, and international cooperation, reflecting the changing needs and aspirations of societies.

Therefore, the transition from authoritarianism to constitutional democracy is a dynamic process that has been shaped by historical events, cultural shifts, and ideological struggles. The memes of constitutional democracy have mutated and evolved over time, spreading from their origins in the Glorious Revolution to influence political developments in regions as diverse as Europe, the Americas, and Asia. While challenges remain, the continued evolution of these democratic memes suggests that the ideals of constitutional democracy will persist and adapt in the face of new challenges.

- 9 The idea that there is "no end of history" challenges the notion that the evolution of political systems might reach a final, stable state, particularly one dominated by liberal democracies. Instead, history shows that political systems, including those of constitutional democracy and authoritarianism, are not static. They are dynamic, constantly evolving, and susceptible to change depending on social, economic, and political pressures. This concept suggests that the struggle between different forms of governance is ongoing, and the memes—cultural and political ideas—associated with these systems can evolve, mutate, and even revert in response to various conditions.

Throughout history, we have seen numerous instances where democratic systems have regressed into authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. For example, the Weimar Republic in Germany, established after World War I, was a constitutional democracy. However, the severe economic instability, political extremism, and social unrest of the time led to its collapse. The Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler, exploited these conditions by spreading authoritarian and nationalist memes, which resonated with the population's fears and desires for stability. This eventually led to the establishment of a totalitarian regime in Nazi Germany, characterized by extreme state control, suppression of opposition, and widespread propaganda. Similarly, in post-revolutionary Russia, after the 1917 revolution, there was a brief period where socialist and democratic governance ideals were debated. However, the Bolsheviks, under Lenin, consolidated power, leading to the creation of a single-party state. The initial socialist memes mutated into authoritarianism, which later evolved into Stalin's totalitarian regime marked by purges, state control, and repression.

Even in more recent history, countries like Turkey have experienced similar shifts. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established a secular, republican state, emphasizing modernization and constitutional democracy. However, in recent years, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey has drifted back toward authoritarianism. Democratic institutions have eroded, press freedoms curtailed, and political opposition suppressed. These examples demonstrate how democratic memes can mutate back into authoritarian ones under certain conditions, illustrating the non-linear na-

ture of political evolution.

On the other hand, there are also numerous examples of authoritarian regimes transitioning to constitutional democracies. South Korea, for instance, was under authoritarian rule for much of the 20th century, especially during the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee and his successors. However, the pro-democracy protests of the 1980s, fueled by a growing middle class and a desire for political freedom, led to a transition to constitutional democracy. In Spain, after the death of Francisco Franco in 1975, the country transitioned from a military dictatorship to a constitutional monarchy with democratic elections during a period known as the "Spanish Transition." This period marked the replacement of authoritarian memes with those of democracy, including the rule of law, electoral competition, and civil liberties.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War also saw many Eastern European countries transition from communist dictatorships to democratic republics. Countries like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic moved away from the totalitarian memes of state control, single-party rule, and suppression of dissent to adopt the memes of constitutional democracy, including free elections, separation of powers, and protection of individual rights. However, even these transitions are not immune to reversal, as seen in contemporary Hungary under Viktor Orbán, where democratic norms and institutions have been increasingly eroded, moving the country toward an "illiberal democracy."

The ongoing nature of these mutations shows that no political system is immune to change. Even established democracies can face challenges that might lead to authoritarian backsliding. Venezuela, once a stable democracy, has seen significant democratic backsliding under Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolás Maduro. Chávez initially came to power through democratic elections but gradually dismantled democratic institutions, concentrated power in the executive, and suppressed opposition, representing a clear case of the mutation of democratic memes into authoritarian ones.

These examples illustrate that political memes—whether those of constitutional democracy or authoritarianism—are not static. They are subject to continuous evolution, mutation, and transmission across different contexts and eras. The global political landscape remains in flux, with systems and ideologies constantly influencing and transforming each other, reflecting the ongoing and dynamic nature of history. The idea that there is no definitive "end of history" underscores the reality that the battle between different forms of governance is never truly over, as societies continually redefine and reshape their political identities.

10 The political history of China from 1840 to today is a narrative deeply intertwined with the competing memes of despotism and democracy, reflecting a complex and dynamic interplay over nearly two centuries. This period has witnessed dramatic shifts, influenced by both internal developments and external pressures, showcasing the continuous mutation and adaptation of these conflicting political ideologies.

10.1 The Late Qing Dynasty and Early Republican Era (1840-1912)

Beginning with the First Opium War in 1840, the Qing Dynasty faced significant challenges from both foreign powers and internal dissent. The memes of traditional despotism, which had long governed Chinese society, were increasingly questioned. The era was marked by domestic upheavals, such as the Taiping Rebellion, and foreign interventions that exacerbated the Qing's decline. Reformers like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao attempted to introduce constitutional monarchy, reflecting the influence of Western political ideas such as democracy and constitutionalism. However, these efforts were largely unsuccessful due to the deeply entrenched despotism within the Qing court, which resisted meaningful change. This resistance ultimately led to the Qing Dynasty's collapse and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912.

10.2 The Republic of China and Warlord Era (1912-1949)

The founding of the Republic of China represented the first significant mutation of political memes, as the country formally adopted a republican form of government. Sun Yat-sen's ideals of nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood were central to this new political order. However, despite these democratic aspirations, the Republic struggled to take root in a society still heavily influenced by its autocratic past. Political fragmentation and the rise of warlordism characterized this period, preventing the establishment of a stable and unified democratic government.

During this time, the competition between democratic and authoritarian memes was evident in the struggles between the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), which initially promoted democratic ideals, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The Nationalists, under Chiang Kai-shek, gradually adopted more authoritarian methods, particularly during the Nanjing Decade, as they sought to consolidate power. Simultaneously, Sun Yat-sen's later acceptance

of Russian communist support for his revolution indicates how the democratic memes he initially espoused began to intertwine with more authoritarian influences, reflecting the complex interplay of these memes in China's evolving political landscape.

10.3 The Rise of Communism and the People's Republic of China (1949-Present)

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 under Mao Zedong marked a decisive shift toward authoritarianism. The CCP, having won the civil war, established a one-party state, and the meme of despotism mutated into a form of totalitarianism that characterized Mao's rule. Mao's policies, including the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, further entrenched authoritarian control, with the state exerting influence over nearly every aspect of life. The CCP's governance during this period exemplified the adaptability of despotic memes, as Mao's regime combined traditional authoritarian practices with revolutionary zeal to maintain control.

Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping emerged as a key figure in China's political evolution. While Deng is often credited with initiating economic reforms and opening China to the global economy, he maintained the Four Cardinal Principles, which upheld the CCP's dictatorial rule. Deng's tenure culminated in the tragic events of June 4, 1989, when the Chinese government, under his influence, brutally suppressed the pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square. This crackdown reaffirmed the CCP's commitment to maintaining its authoritarian rule, despite the economic liberalization that Deng championed.

10.4 The Xi Jinping Era (2012-Present)

Under Xi Jinping, China has experienced a reversion to more overt forms of despotism. Xi has consolidated power in ways reminiscent of Mao, eliminating political rivals and strengthening the party's control over all aspects of society. His policies, such as the "Chinese Dream" and the promotion of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," reflect an adaptation of authoritarian memes to contemporary challenges, reinforcing the CCP's legitimacy while curbing potential democratic influences. Xi's administration has aggressively suppressed dissent, as seen in the increased repression in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, further entrenching the CCP's authoritarian rule.

10.5 Continuity and Mutation of Despotic and Democratic Memes

Throughout China's modern history, the memes of despotism have shown remarkable resilience, often mutating to adapt to new circumstances while maintaining core principles of centralized control and authoritarian governance. Democratic memes, although present and occasionally influential, have struggled to

gain a lasting foothold in a political landscape dominated by authoritarianism. The ongoing tension between these competing memes reflects the broader struggle within China between forces of change and continuity, with moments of potential democratic reform frequently overtaken by deeply ingrained autocratic practices.

In conclusion, the history of China from 1840 to today illustrates a complex and evolving interplay between the memes of despotism and democracy. Despite the dominance of despotism, democratic ideas have continuously influenced the political landscape, contributing to the ongoing dynamic of change and resistance in China's governance. The enduring presence of these competing memes underscores the complexity of China's political evolution and the challenges of balancing tradition with modernity.