

ly incidental, “for Yongle evidently intended to harness the force (and profits) of seaborne commerce to serve the purposes of imperial hegemony in Southeast Asia.”

Needham, a former biochemist who subscribed to an idiosyncratic blend of Marxism and Christianity, was determined, says Finlay, “to present the Ming expeditions as embodying the virtues of China in contrast to the vices of the West.” *Science and Civilisation in China* is an

encyclopedic survey of Chinese accomplishments in science and technology. But, “as with the voyages of Zheng He,” Finlay says, Needham’s account of those accomplishments “ignores social, political, and economic contexts.” Needham’s claims about the impact of Chinese inventions on Europe are also suspect, Finlay thinks. Yet, despite its flaws, he says, the late scholar’s masterwork “remains an extraordinary achievement.”

Mexico’s ‘Compassionate Conservatism’

“Vicente Fox and the Rise of the PAN” by David A. Shirk, in *Journal of Democracy* (Oct. 2000), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Mexico’s new president, Vicente Fox, ended decades of rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) when he took office last December. The country is entering a new era—and many fear that Fox’s National Action Party (PAN) is, at bottom, a reactionary party. It isn’t, contends political scientist Shirk, a former visiting fellow at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, at the University of California, San Diego.

Though the PAN includes traditionalist conservative and Catholic elements, he says, “the party is better understood as a liberal-democratic alternative to PRI authoritarianism than as a Catholic reaction” to the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17.

Founded in Mexico City in 1939, the PAN initially attracted business groups and religious activists opposed to the PRI regime’s leftist and anticlerical tendencies. But the regime soon made a sharp right turn, drawing most businessmen back into the PRI fold. The remaining PAN supporters were committed to the party’s agenda of liberal-democratic reform and religious freedom, says Shirk. During the 1960s and early ’70s, the party’s religious wing grew stronger, but it was heavily influenced by international Christian Democratic organizations and left-leaning liberation theology.

Then, in the early 1980s, many entrepreneurs in small- and medium-sized businesses, frustrated by the PRI regime’s mismanagement of the economy, entered the PAN, and “the balance of power within the leadership shifted in favor of more secular and pragmat-

ic leaders,” Shirk says. Fox, a former Coca-Cola executive who was then running a small business, was one of the PAN’s new breed.

“The PAN’s path to the presidency was paved by a ‘creeping federalist’ strategy focused on winning control of local and state governments,” Shirk observes. PAN governments had jurisdiction over less than one percent of the populace in 1987, but by the time of last year’s election, PAN-controlled municipal governments alone governed nearly a quarter of the nation’s population.

Along with “the practical, largely secular approach of [its] liberal-democratic vision,” says Shirk, the PAN has a philosophy of “political humanism.” Drawing largely from Jesuit teachings, it advocates programs that meet both spiritual and material needs and that help citizens to help themselves—“a Mexican analogue to ‘compassionate conservatism,’” Shirk writes. This outlook is very different from the “illiberal brand of ‘right-wing’ conservatism historically adopted” in Chile, Argentina, and various other Latin American countries, he notes.

While the PAN and Fox have frequently been made out to be Catholic crusaders, “these characterizations have little basis in reality,” the author says. Fox, a divorced bachelor, is a moderate Catholic who “has taken middle-of-the-road positions on key religious issues,” such as abortion. At least for the time being, says Shirk, the Mexican “religious right” has far less voice in the PAN than its U.S. counterpart has in the Republican Party.