As China and the world look at each other, two swathes of issues within China are prominent, and will shape the face that China will present to the world. One is the question of China’s democratisation, an ideational but ultimately political issue. Another is the question of China’s territorial integrity, with respect to particularly Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet.

5.1 Democratisation

Democratisation remains a key issue for China and the world for the twenty-first century. In terms of the world, the sheer size of China’s population makes the political fate of her population an important issue. In addition, for the world, there is a further question that may or may not be resolved thereon: will a democratic China thereby be a peaceful China?

In IR terminology this sort of question is wrapped up in the democracy=peace thesis. This was famously posed as an axiom by Bill Clinton in his 1994 State-of-the-Union address: ‘democracies don’t go to war against each other’ – Jervis’s unofficial ‘security community’ (2002: 1) of the US, Europe and Japan. Levy had reckoned that the democracy=peace thesis is ‘as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international politics’ (1989: 88). Democracies also tend to have a better image with other democracies, itself in IR ‘constructivism’ terms encouraging better relations as a rule (Kahl 1998–99). Again, the implications for the future are significant for China’s relations with the world, under her present political set-up of one-party rule.
However, there are some problems with the application of this to China, as indeed elsewhere. Since extensive citizen participation can easily lead to emotional identification with the country, high levels of nationalism can be expected in democracies. China’s rising nationalism has already been a widely noticed feature of recent years, to some extent used but also to some extent restrained by the PRC leadership (Chen 2005; Jia 2005; Lei 2005; Zhao 2005; Hughes 2006). A democratic China might well be a more nationalistic China. The question then would be, would such a democratic China, responding to public emotions, not only defend China’s interests within China against the outside world but also channel such rising nationalism into its foreign policy outside China (Peerenboom 2007: 264–6)?

A further twist within the democracy = peace thesis is from Mansfield and Snyder who argue that emerging democracies with weak political institutions are especially likely to go to war: ‘in the short run . . . the beginning stages of transitions to democracy often give rise to war rather than peace (2005: 2). Mansfield and Snyder see this as potentially at play in China’, a ‘danger on the horizon’ (14). Already with regard to China, ‘party elites know that they need a stronger basis of popular legitimacy to survive the social and ideological changes that economic change has unleashed. Nationalism is a key element in their strategy’ (ibid.). At the moment, ‘China’s demand to incorporate Taiwan into the People’s Republic of China, its animosity toward Japan, and its public displays of resentment at U.S. slights are themes that resonate with the Chinese public and can easily be played upon to rally national solidarity behind the regime’ (ibid.). This is true now; it is even more true for any initial democratisation process in China involving greater participation of the public.

The democracy = peace thesis has been extended by Bruce Russet and John Oneal, whose study Triangulating Peace (2001) sees a Kantian Peace consisting of the interrelated and reciprocal effects of democracy, economic interdependence, and international law and organizations. With regard to China, there is undoubted greater and growing economic interdependence and involvement with international organizations, though is less clear how far international law is greatly going to influence China, given her continuing hypersensitivity on maintaining sovereignty. Memories of her ‘Century of Humiliation’ and its paraphernalia of legal curbs on China make it