

# Mainland China's Political Development: Is the CCP's Version of Democracy Relevant?

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*Despite the collapse of communist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still maintains its control over mainland China. Economically, the CCP has opened up China to the outside world and is pushing the country toward market-oriented reform. National wealth and living standards have experienced impressive growth. Politically, although it claims to be a democratic organization that has been committed to democratic practices for years, the CCP and its government remain a dictatorship by the world standard. As the momentum toward a market economy increases, pressure for political reform and democratization will also build.*

*This paper examines the rationale of CCP rule and its implications for political democratization in mainland China. The underlying assumptions and historical heritage of CCP power are first examined, followed by an analysis of Mao's concept of mass participation, Deng's collective leadership, and the emergent educated elites' claims of open competition for offices. The last section is an objective assessment of historical and realistic as well as domestic and international forces for democratic changes in China. It is projected that the Chinese democratization process will likely be regime-initiated, but with strong inducement from economic, political, and social interests originating from economic development.*

**Keywords:** CCP, political reform, democratization, social conditions, social change

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Despite its variety across countries and regions, the democratic political system is generally thought of as an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals or parties "acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote."<sup>1</sup> Under that arrangement, "citizens are free to

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 269.

criticize their rulers and to come together to make demands on them and to win support for the policies they favor and the beliefs they hold."<sup>2</sup> The major variables for the implementation and sustenance of democracy in a society or country include: materialistic wealth built upon a market-oriented economy, a pluralistic social structure centered on an autonomous bourgeoisie, positive exposure to existing democratic states, and an instrumental culture that separates intermediate ends from ultimate ends and allows for diversity and compromise.<sup>3</sup>

Mainland China, where the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) monopolizes political decisions and prohibits opposition interests, is apparently not a democratic territory. Moreover, the Chinese economy is centrally planned and has not yet fully developed. There is no self-sufficient middle class and no full-fledged civil society in China. The country was in isolation from Western democracies and did not win any significant trust from the West until recently. Chinese culture is basically a mixture of communist ideology and traditional values, featuring feudalism and proletarian authoritarianism. With all these parameters taken into account, it is difficult to expect democracy to grow in mainland China. In fact, most Westerners, overseas Chinese, and Chinese liberals never hesitate to equate the CCP and its government with a dictatorship. Some Chinese democratic activists exiled overseas still believe that a revolutionary uprising against the CCP and a drastic transformation of the CCP-led bureaucracy are the only way to form a constitutional democratic government.<sup>4</sup>

The CCP, on the other hand, has never acknowledged its international stigma of being undemocratic and authoritarian. Instead, it continually insists that the legitimacy of its rule is built on democracy and it has been committed to democratic practices for years. A highly-civilized and highly-democratized socialist China is formally proclaimed by the CCP as its primary goal: it is written into the

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<sup>2</sup>John Flamenatz, *Democracy and Illusion: An Examination of Certain Aspects of Modern Democratic Theory* (London: Longman, 1977), 98.

<sup>3</sup>Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1963); Lipset, "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited: 1993 Presidential Address," *American Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (1994): 1-22; and Samuel P. Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics," in *Comparative Modernization: A Reader*, ed. Cyril E. Black (New York: Free Press, 1976), 25-61.

<sup>4</sup>Institute for the Study of Chinese Communist Problems (ISCCP), *Zhonggong nianjian* (Yearbook on Chinese Communism) (Taipei: ISCCP Publications, 1990).

Constitution and reiterated in almost all important Party and government documents and announcements.<sup>5</sup> For those who are co-opted into national or local politics through the people's congresses or the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the CCP's version of democracy may indeed have some substantive meanings. Through the official media, the eight "democratic parties" occasionally testify that the CCP grants them enough political maneuvering space and listens cordially to their opinions. People's representatives often say that they feel gratified in discussing political issues and raising hands to approve laws and official appointees in the people's congresses. In the fourth session of the Seventh National People's Congress (NPC), an ordinary rural woman serving as an NPC delegate told reporters that she had raised her hand numerous times for major national laws and leaders, and experienced a feeling in the NPC equivalent to being a master in her own house.<sup>6</sup>

Objectively, there are partial truths to be culled from both the liberal accusation of the CCP as an authoritarian dictatorship and the CCP's self-claim of democratic practices. This paper puts aside presuppositions in attempting to examine the CCP's rationale for its rule and its implications for political democratization in mainland China. Based on a realistic faith that democratic reform shall proceed in a way that does not create a power vacuum, economic slowdown, or social chaos, this paper will review and analyze the underlying assumptions and historical heritage of CCP power: Mao's concept of mass participation, Deng Xiaoping's collective leadership, the emergent educated elites' claims of open competition for offices, and the CCP-envisioned democratic scheme of a multiparty coalition, a cadre institution, local elections, a mass inspection mechanism, and a legal system. The fundamental question to be tackled is: Is the CCP's version of democracy relevant to political democratization in mainland China? Essentially, is it possible for the CCP to lead mainland China toward economic development and political democratization?

### **Underlying Assumptions**

The rise of the CCP and its regime was ideologically based on

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<sup>5</sup>*People's Republic of China Yearbook 1993/94* (Beijing: PRC Yearbook Ltd., 1994).

<sup>6</sup>Shuzhen Zhang, "We Are Constructing Real Democratic Politics," *People's Daily* (Overseas edition), August 6, 1991.

Marxism and Leninism. According to Marx, capitalist society is a class society in which the bourgeoisie monopolizes the economy, manipulates politics, and pushes the proletariat into a state of impoverishment and alienation. To overthrow the exploitative social system of capitalism, the proletariat needs to form a class vanguard of its own that will lead all propertyless people to stage a socialist revolution. Lenin substantiated the theory of the proletarian class vanguard and prescribed a series of directives to the proletariat about organizing power and running the state after revolutionary victory. The central point is to apply the proletarian dictatorship and drive a country through socialist transformation toward communism.

The CCP has taken up the basic framework of the Leninist state but made a few adjustments according to Chinese political realities. With the recognition that socialist China comes from a feudal society without capitalist industrialization, the CCP admits that Chinese communist power is based on alliance of workers with peasants instead of a well-developed proletarian class. In addition to the worker-peasant alliance, the CCP reasons that intellectuals, democratic parties, people's organizations, overseas patriots, and all other working people need to be co-opted into a united front to increase the force of production and forge a true socialist relationship of production. With regard to its own role in the so-called alliance and united front, the CCP claims that its responsibilities are to take leadership, change all individual participants into conscientious "socialist new men," and transform the united front into a "socialist new China." The CCP's ideal of a socialist state is a pure proletarian dictatorship that will presumably be able to furnish the great task of leading the nation into communism.<sup>7</sup>

### Historical Heritage

The alliance of workers with peasants and the united front constitute apparently the core of the CCP's self-claimed democracy. Although it is not a negotiated arrangement reached by all participants on an equal footing, it is the result of a historical power balance. At the time when the CCP first formulated this democratic initiative, it

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<sup>7</sup>*Zhongguo guoqing daquan* (A handbook of China's national conditions) (Beijing: Xuewan chubanshe, 1990).

was fighting a harsh struggle for survival. To win social support for the CCP cause, Mao Zedong proposed a so-called “New Democracy” for China as an alternative to the Kuomintang (KMT) tutelage regime. Under the “New Democracy,” as envisioned by Mao, the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, and the petty bourgeoisie would come together to form a coalition and lead the country in the realization of Sun Yat-sen’s Three People’s Principles.<sup>8</sup> In 1945, when the Japanese defeat was imminent, Mao presented his “On Coalition Government,” and called for an immediate replacement of the KMT one-party rule with a united democratic front composed of “representatives of all the anti-Japanese parties and people without party affiliations.”<sup>9</sup>

Mao’s vision of “New Democracy” through a coalition government not only attracted liberals and young students to the CCP camp, but also effected important changes to the orientation and form of CCP rule. In 1949, when the KMT’s defeat seemed inevitable, many liberals ran to the CCP-controlled liberated areas. A liberal-communist alliance formed, and the CCP modified its policy lines, giving considerable leeway to the newly-formed united front under its flag. In September 1949, based on its self-sponsored alliance and united front, the CCP convoked the first CPPCC. The Conference served in the name of the highest legislative body and adopted the “Common Program” of “New Democracy” as a temporary constitution. It also proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and elected Mao as the chairman of the PRC government.<sup>10</sup>

Theoretically, it is the “New Democracy” and united front that provided the CCP with justification for taking national power. Despite the increasing one-party dictatorship afterwards, the opening or “baptizing” ceremony played by the united front drew a baseline for the CCP to legitimize its leadership among different political and social interests.

### **Mao Zedong: Mass Participation**

The main characteristics of Mao’s “New Democracy” are: (1) CCP leadership is assumed as a prerequisite; (2) the political status

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<sup>8</sup>Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China: The Political Struggle, 1945-1949* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>9</sup>Mao Tse-tung, “On Coalition Government,” in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: International Publishers, 1956), 244-315.

<sup>10</sup>See note 7 above.

and economic interests of all other participating parties, forces, or individuals are evened up or blotted out by a highly abstract common goal of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, and therefore are not particularly specific compared to those of the CCP; and (3) both the alliance and the united front are transitional, with the CCP's ultimate goal being a proletarian dictatorship that is capable of driving the country toward communism.

Because of these features, it is no surprise that after it grasped power and stabilized the political situation, the CCP moved away from alliance toward dictatorship. Socialist transformations were pronounced. The worker-peasant alliance and the united front were streamlined, and a "mass" without particular individual identities and interests was created. One will and one voice were sought throughout all walks of production and social life. In 1953, the First NPC was convened, and the power base was formally shifted from an alliance of different social interests to a mass of one common abstract identity. In 1956, socialist transformation was staged against private ownership of means of production. After a series of campaigns, the state and the collectives took control of all lands, mines, natural resources, means of production, and even means of subsistence. A new economic base officially characterized as "all-people ownership," complemented by collective ownership, was thereby laid out.<sup>11</sup>

The CCP's self-claimed democracy has since changed from horizontal "coexistence" and "mutual supervision" with democratic parties, liberal personage, and overseas patriots to vertical mass participation under CCP leadership. Mass participation and community action, characterized by the CCP as the "mass line," were articulated in CCP policies and institutionalized in its apparatus as early as during the period of guerilla wars in the Jiangxi Soviets. In fact, the mass line was a vital component in the strength and success of the CCP revolutionary movement.<sup>12</sup> The focal point of the "mass line," according to the official requirement, is that Party cadres and organizations are made available to the wishes and needs of the masses, with the masses' primitive enthusiasm and power channeled into effective actions for the CCP cause. From an analytical point of

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Gordon White, "The Post-Revolutionary Chinese State," in *State and Society in Contemporary China*, ed. Victor Nee and David Mozingo (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 27-52.

view, however, since the masses are mobilized solely for the CCP cause and mass participation is subject to Party control, the “mass line” reflects a basic structural inequality of power between the masses and the CCP, despite its egalitarian and democratic elements.

The structural inequality of power has inevitably widened in the post-revolutionary state, as the CCP sits unchallenged in the center of power and the official bureaucracy has grown into a gigantic machinery. For ordinary people, Party organizations and government agencies exist as an intimidating authority, and bureaucrats in those organizations pose as harsh teachers or domineering commanders. There is no longer a sensible feeling among the masses that the Party represents an ideal cause and Party members work for them like helpers or servants. The broadened gap between people and the state was of serious concern to Mao, who as an idealist revolutionary attempted to deal with the matter in his perceived revolutionary manner. Mao's thinking and actions were basically shaped by both his profound knowledge of Chinese history and his irregular exposure to Marxist-Leninist theories. In his Chinese cultural perspective, Mao viewed the increasing distance from the people as a potential crisis for the CCP leadership. From his Marxist point of view, he foresaw a loosening connection with the masses leading to capitalist bureaucratism. Both possibilities were detrimental to the revolutionary cause and needed to be nipped in the bud.

In 1956, following a “socialist high tide” in agricultural collectivization and industrial and commercial socialist conversion, Mao initiated a campaign that he characterized as “letting a hundred flowers bloom, and a hundred schools of thought contend.”<sup>13</sup> The campaign, as it was officially presented in the media, was intended to draw intellectuals to the CCP cause so that their professional knowledge and skills could be given full play in economic construction and their suggestions and “gentle breeze and mild rain” criticisms utilized to improve the CCP's working style. From a historical perspective, the campaign was to some extent an implicit apology to intellectuals, liberals, and democratic parties who had been belittled and marginalized by the CCP during the years of transformation and consolidation of national power. More importantly, it was a gesture toward

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<sup>13</sup>Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China: Rectification and the Decline of Party Norms 1950-1965* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).



democracy in the form of "all-people" participation.

Intellectuals, however, failed to recognize the new meaning of the emergent power arrangement. Embracing an ideal conception of democracy and a somewhat seclusive self-esteem, a number of intellectuals misinterpreted the CCP's intention to hear suggestions and mild criticisms as an opportunity to question the CCP's rule altogether. They moved to blast the CCP as a one-party dictatorship and condemn it as a primary culprit for bureaucratism, which disregarded diverse social interests and mistreated people's livelihood. Open confrontation ensued. Public suspicion grew. The CCP suddenly realized that its legitimacy was under challenge. Meanwhile, in the international communist movement, Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, the Polish October, and the Hungarian revolution came one after another. Fearful of unrest, Mao took a 180-degree turn in 1957 and staged an anti-rightist campaign to strike back at intellectuals' critiques and indictments of the CCP. Hundreds of intellectuals were politically stigmatized and sent to the countryside for "reeducation through labor."

In Chinese tradition, intellectuals have been a minority group of social elite who remain aloof from the general populace. They have maintained access to important social activities, stayed politically alert, and existed as a virtual reserve force for the government bureaucracy. As they usually do not formally hold offices, intellectuals have also functioned in the political system as a resource for alternative ideas, opinions, and initiatives, reminding society of neglected and mistreated issues and criticizing corruption, injustice, and ineptitude. Mao's "hundred flowers" experiment, in a sense, was an attempt to utilize intellectuals for such functions. The failure of the experiment and the exile of a large number of intellectuals, therefore, do not only mean that intellectuals were thereafter distrusted by the CCP and distanced from the national power balance. It also meant that the CCP had to go further down to the grass-roots masses for inspiration, suggestions, and well-meaning criticisms that it needed in implementing its policy initiatives and improving its working style in the public eye.

Why were the masses not scared away by the anti-rightist campaign? Apparently, it is because the masses are in a different social stratum from intellectuals. They are the majority and ascended in the political arena when intellectuals were sent to them for "reeducation." During the early 1960s, Mao noticed that the increasingly large Party and government bureaucracies were unable to carry out his revolu-



tionary commands, or respond to the officially defined wishes and needs of the masses. He identified the problem as a degeneration of revolutionary spirit caused by a handful of top officials taking the capitalist road. Having seen the ineffectiveness of gradual inner correction based on self-criticism and mild critiques from intellectuals, Mao turned to the masses for an external revolution. Through a radical revolution of mass participation, he hoped that "capitalist roaders" in the Party and government bureaucracies would be removed and official policies and operations rectified. He also expected that the masses would be implanted with a new mentality of revolution and be trained as conscientious, active, and mature participants in the revolutionary course. In 1966, the Cultural Revolution was proclaimed under this rationale. In its culmination, the masses were ideologically aroused and physically mobilized to challenge all established authorities and institutions, including Party organizations and government agencies. Many officials were attacked and sent to the masses for reeducation through labor. Revolutionary committees composed of ordinary workers, peasants, and political activists were established to replace the old political and economic machines in administering various substantial business affairs. The entire country was swept into an extensive "democracy" of all-inclusive participation through "big contending, big blooming, big debate, and big-character posters."<sup>14</sup>

The Cultural Revolution was a courageous and adventurous experiment in the sense that it was intended to submit power, power-holders, and power machines back to the people, and to let them become full participants in the administration of cultural, economic, educational, and political affairs under a common goal. It failed partially because of Mao's inability to assume dual roles simultaneously. As a charismatic leader who identified himself with the interests and wishes of all people, Mao was at ease to call the masses into action, drift from the Party and government bureaucracies, and authorize the establishment of mass organizations for the supervision of political and economic affairs. On the other hand, Mao himself was the supreme commander of the Party and government bureaucracies and depended on the entity he ruled to carry out his commands. In fact, no emergent mass organizations could give him the same guarantee

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<sup>14</sup>See note 12 above.

of stability, reliability, and efficiency as did the huge Party, government, and military machinery. When mass actions ran wild, Mao had to back away from his image of a popular leader toward the position of a powerful commander.

The failure of the Cultural Revolution and all other mass movements under Mao was generally due to the fact that mass initiatives and enthusiasm were suddenly and intensively instigated and mobilized in a short period of time for destructive momentum, rather than gradually channeled into constructive impacts. Mao took for granted the purity, simplicity, and honesty of the masses, and believed in the corrective and training value of manual labor and community services for human socialization and personality development. He insisted that officials, intellectuals, and urban youngsters be sent to the countryside to receive reeducation, and peasants, workers, and other manual laborers allowed to supervise educational and technical issues as well as political and economic affairs. This insistence reflected a revolutionary, counter-modern, and counter-bureaucratic form of thinking and action.

Mao's approach obviously did not fit in well with Western democratic concepts of private rights, personal development, and individual participation in the political decision-making process. But insofar as it urged for collective sharing and caring, cross-cutting inspection and supervision, responsiveness from the top to the bottom, and mutual interactions between the masses and leaders, it represented a positive commitment to democratic practices.

### **Deng Xiaoping: Collective Leadership**

Mao stayed high above the Party rank and file and it was natural for him to often lose trust in the Party, the government bureaucracy, and the official functionaries within. When his distrust was at its height, he resorted to revolutionary mass movements for shock corrections. Having worked under Mao as the Party general secretary (the equivalent of the chief of staff for Party bureaucracy), Deng Xiaoping saw clearly how Mao's stormy movements had disturbed the normal operation of the Party and government, and even thrown the entire bureaucracy into disarray. As a pragmatist bureaucrat, Deng believes that it is possible to acquire and maintain rationality, efficiency, and immunization from corruption, injustice, and irresponsibility in the Party's bureaucratic system and government.

Fortune fell onto Deng after Mao's death in September 1976. Taking advantage of the current social psychology, which then featured exhaustion from incessant political struggles and a thirst for social stability and individual livelihood, Deng quickly got his way in practicing an inside-bureaucracy perspective. He rebuilt the damaged Party and government organizations and rehabilitated a large number of exiled political and intellectual elites. At the center, Deng propped up several of his old subordinates and fostered a few promising juniors as his reliable aides. More saliently, he brought back some of his old colleagues to the front stage of national power both as a justification for his political initiatives and a demonstration of his political strength. Deng's old colleagues are obviously different from his junior protégés; they are former revolutionaries who not only have qualifications and ranks similar to Deng's, but also represent particular orientations or agendas within the Party, government, and military. As a result, factions have been developed, and coordinating and balancing different heads and factions has become Deng's primary strategy in holding a loose "collective leadership" under his umbrella.<sup>15</sup>

Deng's choice of collective leadership stems from more than his personal willingness; it is virtually a must for him. To the masses, he lacks the kind of charisma as Mao had to rally them around his policy initiatives, nor does he have the kind of enthusiasm and patience needed to deal with them. As a kind of "aristocratic" bureaucrat, Deng prefers to see the masses tranquilized with their livelihood and kept out of the political decision-making process. He can neither go beyond the old colleagues who have ranks and qualifications similar to his, nor exclude them from sharing power. What he can do is to utilize his shrewdness and intelligence in convincing them to accept his balanced policies. Even to his protégés, he has to bow to his age and relax his accountability demands. After the Tiananmen Square incident of June 1989, Deng boasted that he was the center of the second generation of communist leadership. He did not lie, but his words obviously do not convey the whole truth of the Chinese political story after Mao.

Regardless of intra-Party complexities, Deng's collective leadership represents a new form of CCP-perceived democracy. On the

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<sup>15</sup> Andrew J. Nathan, *China's Crisis: Dilemmas of Reform and Prospects for Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

one hand, as the mass movements and participation that more or less constitute a strong civil society which checks one-party rule have been relegated and minimized, there has been a retreat from social democracy. On the other hand, as power distribution and balance among top politicians with similar qualifications and between seniors and juniors are stressed, intra-Party democracy has progressed. Inside the CCP and its government, Deng has indeed attempted to institutionalize measures for a more relaxed and democratic political atmosphere.<sup>16</sup> For example, he has proposed that bureaucratic functionaries be younger, more knowledgeable, and more professional. The proposal has led to significant changes in the CCP rank and file and proven to be a remarkable initiative in promoting perceived democracy within the Party and government bureaucracies.

### **The Emergent Educated Elites: Open Competition for Offices**

Deng's collective leadership is obviously exclusive, confined to a group of revolutionary elites with similar experiences, expertise, and interests. This has inevitably led to accusations that power has been shared among the so-called "three gangs," which include the "Crown Prince Gang," the "Secretary Gang," and the "Youth League Gang." These terms characterize the political phenomenon in which major figures from each faction of the collective leadership push their patronized and trusted heirs, in-laws, secretaries, and young leaders into key positions in the Party, government, military, and business bureaucracies. The existence of the "three gangs" is a barrier to tens of thousands of ambitious low-rank functionaries. Although the phenomenon also exemplifies how to break into a promising political landscape, it virtually blocks most lower-middle bureaucrats, especially newcomers just out of universities, from any opportunities and aspirations in the Party and state bureaucratic systems.

To counteract the "three gangs" as well as the biased, corrupted admission and promotion procedure, disappointed functionaries have developed an argument of political rationality. They argue that the Party, the government, and all other established institutions, like

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<sup>16</sup>See note 7 above; and Li Yongchun, Shi Yuanqin, and Guo Xiuzhi, eds., *Shiyijie sanzong quanhui yilai zhengzhi tizhi gaige dashiji* (A record of major events in political reform since the third plenary session of the CCP's Eleventh Central Committee) (Beijing: Chunqiu chubanshe, 1987).

public property, are owned by all people. Access to power, therefore, ought to be open to all capable, well-educated individuals. Admission and promotion through the "three gangs" is a reflection of the feudal mentality that takes national power as a personally- or family-owned prestige. The only way to rectify the situation is to institutionalize open competition for public offices; that is, vacant political positions are open to all eligible persons rather than secretly filled through top-down appointments. In this way, not only is each eligible candidate given a fair opportunity to compete, but each public office will be occupied by the best person possible for the efficient and just performance of its specific duty.<sup>17</sup>

The argument corresponds to a common recognition among intellectuals that the CCP, as the holder of national power, is the sole means by which a person can realize his or her political ambitions and Chinese society can achieve clean, just, and efficient politics. In fact, a majority of intellectuals assume that corruption, bureaucratism, and inefficiency are attributable to the inadequacy of Party members and government functionaries. They believe that a massive penetration of well-educated people into the Party and government can lead to a magic change of the CCP and its governing behavior. In practice, they have put aside personal likes or dislikes for the CCP, entered the CCP as members, penetrated the CCP-led bureaucracies as functionaries, and made practical contributions to society. This train of thought, represented by such influential social activists as Professor Fang Lizhi, has in effect helped alleviate the broadened cleavage between the CCP and the civil society symbolized by intellectuals.

Intellectuals' political participation and expectations of accession, however, have added pressures to the already-crowded Party and government bureaucracies, and increased frustrations among existing bureaucratic functionaries. The waves of frustration have naturally flowed to college students who are primarily concerned with their job assignments and career development after graduation. Taking advantage of a status that is literally equal to immunity from the CCP's strict organizational control, students have staged a series of written indictments and street protests in tune with political events.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>See note 15 above; and Andrew J. Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup>Liu Sun-chi, *Zhongguo dalu de xiaobaokan yanjiu 1978-1982* (A study of underground periodicals in mainland China 1978-82) (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1985).

The most extensive and tragic student protest occurred in 1989, the Tiananmen Square incident. Although it aroused a large number of people from many walks of life and led to martial law and crack-down, in terms of political democracy, it actually went no further than all its precedents. First, it was confined to the ideology, political goals, and institutional framework of the CCP, and did not formulate any alternative initiative to question or challenge the CCP authority, the proletarian dictatorship, and the socialist road. In fact, protesters' denouncement of corruption, injustice, and inefficiency, and their claims for free press were all laid out in a way suggesting that they stemmed from the good intention to protect and defend the CCP against its self-inflicted mistakes and failures. Second, it was directed at persons rather than the established power machine and institutional arrangement. It began by demanding redress for a CCP leader, Hu Yaobang, and died out after failing to bring down other leaders such as Li Peng or Deng Xiaoping. In the eyes of students and intellectuals, particular leaders within the taken-for-granted political structure were crucial to what kind of political decisions are made and what kind of social situations are created. They failed to recognize that all irrationalities and problems have originated from the one-party rule, which denies participation, inspection, and counteraction from various social groups and interests in the general population. Third, it appealed to moral power rather than realistically effective forces for its objectives. In concordance with their "personal orientation," both students and intellectuals believed that a conscientious leadership would improve the situation. They did not examine the roots of CCP power to see how problems are structurally produced and how a wise and moral leader can be gradually affected by his or her surrounding environment. "Personal" and "moral" orientations have been derived from traditional Chinese political philosophy, and provided motivation for Chinese intellectuals to maintain interest in politics or join the officialdom: if one is well-educated and conscientious, one therefore has the prestige and responsibility to pass judgment on political situations or assume official positions.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Dorothy J. Solinger, "Democracy with Chinese Characteristics," *World Policy Journal* 6, no. 4 (1989): 621-32; Andrew Walder, "The Political Sociology of the Beijing Uprising of 1989," *Problems of Communism* 38, no. 5 (1989): 30-40; Nathan, *China's Crisis*; Lucian W. Pye, "Tiananmen and Chinese Political Culture," *Asian Survey* 30, no. 4 (April 1990): 331-47.

In general, student protest, like intellectual participation in CCP politics, is part of, reflects, supplements, and is an indirect extension of CCP-perceived democracy.

### **The Future: China Toward Democracy**

The 1989 Tiananmen Square incident was not just an episode of democratic development within the Chinese communist framework, but also ushered in a new from-without approach to the Chinese democratization process. Intellectuals and student leaders who fled to the West after the Tiananmen Square incident, taking advantage of being outside the country and directly observing Western democracy in practice, have explored various possibilities for Chinese democratization from without the communist system. They have meditated on the grandiose democratic designs of free press, public suffrage, multiple parties and interest groups, fair competition, and an independent judiciary system as the alternative to the irrational and problematic CCP one-party dictatorship. They have also pondered different justifiable and workable means, including revolution, to realize the ultimate goal of democracy. A range of activities has been organized to place pressure on the CCP, weaken it, or force it to step down.<sup>20</sup>

The from-within approach to democracy is not dead at home, however. After a short cooling-off period, economic reform has moved into high gear. Deng Xiaoping made a tour to the South in early 1992 and called for more economic reform and greater opening-up to the outside world. The effects of the renewed race for economic development and prosperity have been conspicuous. Regional economies have grown rapidly. Individual entrepreneurship has become fashionable.<sup>21</sup> Workers, peasants, intellectuals, and other members of society have begun to acknowledge their materialistic needs and strive for economic well-being.<sup>22</sup> Business groups and associations have developed their constituencies and sought to protect their fundamental

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<sup>20</sup>See note 4 above.

<sup>21</sup>State Commission for Restructuring the Economy, ed., *Zhongguo jingji tizhi gaige nianjian 1992* (China economic systems reform yearbook 1992) (Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1992).

<sup>22</sup>Jing Lin, *The Opening of the Chinese Mind: Democratic Change in China Since 1978* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994).



rights and substantial interests through legal means.<sup>23</sup> A Western-style middle class is emerging in the economic scene and has set out to consolidate its position in the political arena.<sup>24</sup> These new developments at home have prompted Chinese outside the country to rethink their from-without approach and turn back to their homeland for from-within forces, inspirations, and models for the Chinese democratization process.

From an objective point of view, future changes are prepared or determined by both reality and history. Is democratic change or transition possible in mainland China? What route will China likely follow toward democracy? What form of democracy will likely be realized in China? What role will the CCP assume in the Chinese democratization process and a final democratic form of government?

In answering the first question, there are a number of factors that point to democratic progress and make it possible to predict that democratization will be inevitable in China. One factor is that the party-state is essentially a one-party dictatorship and has become increasingly incompatible with a modern style of government. Aware of its international image, the CCP has begun to justify its position in terms of democratic ideas or principles.<sup>25</sup> As pointed out by Martin King Whyte<sup>26</sup> as well as the foregoing analysis, Mao's legacy of mass movements also provides inspiration for popular participation in the political decision-making process, and the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident further sowed seeds for democratic changes. Economic reform will favor political relaxation. Old Chinese revolutionaries are dying and have become less and less influential in the political scene. Still another factor is that opening up to the outside world and participating in global economic development will draw China to the world mainstream and expose it to outside influences, including Western democratic ideas and practices.

There are also elements in the Chinese population which could encourage democratic change. Ethnic minorities have been living

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<sup>23</sup>Yongnian Zheng, "Development and Democracy: Are They Compatible in China?" *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 1 (1994): 235-59.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald M. Glassman, *China in Transition: Communism, Capitalism, and Democracy* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

<sup>25</sup>Jiang Zemin, "Speech at the Meeting in Celebration of the CCP's 70th Founding Anniversary," in *Zhongguo jingji tizhi gaige nianjian 1992*, 53-66.

<sup>26</sup>Martin King Whyte, "Prospects for Democracy in China," *Problems of Communism* 42, no. 3 (1992): 58-70.

quite harmoniously with each other for a long time; thus, minority issues are not likely to be as serious as they have been in the democratic transition of the former Soviet Union. There is also a sizable population of well-educated urbanites and intellectuals. Economic reform and modernization have opened up the Chinese mind in general and cultivated an entrepreneurial class in particular. The populace and the emerging middle class are poised to claim political representation and meaningful participation in important decision-making processes that affect their economic well-being.<sup>27</sup> A democratic elite is also emerging among intellectuals and bureaucrats.<sup>28</sup>

How will democratic change take place in mainland China? According to Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, democratization can be either regime-initiated or opposition-induced.<sup>29</sup> For China, a regime-initiated route toward democracy would entail the CCP submitting itself to economic reform, surrendering its monopoly on national power, and sharing power with other social forces originating from economic development in a democratic form of government. Opposition-induced democratization has two possibilities. One route is that a self-assertive middle class, a democratic elite, and other social interests mature, stand up for their economic interests and constitutional rights, and make further claims for political representation and participation. Another possibility is that a popular movement or revolution breaks out instantly amid a national crisis. Chinese liberals or democrats at home and overseas would take advantage of such a crisis, join their forces to rally the populace around a well-defined democratic agenda, and thereby force the CCP to step down or share power with other social forces in a democratic form of government. There are, however, several obvious problems with this possibility. For instance, how likely is a nationwide crisis to take place if the CCP can continue its pursuit of economic development? Is Deng's death a likely blasting fuse? If a national crisis occurs, can a mass movement build itself in an orderly manner and result in a democratic arrangement of national power? The most recent

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<sup>27</sup>See notes 22 and 23 above.

<sup>28</sup>Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup>Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

precedent, the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, seems to suggest that it is easy for a popular movement to grow out of control and lose its goal and direction. Revolution is a dangerous and even destructive possibility. The communist revolution, as mentioned before, initially aimed at a "New Democracy" envisioned by Mao. It has led to no constitutional democracy but a party-state. As Samuel Huntington warns, "democratic regimes that last have seldom, if ever, been instituted by mass popular action."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, democracy necessitates a sense of responsibility and mutual respect among competing parties. Pact-making needs patience and delicate legislative skills of negotiation and compromise.<sup>31</sup> As such, a competitive party system has a much better chance of establishing and sustaining itself when it grows from a legislature rather than a mass movement or revolution.

What exact route will the Chinese democratization process take? Will it be regime-initiated? Will it be opposition-induced? Or will it partly be regime-initiated and partly opposition-induced? The answer again lies in reality and history. Historically, as it has been implied by the above description and analysis, the Chinese party-state is not a patriarchal, feudal, or monarchical system. It was built on popular support and pursues its political cause through people's campaigns or revolution. One of its fundamental principles or faiths is that people are the masters of socialist society and thereby the driving forces for historical progress. This faith aligns logically with the democratic principle that people have full participation in the political decision-making process. As for individual leaders, Mao was not a traditional tyrant. In fact, his great legacy was mass movements against feudal repression, imperialist aggression, and bureaucratic authoritarianism. Deng is not an old-fashioned despot either; he is marked by his collective leadership within the Party, reform, and opening the country up to the outside world. There are also various traditional Chinese influences that can positively affect current and future democratic changes.<sup>32</sup> According to Roger Des Forges, dem-

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<sup>30</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 2 (1984): 212.

<sup>31</sup>Baohui Zhang, "Corporatism, Totalitarianism, and Transition to Democracy: Brazil, Spain, China, and the Soviet Union," *Comparative Political Studies* 27 (1994): 108-36.

<sup>32</sup>Whyte, "Prospects for Democracy in China"; Roger V. Des Forges, "Democracy in Chinese History," in *Chinese Democracy and the Crisis of 1989: Chinese and American Reflections*, ed. Roger V. Des Forges, Luo Ning, and Wu Yen-bo (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993), 21-52.

*Is the CCP's Version of Democracy Relevant?*

ocratic ideas, institutions, and even states have developed to varying degrees in different periods of Chinese history.<sup>33</sup> These democratic elements have to some extent been built into the communist political order, and therefore should continue to provide inspiration, structure, and models for Chinese democracy.

Most importantly, the majority of Chinese still maintain a power-oriented mentality or dependence, tending to place their hopes for positive changes on the existing system. The general population recognizes that the CCP has a strong hold on national power and remains the supreme source of national stability. Any radical or violent attempt to replace the CCP one-party regime by a multiparty democracy seems both impossible and dangerous to the welfare of Chinese people and the survival of China as a united nation. People also believe that there are many conscientious and competent officials in the Party and government bureaucracies. Entrance to the CCP and its government remains open to capable people. Progressive figures and forces inside and outside the power machine can prevail and lead the nation to a bright political future. Through mass media, people have also seen the collapse of the communist bloc, the Berlin Wall, and the former Soviet Union. They assume that the CCP has learned a lesson from its previous communist friends and rivals through their landslide transitions toward market-oriented economy and political democracy. They expect that the CCP will follow this global trend and move away from ideological obsession and military confrontation toward negotiation, compromise, cooperation, and utilitarianism. In short, most Chinese tend to wait and see if good things will develop from logical evolution.

Also relevant is the fact that China is a developing country that is confronted with a huge population, limited resources and opportunities, and a high rate of illiteracy. In the initial phase of development, a strong authority which cultivates a collective feeling of crisis, unifies national interests, motivates people, and concentrates limited resources in order to roll the country's economy out of inefficiency and stagnation is necessary. This necessity has clearly been demonstrated by successful cases in Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore in which one party or a one party-state regime dominated the political arena year after year to the advantage of economic develop-

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<sup>33</sup>Des Forges, "Democracy in Chinese History."

ment before proceeding to democratic reform after social affluence was achieved.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, popular revolution and a resultant installation of a full-fledged Western democracy under economically undeveloped conditions would not only be unproductive, but also quite likely destructive. It could lead a country into a disarray of diverse interests and orientations, unceasing squabbles, and hard-to-cure anomie; it would therefore prevent the country from concentrating necessary energy on economic development. This scenario has been well-illustrated by various newly-installed democracies in the Third World. Taiwan's experience is particularly relevant to mainland China, as the ruling KMT in Taiwan has historically been a Leninist party and habitually been seen by the CCP as a political rival.<sup>35</sup> The successful transition from one-party rule to a multiparty democracy in Taiwan has posed a great challenge to the CCP. If the Leninist KMT can adapt to democratic change, why not the CCP? More importantly, as the CCP claims its sovereignty over Taiwan, how will it legitimize its one-party rule over Taiwan's democratically elected government? The upcoming return of capitalist Hong Kong and Macao, where freedom of speech, if not a democratic form of government, is practiced by a strong civil society, will also strike a soft but essential blow to CCP one-party rule and give a significant push for democratic changes in mainland China.

Given all these historical, realistic, domestic, and international forces, it is reasonable to say that democratization in China is inevitable and that it will likely be regime-initiated, but with strong inducement from different economic, political, and social interests. In other words, the CCP will likely change itself and its relations with the state, society, and the general public, and surrender more political space to all emergent forces out of economic reform and development. In the meantime, however, different social forces need to stand up with their constitutional rights and essential interests and make serious efforts to expand their legal representation and political participation. In addition, domestic and international pressures have to be skillfully applied to ensure that the CCP does not back off from its pursuit of economic reform and slide back to isolation.

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<sup>34</sup>Frederic C. Deyo, ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>35</sup>Jiang Zemin, "Strive Continually for the Promotion and Completion of National Unification," *People's Daily* (Overseas edition), January 31, 1995.

A partly regime-initiated democratization process obviously resonates with the CCP's official claims about its democratic scheme. At the Party's seventieth founding anniversary, CCP general secretary Jiang Zemin, whom Deng Xiaoping hopes to mold as the center for the third generation of communist leadership, laid out "socialist democracy" as the CCP's political goal for the nation.<sup>36</sup> According to the CCP, "socialist democracy" refers to a political situation in which centralization is kept in balance and harmony with democracy, rules with freedom, and a unified will with individual happiness and vitality. At an institutional level, the CCP's specified goal of democratic reform and legal construction is composed of five essential elements: a multiparty coalition, a cadre institution, local elections, a mass inspection mechanism, and a legal system.<sup>37</sup> Each of these elements is elaborated on below.

First, a multiparty coalition refers to the CCP's cooperation with the eight democratic parties in the administration of national political affairs. The eight democratic parties include the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Guomindang, the China Democratic League, the China Democratic National Construction Association, the China Association for Promoting Democracy, the Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party, the China Zhi Gong Dang, the Jiusan Society, and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.<sup>38</sup> Representing a wide range of social interests, especially the liberal and practical approaches of intellectuals and business communities, democratic parties were promised a coalition more than forty years ago by Mao Zedong, and the concept has been used by the CCP as a vehicle for political legitimization as well as access to other social resources.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, while they have benefitted the CCP in different ways, democratic parties have not yet been given much share in the administration of national power. The multiparty coalition under the CCP is now seriously skewed to a one-party dictatorship.

Second, establishing a cadre institution involves instituting a rational division of labor among government agencies and developing a scientific procedure of personnel management. The previous Ministry

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<sup>36</sup>See note 25 above.

<sup>37</sup>See note 7 above.

<sup>38</sup>See note 5 above.

<sup>39</sup>See note 8 above.





of Labor and Personnel was divided into the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Personnel. Administration of workers is now separate from that of cadres. Among cadres, a civil service system is being established to separate bureaucratic functionaries from political appointees and protect civil service personnel from changes in the political arena. Scientific procedures of personnel management, on the other hand, involve rules on recruitment, award, and promotion. For example, political appointments are made in a way that ensures leadership continuity and social representation in terms of age, gender, ethnic background, educational level, and other status variables. Civil service positions are open for competition through standardized examinations.<sup>40</sup> However, given the fact that political positions are all filled through appointment rather than public votes and that political appointees are put in charge of civil service personnel, it is easy to see that political nepotism and bureaucratic favoritism are still serious problems for the Party and government.

Third, local elections refer to villagers electing their village committees and urban residents electing their neighborhood committees. In addition to voting rights in the formation of grass-roots self-government, villagers and urban residents have the right to elect people's representatives to the township as well as the county people's congresses. People's representatives selected through direct votes may then elect heads for the township and county governments. With inspiration from people's representative elections, some enterprises, work units, and government agencies have begun to attempt a "bottom-up" approach in electing or selecting lower-middle bureaucrats and officials.<sup>41</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that local elections are often rigged and must be verified by the CCP without exception.

Fourth, a mass inspection mechanism includes people from different social backgrounds in political alliance with the CCP who inspect, monitor, and evaluate the CCP's performance in areas concerning their life or interests. In Western democracies, mass media and interest groups provide an effective inspection mechanism which monitors the party in power and keeps the government in check. In Chinese communist history, both the people and the authorities have

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<sup>40</sup>Zi Ye, "Central State Organs Institute Civil Examinations on a Full Scale," *People's Daily* (Overseas edition), June 13, 1996.

<sup>41</sup>See notes 7 and 21 above.



made efforts, but political representation and participation have not yet been fully institutionalized. The CCP still maintains that the mass media serve as its mouthpiece and people's organizations its tools of support. Reports on problems and issues are all expected to be made in a way that does not conflict with the CCP's political position.

Fifth, a legal system means a clear definition and effective protection of the constitutional rights of government agencies, mass organizations, and people from different family backgrounds and occupations. In fulfilling this pledge, the CCP must face several contradictions between a modern-style legal system and its revolutionary tradition. One contradiction involves the party-state relationship. The state Constitution stipulates that no party or individual is allowed to transgress or transcend state power. The CCP Constitution also admits that the Party itself is subject to the state law.<sup>42</sup> In accordance with these two supreme laws, the de facto superimposition of the CCP on the government is unconstitutional. Will this fundamental self-contradiction of the communist party-state serve as a starting point for a legalist move toward democracy?

Another contradiction concerns people's rights. The state Constitution sanctifies all basic human rights for citizens, including freedom of speech and association. But in the eyes of the CCP, ideas alien to the communist ideology are reactionary. Organizations or activities aimed at challenging CCP rule are treasonous. Freedom of speech is essentially confined to the one dimension of signing praises for the CCP, or at the most, making "good" suggestions to the government. Freedom of association has likewise been limited to the CCP-designated functions for people's organizations. In other words, people still cannot openly criticize the CCP and spread ideas that do not align with communist ideology, nor can they freely make public protests and organize interest groups with political motives. This reality is well exemplified by the CCP's current stand toward political dissidence. Despite an obvious liberalizing trend in trade and economic development, the CCP continues to maintain a heightened sensitivity against political dissidents. Democratic activists overseas are banned from reentry to the country. Dissidents at home are either put in jails or under surveillance. There seems to be an ironic connection between the rise of freedom on the economic front and

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<sup>42</sup>See note 5 above.

the fall of tolerance for difference and dissidence in the political arena.

Still another contradiction involves the role of the government. According to the state Constitution, government agencies and bureaucratic functionaries within are responsible for their duties. People have the right to participate in the political decision-making process and inspect how power is exercised through formal institutional means and channels such as mass media, local elections, and people's organizations. In reality, however, as mass media is controlled by the Party, elections remain local, and as people's organizations are affiliated with the Party bureaucracy, participating in and inspecting the governing process are all but empty words. Government is left to the CCP and its trusted officials. Lack of accountability, corruption, and abuse of power have become widespread phenomena in Chinese political life.

These contradictions are obviously due to gaps between ideal democracy and people's democratic rights granted by the state Constitution, between the state Constitution and communist ideology, and between the CCP's pledge on democracy and the CCP's politics in practice. A long democratization process will be required to gradually close gaps and eliminate contradictions. The CCP's current grip on national power indicates it has a long way to go to deliver its envisioned democracy of a multiparty coalition, a cadre institution, local elections, a mass inspection mechanism, and a legal system in the Chinese political landscape.

Will history allow the CCP to move along toward democracy? The CCP, in its forty-plus year reign over mainland China, has consolidated its power base and become the only authority that can rally people for society-wide initiatives. Given the fact that the collapse of the global communist movement has minimized the possibility of the CCP driving the nation toward ideal communism, and that economic reform has involved the CCP in national construction and increasingly attracted the country to the world capitalist system, it is reasonable to expect that the CCP will continue its yet-to-be-realized democratic scheme and China will progress toward democracy along an economy-driven track. However, in order to maintain democratic change and ensure China achieves a true political and economic democracy, positive pressure must be continually placed on the CCP both from the outside world through reconciliatory contacts and from different interests inside the country through economic initiatives and multi-perspective participation in cultural, political, and social affairs.