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THE 1980 COUNTY-LEVEL ELECTIONS IN CHINA: EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRATIC MODERNIZATION

Brantly Womack *

Democratic political reforms have an important but ambiguous status in China’s post-Mao modernization drive. On the one hand, the regime is confident of overwhelming popular support for its removal of ultraleft dogmatism and promotion of material welfare. On the other hand, instruments of popular political expression and control confront any established regime with specific challenges to its authority. The post-Mao regime has already shown its impatience with the anti-establishment tendencies expressed on Xidan Wall ("Democracy Wall") and with wall posters in general. Democratic institutions are supposed to guarantee the influence of mass opinion; they are not supposed to provide an enclave for "anarchism." But as democracy becomes institutionalized, tensions necessarily increase between democracy and centralism.

Among the many aspects of political reform in China, electoral reform is particularly deserving of attention. The election law adopted by the Second Session of the Fifth National People’s Congress (NPC) in July 1979 contained a number of radical departures from the 1953 law, including a system of more candidates than positions, direct election of delegates to the county people’s congresses, and a more open nominating process. If such reforms should be put into practice in China, it might be expected that in the long run public opinion would become a more formal part of the political process through the formation of electoral constituen-

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cies, and that elected officials would begin to share the mantle of political leadership that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) inherited from the revolution. However, democracy is not the only available path, and the current leadership might well be tempted to preserve the privileges and convenience of unquestioned political hegemony.

The new election law is a fairly late arrival in a wave of democratic reforms that has emerged since 1976. Newspapers and government offices have become more open and responsive to individual complaints, the principles of “let a hundred flowers blossom” and “do not put on hats (ideological labels)” are supposed to govern debate, and worker and peasant participation in managing their units of production is encouraged. In the more explicitly political realm, the Third Session of the Fifth NPC in September 1980 was unprecedented in the frankness of governmental reports and the openness of delegates’ comments. Several proposals were made to regularize and strengthen the NPC’s oversight of government operations. Inner-Party democracy also was encouraged with the promulgation of the “Guiding Principles for Inner-Party Life” in March 1980 and the circulation of a draft CCP constitution in November. The draft constitution stipulates that elections of Party officials and delegates to higher levels should follow the procedures of secret ballot and more candidates than positions.

However popular these democratizing measures are, it was the support of central leadership rather than popular pressure that led to their adoption. Undoubtedly the Center’s enthusiasm for democracy is in part an expression of anti-authoritarian sentiment steeled by the experience of the Cultural Revolution. As victims of leftist excesses, the post-Mao leadership would be determined to control the abuse of power. The reforms are also politically useful in the Center’s struggle to require lower and middle-ranking cadres to implement its anti-leftist modernization policies. Cadres at the local, county, and provincial level tend to be less motivated and more cautious than national leadership. Moreover, since a large number of lower-level cadres were leftists recruited in the Cultural Revolution, there is still considerable antagonism to the new directions of post-Mao policy. By mobilizing popular sentiment (which is assumed to support modernization) and institutionalizing mass political power, the Center’s modernizing pressure from above would be complemented by popular pressure from below. There is a presumption that expanding the local political arena will be useful for the Center’s modernization policies. If democratic institutionalization does not yield the desired political result, then it would lose its utility as a political strategy against lower level intransigence. As mass leftist currents discovered in the Cultural Revolution, the advantage of center support carries with it vulnerability to changes of wind.

The democratic trends in post-Mao China express an aversion to the authoritarianism epitomized by the Gang of Four. But they do not represent a return to pre-Cultural Revolution politics. The legal and pro-
cedural guarantees to the masses are more explicit and sweeping than previous policies; the importance of class struggle in justifying the dictatorship of the proletariat has lessened. It has often happened that China has announced major new policies and then has spent the next few years coping with the consequences. Current democratic reforms are worthy of close attention regardless of whether they are a temporary trend reversed by a later authoritarian one or the beginning of a new age of stable, institutionalized politics.

The New Electoral Law

The "Electoral Law of the People’s Republic of China for the NPC and Local People’s Congresses at All Levels" was one of seven major laws passed on July 1, 1979 by the Second Session of the Fifth NPC to take effect on January 1, 1980. There was little advance discussion of election law reform and it did not attract much public notice until preparations for experimental county elections began several months later.

Despite the lack of fanfare, the new electoral law embodied several momentous changes from the previous law, which had been adopted in 1953 and used in four elections. The most important change was away from the Soviet system of one candidate per place (deng e xuanju zhi) to a system of more candidates than places (cha e xuanju zhi). Voters in direct elections should be presented with one and a half to two times as many final candidates as places, and representatives choosing delegates to the next highest people’s congress should have 20%-50% more candidates. Moreover, a companion law on the organization of people’s congresses specifies that there should be more candidates than places for such positions as standing committee membership, provincial governor and vice-governor, mayor and vice-mayor, county magistrate, etc. Suddenly Chinese citizens and representatives were to be confronted with what is considered a major aspect of democracy in the West, namely, a choice among candidates.

A second major innovation was the introduction of direct elections at the county level. The expansion of the sphere of direct election from the commune to the county is important in itself and also as a regime commitment to the principle of direct election. The county (average population: 360,000) is a much larger and more diverse unit than the commune (average population: 15,000) with correspondingly more complex political and administrative responsibilities. The county congress is directly below the provincial congress, which in turn elects delegates to the NPC, and it elects its own standing committee with responsibilities similar to the provincial standing committee. The newly established county standing committee is elected by the county congress, as well as major county administrative officers, including county magistrate, judge, and procurator. Moreover, Cheng Zihua, Minister for Civil Affairs and Director of the Office of Direct Elections at the County Level, has claimed that the
principle of direct elections will be extended gradually to provincial and national levels.\textsuperscript{6}

A third major reform is the attempt to guarantee a fairly open process of nomination. Any organization or any individual with three seconds can submit candidates for the initial list. If the initial list is too long (in one district there were 24 nominees for each position) then it is to be pared to proper length by a series of democratic consultations between the election committee and the masses or by a primary election (\textit{yu xuanju}). Campaigning for candidates is allowed, and the final list of candidates must be posted five days before the election.

Further significant innovations include the requirement of secret ballots, more flexible criteria for election districts, and definite procedures for recalling delegates. Secret ballots were optional under the 1953 law because of widespread illiteracy, but were used in a majority of places by 1957. The new law allows electoral districts to be determined by workplace as well as by residence in order to render more convenient active participation in the nomination and election process. The nominations and elections take place in the election districts, and these are designated and assigned a quota of representatives by the county election committee.

Although every citizen is restricted to one vote, the equal weighting of votes is affected by two modifications. First, there are extensive provisions to promote the representation of minority groups. Second, urban representation is heavily favored over rural representation. At the county level, an urban delegate need represent only a quarter as many people as a rural delegate, and at the NPC level the bias of representation is eight to one. This preference for urban representation is justified by the leading role of the urban proletariat in the dictatorship of the proletariat and by the key importance of cities in modernization. Laying this peculiarity aside, the overall impression given by the new electoral law is one of extensive and serious institutionalization of democracy.

In the major speech at the 1979 NPC session that adopted the election law, Hua Guofeng provided a general justification for socialist democracy that set the pattern for later articles on the subject.\textsuperscript{7} The justification has three distinct parts that are assumed to be harmonious and interrelated. First, rule by the people is an essential characteristic of socialism and so socialist democracy should be the highest form of democracy. Second, the achievement of the four modernizations in agriculture, industry, defense, and science requires the enthusiasm and full mobilization of the people, and “the more socialist democracy develops, the better can modernization be achieved.” Third, democratic and legal institutions need to be strengthened in order to prevent the recurrence of a minority seizure of power such as that of the Gang of Four. The first argument makes democracy a question of socialist principle, the second stresses its utility for current national tasks, and the third connects democratic institutions with the criticism of the Gang of Four. Hua himself did not
detail the contribution of the new electoral law to socialist democracy, but other writers did so within the framework of his general argument.\textsuperscript{8}

The problem with electoral reform as a basic contribution to popular rule under socialism is that the specific measures of direct election—choice of candidates and secret ballots—are those of bourgeois democracy. Explaining why policies long in use in capitalist countries should be necessary to socialism poses a delicate ideological problem. Two kinds of answers are given. One follows the pattern used to justify the introduction of capitalist management techniques, namely, that bourgeois states have collected useful experience that can be taken over and transformed for socialist purposes. As in enterprise management, China has not lived up to its socialist potential: "Our socialist democracy should and can be superior to bourgeois democracy. But, 'should be' does not mean 'actually is,' and 'can' does not denote 'in reality.'"\textsuperscript{9} The other approach is to emphasize Chinese precedents for election reform reaching back to base area elections in 1933 and to point out the superiority of the new Chinese election law to bourgeois precedents. The Chinese law would avoid the problems of campaign financing, inadequate worker and minority representation, and low voter turnout, which show the class limitations of bourgeois democracy. Regardless of the relation to bourgeois democracy, however, the primary claim for the electoral reforms is that they contribute to the socialist principle of rule by the people.

The claim that greater democracy will be useful for China’s modernization program is based on the expectation that the masses would be more enthusiastic and productive with greater democracy and also that elected officials would be more competent. One author combines these points elegantly:

A county level leadership cadre produced in this manner [through direct elections] will be more able to gain the support and trust of the people, will be better at arousing the enthusiasm of the masses, can guarantee the smooth execution throughout the whole county of the line, directives, and policies of the Party and state, and can successfully complete every county task of socialist construction—all because the leadership arises from the people.\textsuperscript{10}

It is traditional for the CCP to combine election movements and production movements. The first general election in the Chinese Soviet Republic (the "Jiangxi Soviet") in 1933 was combined with an "urgent mobilization for war."\textsuperscript{11} James Townsend points out that the first PRC election in 1953 was combined with other movements.\textsuperscript{12} However, the promise of greater productivity from the current electoral reforms is somewhat different. Now it is not the mobilization achieved by the election campaign that is expected to yield results, but the institutionalization of popular control and expression. Socialist democracy as embodied in the electoral
law is the political equivalent of guarantees of material interest and of enterprise and production team autonomy in the economic sphere.

Such institutionalization is also viewed as a necessary bulwark against strong habits of feudal authoritarianism in Chinese politics. At the national level, the rule of law, division of responsibilities, and circulation of leadership are considered measures against the reemergence of an authoritarian clique or of an emperor figure. At the local level, the electoral process of the new law should be sufficient to break and remove unpopular powerholders. It is a reasonable expectation that multiple candidate elections for the people's congress and within the people's congress for responsible positions should render manipulation either more difficult or more obvious. However, the key role of the election committee in the nomination process and the inherent advantages of established power in an election provide possible avenues of undue official influence. Any person with influence over the local CCP organization would derive tremendous benefit from its cohesive activities, prestige, and power. Nevertheless, implementation of the electoral law would be unwelcome to officials accustomed to bureaucratic authority patterns.

The electoral law's three objectives of improving socialist democracy, aiding modernization, and providing popular control of officials are compatible, but they are also sufficiently distinct to become involved in real and apparent conflicts. A number of "what if" situations could be imagined that would pit each of these purposes against the other two, and, with nearly 3000 county level units, there must be some cases of each variety of conflict. Democracy is not an absolute even for its proponents. It is only one-half of the principle of democratic centralism, and it is subordinate to the general task of the present period, the four modernizations. The absence of major conflicts with centralized efficiency may well be a prerequisite for continued democratic development, and it will be the center that will decide what constitutes a major conflict.

The 1980 County-level Elections

Direct county-level elections have been carried out nationwide in three stages. Experimental elections were held in 66 places from November 1979 to January 1980. In the first half of 1980 the experimental units were expanded to 550, and in August 1980 plans were laid by each province for completing county elections in phases by early 1981.

The purpose of the initial election was to test the practical application of the new law, to give each province experience with direct county elections, and to train election cadres. The Ministry of Civil Affairs directly observed five counties, and regional meetings to exchange election experience were held in January, culminating in a national meeting. In an address to the national meeting, Politburo member Peng Zhen stressed the importance of direct elections and choice among candidates. Provin-
cial commentary on the experimental elections was quite restrained, although Shandong claimed to have trained 10,000 election workers.\textsuperscript{13}

The experience of the initial experimental phase was summed up by Cheng Zihua in a report to the 13th Session of the 5th NPC Standing Committee on February 7, 1980. Cheng stated that the elections had been successful in general, though lack of experience was evident. As a guideline for the second phase of expanded experiments, Cheng outlined seven steps of election work that ran from cadres studying the new law beforehand to receptivity to mass suggestions at the eventual county people's congresses.

The purpose of the second phase of more elections in specified counties was to extend the base of experience with the new election law and to train more cadres. Experience and leadership were problems because, as one article pointed out, the previous election had occurred more than ten years earlier and the new law was quite different. Further guidelines were issued to guarantee democratic participation, evidently including such measures as devoting equal time to the backgrounds of candidates and listing candidates by stroke order. From February to April the provinces formed election committees and selected election sites, usually one or two counties in each prefecture.

Despite the election activity, the political mood in Beijing was rather harshly anti-dissident in the first few months of 1980. Deng Xiaoping gave an address on tasks for the 1980s in January that not only criticized dissident activity but condemned even passive tolerance of dissidents by Party members.\textsuperscript{14} The illiberal attitude toward dissidents was specifically applied to socialist democracy by a front page \textit{People's Daily} article, “Keep to the Correct Orientation of Socialist Democracy,”\textsuperscript{15} that emphasized class struggle and the difference between socialist democracy and bourgeois democracy. Evidently a major criterion for correct democracy is its convenience for modernization:

Prattling about democracy while neglecting the general objective of modernization will result in betraying the socialist principles of democracy and violating the basic interests of the proletariat and people.\textsuperscript{16}

It is understandable, according to the author, that some people would fall victim to bourgeois temptations in their aversion to Gang of Four feudalism. In conclusion he gives three guidelines for developing socialist democracy that are obviously more convenient for the leadership than they are for the masses: first, serve the total interest of socialism; second, preserve the unity of democracy and centralism; third, subordinate the form of democracy to its content. The last guideline in particular is antithetical to the institutionalization of democracy embodied in the electoral law.

Despite the somber ideological environment, the second phase of experimental elections ran smoothly. By the end of June, 550 county-level units, 20\% of the national total, had completed elections, and stories of
specific cases of success and difficulties became more common. Many success stories were reported that stressed the enthusiasm of the masses and the high percentage of voter turnout, usually over 95%. Voter registration was another major area of success; numerous cases of improper disenfranchisement were reversed. In Shanghai only one quarter of one percent of the electorate remained deprived of voting rights. 17

In August 1980 13 provinces began the third phase of full-scale elections and, more importantly, the central leadership decided to encourage free expression in the elections and discourage official interference. Again, Cheng Zihua was the spokesman for the specific task of elections and Deng Xiaoping set the general ideological and political tone.

Cheng's talk is primarily a very strong statement in favor of having more candidates than offices, and the reason for his emphasis is the great resistance of local cadres to this stipulation in many of the 550 experimental counties. 18 Candidates were nominated from the top down and candidate lists were padded with pro forma entries. Evidently these tendencies were particularly bad in the selection of county leaders at the county people's congresses. Cheng says flatly that the number of candidates should exceed the number of positions "regardless of the special situation in certain places." Only where no other candidate is nominated by the deputies can an election proceed without a contest. Throughout September the national press strongly supported maximum democracy in elections both through positive endorsements and through the exposé of lurid cases of official interference.

Undoubtedly one reason for the media's supportive mood was an "extremely important" speech given by Deng Xiaoping to an enlarged meeting of the Politburo in August. 19 Although the first part of the speech stresses the essential differences between bourgeois and socialist democracy and the superiority of socialism, the second part makes very wide-ranging suggestions for "strengthening the socialist democratic system." The first area for improvement is the people's congress system. Direct elections should gradually be extended to all levels and the role of deputies and standing committees should be strengthened. Moreover, the other areas for improvement stress the importance of the separation of Party and government functions, decentralization of power, extension of elections in workplaces and the Party, and obedience to law—all of which strengthen the significance of the electoral law and the ongoing elections. Rather than the dangers of dissidents and anarchism, the undemocratic habits of cadres who "rely on the old methods of the authority of the organization, the power of the state, and their own position and influence to carry out work" are cited as the most serious obstacle to democratization. Because of the difficulties of revivifying true mass leadership, "realizing political democratization is not as simple as realizing economic modernization." 20

Examples of successes and errors give some idea of the process of election work. In one case, the Xuanwu District in southwest Beijing,
10,000 initial candidates were reduced by agreement between the parties, voters' representatives, and people's organizations to 502 final candidates for 316 seats. The candidates included 334 (67%) Party members, 186 (37%) women, and 38 (8%) minorities. With 96% of the voters participating, the district elected 208 (65%) Party members, 104 (33%) women, and 22 (7%) minorities. Included among the new deputies was Chen Aiwu, a restaurant cook who became famous for publicly criticizing Commerce Minister Wang Lei's habit of not paying for his meals. In the Gulou District of Nanjing, the 8486 initial nominees yielded 339 representatives, 48% of whom were Party members.

As the remarks of Cheng Zihua and Deng Xiaoping suggested, the chief area of difficulty with the elections was the suppression and manipulation of the democratic process by local power holders. In the nomination phase of the election process, candidates recommended by the masses were sometimes arbitrarily crossed out or replaced, cadres were assigned to be candidates from various districts, and equal numbers of candidates and offices were proposed. In one case, the nomination process consisted of an enlarged CCP branch meeting to which only the heads of mass organizations were invited. During the elections themselves, some cadres watched the voting and put the names of the candidates in order of official preference. Election results were thrown out in one county where cadres had forged ballots and had added a representative to the congress who was not elected.

Serious violations also occurred in the election of county leading officials at the people's congresses. In one case a few county leaders unilaterally drew up a list of candidates for county magistrate and called a meeting of Party members among the delegates in order to push the preferred candidate. In Nei Mongol (Inner Mongolia), county authorities suspected that a person who was not an official candidate might be elected county magistrate. They urged the representatives not to vote for him, but he was elected anyway. Then the county authorities requested "emergency help" from the provincial Organization Department to declare the election invalid. But, as the commentator on this case observes, "the failure of such [Party] candidates and the success of others not recommended by the Party organizations in an election can only prove that the Party's choice of its candidates was wrong and should be improved."

The most spectacular case of election controversy was a hunger strike at Mao Zedong's alma mater, Hunan Normal University, over the removal of a non-Marxist student candidate from a Changsha county-level election. More than 4000 students participated in street demonstrations supporting the demands of the 87 strikers. After a three-day strike central authorities agreed to adjudicate the matter and student representatives went to Beijing. Meanwhile the Hunan students had sent telegrams describing the affair to major universities in Beijing and Shanghai and some students at these institutions publicly expressed support. Two students at Fudan University who had already been elected
representatives to their Shanghai county-level people's congress demanded a detailed report on the incident and condemned "maneuvers" by local authorities aimed at obstructing democratic elections.\textsuperscript{26} Despite student support for the Hunanese non-Marxist's right to be a candidate, student candidates in Beijing were evidently more circumspect in dealing with questions of basic ideology. Descriptions of the general university election scene from both Hong Kong and Western sources suggest, however, that the unorthodox views of urban candidates and representatives might test the democratic will of the leadership.\textsuperscript{27}

The election cases cited are sufficient to indicate both that truly meaningful elections will occur only after a long struggle in many localities and that the new provisions of the election law are not just pro forma in the eyes of the authorities. Besides the provincial election committees, the Ministry of Civil Affairs had seven inspection teams checking on election regularity. It can be expected that in China, as in other countries, the assurance of fair and honest elections will be a constant challenge.

\textit{The Challenge of Electoral Constituencies}

The significance of the 1980 county-level elections does not lie as much in the results themselves as in the changes in China's political system that could result from a regular electoral process. Undoubtedly most voters and representatives in 1980 were cautious about challenging established cadres, uncertain about their own preferences, and not convinced that elections would become a permanent and expanding part of Chinese politics. Such reservations would be particularly strong in the first election. On the other hand, caution does not necessarily imply cynicism about elections in general. An unofficial poll of 535 students at Beijing University found that 53% believed the elections were "a first step toward realizing socialist democracy," 37% expected a positive effect, and only 9% thought it was a formality.\textsuperscript{28} If the leadership confirms its support for democratic institutionalization and relatively open elections become a regular feature of politics, such reservations will fade and popular participation will become less restrained. Popular participation is precisely the goal of current democratic reforms, but it seems likely that some of the results of expanded and more democratic elections will be neither expected nor desired. The open question is how the leadership will respond to the unanticipated effects of its new procedural commitments.

\textit{The Natural Path of Democratic Development:} In order to discuss the possible systemic effects of electoral reforms it is necessary to speculate on the trend that might be created by a continuing series of elections according to established procedures. As a strengthened form of popular political expression, it seems reasonable to expect increased pressures for the importance of people's congresses and the autonomy of elected officials. Since popular
opinion will probably concern itself with the matters before its representatives as well as with their personal qualities, I would also expect implicit policy mandating to occur.

Given the Center’s support for strengthening the people’s congresses and their standing committees, it might seem a foregone conclusion that they will become more important. But the elections will add the pressure of the representatives themselves, supported by the social energies invested in the election process, to the effort to strengthen popular control of government. Elected officials, standing committees, and people’s deputies will establish their reputations by supporting the public interest in government activities.

Elected officials will tend to be held responsible by their constituencies for what happens in their domains, and because of the electoral process, will have a certain political autonomy from bureaucratic pressures. Therefore, it might be expected that they would be less responsive to indirect pressures from above and press for a larger sphere of discretion within Party discipline. Current leadership interest in separating Party and state functions and decentralizing authority would aid such tendencies.

Finally, it is hard to imagine that the content of election issues can be held to differences in personal character of the candidates. The rationale for the new election law is in terms of popular trust and control. If the behavior of a leader is unpopular, he will not be elected. But surely some candidates will be more identified with popular or unpopular policy lines than others, if only because of their unit or the type of work they do. Other candidates might seek to utilize the popularity of some policy by affirming support of it. Ultimately, it is not unreasonable that representatives of the power of the people should develop a quasi-legislative interest in state policy.

The increase of autonomy for elected bodies and officials and policy implications of elections would seem to be direct results of a serious, long-term commitment to the procedures of the 1979 electoral law. Undoubtedly there would be many other, less predictable effects in the areas of media control and content, freedom of discussion, localism, and political organization. It is hard to imagine how any of the three developments discussed above could be completely repressed without undermining the credibility of the regime’s commitment to elections. A competitive election in a context of enforced non-autonomy and policy irrelevance would be a rather artificial popularity contest. As the leadership apparently anticipates, a democratic election law and its first application are steps in a process of democratization rather than a defined and static increment to the political system.

**Vulnerabilities of Democratic Development:** There is nothing in the direct implications of democratization as described above that is in fundamental
conflict with the rationale for the election law. Indeed, it is encouraged by Deng Xiaoping and even extended to the areas of enterprise democracy and inner-Party democracy. However, democratization as a significant addition to Chinese politics is not simply the growth of a new political resource; it is also a displacement of established political power. Since the election reform is a creature of established political power, its threat to the establishment makes it vulnerable to a policy reversal.

I would expect four specific areas of vulnerability for electoral democracy, two arising from institutional challenges and two from policy frictions. The two institutional challenges are to the parents of electoral reform: central leadership and the CCP. The areas of policy friction would be the procedural problem of the apparent inefficiency of legal and democratic processes and the policy content problem created by democracy's proclivity for reflecting a diversity of social interests. The resulting costs to the established leadership might cause it to reverse its decision on electoral democratization or to emasculate the process. Perhaps more likely is that these problems will become areas of tension in which many indecisive battles will be fought among shifting antagonists.

The 1980 county-level elections first posed a positive challenge to central leadership control in that the Center strove to promote and enforce the election law particularly in the full-scale phase of the movement. In this case, the Center and the elections had the same target—namely, the entrenched local leadership that was responsive to neither. But a successful election from a democratic perspective is an uncontrolled one, and electoral power is non-centralized, popular power. The Center may not now be bothered by the idea of popular power because it assumes that it and its policies are popular. But an electoral system provides a different and less manipulable kind of support than an old-style election campaign. Also, it will be difficult for the Center to blame foot-dragging or opposition from a provincial or county congress on bureaucracy or separation from the masses. An established electoral democracy is not derived from the administrative power of the Center, and the established central leadership is not based on elections. As a chronic problem the tension will be resolved only by further institutional developments; the acuteness of the problem will vary according to amount of substantive difference and the style of resolving contradictions.

The CCP is the "vanguard of the proletariat." It has a virtual monopoly on politics and policy formation because of its exemplary dedication, its disciplined execution of central directives, its heritage of revolutionary success, and its grasp of Marxism-Leninism. For these reasons, a well-functioning Party organization among a satisfied citizenry should be well represented in elected offices. Because it is the established political power, the CCP would tend to be well represented unless there were massive discontent in a locality. Even with significant dissatisfaction, the only semi-open nature of the nomination process would proba-
bly allow the local Party to save face legally. Nevertheless, the electoral process sets up a second avenue of leadership advance, and if it functions effectively, the Party loses some of its political hegemony. For the local cadres the path between "commandism" and "tailism" will become narrower.

The political challenge of the people's congresses are by no means the only threat to the traditional role of the CCP member. On the intellectual front is the encouragement of specialists, on the economic front workers' congresses and enterprise self-management, and on the ideological front the individualist temptations connected with modernization. The risks and costs of these challenges are borne at the behest of an anti-Cultural Revolution central leadership by a rank and file largely recruited during the Cultural Revolution. It would be surprising if some cadres were not defensive about their change in status and uncommitted to current reforms. Under the more democratic rules of new Party statutes, perhaps this occupational defensiveness might be more represented in Party policy. Meanwhile there are possibly broad sections of the urban population for whom the Party definitively lost credibility during the wild fluctuations of the last twenty years and who might tend to be politically anti-Party in the same way an Italian might be anti-clerical. If either force is driven out, democratic elections would cease. Elections would cease if the Party lost, and democracy would cease if the people could not express themselves freely.

The institutional challenges that democracy poses to central leadership and the Party are perhaps too sensitive to be publicly articulated, but complaints arising from policy inconveniences might well be voiced. One would be the apparent inefficiency of the elaborate procedure of democratic institutions. Oversight by people's congresses will greatly inconvenience the bureaucracies, and consultative practices will slow the chain of administrative communication. No one who has enjoyed the authoritarian cascade of power in a bureaucratic system could avoid a twinge of nostalgia in such circumstances. There will be pressure for cutting procedural corners and for forgiveness when corners are cut. If the contradiction between administrative bureaucracy and popular representatives became acute, it might be argued that democratization was not serving the interests of modernization, and, in the words of the Xinhua special commentator cited earlier, the form of democracy should be subordinated to its content.

As the incident at Hunan Normal University indicates, problems are already occurring in the second area of policy friction—namely, the diversity of social interests and opinions given voice by electoral reforms. There is great tension between the young students, workers, and children of cadres who view the elections as a political forum and officials who only feel comfortable with mass expressions of support. The political evil of anarchism seems to be defined by some leaders as not confessing to the
"four principles" —upholding the socialist road, dictatorship of the proletariat, leading role of the CCP, and Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong thought. One elected delegate from Beijing University has been banned from publishing in official journals.29 If orthodoxy prevails over newly established procedures, the mass base of the elections might tend to be restricted to the "correct" masses, and democratic processes might not be entrusted to eliminate eccentric or radical views by the natural selection of electoral success. Although the question of freedom of speech is by no means identical with the question of democracy, it is unimaginable that an electoral system could operate effectively if a significant part of the electorate were prohibited from speaking out or running for office. This is a long-term problem because as the societal effects of modernization spread, all manner of general reactions and specific interests will develop. It will be inconvenient to a modernizing leadership to accommodate such a diversity of opinion in its elective bodies. On the other hand, elections merely give expression to hostile opinions, they do not create them. If adverse reactions to modernization are suppressed in legitimate political life, they may reappear in more chaotic forms. Unfortunately the complacency of Marxist leadership concerning its own correctness tends to narrow the spectrum of permissible public opinion.

A Significant Step

No matter how tentative and guarded participation in the first set of competitive elections might have been, the 1979–1980 electoral reform marks a significant policy and institutional commitment. Even if there were a sudden and complete reversal, a latent constituency for democratic institutionalization would remain. Just as democratic measures before the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 served as a precedent for current reforms, so current programs even if aborted might serve as a model for an anti-authoritarian regime in the future.

Democratic institutionalization might be viewed as an attempt to stabilize and systematize the popular energy and support that used to be expressed in concentrated form in mass campaigns. The interaction of the leaders and the led in campaigns was reciprocal in substance but not in form. The "scattered and unsystematic" ideas of the masses were the starting point of the mass line, but it was up to the Party cadres to collect them. In order to rely on constant popular initiative rather than on occasional popular mobilization, channels of expression must be guaranteed. The price is confusion. Peasant initiative might well conflict with urban specialist initiative, and both might differ from the ministerial point of view. But the resulting cacaphony would probably be a more accurate picture of policy terrain than the elegance of an unchallenged bureaucratic plan, and it would indicate that the goal of stimulating popular participation had been achieved.

The county elections are not scheduled to recur for three years, so if
a policy reversal does not occur in the summing up of 1980 experience the issue will not return until mid-1982. The remaining active fronts of democratic institutionalization are workplace democracy and inner-Party democracy. For both of these, changes are proposed that are as far-reaching as the changes in the electoral law. In all these reforms, the changes are not the result of popular power but are an attempt by the leadership to encourage popular participation.

A reversal of democratizing initiatives would be a major decision. A defensive consolidation of established power would cut off potential participants in a more broadly based system. Moreover, it would be just the type of elite self-isolation and protection that was condemned as revisionist in the early 1960s. With Deng Xiaoping's personal involvement in setting reform goals, a major about-face by the current leadership would be embarrassing.

Neither reversal nor unflinching commitment to democratization seems to be likely alternatives. It seems more likely that the Party and the Center would attempt to narrow the scope of permissible opinion, and that those endangered would react by insisting on their procedural rights. A recent article makes clear the leadership's idea of orderly democracy.

A handful of persons want chaos, want to repeat what was done in the "cultural revolution." They advocate "kicking away the Party committee to make revolution," making petitions, contacting others for concerted actions to realize their aims, issuing declarations and even going on strike for "democracy and freedom." . . . We should pay attention to the fact that some people are either influenced by the "Leftist" thinking or the ideas of bourgeois freedom while others are influenced by both. Although such people are different in many ways, they share one thing in common: they cannot correctly comprehend the dialectical relationship between the development of democracy and the strengthening of Party leadership, democracy and centralism as well as freedom and discipline. Therefore, they place the two in opposition to each other.30

But what if an electoral constituency shares such mistaken ideas? The grounds for deciding in favor of either democratic procedures or approved content are both present in current positions. Where the line is drawn in specific cases will contribute to defining the parameters of democratic development in the 1980s.

There is no ready model of socialist democracy in the world which completely accords with the actual conditions of China for us to copy. Therefore, to develop socialist democracy in China, we can only proceed from China's reality, carry out investigations and research, sum up historical experiences, draw on experiences of other countries and break a new path of our own. To this end, we have to experiment, to create and to advance step by step in a down-to-earth manner.31

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NOTES

3. The Chinese texts of these laws are available in *Xinhua Yuebaow* 1979:6. English translations are available in *FBIS*, Supplements to July 27 and July 30, 1979.
4. Article 16 of the NPC and People’s Congress Organic Law, in *ibid*.
5. The “county level” comprises counties, autonomous counties, municipalities not divided into districts, and districts of larger cities.
19. Deng’s speech is not available, but there is a two-part article by Feng Wenbin that apparently is intended to be the public version of the speech. *Renmin Ribao*, November 24, 25, 1980, p. 5; *FBIS*, November 26, pp. L 23–30, December 2, 1980, pp. L9–15. The reforms are excerpted in *Beijing Review* 1981:4 (January 26), pp. 17–20. 28. Feng Wenbin has been an associate of Hu Qioumu since the 1930s and was replaced by Hu Yaobang as secretary of the Communist Youth League in 1952. Currently he is a deputy secretary-general of the CCP and vice-president of the Party School.
22. From interview notes by Barrett McCormick.
23. The most interesting descriptions of violations are in *FBIS*, September 4, 1980, p. L 13; September 9, p. S 5; November 12, p. T 2; November 17, p. S 3. A


26. According to informants in Changsha, the student eventually was permitted to be a candidate but was not elected.


