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Modernization and Democratic Reform in China

BRANTLY WOMACK

Chinese notions of popular government have undergone several metamorphoses in the twentieth century. The traditional Confucian concept of the imperial "mandate of heaven" gave way to the ineffectual parliamentary institutions and tutelary democratic ideology of the Republican period, which in turn led to a new form of popular mobilization in rural areas and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The chaotic consequences of revolutionary populism during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) have led since the death of Mao in 1976 to the current situation: rethinking the problem of democracy in China and experimentation with new political forms.¹ Post-Mao democratic thought, the subject of this article, is concerned to an unprecedented degree with institutional guarantees of popular influence and greater autonomy for political, legal, and social structures.

The present flurry of reform in democratic theory and politics is primarily China's response to its own history and to inherent problems of modern government. The Cultural Revolution demonstrated that a large-scale society with a complex division of labor is too diverse and too fragile to rely for popular control on unstructured mass action. Democratic institutionalism has appeared in China as a political adjustment to the needs of a modern state. This is not to say that the Chinese response to modernity (itself an ambiguous concept) is identical to the Western response. But no matter how individuated Chinese politics is, it is not incomparably unique.

The objective of this article is to analyze the interrelationship of modernization and democratic reform in post-Mao China in the areas of ideology and central policymaking. Democratic political reform in China has a special relationship to economic modernization. For most people, democratic reform is subordinate to economic objectives in that it is justified by its role in mobilizing mass enthusiasm. Some, to be sure, see democracy as an end in itself. Socialist democracy is, in any case, seen as a guarantee of orderly procedure and of mass control over local leaders, not as an assertion of absolute individual rights. Socialist modernization is complementary to socialist democracy. The most recent official statement, by Party Chairman Hu Yaobang at the 12th Party Congress, states: "The steady development of socialist

¹ The Chinese word for democracy, minzhu, is an ancient term. Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, under Western influence, did minzhu assume the meaning of rule by the people.

From Yan Fu (Schwartz 1964) to the present, the power of the people and political legitimacy through popular support have been key themes of Chinese ideology and politics. It is important to define "democracy" broadly as popular influence on government in order to distinguish Western institutional peculiarities from transculural questions of democracy's relationship to modernization. This article does not claim that China is a democracy or even that China has moved definitively toward democracy; it does claim that political reforms have been adopted which strengthen popular influence in public affairs.
democracy provides the guarantee and support for the building of socialist material and spiritual civilization. To attain a high level of socialist democracy is therefore one of our fundamental tasks" (Hu Yaobang 1982). The basic idea of socialist modernization is the progressive realization of the material interests of the people, and it is assumed that giving the people more control over their affairs and their officials will only speed it along. In short, modernization is expected to be popular and democracy is expected to be orderly.

The thrust of democratic reforms is to strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law. This includes spheres of private and group activity in which state interference is now considered inappropriate, a greater autonomy from Party interference for administrative and legal activities, and more directly democratic measures that broaden mass control of representatives and strengthen representative institutions. The ideological justification of these reforms is not systematic, and it clearly differs from the rationale of democratic reform in the West. Modern Western political theorists argued that the legitimacy of the state rested on the rational consent of individuals. The metaphor for the individualist base of the state was the "social contract," a primordial agreement to submit to authority in order to avoid chaos (Hobbes), protect property (Locke), or secure the advantages of civilized life (Rousseau). Marxism-Leninism rejects the individualist equality of citizens as a fiction masking the class rule of capital, and bases the legitimacy of the Party on the science of Marxism and leadership of the revolution. In China democratic reforms include procedural guarantees to the citizenry, but these are the product and facilitator of a unitary social commitment to the public material interest. Citizenship is the end rather than the beginning of legitimacy, and political rights of citizens—expressed in Western parliamentary regimes in the sovereignty of the legislature and the sanctity of the electoral process—are contingent upon an officially defined modernization.

Materialism and Modernization

There have been considerable accomplishments since 1949 in economic development, but major changes in modernization are clearly necessary. As a recent World Bank study (1983) of the Chinese economy put it, "Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the Chinese economic system has been its ability to mobilize resources, both physical and human, for achieving an unambiguously defined goal...[but] future development must be based on increasing efficiency of resource use rather than on mobilization of resources as in the past" (vol. 1:146–47). Since 1977 there has been a great deal of experimentation, decentralization, and de-ideologization, but it is easier to describe the details of Chinese policies than to present their underlying rationale.

The primary post-Mao Chinese slogan has been the "four modernizations" of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology. Unfortunately this slogan is woefully inadequate in indicating the ideological or even the practical commitments of modernization. Modernization policies are developing without any comprehensive elaboration of their rationale, and yet the overall transformation of policy seems basically coherent. It can best be described as a new materialism that defines itself against the dogmatic leftism of the Cultural Revolution and aims at the steady increase of Chinese prosperity, capabilities, and quality of life. If we pursue the underlying ideology further, I think that the diversity of modernization policies and

\[2\] It is interesting to note that the slogan is not mentioned in Premier Zhao Ziyang's report (1982)
their rationalizations can be systematized under three principles: (1) the priority of economics over politics (or of productivity over dogma); (2) the motivational premise of material interest; and (3) acknowledgment of social and economic complexity and therefore the need for specialization. All of these principles are interrelated; together they constitute a materialism that emphasizes productivity, incentives, expertise, and institutions, and deemphasizes dogmatic purism, egalitarianism, and the vulnerability of society to political intervention.

The most basic of the four principles is the priority of production over ideology because it is presupposed by the other three. It is also a key reversal of the Cultural Revolution. As Tâng Tsou (1977) has shown, Mao Zedong attributed a more active role to politics than did the Marxist classics, and politics was absolutized into an "all-round dictatorship" during the Cultural Revolution. The establishment of productivity as a supreme policy value is implied in the declaration that socialist modernization is currently China's main task. The priority of economics and productivity is subject to many qualifications—more precisely, the vulnerability of politics and ideology to questioning and experimentation is protected in many areas. The most significant reservation is that the leadership of the Party, the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought (the "four principles" first enunciated by Deng Xiaoping in March 1979) must be upheld. At the present time the required credo is not a counterattack on modernization but rather a brake on the rate and depth of reform. The brake is most effective in areas such as literature and culture which are only indirectly related to economics. In explicitly economic areas, productivity clearly determines policy. The best examples are adjustments to the international capitalist economy and, more importantly, the disaggregation of collective production in rural areas (O'Leary and Watson 1982; Hinton 1983). Such radical policy changes are justified by claiming that socialism is not a dogmatic commitment to ever greater levels of common ownership, but instead it is a practical adoption of the most efficient economic policies for a given context. Therefore it can be more socialistic to have less public ownership if a higher level of public ownership is inappropriate for current conditions (Yu 1980).

Without the priority of productivity, new policies toward material interest (wuzhi liyi) could not have been formulated. Material interest is construed broadly to include individual and unit production incentives, state criteria of profitability in economic management, and the reorientation of production toward consumption. All of these areas of policy reform involve recognition of the value of material satisfaction and its importance in motivating rational productive behavior. The specific economic policies inspired by this principle are too numerous to outline in detail, but examples may be given of the three major areas. New concern for individual and group production incentives has led to a reinstitution of bonus and piece-rate systems, merit-linked promotion, retention by enterprises of part of their profit, and the private contracting for collective tasks in agriculture. State criteria of profitability have led to reform of state investment from grants to loans, use of market mechanisms and pricing for economic direction, and decentralization of industrial decision making. Reorientation of the goal of socialist production toward consumption has led to a higher priority for improving the standard of living and a lower rate of capital investment, as well as a reduction of rural-urban inequalities. With these changes, the conception of

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3 Modernization became the official goal in the "Communique of the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee" (1978) and was reaffirmed most recently in the preamble of China's 1982 constitution (p. 11)
the public good has shifted from the Cultural Revolution’s dogmatic insistence on undistributed public goods ("all public, no private"—da gong wu si) toward an idea of the public good as an aggregate of distributed private goods. Economic activity has become less based on a holistic, administrative rationality made operative by bureaucratic authority, more based on a particularized economic rationality oriented toward the material interest of producers and consumers and managed for the public material interest. Needless to say, these are only policy initiatives and trends—China’s economy has not jumped out of its skin. But they represent current thinking in central economic policy making.

The third principle, acknowledging social and economic complexity, received much attention in 1978 because it became the center of a political struggle between Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatists and the remaining dogmatists in the central leadership (Womack 1979). The slogans “Practice is the only criterion for determining truth” and “Seek truth from facts” were objectionable to the dogmatists because they implied that Mao Zedong’s policy opinions should not be upheld without practical investigation. The principle was more than a ploy in a political struggle, however. The complexity of the objective world in fact requires experimentation and expertise, which in turn require respect for specialists, more wide-ranging discussion, openness to the experience of capitalist countries, and a certain decentralization of policy initiative. Paradoxically, Mao’s political thought was also based on the pragmatic realization of the necessity for experimentation and flexibility, but the brutally simple problem of guerrilla survival did not require technological expertise, social specialization, or stratification. His “uninterrupted revolution” can be viewed as a rejection of the structural prerequisites of a complex society, a rejection nostalgically based on a successful experience of an undifferentiated revolutionary community. In any case, it is now officially acknowledged that society must be educated and specialized, that intellectuals are workers of a sort, that differentiation of tasks requires differential rewards. As society’s coping with complexity becomes more expert its parts are no longer interchangeable.

With greater specialization, the Party itself will either become specialized in a limited set of political and ideological functions, fight to maintain its generalist policy-making status in the face of increasing opposition from specialists, or meld with specialist personnel, values, and hierarchy. Recent reforms in the curriculum of the Central Party School point toward the last alternative (Li and Hu 1983), but probably the result in each unit will depend more on individual context and personalities than on national policy.

The new materialism sketched above is both less and more novel than it appears. Its continuity with the search for wealth and power running throughout modern Chinese history is masked by its divergence from the preceding twenty years of leftist policies. The regime sees itself both as an innovator in the development of Chinese communism and as a representative of the core values of patriotism, democracy, science, and prosperity shared historically by all Chinese progressives (Schram 1981). On the other hand, if post-Mao policies mark the beginning of an institutionalization and retrenchment of the Chinese state, then a watershed of historic significance has been passed. For the current regime to “talk less about isms and to study problems more” is quite a bit different from Hu Shi’s call for incremental politics and professionalism sixty years earlier (Hu Shi 1919). In the first half of the twentieth century the collapse of traditional Chinese politics and society did not provide a stable basis upon which incremental improvements could accumulate. Now pragmatic sentiment recurs in an effective, self-confident regime with recent experience of the
excesses of total politics. But the new pragmatists are not liberal-democratic professionals. The Chinese bureaucratic tradition and the orthodoxy of Marxism-Leninism, as well as the privileges enjoyed by the Party, incline the regime to view modernization as a public project and political reform as a strategic self-restraint of leadership.

In 1976 the death of Mao Zedong made possible this new era of Chinese politics. Two major effects of the removal of his extraordinary power were the collapse of the leftists whom Mao had patronized as a court clique and the necessity of some form of collective leadership. The fact that the leftists had discredited their cause with unpopular policies and ideological terrorism meant that, in general, a practical-minded, modernizing regime would have little effective opposition until its political mistakes and the import of the social changes generated by its policies created an opposition. Its longevity would be strengthened by democratizing political reforms. The new central leadership must cope with a middle- and local-level bureaucracy that was recruited in large part according to leftist values during the Cultural Revolution. Some of the reforms discussed below are intended to enable the masses to put pressure for modernization on recalcitrant local leaders. Moreover the intelligentsia, the natural ally of modernization, is no longer the willing and docile helpmate of the 1950s. Having been criticized and persecuted—and having seen the Party criticized and persecuted—it would tend to remain skeptical and apathetic without institutional guarantees of its interests. The regime has adopted reforms not out of weakness vis-à-vis an organized opposition but in order to accomplish presumably popular goals.

Despite the new direction of politics since the death of Mao, continuities in political style abound. The regime operates on the presumptions that there is latent support among the masses waiting to be mobilized and that the activation of the masses—whether through class struggle or through incentives—will proceed in harmony with the regime's plans. The historically close relationship between the Party and the masses and the assumption that the current policy thrust is universally popular (except for a “small handful” of capitalist roaders or leftists) underlie these presumptions. The orthodox complacency evident in the second assumption and an official style of enforced enthusiasm for current policy have been modified somewhat by the greater pluralism inherent in collective leadership, united front politics, and regime self-restraint, but their influence can be seen in the regime's dealings with dissidents. Articulation of demands and criticisms that the regime is not able or willing to satisfy is not permitted. The government enforces Marx's observation that society raises only such problems as it can solve.

There is an inherent tension between the principles of modernization described at the beginning of this section and the orthodox complacency noted at the end. The new materialism involves a relaxation of ideological control, devolution of initiative, and assurances of institutional and individual autonomy; orthodoxy assents to this provided that it detects no intolerable threats or inconveniences to itself. Procedures are guaranteed on the assumption that the outcome will be satisfactory. This does not imply that the reforms are not serious or that they will not have long-term democratizing consequences. By definition, democratizing reforms are adopted by governments less democratic than the reforms promise. For ideological, programmatic, or factional reasons, a regime may decide that to broaden the base of politics or to limit the exercise of its authority is in its interest. The future of such reforms is neither assured nor denied by the context of their adoption.
Democratic Reform

Democratic reforms are an integral part of the rejection of the Cultural Revolution by the post-Mao regime, even though they are subordinate to the new materialism of modernization. The importance of reform is underscored by unofficial reference to democracy as the "fifth modernization," a term that raises it to the level of a primary national goal. Democratic reforms, which include procedural restraints on public power, greater personal and political freedoms for individuals and groups, and strengthened representative institutions, have a complex justification. In part they are corrections of the ideological and political totalism of the Cultural Revolution; in part they are a sui generis modernization of political structures. In any case, democratic reforms are meant to enhance rather than impede material modernization.

The great variety of democratic reform initiatives since 1976 can be grouped into four categories. The first category includes reforms intended to strengthen the rule of law. The second category comprises reforms concerned with expansion of personal freedom. The third category includes attempts to institutionalize mass voice, including a trend toward competitive elections in the local people's congresses, workers' congresses, and Party organizations. The fourth category includes enhancement of the representative elements of the governmental system, most importantly the people's congress system. The content of these reforms will be discussed in this section and their rationale will be discussed in the following section.

The most basic and least problematic democratic reforms are those relating to the rule of law and the constitution. There have been two new constitutions since the death of Mao, and the constitution adopted at the end of 1982 differed considerably from that of 1978. The reforms have been progressively more democratic, but it should be noted that the basic purpose of Chinese constitutional and legal reform is not the limitation of government itself by citizen rights but the establishment and strengthening of public rules and the limitation of arbitrary behavior by officials. The definition of political structure, not its limitation, is the primary focus. However, the 1982 constitution and legal codification work since 1978 attempt to go beyond earlier efforts to establish a rule of law because those efforts failed and because modernization requires a stable and effective system of rules. The 1982 constitution was supposed to be an effective fundamental law in a new legal system, so there was a major public campaign in 1982 for discussion of the draft constitution, followed by a major campaign in 1983 explaining the constitution and insisting that it must be obeyed.

The constitutional history of the People's Republic of China is rooted in the non-Communist, Western-influenced constitutions of China that were in effect from 1908 to 1949 (Ch'ien 1950) and in the Soviet constitution. Both traditions were concerned more with the rationalization and regularization of state power than with its restriction. Even with this limited objective—or perhaps because the objective was limited—constitutional provisions imposed no effective form on the politics of Republican Chinese or Soviet governments. Despite the promising reforms of the 1950s, the People's Republic of China followed suit (Victor Li 1978; Leng 1967). From the 1957 Anti-Rightist Movement until the end of the Cultural Revolution, legalism was suspect and the arbitrary power of persons prevailed. The Ministry of Justice was closed in 1959 and did not reopen for eighteen years. Just as de-Stalinization included an important reemphasis on socialist legality (Hammer 1974; Medvedev 1977), the post-Mao regime called for the restoration of constitutional and legal order.
Legality is necessary but not sufficient for democracy. Only strong commitments to structural and procedural definitions can protect nonpowerholders from powerholders. As the description of land reform in Fan shen (Hinton 1966) illustrates, mass politics without legality is made unstable by abuses and excesses. But popular government is not simply a matter of formal rights, and firm governmental structures and procedures are just as important to the officials themselves, especially in a complex, modern society. Bureaucrats fear instability. The development of legal norms is also part of the normal routinization of state power over time and, as such, is an institutional maturation process with no direct link to democratization. Therefore the attempt made by some Chinese theorists (Wang Jingrong 1982) to reduce democratic institutionalization to legal institutionalization is a rather conservative and bureaucratic stance.

One crucial question for the effectiveness of constitutional and legal reform is the real autonomy of the judiciary. Despite the promise of judicial autonomy in the 1954 constitution, the Party committee at the level of the court handling the case has been responsible for court decisions. This process was known as "secretarial decision" (shuji bian) because responsibility for making the decision was usually left to the committee's political-legal secretary (Chiou 1980; Leng 1981). This system was ended in September 1979 by an instruction of the Central Committee, and there have been a number of arguments for a more independent judiciary (Xiong 1981; Wang Shuwen 1982). As might be expected, however, the traditionally low prestige of the judiciary and the power of the Party encourage continued intervention (Leng 1981).

Effective constitutionality also requires the autonomy of other public institutions. If the Party is able to displace the functions of the State Council at will, or if provincial Party leaders can override inconvenient legal stipulations or intimidate public officials at the local level, then public structures will only be epiphenomena of an unregulated, real power structure. There is in fact a strong tradition of Party domination. Its effects are illustrated by the case of the Central Military Commission, a new state organ to oversee military affairs, which is, according to the constitution, responsible to the National People's Congress (NPC). On the question of the relationship of the civil organ to the Party's Military Commission, Politburo member Hu Qiaomu (1982) had the following to say:

Our Party's idea is that members of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee... can concurrently become members of the Central Military Commission of the State... The Party's continued leadership of the Central Military Commission of the State and the People's Liberation Army conforms to the fundamental interests of the people of the whole country, as they can easily understand.... Of course, legally speaking, only with the decision of the National People's Congress can this idea be translated into reality.

It hardly bears mentioning that Hu's strong confidence in a harmony of viewpoints between the Party and the National People's Congress is a self-fulfilling expectation. The principle behind the habit of Party domination is that of Party hegemony. Nevertheless, one purpose of legal institutionalization is to inhibit Party domination, and some violations by Party cadres are being decried publicly (Democracy and Legal System Commentator 1983). There is a contradiction here: if the Party is correct, it should rule, but if the Party is correct, it should rule legally. The contradiction renders impossible the clear and principled separation of Party and state. The problem of Party interference becomes one of "undue" interference, a question of circumstance and political style best judged by the Party itself. To
summarize Chinese legal and constitutional reform, considerable progress has been made toward regularizing Chinese public institutions and procedures, but principle and practice of the hegemony of the Party create a basic ambiguity concerning the salience of public law.

The second area of democratic reform, the expansion of personal freedoms, is even more ambiguous than constitutional reform, and yet it is an essential and important area of improvement. The all-pervasive ideological terrorism of the Cultural Revolution—very effective because it was to a great extent self-imposed by ideological factions within the work units rather than by a secret police apparatus—denied the legitimacy of private affairs. Every act was naked before the examining light of the revolutionary public good. The intolerable pressure of “all public and no private” and its contrast with the lifestyle of the “Gang of Four” were important reasons for the early popularity of the post-Mao regime. Since 1977 there has been a visible relaxation in behavior, and nonconformity is tolerated in many areas. Purely private activities that are harmless but lack redeeming social importance are now permitted. Evening papers provide more entertaining and thought-provoking fare, reporters make investigative forays, and journals feature open debates among experts. Since 1980, concerns expressed about bourgeois influences indicate disapproval and a vague limitation of the outer reaches of nonconformity, but the warnings would be unnecessary if a general relaxation among the population had not occurred. Even the determined campaign against spiritual pollution that began in late 1983 is careful to distinguish its targets and methods from excesses of the Cultural Revolution (BR 1983, no. 46 [14 November]: pp. 4–5).

The important ambiguity in the current expansion of personal freedoms is that the expansion is more a retreat of state interests from personal affairs than it is an advance of personal rights. State totalism has retreated, accompanied by criterisms of Cultural Revolution terrorism and by guarantees of commitment to material interests. But the new realms of personal freedom are not legitimated by a new doctrine of personal or citizen rights; in fact, little specific justification is given. Citizen rights have been part of China’s public law from the beginning (Chen Hefu 1980:184, 232), and from the beginning the explicit class basis of the state has restricted the application of citizen rights. As one writer explains, “The reason why the ruling class legally determines citizen freedoms is to preserve its rule. If citizen freedoms affect or harm the basic interests of the ruling class they will be subject to legal intervention or sanctions” (Li Maoguan 1981:7). Therefore, there is a tendency to talk about the rights of “all good and honest citizens” (Chen Yunsheng 1983:16) and to condemn “extreme democratization” (Li Maoguan 1981). It is the political interest of the regime rather than its legal conscience which accounts for the substantial expansions of personal rights: “Think about it. If a citizen’s personal dignity can be insulted and slandered, how can the people be united? How can they have ease of mind? How can they develop fully their socialist activism and creativity?” (Chen Yunsheng 1983:16).

In Tang Tsou’s terminology, a “zone of indifference” has been created which has given much-needed elbow room to individual opinion and behavior. But a “zone of indifference” is not a “zone of immunity” that is legitimated and protected by a doctrine of individual rights. A zone of indifference is defined by policy decisions, which determine that it is not in the state’s interest to interfere in certain spheres of activity. These decisions are neither arbitrary nor easily reversed—a major change in current policies would have profound consequences for the modernization program. However, presumptions of equal protection of the freedoms of individuals and of the illegality of state encroachments are much weaker in a policy-based zone of indiffer-
ence than they would be in a zone of immunity based on rights. In fact, whole
categories of offenders are exempted from legal protection. In November 1979, four
months after the adoption of the new criminal code, a 1957 regulation on labor camps
was revived which allows administrative agencies to confine without trial a wide range
of alleged offenders for up to four years (Leng 1981). Thousands of dissidents,
vagrants, and unemployed persons have fallen through this hole in the legal system.
There has been a general trend since 1980 of the abuse of dissidents' rights (Rosen
1983); the sentencing without trial of a dissident (three years hard labor) for
distributing the transcript of the supposedly public trial of another dissident was a
particularly ironic case. On the positive side, a comprehensive proposal to bring the
labor reform system under the control of law has been proposed recently (Cai 1983).

Even if abstention from interference is justified by the general supposition that the
activity in question does not affect state interests, it is possible that the state will
intervene in specific cases that do affect state interests (in the eyes of the officials
concerned). As the case of the criticism and suppression of Bai Hua's play Unrequited
Love makes clear, the frontiers of personal freedom become political questions rather
than legal ones. In both constitutional reform and expansion of personal freedoms,
protection by the state has been extended, but protection from the state remains
ambiguous.

It could even be argued that whereas the zone of indifference has expanded
eormously over the last few years, the zone of immunity has shrunk. The right to
strike, which was added at Mao Zedong's suggestion to the 1975 constitution (Zhang
Chunjiao 1975) and retained in 1978, has been eliminated. The "four big freedoms"
of the Cultural Revolution, most notably the right to put up big character posters,
were removed in 1980.4 Perhaps more significantly, Article 51 of the new constitu-
tion contains a clause that states explicitly for the first time that "the exercise by
citizens of their freedoms and rights may not infringe upon the interests of the state,
of society and of the collective, or upon the lawful freedoms and rights of other
citizens," a clause borrowed from the 1977 Soviet constitution (Art. 39). If we assume
that state officials determine state interests, then there is ultimately no zone of
immunity under the new Chinese constitution. However, this marks a retrogression
only in the language of previous constitutions. In reality, official interests have always
prevailed.

The third area of democratic reform, institutionalization of mass voice, includes
the introduction of competitive elections, the single most spectacular political reform
of the post-Mao era. The nationwide elections for county-level people's congresses held
in 1980 were the first large-scale elections to employ ballots with more candidates
than positions (Womack 1982). As remarkable as the county elections were, however,
they were only one part of a broader and more important development of increasing
formal influence over organizational superiors.

What I call the institutionalization of mass voice is an officially sponsored trend
within the Party, work units, and the people's congress system toward the modification
of informal Party and cadre rule and bureaucratic administration by adding formal,
constituency-based structures. The term "masses" (qunzhong) is sometimes used in
China to refer to the ordinary membership of an organization or organizational level,

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4 The "four bigs," the rights to speak out freely, air views freely, hold great debates, and write big
character posters, first emerged in the 1957 anti-
rightist campaign as a means of mass criticism of
rightists. Use of the four bigs was encouraged early
in the Cultural Revolution by Chen Boda (RMRB:
20 June 1966). The four bigs were included in the
1975 and 1978 constitutions, but they were re-
moved by the third session of the Fifth NPC in
1980.
in contrast to its leadership, even if, from a general social perspective, the whole membership of the organization might be considered "cadres" (ganbu) rather than "masses." Thus the "masses" of a research organization are subordinates in that organization rather than simply its working-class members. The institutionalization of mass voice in this sense is an organizational democratization rather than a class-based mobilization. It is not intended to replace or even share the hierarchy's general control of policy. Instead, it attempts to establish an interdependence of cadres and masses by setting up channels of mass influence in the selection of cadre personnel and by other forms of organizational participation.

Within the Party, democratization is manifested in a greater emphasis on collective decision making, a provision for competitive elections for leadership positions, and specification of the rights of individual Party members. These trends are clear in the Party constitution (zhangheng, "bylaws," rather than xianfa, "state constitution") adopted in September 1982 by the 12th Party Congress. The institutional import of the Party's commitment to a "high degree of centralism based on a high degree of democracy" (Art. 10) is that members commit themselves to a strict organizational discipline and in return they are promised a voice in selecting leadership, procedural protections against arbitrary sanctions, and participation in collective decision making.

Participation in collective decision making is the most ambiguous of the promises, but it is a traditional part of the Party's internal workstyle (Mao 1949), which has been reemphasized since the death of Mao. Besides general guarantees of discussion before decision (Art. 10, Sect. 5), members and subordinate Party levels can both register objections to policy, although they are still obligated to carry it out (Art. 4, Sect. 7; Art. 15). The right to put forward requests and complaints to higher levels of Party organization, up to and including the Central Committee, has been strengthened by the addition of the right to a responsible reply. Meanwhile the arbitrariness of committee chairpersons may be affected by the condemnation of the cult of personality (Art. 10, Sect. 6), abolition of life tenure (Art. 37), and greater autonomy for the commissions for discipline inspection (Chap. 8). Members are protected against arbitrary disciplinary action by procedural guarantees that include the rights of participation in proceedings and of appeal (Art. 4, Sect. 6; Art. 41).

The most significant democratic innovation in Party structure is the institution of competitive elections by secret ballot for Party committees at each level and for delegates to higher Party levels. Two electoral alternatives are provided (Art. 11). In the first, a candidate's list is generated by a preliminary election, and those receiving the most votes become candidates for a more restricted (or even pro forma) final election. In the second, a list of candidates, which includes more names than positions, is submitted to the voters for discussion and changes, and the range of choices for the final election is determined by the candidate list. There is no recommended ratio of candidates to positions. The first method seems to allow a wider choice at the primary level, but the second method also promises a certain range of choice to the voter. Although the 1977 provision for approval by higher levels of elected officials has been deleted, higher levels are able to transfer or appoint officials of any level when their congress is not in session (Art. 13). Thus ultimate personnel control that is constitutionally sanctioned still remains in the hands of Party superiors.

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5 Compare Art. 12 of the 1977 Party constitution with Art. 4, Sect. 8 of the 1982 Party constitution. In the draft Party constitution of 1980, the passage read, "a right to a responsible reply without delay" (Art. 4, Sect. 8).

6 Art. 10 of the 1977 Party constitution. The 1977 version provided for election of officials by secret ballot, but there was no discussion of procedures.
The institutionalization of mass voice in the workplace differs in its significance depending on the type of workplace. In the countryside, peasants have long elected their team (small village) management committee by secret ballot with more candidates than positions. According to John Burns' research (1978) on rural grassroots politics from 1958 to 1974, the major problem with democratic control was close supervision and interference in team affairs by the brigade leadership. New rural policies that encourage household contracting have weakened local control and have led to increased conflict at the brigade level (Zhongguo Fazhi Bao, 5 August 1983). Undoubtedly the policies will also stimulate new political interests and demands (Zweig 1983). In scientific, technical, and higher education units, restored legitimacy of expertise coupled with increased self-determination of unit affairs and leadership have resulted in a more democratic and productive organizational environment. At the extreme end of a spectrum of democracy in the workplace, burgeoning small-scale enterprises of the urban cooperative sector seem to be essentially entrepreneurial enterprises under public sponsorship and regulation.

In state industrial enterprises, institutionalization of mass voice has a more complicated relationship to the practices of the Cultural Revolution. The main problem of industrial relations during the Cultural Revolution was certainly not authoritarianism. The 1971 model factory described by Charles Bettelheim (1974) apparently had an even higher level of mass participation than current reforms envisage. The thrust of post-Mao industrial modernization has been to raise profitability and efficiency and to tie incentives to production. The ultraegalitarianism of the Cultural Revolution, which was intimately bound up with its class forms of mass participation, has been fundamentally rejected. Some workers resent the changes, as is indicated by this saying, "The workers have stood aside, the peasants have divided the fields, and the intellectuals have gone to heaven" (Lao da kuole bian, lao er fenle tian, lao jiu shengle tian) (Miao 1983). However, this does not mean that democracy has been replaced by discipline. Beginning with a message by Deng Xiaoping (1978) to the 9th National Trade Union Congress, a policy has evolved that allows trade unions to control issues related to worker's welfare and rights of examination and to discuss management decisions. In addition, there is experimentation with competitive election by the workers of factory directors and vice-directors (Zhang Nan 1982). The goal in industrial relations, as elsewhere, is to establish orderly participation that enhances material progress. To contrast current reforms with Cultural Revolution reforms having similar content, elections are now seen as a democratic institution promoting the productive purpose of the enterprise in an orderly way rather than as an expression of egalitarian class control. Competition, which earlier would have been viewed as a bourgeois formalism, becomes an essential element of the new institution.

The largest scale competitive elections in China were the nationwide county-level people's congress elections of 1980. In fact, with 540 million people voting, it was the largest election movement in the world (Cheng 1981). As in the Party and work-unit elections, the most striking reforms were the introduction of more candidates than positions and a more open nominating process, including the possibility of primaries. County-level people's congresses elected in this manner went on to elect, by a similar procedure, the county head, county standing committee, and other leading county officials as well as delegates to the provincial people's congress. Although neither the intent nor the effect of these reforms was to introduce oppositional democracy into China, they catapult China into the forefront of Communist countries involved in electoral reform (see Pravda 1978). Traditionally Chinese
elections have been mobilizational, and the 1980 election was no exception. Voter turnout was over 96 percent, and there was one election cadre for every fifty voters. But in addition to mobilizational enthusiasm there was a clear commitment of the central leadership to preserve the reality of choice in the election. Party leadership in the elections was supported, but not Party displacement of the election process or correction of the results. As an article in the Party journal Hongqi [Red Flag] put it, "The failure of such [Party-supported] candidates and the success of others not recommended by the Party organizations can only prove that the Party's choice of its candidates was wrong" (Lu and Zhu 1980). Nevertheless, after the procedural guarantees of the new law were put to the test in a number of university constituencies, the government let it be known that elections are for those who uphold the "four principles." Party hegemony, the socialist road, dictatorship of the proletariat, and Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong thought (Womack 1982). Ambiguities concerning the regime's commitment to the procedural guarantees of the election law should be clarified in the second county-level elections, scheduled for late 1983.

The institutionalization of mass voice in organizations is undeniably an important structural reform in the Chinese idea of socialist democracy. Procedural guarantees are no longer despised as bourgeois formalisms, and the new starting point for the mass line is regular mass input on a citizen basis rather than irregular mass input on a class basis. Bitter experience with the weakness of Chinese democratic institutions and the relative success of Western democratic institutions are two key premises of these reforms (Wu 1979). However, it would be a mistake to view them as an ideological capitulation to bourgeois democracy. Closeness of cadre-mass relationships founded on interdependence is a pre-Liberation goal (People's Daily Special Commentator 1978), and it is natural for a state embarking on its second generation of socialist citizens to move away from class-based politics. More importantly, the focus of current reforms—even in the case of the county elections—is on personnel control and mass access to cadres, not on collective discretion concerning policy. Candidates are recommended for personal qualities, not for a policy platform. Large political units such as counties are broken up into small election units so that personal knowledge of the candidate's qualifications can influence voters, and the relationship of the outcome to policy is indirect. The candidate's concrete relationship to the masses is in the foreground, with an indirect and nebulous notion of representation in the background.

The fourth area of democratic reform is the strengthening of the people's congress system, which has three aspects: first, the institutional effects of the new electoral system; second, new structures and responsibilities of representative organs; and third, defenses of the importance and autonomy of the state and of the people's congress system. The three aspects are interrelated. Electoral reform and new structures are expressions of a new importance attached to the representative system, and, by the same token, if the regime made institutional changes but did not enhance the importance and autonomy of the representative system, the reforms would be empty window dressing that would weaken the credibility and prestige of the institutions.

The major institutional effect of electoral reform has been to create citizen constituencies for delegates to the county-level people's congress. Formerly, county delegates were elected by commune-level people's congresses and, more importantly, the elections were not competitive. The effect of the reform is to have better known, more popular delegates who may expect to be replaced if they do not retain their popularity. The fact that the delegates have won their positions in contested elections gives them a greater autonomy vis-à-vis county leadership, and the desire to avoid embarrassment makes them vulnerable vis-à-vis their constituencies. Moreover, the
restructuring of electoral units away from territorial constituencies and toward work-unit constituencies should lead to more clearly defined and articulate popular interest and influence.

Although the elections occurred too recently for their institutional effects to be visible generally, a lengthy report in Beijing Review—on two years of experience in a county that held elections in 1979—bears out expectations of greater constituency influence and reports a high level of delegate activity in the role of community spokesmen (Tian 1982). The main vehicles of constituency voice have been "delegates' motions," six to seven hundred proposals for government action per year that are passed on to relevant county authorities and require an official response. These are not items of legislation voted on by the people's congress, although they do require a second of three delegates. Rather they are requests for road paving, better sewage, official action against polluters, and so forth, which assume quasiofficial and more urgent status as a delegate's motion. Governmental performance on such motions is a main item of report to the annual congress. The congress passes resolutions on county affairs, but more importantly it criticizes and effects significant changes in government-proposed budgets. In the Beijing Review case, an urban-weighted construction budget was turned into a rural-weighted one, and bonuses for teachers were added to the education budget. These instances confirm the expectation that the election of county leadership by the people's congress and the new constituency base of the delegates might significantly affect the institutional balance of power at the base of Chinese government. Delegates have recently organized local delegates' groups averaging six persons (four election units), which meet once a month to discuss local problems. Such groupings should work to increase autonomy and local representativeness of the people's congress at the county level.

The people's congress system has been strengthened by new institutions at both the national and the county level. The most significant new organ at the county level is the standing committee of the people's congress, a body which should make continuing supervision of governmental activity more effective. At the national level, the Fifth National People's Congress (NPC) assumed a significant role in policy discussion (Solinger 1982), and many of the delegates to its third session in 1980 demanded an active legislative role for that body. Some of their suggestions have been incorporated into the 1982 constitution. The supervisory functions of the NPC and its standing committee have been strengthened by the establishment of six specialized committees (zhuanmen weiyuanhui, misleadingly translated as "special committees" in Beijing Review) for the discussion and drafting of legislation in their respective areas.7 These new committee responsibilities lie behind Yang Shangkun's admonition to the provincial congresses to elect national delegates who can be freed of other obligations. Whether in response to this request or to other pressures, only 16 percent of the delegates to the Sixth NPC had been delegates to the Fifth NPC (ranging from only 7 percent in the army and some provinces to more than 35 percent in the provincial-level cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin). It appears that the NPC may become a full-time, legislative job for some of its members, even though the congress itself will continue meeting only once a year. Such organizational

7 See Gasper (1982:178–81) for the history of NPC committees. The specialized committees (standing, or permanent committees, in parliamentary terms) enumerated in Art. 70 of the 1982 constitution are: (1) Nationalities; (2) Law; (3) Finance and Economics; (4) Education, Science, Culture, and Public Health; (5) Foreign Affairs; and (6) Overseas Chinese. Vague provision is made for more specialized committees, and the Committee on Overseas Chinese was not mentioned in the draft constitution of early 1982 (Art. 69).
changes promise to give meaning to the expanded legislative powers of the NPC and to rights of legislative initiative newly granted to individual delegates (Wang and Zhou 1982; Li Buyun 1983).

The expansion of the legislative organization and functions of the NPC is accompanied by emphasis on the importance of popular sovereignty as expressed in the people's congress system and the need to move away from the "feudal" system of arbitrary power wielded by a few individuals holding a number of lifetime positions concurrently. Concrete steps have been taken to reduce the possibility of domination by powerholders. The president, vice-president, premier, vice-premiers, and members of the State Council can serve no more than two consecutive five-year terms (Arts. 79 and 87 of the 1982 constitution). Moreover, government officials cannot be members of the NPC's Standing Committee (Art. 65) or of the standing committees of the provincial and county people's congresses ("Organic Law" 1979, Art. 26). These provisions in conjunction with public criticism of the ineffective and rubber-stamp character of earlier people's congresses must be taken as a serious effort to endow the new representative system with importance and autonomy. Of course, the autonomy in question is autonomy from undue personal influence over governmental affairs and not immunity from the leadership of the Party, and the legitimation of a citizen state has not replaced the affirmation of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

National representative institutions have also been strengthened by the renascence of a uniquely Chinese institution, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. This multiparty, united front organization from the 1940s played an important role as a provisional national assembly before the establishment of the people's congress system in 1954. It remained in operation because of the continued importance of united front work, but disappeared during the Cultural Revolution. It reappeared suddenly in 1978, with Deng Xiaoping as its president (succeeding Zhou Enlai, who had died in 1976) and has been expanding on local, provincial, and national levels ever since. In 1982 it had more than 100,000 members in 1,600 local organizations (BR, 22 December 1982, p. 5). Although the structure of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference parallels that of the people's congress system, its principle of representation is corporatist (see Ardant 1980). It includes organizations and individuals who played a historic role before 1949, intellectuals, and representatives of mass organizations and minorities—both ethnic and religious. The purpose of the Conference corresponds to the united front needs of the present. The older members lend credibility to the overtures to Taiwan, and the cooperation of intellectuals is essential to modernization. Although it is not a state organ, views of Conference members appear to be taken seriously by Party leadership, and discussion among Conference delegates is sometimes more lively and critical than among NPC delegates (Luo 1983). The anomaly of a massive political organization with only a consultative role is very convenient to the Party, enabling it to involve important groups in the discussion of policy without having to share its policy-making prerogatives.

The Cultural Revolution demonstrated that popular and effective government was not simply a question of class rule or of good or evil cadres. Power leads astray and corrupts, particularly in a country with a weak democratic and a strong autocratic heritage. The institutionalization of constitutionalism and the rule of law, an expanded zone of personal freedoms, mass voice in Party, work unit, and governmental organizations, and a strengthened representative system are restrictions of arbitrary power. The restrictions are rendered ambiguous by the continued reservation of the commanding heights of politics for the Party, which in practice means that the central leadership is not—or is not yet—subordinate to its own institutions. But it is bound
by them. The reforms are first of all its own institutions; secondly they are major policy commitments that are supported by key elements of the population and are creating their own organizational constituencies. A reversal of democratic institutionalization would be a major policy event, and would require a change of heart of the central leadership, if not a change of leadership. It is more likely that the basic reforms will remain and that policy battlelines will form on questions of their expansion or retrenchment.

**The Rationale of Democratic Institutionalization**

The rationale of democratic institutionalization is implicit in the foregoing discussion of democratic reforms and is closely connected with the underlying rationale of modernization. Democratic institutionalization is expected to contribute to an orderly, productive, popular governmental system with more defined and accountable leadership roles and a better system of leadership circulation. Opposing the excesses of the Cultural Revolution by developing an orderly system of government is related directly to the priority of economics over ideology; emphasis on the productive contribution of democracy is tied to social and economic complexity; and guarantees of mass orientation of authority rely on the principle of material interest. To these three general rationales for democracy—namely, order, productivity, and popular control—is added the more specific one: the central leadership’s desire for a competent and effective leadership structure.

Despite an impressive amount of innovation and experimentation, the most basic and general justification of democratization is the restoration of order and the critique of Cultural Revolution chaos. The exaggeration of class and mass struggle, unjustified attacks on intellectuals and cadres, use of hats (labels) and clubs in criticism, factionalism, ideological purism, xenophobia, ultra-egalitarianism, imperial patriarchalism, antiproduction mentality, and destruction of Party and state organization comprise the “teacher by negative example” of the post-Mao regime. In contrast to the destructive ideological dogmatism associated with the Gang of Four, the guiding policy of the post-Mao regime has been production over ideology, economics over politics.

The political correlate of the priority of production and economics is that politics should be nondisruptive. Even before the Cultural Revolution was officially criticized, Hua Guofeng (1977) declared an end to large-scale mass movements. On the other hand, the regime did not see itself as the suppressor of popular mass movements, but as the popular restorer of normalcy in Chinese political, social, and economic life. The regime feels that its policies of “unity and stability” (anding tuanjie) are a middle road between leftist dogmatism and bourgeois anarchy supported by the silent majority of the masses.

The problem with democracy and order is that either term can be so defined as to overpower the other. Individual and procedural rights can be so absolutized as to permit the destruction of the system that guarantees them, while “order” can be so extensive that there is no freedom of political expression despite institutions that are apparently democratic. In China private opinion on the problem covers the entire

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8 I have avoided the often-used term “democratic centralism” on purpose because its complex ideological history would only confuse the issue.

9 In U.S. constitutional theory, freedom of speech is generally considered to be limited by the survival requirements of the regime, in other words, whether or not an act constitutes a “clear and present danger” (Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in *Schenck v. U.S.*, 1919). Justice Holmes supported the conviction of the Socialist leader Eugene Debs under this doctrine (*Debs v. U.S.*, 1919).
gamut (Rosen 1983; Garside 1981), but the range of official views proceeds from balanced positions to positions emphasizing order. The orderly extreme is exemplified by arguments that democracy exists for the majority and not for the minority (Hua 1979:24–25; Li Maoguan 1981), and that democratic procedures should be judged by their socialist content and corrected accordingly (Xinhua Special Commentator 1981). The more moderate view is that democratic institutionalization is a long-term guarantee of political stability. Short-term inconveniences should be borne for the sake of establishing institutions that would prevent the chaos of the Cultural Revolution in the future (Lu 1981).

Different attitudes about the cause of the chaos of the Cultural Revolution underlie different views on the relationship of democracy and order. If the major blame is placed on leftist and personal mistakes—whether of the Gang of Four or of Mao Zedong—then a change in leadership and reorientation toward modernization suffices to prevent a recurrence. If, however, the Cultural Revolution is attributed to the weakness of Chinese democracy and law, exaggeration of class struggle, bureaucratic estrangement of the Party from the masses, and feudal habits of leadership, then the political mission of the post-Mao regime is not simply anti-Cultural Revolution policies but fundamental structural reform. This is the official interpretation of the Cultural Revolution: “Blaming [the Cultural Revolution] on only one person or on only a handful of people will not provide a deep lesson for the whole Party or enable it to find practical ways to change the situation” (“Resolution on Certain Questions” 1981). However, the official interpretation itself is a combination of personal criticisms and vague allusions to structural problems. As it stands, the requisites of order are quite clear; there is strong condemnation of leftist, anarchism, and disruptive bourgeois influences. Balancing the unanimity on the need for order is a strong but still contested advocacy of inconvenient or even slightly discordant popular participation within institutions.

The second rationale for political reform is that it promotes the country’s modernizing, productive mission. Democratic institutionalization follows from the rejection of the Cultural Revolution’s egalitarian emphasis on class struggle. It complements the modernizing principle recognizing economic and social complexity by offering a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, improvement in political participation. The transition from mass/class movements to citizen-based institutions allows (and perhaps requires) constructive political voice, giving both elite and mass participants greater security in participation. Moreover, the complexity of modernization requires the cooperation of many specialized groups and individuals. As a result, the Party has revamped its united front politics of the 1950s in an effort to establish a mutually supportive relationship between the Party and the intelligentsia under the banner of patriotic modernization.

Despite the reappearance of united front policies, current reforms are a major innovation in contrast to both pre-Cultural Revolution policies and those of the Cultural Revolution. Before 1966, elections and representative organs were primarily mobilizations of popular support à la Russe (Townsend 1969). The Party did not feel that it needed to provide for external input into its personnel or policy hegemony. The Cultural Revolution was in part a critique of the bureaucratic-authoritarian presumptions of the Party’s political monopoly, but its remedy was large-scale mass movements that destroyed the Party’s monopoly of power without providing an effective alternative. As a result political chaos ensued and central authority was reduced to a residuum of loyalty to Mao. Now the restoration of the Party’s general credibility and
political control is a major problem. This is recognized by Deng Xiaoping, not without certain nostalgia:

It is apparent that our Party’s prestige among the people is not as high as it used to be. In the past, to overcome difficulties the Party just issued one call and the Central Committee uttered one sentence, and the whole country acted accordingly. In this way the purpose was served very well. . . . When over 20 million workers were sent down to the rural areas (after the failure of the Great Leap Forward), we followed the mass line and explained things clearly, and nobody complained. Things are not so easy today (1980:232).

Democratic reforms are an attempt to reestablish Party control by cooptation and institutional self-limitation. The Cultural Revolution has required Party hegemony to accept a more pluralist operating environment.

China’s intelligentsia is the special beneficiary of the more sophisticated approach to the political needs of production. Abandonment of class struggle as the “key link,” expansion of the zone of indifference, and the urban bias of NPC representation already favor intellectuals, but their interests are further promoted by policies specifically designed to enhance their specialized contribution to modernization. Not only is the expertise of the intellectuals necessary for the sophisticated planning, management, and technological tasks of modernization (World Bank, 1983, vol. 3:134–45), but the intellectuals also have a special role in peaceful reunification with Taiwan, another of Deng’s (1980) three great tasks for the 1980s. The revival of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference is the leading institutional symbol of the regime’s new united front policies toward intellectuals.

The priority of intellectuals raises two questions concerning the reforms, which will be answered only by future policy developments. The first question is whether or not the intellectuals are simply being manipulated by the Party. Given the fate of intellectuals in the 1957 Anti-Rightist Campaign (MacFarquhar 1960, 1974), and the manipulation of “Democracy Wall” dissidents by Deng Xiaoping in 1978–79 (Rosen 1983), such a suspicion is natural. The intellectuals are weak politically and the Party retains the option of a strategic redirection of policy. On the other hand, the goal of the new united front, modernization, is complex and long term, and the importance of specialists should increase rather than diminish. The rough treatment of intellectuals in 1957 was related to the illusion of the Great Leap Forward that modernization was a matter of effort rather than knowledge. Within the context of the present regime, the intellectuals are not likely to be “squeezed like a lemon.”

The second question concerns whether the policies of the new united front are a citizen-based democratic reform or a corporatist reform aimed at intellectuals as a group. The participation and prestige of intellectuals has increased in most Communist countries over the last three decades, but some (Konrad and Szelenyi 1979) have seen this trend as the formation of a new ruling class rather than democratization. The internal structure and political role of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference is certainly corporatist (Ardant 1980). It might be argued that the recognition of various groups and professions by the Party and accommodation of their interests is necessary but not sufficient for modern democracy.

The third rationale of democratic institutionalization is that of guaranteeing mass orientation of authority. The most innovative aspects of the reforms relate directly to this rationale: competitive elections provide influence over officeholders, and the strengthening of representative institutions increases the prominence of elected
officials. Ultimately, measures of mass control are justified by the Party's conception of itself as a vanguard of the masses and its heritage of having led a successful popular revolution, but the more specific rationale of democratic institutionalization is closely related to the modernizing principle of material interest. Only marginally are electoral and representative systems organs for policy formulation. They do, however, provide citizens with influence over representatives, who are strengthened and motivated by their constituencies to act as tribunes of the people in both local matters of concern and in supervision of administrative plans and functions.

Although the mass movements of the Cultural Revolution may be said to have occasioned current democratic reforms by preventing a return to the Party's earlier political monopoly, there is a fundamental difference between the ideology of class mobilization in the Cultural Revolution and post-Mao thinking on the legitimacy of material interests in politics. The Cultural Revolution proclaimed total sacrifice for public purposes, total dedication to the revolution and to Chairman Mao. Material interest was present only in the form of a critique of material interest—the targeting of corrupt and authoritarian leadership and members of bad classes. Nevertheless, as research by Hong Yung Lee (1978) on the composition of Red Guard groups has shown, the positive material interests of group members lay behind selection of the targets. Low-paid workers often became radical critics of factory leaders while highly paid workers defended them. But the open articulation of anything smaller than working-class interests was not allowed. By contrast, a competitive electoral system expects positive effects from motivation by material interests. It expects that the interest in reelection or the fear of embarrassment will stimulate representatives to be attentive to their functions. It also expects that the voicing of local needs will lead to more effective government and more appropriate policies. The application of material-interest motivation to politics is limited by perceived threats to Party hegemony and by Leninist prejudices against "tailism," but the complementarity between economic and material interests should provide a constant pressure in this direction. As a delegate to the third session of the Fifth NPC put it, "We have now begun to be emancipated economically, but we have not been emancipated politically" (RMRB: 12 September 1980).

The fourth and last rationale of democratic institutionalization is its contribution to the leadership structure as a personnel system. The recruitment, promotion, and removal of leadership personnel is a major factor in the regime's capacity to implement modernization policies, and the higher problem of generational succession is vital for the continued development of modernization policies. Democratic institutionalization is one of two major policy directions affecting personnel management, the other being the training and professionalization of leading cadres. Needless to say, the ultimate effects of democratic reforms on leadership personnel must remain as partial and ambiguous as the regime's commitment to the reforms, but anticipated effects help justify the reforms.

The capacity of a leadership group to be self-selective and self-protective is as frustrating to its superiors as it is to its subordinates. Assuming, as the regime does, that the central leadership and the masses in the Party, workplace, and people's congress constituencies have basically the same goals, democratic reforms allow the masses to influence local leadership, which the central government cannot reach as easily from above, from below. The definition of leadership roles through constitutionalism and the promotion of socialist legality are necessary correlates of accountability and of a more stable, complex political structure.

Democratic institutionalization could make an especially interesting contribution
to the problem of leadership succession. Succession first became an issue in the early 1960s, when Mao issued his “five criteria for revolutionary successors,” and it is even more acute twenty years later with the same cohort of central leadership returned to power. However—as the replacement of Hua Guofeng by the slightly older Zhao Ziyang indicates—the problem is not one of finding younger persons willing to rule but of finding worthy successors to the mission of modernization. As difficult as the problem is at the central level, it is much more so at the local level, where the power of Cultural Revolution holdovers is stronger. By specifying leadership roles and subjecting leaders to periodic public evaluations, democratic institutionalization divides succession problems into a long-term procedural commitment and an indefinite series of limited decisions. It is only with such procedural commitments that the leviathan can live longer than its parts.

A comprehensive, well-articulated ideology is not a strong point of democratic reform in China, just as it is not a strong point of the general post-Mao commitment to modernization. However, there are important rationales presented, and these are closely related to the underlying principles of modernization. Despite the ambiguities in the regime’s commitment to democratic institutionalization, modernization can be expected to provide a continuing pressure to resolve ambiguities in favor of democracy.

Conclusion

Chinese democratic reform is a response to the needs of modernization, but it is a top-down response sponsored by a regime that sees political reform as a necessary concomitant of economic progress. This starting point is very different from that of Western parliamentaryism. Western democracy emerged slowly, from a relatively short period of absolutism, in a process of political contention, piecemeal improvement, and institutional restriction of the public power. Typically, Western democracy’s rationale of universal individual rights was extended slowly, from civil to political to welfare rights in content, and from elite to property to general citizenry in scope. By contrast, China emerged from a situation of total crisis, with an ideology based on a class critique of bourgeois parliamentarism and a leadership practically committed to the interests of the vast majority of people. The Cultural Revolution discredited the mass revolutionary approach as too primitive and destructive for the complex problems of a modern state, and democratic institutionalization emerged as a presumably popular governmental policy for presumably popular governmental economic ends. But the “means-end” distinction between democracy and modernization is blurred by the close linkage between the rationales of each. The constitutional-legal, electoral, representative, and citizen rights’ dimensions of Chinese democratic reform are a response to general features and needs of modern society rather than an importation of capitalist politics.

It is clear that China, as both a socialist and a developing country, will remain a public sector society. The tasks of Chinese democracy will not be to carve out an inviolate private sphere but to bind government and its personnel to effective service of the public interest. But a sophisticated understanding of the public interest requires some autonomy for groups and a tolerance of a broad range of individual preferences. If these are considered inimical to socialism, then socialism has defined itself as authoritarian. Chinese and Communist political traditions combine to provide a strong legacy of authoritarianism, and the habits and forms of democracy remain to be developed.

It is also clear that the Chinese Communist Party will continue to play a leading
role in Chinese politics for the foreseeable future. It is not clear, however, what form that leadership will take. The Party has made a significant commitment to democratic reforms, and it could do so because of its self-understanding as the vanguard of the people. It is quite possible in theory to have Party leadership in an increasingly democratic society. In fact, it is hard to imagine the Party not retaining political preeminence. It has the advantages of established leadership, prestige, and organization. However, the Party also enforces an ideological tutelage that could conflict with the procedural guarantees or significance of democratic institutions. If the Party uses its orthodoxy and leading positions as weapons, then it might in the long run isolate itself and invite chaos. However, it is not likely that either democracy or Party orthodoxy will emerge as a total victor. Continuity and convenience make orthodoxy attractive to the Party, while the rationale and forces of modernization support democracy. Even when the stage for development is set by revolution, solid and peaceful development may only be possible through compromise.

List of References

**Abbreviations**

AS  Asian Survey
BR  Beijing Review
CLG  Chinese Law and Government
CQ  China Quarterly
FY  Faxue Yanjiu [Studies in Law]
HQ  Hong Qi [Red Flag]
MYF  Minzhu yu Fazhi [Democracy and Legal System]
PA  Pacific Affairs
RMRB  Renmin Ribao [People’s Daily]

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