hold in some instance, then the party should put its correctness to the test of citizen opinion. The high level authority trap should be replaced by recourse to the citizenry.

In other words, the party must put itself at risk to the people if it wishes to relegate its position as a modern democracy. It must also reduce and control the vulnerability of citizens and society to state intervention and arbitrariness if it wants to encourage individual and group initiative in a decentralized commodity economy.

The party-state could be considered a democratic system if it could be relied upon to base its priorities on the individual and collective welfare of citizens and to protect society and individual citizens from undue state interference; to make policy on the basis of an active concern for concrete citizen interest; to revise policy in line with citizen reaction to policy effects; and if recruitment of officials is open and advancement depends on quality of service to the citizenry.

Of course, such a standard, like that for an ideal parliamentary democracy, could only be approximated by an existing government. But is the institutionalization of such a standard compatible with a party-state structure? To answer this question we must explore the organizational arrangements which are necessarily implied by the standard.

The Corollaries of Party-State Democracy

The problem with the democratic character of the vanguard party-state is that the question of whether or not the people are being served by this policy or that leader is left to the leadership and its commitment to a mass-line political style; there is no institutional guarantee of citizen voice in politics. The institutionalization of a party-state democracy also assumes that the party serves the people, but it goes further to provide institutions and procedures that articulate and reinforce the citizen role in government and define the general contours of public power.

My ideas sketched below regarding the concrete prerequisites of party-state democracy are certainly incomplete. Completeness would require a work of practical political theory comparable in scope to the Federalist Papers. Moreover, this is not a prescription for Chinese politics but an elaboration of a theory of party-state democracy. Whatever seems necessary to democracy is discussed, regardless of whether it already exists, seems likely, or seems
unlikely. The mentioning of an item does not imply that current politics is defective in this area; on the contrary, the many political reforms in the 1980s are what have encouraged me to consider the prospect of party-state democracy. The discussion of the institutionalization of party-state democracy begins with the party's structure and role and then considers the relationship of the state to society and citizen. Finally, the role of the people's congress system must be considered.

Democratization of the party. Because the party in a party-state system is not in competition with other parties, its internal democratization and its functioning for the public benefit are major problems for party-state democracy. There might appear to be an inherent contradiction between democracy and any special political influence on the part of any group, but I would argue that inequality in political participation is a fact of life in any democracy, and that the crucial question is whether the group is exclusive and whether its purposes are isomorphic with public purposes.

Public openness would require an ethic of citizen service, non-preclusive recruitment, and access to party leaders by other societal institutions and non-party citizens. Recruitment would not necessarily have to be massive, but the criteria for recruitment could not preclude membership on the basis of class or other descriptive criteria. Public access to party leadership is also necessary in order to provide for short-term, issue-oriented openness. Any privileges or perquisites granted to party members or leaders should be publicly specified and justified by the services provided.

Within the party, member's rights of opinion, discussion, and decision should be protected, and majority rule should be the ultimate standard of decision-making. Party disciplinary actions should be adjudicated by a specialized organ independent of the regular chain of command.

The party's orthodoxy should not be narrower than its commitment to public service. It should not be imposed on society at large, and its tenets should be discussable within the party.

It should be clear that party-state democracy has not been achieved if only the "good party members" feel secure enough to voice their political views and criticisms. If such is the case, then the monopoly from above of political life is too tight to allow significant popular control. Oppositional voices both within and outside the party must be allowed to develop according to specified, legal "rules of the game," rather than depending on the momentary goodwill
and tolerance of the leadership.

Encouragement of societal articulation. One of the most damaging assumptions of the leftist period was that any societal differentiation was bad. The mentality of “taking class struggle as the key link” interpreted any differences as alien to socialism. But one of the basic facts of modern life is that a large-scale, productive society requires complexity. Therefore a modern, party-state democracy should be based on the acknowledgment of societal articulation. The two primary ways of encouragement are to open up many access channels between authorities and groups or individuals, and to activate the diversity of societal interests through a broader range of public discussion. In a modern society, unanimity is a sign of suppression, not agreement.

Guarantees of citizen welfare. In contrast to the future-oriented approach of vanguardism, the chief policy criterion of a party-state democracy should be citizen welfare in a very tangible sense, and the question of what constitutes citizen welfare should be considered a legitimate subject for citizen discussion. Of course, there should be no exclusion of individuals or groups from full citizenship status except by crime, and even then there should be the encouragement of return to full status. The “people” of the PRC should mean the citizens.

Citizen welfare dictates some general policy interests. The first is the urgency of meeting the basic needs of the entire population. Secondly, there should be a minimization of extraordinary interventions in society. Thirdly, there should be a minimization of bureaucratic administration.

Guarantees of citizen rights. The first step in guaranteeing citizen rights is the specification of rights in the constitution and laws, closely followed by the second step of an independent and effective legal and juridical system. Beyond these basics, openness requires that the juridical system be especially careful on matters regarding political rights, and that ambiguities be interpreted in a citizen-friendly manner. Finally, there should be a minimization of imprisonment and the death penalty.

Significant citizen influence over personnel. The most obvious requirements under this heading are that there be a maximum of elected positions, and that elections be carried out with more candidates than positions in all public institutions, including the party and state-owned enterprises as well as governmental positions. Although the party can be involved in the nomination process, it
Party-State Democracy: A Theoretical Exploration

should not be in a position to discourage other nominations or to control the outcome. Otherwise the officials will not be dependent on the people, and cannot be expected to be responsible to them.

The exposure of officials to the risk of non-reelection creates a delicate situation in any political system because the power currently enjoyed can be manipulated for electoral advantage, but this would be especially true in a relatively monolithic system. Therefore it is of great importance that the principle be established that conflict should lead to more rather than less formal democracy. For example, if there are difficulties arriving at a final slate of candidates, then a primary election should be held in which all compete and the top vote-getters become the final candidates. Any intimidation or manipulation should be strongly and publicly criticized and punished.

In order that the citizenry be better informed and more in control of officials, there should be oversight of their activities by disinterested institutions, especially the press, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, and people’s congress delegates. Analogous oversight should exist within the party and in state-owned enterprises.

The role of the people’s congress system. As the constitution of the PRC indicates, the people’s congress system is the organ through which popular sovereignty is exercised. In order to be adequate to this task, its personnel must be accessible to and controlled by the citizens, and it must have ultimate review and control of state policy and personnel.

Public control over the people’s congress is institutionalized primarily in the form of elections, and it is especially important that the election of members and the election of people’s congress leadership provide more candidates than positions and an open nominating process. Members should also be available to their constituents on a regular basis. Great care should be taken to ensure that congress members at each level are protected from party and governmental interference and pressure in order to secure their status as servants of the people.

Exercise of review and control functions requires a standing committee and staff with sufficient time and resources to oversee governmental functions at the respective level. The congress and its standing committee should have the right to investigate governmental activities and personnel, to hear periodic reports on activities, to pass binding resolutions, and to select government leadership. The more
problematic the relationship between the people's congress and officials, the more decisive should be the role of the people's congress and its formal democratic procedures. In a party-state system the role of the people's congress is not as central as it would be in a parliamentary system, but the people’s congress is the institutional representative of the people, and if it is not democratic internally, or if it lacks effective, ultimate control over state policy and personnel, then a party-state democracy is impossible.

The institutional features listed above serve only to indicate some of the general institutional features that would seem to be required by a party-state democracy. It is doubtful that any government would have all these features, and therefore party-state democracy, like parliamentary democracy, sets an ideal target for political reform. The primary utility of a theory of party-state democracy is to set criteria for the interpretation and evaluation of political reform within the party-state.

The Practicality of Party-State Democracy

It is, of course, impossible to know the future, and this has proven especially true of mainland Chinese politics. If we reflect on what we expected of mainland Chinese politics in 1978, in 1968, in 1958, in 1948..., our thoughts on what could or could not happen by 1998 must be humble and cautious. On the other hand, it is impossible to portray a major structural alternative for mainland Chinese politics and not to consider its chances for realization. Let me divide the question of its realization into two parts, first the practicality of party-state democracy, and secondly, its probability. The first is still somewhat hypothetical, since it is concerned with the model's “fit” to Chinese circumstances and its workability. The second is a question of political speculation far too complicated for me to consider and far too volatile for me to risk a written prediction.

A serious consideration of the practicality of party-state democracy might hold some surprises. I would argue that it fits China’s current political heritage better than either party-state vanguardism or parliamentary democracy; that its democratic features would consolidate the party's role rather than challenge it; that the main tension between party leadership and democratic mechanisms would be the inefficiency of democracy; and that the more effective goal-setting of democracy is a product of its inef-
If we look back on the development of parliamentary democracy in those Western countries where it has been most successful, we see that it did not suddenly appear as a *deux ex machina*, but rather it developed slowly, reflecting the development of a strong, diversified society and presupposing various compatible feudal institutions which existed nowhere else in the world. However admirable its achievements, one must be cautious about assuming that the current context of Chinese politics is suitable for its transplantation. The most obvious problem is the uniquely dominant position of the CCP. I think that it is safe to say that if free, fair, and open elections were held in mainland China tomorrow, the CCP would be the overwhelming victor. If for whatever reason this did not happen—for instance, if the CCP split into competing factions on the basis of ideological or regional differences—I would think that the outcome would more likely be chaos than democracy. The political development of mainland China has confirmed the age-old Chinese tradition of unitary, noncompetitive politics and it has created a correspondingly centralized, state-dependent society. To imagine that parliamentary democracy could function smoothly in this context takes a greater faith in the magical powers of its institutions than the experienced observer should have.

Nonetheless, it is true that parliamentary democracy has a great credibility among Chinese intellectuals, and this in itself is a strong force in its favor. I think, however, that the tremendous external strength and the desirability of material conditions in the leading Western democracies creates a misleading impression of the power of their political institutions *per se*. The world is full of parliamentary institutions, and as these institutions reflect their contexts, relatively few of them seem attractive enough to copy.

What, then, of the possibility of continuing party-state vanguardism? It may seem perverse to argue a form of government currently in power does not correspond to the political context that it itself created, but I think that this is true in part. Of course, the vanguard role of the CCP does correspond to the tradition of unitary authoritarianism in China and to the political habits and structures of the PRC. The problem is, in my opinion, that the party no longer has a vanguard mission that is believed in by either society at large or the party itself. The habits of vanguardism are still very strong, and the CCP is loath to give up the power of vanguardism, but the party cannot claim any more that it is pursuing a desirable social
goal that is over the horizon of the future. Modernization is not a
goal deduced from Marxism-Leninism. It is the complex and some-
what fragile product of many hands — a goal that the party by
itself is too strong to achieve.

Of course, the party can postpone its historical target, thus
rendering it harmless for current policy and yet preserving the
vanguard claim. It can simply try to rule well and thus justify its
power. It can suppress dissent and enforce orthodoxy. But as the
revolution fades into the past and new generations of leaders emerge,
the party is confronted with the problem of updating its role.
Refusing to acknowledge the problem is an alternative, but it is also
a decision of a sort. If the party is too involved in its own con-
venience and interests as a ruling elite to consider democratization
seriously, it might follow the twenty years of leftist commandism
with an equally long period of rightist tailism.

I would argue that party-state democracy is compatible with
mainland China's current political context because it utilizes the
existing institutions and habits and at the same time opens them up
to redirection and modification. A modern society does not require
authoritarianism, but it does require order. It is too complex and
interdependent to function well if threatened by the chaos of too
little government or the interference of too much. It does not face
China with a sudden structural transformation, but rather with many
small steps and a leap. Many of the small political reforms have
already been initiated in the process of eliminating leftist and
softening authoritarianism. The leap that remains is for the CCP to
commit itself to the principle of popular party rule rather than
simply trying to make party rule popular. In other words, it must
decide to bind itself to the outcomes of democratic procedures and
institutions. This requires a leap of faith in the people, and entails
putting the party's control at risk. But if the party is confident of its
popularity and leadership competence, the risk will seem small and
the gain great.

In fact, one could expect that the leap to democracy would
strengthen and ensure the party's leadership role in general at the
price of particular challenges and defeats. The basic reason for this
expectation is that modern democracy is an inherently conservative
political mechanism. A society with something to lose chooses to
preserve what it has, and by this choice strengthens community
commitment and loyalty to existing leaders, policies, and institu-
tions. The regime takes the mind-boggling — but hypothetical — risk
of total replacement and thereby gains the legitimacy of being the free choice of the citizenry. In reality, there is only marginal risk to the regime. Satisficing performance by an authoritarian regime produces acceptance but not loyalty in the population; a democratic regime may do no better, and yet it is strengthened by the bond of citizen choice. Moreover, the current constellation of power in society is reflected in democratic political outcomes, so the party’s hegemonic position is more likely to be confirmed rather than challenged by democratic institutions. Of course, individual officials and policies would be at greater risk in a democracy, but one could view this as a political “survival of the fittest” that also strengthens the party as a whole.

The problem between the party and democratic institutions is not likely to be the general challenge posed to party leadership from below but party frustration with the inefficiencies of democracy. The party’s structure and habits are those of a strong state and a strong leader. Goals and procedures are not questioned; attention is focused on accomplishment. By contrast, democratic institutions are frustrating even to those who are used to them. It would be very frustrating to party and state officials at all levels to know from experience that something could be handled by their authoritative intervention and to watch democratic institutions take longer to do less. The hard behavioral lesson for officials would be that sometimes the obviously best thing to do is not the best thing to do because of its indirect costs in the violation of institutional and procedural norms.

A related problem would be the tension between the party’s tendency to set high goals for development and pressure from the citizenry for more distributive policies. In any political system there is a tension between investment and expenditures, taxation and tax relief, redistributive policies and economic growth. In developed parliamentary democracies these issues are usually part of the political fissuring between the major political parties, but in developing countries Samuel Huntington has argued that democratizing tendencies are more on the side of redistributive, spending policies, while authoritarian forces favor investment and development. It is quite imaginable that in a party-state democracy the people’s congress system could articulate budget-breaking popular demands, while the party would feel responsible for controlling expenditure and meeting developmental goals. The officials would be tempted to ignore or override the people’s congress, but unless
the people's congress has some fiscal responsibility, it could not be expected to become fiscally responsible.

It is important to observe that the apparent inefficiency of democratic institutions and processes is one of their most important contributions to modern politics. The inefficiency has two positive effects. The first is that the organizational friction that democracy adds to policy-making raises the cost of making and changing policy and thereby stabilizes policy. Committees and consultations increase the mass of the policy-making apparatus and thus tend to smooth out its trajectory. By contrast, in mainland China's highly personalistic politics the top leader is in absolute control and can get anything done quickly, but policy direction seems to flicker with his attention span. In a complex society, policy stability can be almost as important as policy content.

The second advantage of democratic inefficiency is that it brings up for review the goals and priorities of policies. It often happens that the desirability of goals is too easily assumed. An open policy review process aggregates more diverse societal interests and does not have the bureaucratic turf or the command structure of the state machinery. The shifting of policy standards inconveniences and frustrates the bureaucracy, but such micro adjustments of policy goals are one of the most important contributions of democratic institutions. The efficient execution of inappropriate goals is not good. To the extent that democracy's inefficiency readjusts state machinery toward more appropriate goals, it has done a great service.

Conclusion

More than twenty years ago, the Canadian political theorist C. B. Macpherson discussed the theoretical possibility of democracy in a Marxist party-state.\(^6\) For much of the intervening time, such speculations were irrelevant to mainland China. The definition and limitation of public power by citizen-based institutions was condemned as bourgeois democracy. But mainland China's own experience with the excesses of the party-state has issued in a new era of political reform which has had the effect of limiting the arbitrariness of official behavior, increasing the role of the constitution and of law, improving the electoral process, and expanding the

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role of the people's congress system.

What is the significance of these reforms? Are they concessions which buy time for the party, but at the cost of moving mainland China closer to a dichotomous choice between party authoritarianism and the democratic overthrow of party rule? Is it possible for the party-state structure to cope with a stronger society and a more limited state? These questions lie embedded in our interpretations and evaluations of ongoing political developments in mainland China. Theoretical speculation does not answer these questions, but it brings them to the surface and clarifies alternative interpretive paradigms.

The primary goal of this essay is to stimulate thought on mainland China's political alternatives. If my argument for the theoretical possibility of party-state democracy is considered and rejected, progress has still been made, because unexamined assumptions have become examined ones. Like the candidate who says "I don't care how you vote, just be sure to vote," I say "I don't care what you think of the possibility of party-state democracy, as long as you've thought about it."

Of course, just as the candidate cares how you vote, I care what you think of party-state democracy. In my opinion, it presents a real possibility for a modern democratic base for Chinese politics. The vanguardism that has been the underlying logic of the party-state has been reduced to a husk of the habit of power and a few slogans of orthodoxy. But the competitive, multi-party democracy of the West cannot be imported like a turnkey factory. It requires a pluralism of societal forces and a stability of political expectations that simply does not exist in mainland China at the present time. A citizen-based, open party-state system would itself involve new, fundamental commitments for Chinese politics, but it appears to me to be in line with the political heritage of the present and the more optimistic possibilities of the future.
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