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POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA: FROM "A REVOLUTION IS NOT A DINNER PARTY" TO "TO GET RICH IS GLORIOUS" TO CREATING A "HARMONIOUS SOCIETY"

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The Xinhua Gate—the New China Gate—is the formal entrance to Zhongnanhai—the South and Central Seas that are part of the former imperial park and that have long housed the compound where China's top elite live and work. Just inside the gate stands, in Chairman Mao Zedong's calligraphy, the slogan *wei renmin fuwu*—"serve the people." The implied message is that building a new China—here, the People's Republic—means "serving the people." I begin with this reference to, and an overview of, the Mao Era—the first nearly three decades of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1949-1976)—because so much of what has gone on during the Reform Era—the last third of a century of rapid and radical change—depends on what went on before, partly as a reaction against it and partly as a continuation of past patterns.

THE MAO ZEDONG YEARS: PHASES OF CHINESE POLITICS, 1949-1976

The Chinese Communist Party took power at the end of the Chinese Civil War as several different things. It had led a communist revolution, but a communist revolution of a particular sort. First, it was a peasant revolution—something neither Marx nor Lenin envisioned. Tellingly, the Chinese translation for "proletariat"—*wuchanjieji*—has nothing to do with being a worker. It literally means the "property-less class," including poor and landless peasants. Second, the Chinese Communist Party came to power at the head of an army. The party and army were deeply fused in revolutionary China in a way that was not the case in many other communist regimes. They fought two wars, one against the Japanese and another against their Nationalist Chinese (Kuomintang) rivals. To this day, the relationship between party and army has remained closely entwined and complicated, and, at the worst of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, the party leadership over the army gave way to an arrangement approaching military rule.

Third, the Chinese Communist Revolution was also a nationalist revolution—a victory for Chinese nationalism, most immediately against the Japanese who had invaded China in 1937 but also more broadly as bringing an end to the "century of humiliation" (as it is known in China) that began with the Opium Wars of the middle nineteenth century and proceeded to colonial (in the case of Hong Kong) and quasi-colonial encroachments on Chinese territory and sovereignty by the Western great powers and Japan.

Fourth, the Chinese Communist regime from the beginning was determined to build a wealthy and powerful China. This was an old goal (dating in its modern form to the nineteenth and early twentieth century foreign encroachments) that the new regime embraced and rarely abandoned despite the anti-materialist strains in Maoist ideology. This enduring aim of the PRC has, of course, taken center stage since the Post-Mao Reform Era began under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s.

The three decades that followed the Mao years were famously tumultuous, but it is possible to understand their key features by following a conventional periodization while stressing structural parallels that run across the periods. The PRC began with a period of initial consolidation, running roughly from 1949 to 1953. The regime was flush with the success of nationalist revolutionary triumph and the legitimacy that came with it. But the period also was shadowed by concerns, primarily the worry that old enemies lingered: spies, counterrevolutionaries, a defeated Kuomintang that had fled to Taiwan but that had agents on the mainland and that was officially committed to recovering the lost mainland. China's new rulers also were troubled by their need to rely on distrusted holdovers from the prior regime, especially to govern the newly conquered urban areas and their complex economies—areas that had been largely beyond the reach of the rural-based communist movement and the governing bodies it had created up to 1949.

The major events of the period reflected these insecurities. They included campaigns—with archetypically Maoist names like the Three Anti Campaign, the Five Anti Campaign and the Campaign Against Counter-Revolutionaries—that targeted residual enemies, as well as incipient corruption and backsliding from revolutionary ideals. These drives sometimes resorted to radical, Alice-in-Wonderland-like tactics. For example, at a mass trial of counterrevolutionaries in a Beijing soccer stadium, the presiding officials elicited the crowd's support for executing the accused and then pledged that trials resulting in conviction would follow forthwith.

Beginning around 1953 and lasting until around 1958 was a period of “planning, blooming and contending.” By the beginning of this phase, the regime had achieved considerable additional success, rapidly consolidating power over the long-fragmented country, eliminating many of the vestiges of the prior regime, and socializing the ownership of the means of production. This socialist transformation of the economy included taking over factories and commercial firms in the urban industrial areas and collectivizing agricultural land and production in the rural areas (following a short-lived initial phase of land redistribution to peasant households). This period also saw adoption of broadly Soviet-style economic policies, including China's first Five Year Plan. But it was planning “lite,” never as pervasive and detailed as the measures adopted under the Soviet Union's *Gosplan*. In short, the focus of revolutionary change in this period was on what Marx had called the means and relations of production—building up economic production and especially industrial capacity and transforming ownership to state and collective ownership, thereby eliminating the “capitalist” and “semi-feudal” structures of the prior order.

This was also an era of major construction of political institutions. The first PRC constitution was adopted. Major laws were written. Relatively stable structures of government were put fully in place, including ministries of the central government and provincial and local government organs. The newly massive party-state was rapidly staffed up.

Despite these major accomplishments, the period was also marked by worries and perceived dangers. A principal worry was that after even a few short years in power, the regime was losing its revolutionary zeal. There was a sense that running an increasingly industrial and urban-centered economy required skills that were very different from, and somewhat at odds with, the political orientations and attributes that had defined the party in its revolutionary days. There were already emerging complaints about the way the party-state ruled, particularly among a notoriously critical and politically suspect group: “intellectuals” (which in the PRC lexicon means, broadly, anyone with a high level of education doing primarily mental work).

Partly in response to these concerns, Mao launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign—named after the ancient, but Mao-embraced, aphorism “let a hundred flowers bloom; let a hundred schools of thought contend.” This invited people in general and intellectuals in particular to voice their concerns. This period of openness lasted only briefly. The political winds shifted abruptly and the Anti-Rightist Campaign followed. This shut down “blooming and contending,” which in the eyes of the leadership had been shockingly harsh and out of control. The political and social effects were significant. Encouraging intellectuals to stick their necks out and then chopping them off alienated a group that had been seen as important to achieving vital functions of economic development and governance. They would not be won back (and even then only tenuously) until after Mao's death.

The following period was dominated by the Great Leap Forward. Flush with the success of rapid economic transformation and growth during the preceding period and amid Mao's belief that China had the right version of communism (in contrast to the despised revisionism of Khrushchev's now rapidly de-Stalinizing Soviet Union), Mao and others in the top leadership believed that China could move more rapidly forward with economic development and thoroughgoing social change in line with communist ideals. At the same time, Mao and his colleagues discerned dangers to be addressed: at home, the rise of what was called “bureaucratism” and what Milovan Djilas identified as the problem of a “new class” of party cadres holding seemingly secure and unaccountable power; and abroad, challenges to socialism, including the Hungarian revolt against a Soviet-backed communist order. These gave rise to a sense that communism might be in trouble generally and in China specifically.

What followed was a remarkable and ultimately disastrous attempt to leap dramatically forward in both level of development and nearness to a communist utopia. In rural China, this meant the establishment of giant “communes.” These were organizational units in the countryside of many thousands of peasants, on a much larger scale than the preexisting collectives, any historic precedent, and any natural economic area. The communes pooled resources and labor on a vast scale that

fundamentally delinked work and reward. People were to eat in communal mess-halls, in the early days without restriction on quantities consumed. They were required to turn in their private cooking utensils, which were used as raw materials for “backyard furnaces” that were supposed to help China surpass Britain and ultimately the United States in steel production but that ultimately produced useless lumps of metal.

The aim was to create a landscape of large scale agricultural-with-some-industry collectives that were fairly low-tech but also largely self-sufficient and highly productive. The idea of what revolutionary progress meant had shifted from a relatively orthodox Marxist emphasis on developing the forces of production to a belief in the power of human organization to achieve great things—the heaven-storming ability of the human will when channeled through the right mobilizational mechanisms. Institutionally, the strategy relied on relatively grassroots-level party structures, rather than the state’s economic bureaucrats and the remote organs in Beijing whom Mao in particular regarded with increasing suspicion.

Absurdly high targets for production were set, and they were reported met, which led to still higher targets. Grain exactions from the countryside tracked the high reported, not the low actual figures. The combination of bad policy with the bad luck of bad weather and the failure to reverse failed policies promptly led to massive starvation and malnutrition, contributing to tens of millions of deaths. The political consequences were dire, with China’s vast peasantry suffering terrible devastation and, in turn, a severe loss of confidence in the regime. At more elite levels, Mao came down hard on perceived challenges to his leadership, undertaking the first top-level purge since the regime’s earliest days (most notably of the party and military leader Peng Dehuai, who dared to criticize the folly of the Great Leap) and arguably paving the way for the more widespread assault on senior leaders that came during the Cultural Revolution several years later.

After a few years of recovery from the Great Leap Forward, China began to move toward the last major period of the Mao Era: the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Given the disaster of the Great Leap, it seems odd to describe the Cultural Revolution as coming upon the heels of a preceding period’s successes. But the description is partly apt. The Cultural Revolution followed a post-Great Leap period of moderation. With Mao and radical ideas in temporary eclipse, the regime adopted moderate economic policies that were in many ways harbingers of the policies that would later prove so successful in the early years of the Reform Era—decentralization to smaller scale production units in the countryside, greater reliance on material incentives, allowing peasants to farm small plots privately, and so on. Politically and institutionally, there were also attempts to re-instill top-down discipline and accountability and to address ongoing problems of corruption and laxness in party-state structures.

By the early-middle 1960s, there was a sense that China had recovered from many of the horrors of the Great Leap Forward, in large part thanks to the policies of retrenchment and rebuilding that had followed the catastrophe. This coincided, however, with the rising determination of the Great Helmsman (as Mao was called) to undertake one last great intervention to steer the Chinese Revolution in a more radical direction. Mao had developed a sense that the revolution was waning—a sense that had been building for more than a decade but that reached a new, qualitatively more serious level as Mao neared the end of his life. Mao complained that, after the regime’s retreat from the Great Leap Forward and Mao’s concomitant retreat to a less dominant political role, the party-state apparatus—particularly in Beijing, where Peng Zhen was the top power-holder—had become so “tight” that the Chairman could not “insert a pin.” Mao worried about “capitalist roaders” holding power inside the party. He later identified the number one capitalist roader as Liu Shaoqi, Mao’s designated heir and the party’s arch-proponent of Leninist structure and discipline, and the number two capitalist roader as Deng Xiaoping, a key architect of the post-Great Leap reforms and, later, China’s paramount leader through the first decade and half of the Reform Era. Mao also was concerned about China’s youth: young people had had no personal experience of revolution and thus were at risk of becoming insufficiently revolutionary. In Mao’s view, they needed to “learn to make revolution by making revolution.”

To address these problems, Mao unleashed the Cultural Revolution. It included elite-level purges, first ousting Peng Zhen and then proceeding to topple Liu and Deng and many others. The methods again were striking and chilling. For example, Wang Guangmei (Liu Shaoqi’s wife) was subjected to a series of kangaroo court-like show trials by a gang of radical students at the elite Tsinghua University, where her daughter was a student and where she herself had been sent to address the initial wave of Cultural Revolution student uprisings. She and many others among the top elite were subjected to humiliating and sometimes brutal “struggle sessions” in which they were coerced to confess their political errors. Liu Shaoqi died from the mistreatment. Deng Xiaoping’s son suffered crippling injuries when he leapt from a window to escape his tormentors.

Much of the violence was initially undertaken by student “Red Guard” groups. In keeping with his desire that they have their own revolutionary experiences, Mao unleashed the students, encouraging them first to attack leaders at their schools. They moved on, with Mao’s blessing, to attack higher-level members of the political elite. The mass movements spilled well beyond the schools. Factional groups emerged in, and disrupted, virtually every institution in society, particularly in the urban areas—schools, government offices, workplaces, neighborhoods. The consequences were dramatic: conflicts paralyzed and shut down state and party institutions across much of China; radicals in Shanghai established an abortive Paris Commune-style government; and, in the first full summer of the Cultural Revolution, China stood on the brink of civil war as units of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)—the last functioning public institution—mobilized to back relatively radical and relatively moderate groups. With the possible end of the regime looming, Mao and other leaders moved to end the most radical phase of

the Cultural Revolution. They shut down the Red Guards and factional groups in society and sent much of the Red Guard generation of students down to live and work in the countryside and factories. They deployed the PLA to suppress disorder and to take a leading role in the new revolutionary committees that were being established to supersede the shattered institutions of party and state. Lin Biao, Mao's acolyte in the PLA and the man responsible for the iconic "little red book" of Chairman Mao's sayings that every Red Guard carried, was designated Mao's "best pupil" and successor. (Learning that his position was as perilous as Liu's had been at the end, Lin soon sought to eliminate Mao and died trying to escape when his plot failed.)

After the most active and tumultuous phase of the Cultural Revolution thus came to a close, there followed a period of reconstruction and relative stability. Government offices and schools reopened. Economic units returned to operation. Deng Xiaoping, the great survivor of Chinese communist politics, was rehabilitated. A degree of normalcy reemerged.

In the early to middle 1970s, additional twists followed. Some aspects of Cultural Revolution radicalism soon reemerged. Mao's wife Jiang Qing emerged as the leader of a "Gang of Four" that pushed for the resurgence of radicalism. Wang Hongwen, the most junior member of the Gang of Four was designated Mao's successor—a symbolic choice that reflected the Cultural Revolution's emphasis on youth but a politically bizarre one given his utter lack of political and governmental experience and gravitas. The Gang of Four instigated a second purge of Deng, who had spent the few years following his rehabilitation introducing incentive-based and somewhat market-oriented economic policies (again presaging the reforms of the post-Mao years). The Gang of Four's triumph proved short-lived. Early in the brief interregnum between Mao and the Deng-led Reform Era, Mao's final designated successor Hua Guofeng (a previously relatively minor figure) presided over the arrest of the Gang of Four and other Maoists at the instigation of a handful of Mao's near-peers among the revolutionary generation leadership who had survived the Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution meant a good many things, of course. In terms of the focus and meaning of the revolution, the revolution had migrated fully into what Marxist analysis calls the superstructure. In Mao's last years, the key agenda was not building up the means of production or exploiting the power of political organization; politics was about ideological standpoint, the power of having the right thoughts, being in touch with Mao's ideas—which could be redefined retroactively (that is, those who followed Mao's views and instructions circa 1956 or 1963 could be condemned and ousted in the Cultural Revolution because those views were insufficiently radical and Maoist when measured against the Chairman's views in 1966 or 1975). The distinctive idea of the era was that people having the right thoughts—the right inner life—was what was necessary to achieve revolutionary progress. And, as the name of the era implies, culture played a significant role. It had always been somewhat important in Chinese communism, but it became a more central concern in this period. Jiang Qing endorsed several "revolutionary" operas, ballets and such that became the only works publicly performed in China for a time. Earlier, the initial round of purges that ousted Beijing chief Peng Zhen had begun with a cultural focus, in a controversy over how to handle a play about a Ming dynasty official that read as an allegory for Mao's misbegotten purge of Peng Dehuai and prolongation of the Great Leap Forward.

The political and social effects of the Cultural Revolution were transformative. Millions saw their lives severely disrupted and many tens of thousands died. The damage to institutions was massive and lasting. The communist regime suffered severe declines in popular legitimacy and belief in its ideology. One striking indication was the first Tiananmen protests—essentially an anti-Gang of Four popular movement that blossomed on the vast square that is the symbolic political center of China and where Mao had rallied the Red Guards at the Cultural Revolution's opening. The movement erupted amid mourning for Zhou Enlai—China's long-time premier, widely regarded as a moderate, restraining influence on Mao, and an engineer of Deng's first rehabilitation. Mao did not long outlive Zhou, nor did the Mao-dependent Gang of Four. With the Chairman's death, the Gang's arrest and the second rehabilitation of Deng, the stage was set for the opening of the Reform Era.

THE REFORM ERA: PHASES OF CHINESE POLITICS, 1978-

Especially in its early years, the Reform Era unfolded as "not that" politics. It was a reaction against the Cultural Revolution as chaos and brought substantial rebuilding of party and state institutions and a commitment to prevent relapses into social disorder. It was also a reaction against the Cultural Revolution as tyranny, which meant abandoning demands that citizens zealously embrace a hard ideology and establishing legal and other restraints on abusive behavior by local officials and some private actors as well. What has principally defined the Reform Era, however, is its fundamental shift in economic policies from plan to market and from autarchy to international engagement, and the related adoption of a pragmatic style of governance and policymaking, particularly in shaping and implementing development-promoting economic policies.

Like the Mao years, the Reform Era can be divided into periods with relatively clear turning points. It began in earnest with the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party—the prosaic name for the meeting at which Deng Xiaoping consolidated his, and a pro-reform coalition's, hold on power and set forth the basic policy orientations of the Reform Era. The years immediately following brought fundamental and growing changes in economic policy: decentralizing economic decision-making authority to lower levels in the state and to enterprises, expanding reliance on material incentives, experimentation with increasingly market-oriented policies, loosening once-draconian restrictions on

foreign trade and investment, and growing tolerance for private or semi-private forms of ownership. Along with this came further retrenchment of the party-state as the reforms created a sphere of autonomous economic decision-making and social space into which political authorities no longer routinely intruded.

In the first decade of the Reform Era, there was disappointment and in some quarters despair that the regime quashed the early apparent promise of political openness—most strikingly exemplified by the Democracy Wall movement, its sweeping criticisms of the shortcomings of socialism as practiced in China and its heady arguments asserting the need for democracy and human rights. More generally, there were small cycles between comparatively rapid advance for reforms and partial retrenchment and reassertion of control. Still, the reform trends proceeded fairly smoothly until near the end of the 1980s.

The turning point was the Tiananmen Incident of 1989. Once again, leadership instability played a role. Hu Yaobang, who had been Deng's designated successor and a proponent of relatively expansive political reform, was seen as being too soft on liberal ideas and on a small-scale student movement in the middle 1980s. Stripped of power and the general secretary post but allowed to remain on the party's governing Politburo, he had a fatal heart attack during one of its meetings in the spring of 1989. Evocative of Zhou Enlai's death thirteen years earlier, Hu's demise prompted an outpouring of grief-as-support for the comparatively liberal agenda with which he had been associated. Citizens—primarily students from Beijing universities—gathered on Tiananmen Square to protest the political pathologies that had emerged after a decade of reforms. Their complaints ranged from parochial issues about university conditions to systemic concerns about official corruption and the failure to fulfill pledges for political reform, including promises of democracy, that were part of the Reform-Era regime's official rhetoric and that had gained in sophistication and currency among intellectuals and on campuses in the middle 1980s. Premier Zhao Ziyang, who had been second to Hu among the rising generation of leaders, was tapped to succeed Hu as Party General Secretary and heir apparent to the officially retired but still in-practice preeminent leader Deng.

Zhao soon fell for much the same reason that Hu had, but in the much more spectacular and tragic context of the rise and suppression of the protests centered at Tiananmen. Threatened by a spontaneous mass movement that was much larger in scale and pressing much more thoroughgoing—and escalating—criticisms and demands of the regime (including calling for the ouster of Zhao's successor as premier, Li Peng, a dialogue among equals of student leaders and party-state leaders, and a list of reforms ranging from economic policies to anti-corruption to free speech), Deng and the top party elders who still wielded decisive power in China imposed martial law and, in the wee hours of June 4, 1989, ordered the army to move on the square. The move led to at least hundreds and, on most credible accounts, thousands of deaths.

At the elite level, the crackdown brought the ouster of Zhao Ziyang, who had at one point gone to the square to express sympathy with the student movement, and his replacement by Jiang Zemin, who had—in the top leadership's view—successfully handled smaller scale protests in Shanghai. In the wider society, the specter of Chinese soldiers killing Chinese students struck a blow to the party-state's recently rebuilt legitimacy, particularly among the perennially troubled and troublesome intellectuals and the rising urban middle classes. On the other hand, the regime's argument about the need to prevent chaos had some traction with a wider public, evoking the fear of disorder that has been an ancient and enduring trope in Chinese political culture.

Like Mao but in a very different direction, Deng undertook one last dramatic intervention in politics in his final years. Deng's 1992 “southern tour” (*nanxun*)—a much-publicized trip to the areas in southeastern coastal China where the economic boom associated with market-oriented reform and opening to the outside world had taken off—reinvigorated (some would say relaunched) the drive for reform. In Deng's last years and after, under the leadership of President and Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji, China entered a new phase. The political economy of the Jiang era was about rapid growth, economic transformation and greatly deepening China's economic integration with the outside world (especially through export-led growth and inbound foreign investment). Jiang-era policies were focused on macroeconomic growth and modernization. They evinced little concern for inequality and the consequences of economic development for those displaced, or left behind, by China's break-neck growth and rapid sectoral transformation.

Village-level elections with a modicum of democracy had been introduced in the Deng era. Some vestiges of Mao-era politicization were removed from the criminal laws. And several anti-corruption drives were launched. But these were small moves in an era when political reform was not a high priority and the construction of a socialist legal system focused mostly on putting in place the means for regulating and supporting an increasingly complex economy that was more porous to the outside world, more market-based and characterized by more complex patterns of industrial organization and ownership.

In 2002, the baton began to pass from Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao. China's first truly orderly—and, in practice, distinctively gradual—transition at the top brought some adjustments in policy and politics. Although the pursuit of growth and development remained defining concerns, the emphasis in the Hu years shifted toward greater concern about equity, the less-developed Chinese hinterland, the increasingly hard-pressed peasantry, the vast part of Chinese society that was not partaking of the astounding affluence of glitzy Shanghai and other coastal metropolises. Wen in particular became popular for his common touch, apparent sympathy with over-taxed rural residents and victims of disasters (from the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome to the devastating Sichuan earthquake).

This new populism, however, was not liberal or democratic. The Hu years began with a new emphasis on constitutional governance, brought high-profile amendments that elevated the constitutional status of human rights and private property rights, and witnessed intriguing moves, especially at sub-national levels, toward greater government transparency, public opportunities to comment on proposed legislation and regulation, and grassroots experiments with mechanisms to give citizens expanded if still-informal influence on how they were governed and particularly how revenues were spent. At the same time, and especially after 2008, the Hu leadership sharply repudiated so-called “Western style” democracy as unsuited to China. It halted and in some respects reversed the pro-rule-of-law agenda that the head of the Supreme People’s Court and like-minded judges and legal intellectuals had pursued through much of the new century’s first decade. And it undertook the harshest repression since 1989 of critics and dissidents—with prominent targets including an internationally renowned artist, a principal author of a prescription for democratic-constitutional reform, and activist “rights protection” (*weiquan*) lawyers who sought to protect citizens from property rights expropriation and other abuses inflicted by or with the complicity of officials.

CONTEMPORARY CHINESE POLITICS: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND STRUCTURE

I have given the historical narrative of the Reform Era somewhat shorter shrift than the Mao years because I believe that politics in contemporary China is better understood not in terms of chronological phases marked by radical changes, but rather in terms of longer term trends, persisting and evolving political structures, and challenges and issues that have emerged largely as consequences of three decades of reform.

During the Reform Era, politics in China has become significantly more institutionalized at several levels. At the elite level, positions of great power have come back into alignment with formal office. Incumbents of the leadership posts now serve regular terms specified by law and party regulations. Thus, President and Party General Secretary Jiang Zemin and Premier Zhu Rongji yielded to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, and Hu and Wen will in turn step down in 2012 in favor of Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang. To be sure, formally retired leaders continue to exercise influence, but they no longer can expect an indefinite period of influence or, if relatively recent history is a reliable guide, to hold much informal authority more than a few years beyond their incumbency. The top leadership has become more truly collective, leaving behind the Mao and, to a lesser degree, Deng model of a dominant leader wielding partly personal and partly institutional power.

Below the political summit, political institutions have reached a level of stability, complexity and adaptability that seemed unimaginable amid the wreckage of the Cultural Revolution and that far surpasses anything found in the Mao years. The scope of authority of ministries and other central government units, provincial and sub-provincial governmental entities have become far clearer. Although informal connections and opinion groups still matter, laws, rules and policies are made through much more regularized formal—as well as informal—procedures. In the polity more broadly, the top-elite-defined interest and will of “the people” or the “good classes” has given way to a more conventional and generally more stable pattern of “bureaucratic politics” (with bargaining and jostling among major institutional actors) and “interest representation” or “state corporatism” with Chinese characteristics (with party and state entities accommodating and coopting the views of diverse groups in an increasingly complex society).

This relatively robust institutionalization has occurred within (and partly alongside) political structures that remain at least vestigially Leninist and rooted in the pre-Reform Era. Although the Chinese Communist Party has retreated from what had been—always in principle and often in practice—a pervasive role in politics and policy, the party and its leadership have retained a “leading role,” setting the agenda for policies and laws and retaining the means (and the claimed right and obligation) to do more. The party deeply penetrates and steers the state. State officials are largely party members who are answerable to party committees within their units and whose appointments and promotions depend on party vetting. Party bodies exercise much power that in other systems would be state or governmental power (including, most strikingly, the authority to, in effect, incarcerate miscreant party members). At the apex of the Chinese political system, the offices of president of the state and general secretary of the party are held by the same person, and the premier and other top government officials are reliably members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo—which is the highest authority within the party and is routinely and accurately described as the most powerful political body in China.

The party hierarchy is nominally bottom-up, with lower levels selecting delegates to the national Party Congress, which selects a Central Committee, which in turn selects the members of the Politburo and its Standing Committee, including the General Secretary. In practice, the institutions operate in a much more top-down fashion. The members of a new Standing Committee and Politburo, for example, are selected through complex and opaque processes in which the preceding (and earlier) generations of top leaders play a large role and the supposed party electorate plays a largely ceremonial one. So too, elections to the Central Committee include some contestation, but generally among a limited slate set by higher elites. The party also has functional and geographical structures. Bureaus or offices within the party have responsibilities for such matters as international affairs, personnel, “united front” work (with non-communist parties and other groups) and so on. Each province (and each of the few large, provincial-level cities) has a party secretary whose power equals and generally surpasses that of the governor, and the pattern is replicated at lower levels.

The state structure is in many respects parallel. Legislative institutions are nominally “bottom up,” selected (except at the most basic level) by means of indirect election, with lower-level people’s congresses selecting higher-level ones, including the highest-level National People’s Congress (NPC). In practice, the selection process is one of limited contestation. Even the direct popular elections at the most basic-level people’s congresses are constrained, with unorthodox or opposition candidates almost never winning. In theory, the NPC (including its Standing Committee) wields supreme sovereign power, interpreting and amending the constitution, making the laws and selecting top state and government officers. In practice, many of the NPC’s constitutional powers have lain fallow. Much legislation is shaped by the party and drafted by government ministries. This executive dominance has faded somewhat in recent years, as the NPC has acquired a larger and more professional staff and has developed, or come to represent, distinctive policy viewpoints. Interestingly, it has often taken relatively “conservative” or “populist” stands, delaying or weakening some of the more ambitiously pro-market and socialism-dismantling legislation, including on matters such as bankruptcy (an issue vitally important to employees of inefficient state-owned industrial enterprises) and property rights (where more robust protections drew fire for going too far in allowing privatization of the most fundamental of collectively owned assets). The NPC’s nominal power to choose state and government leaders is in practice exercised through a more shadowy and informal process steered by the existing party-state leadership.

Much of the work of the Chinese state occurs on the executive side. Headed by the premier, the State Council and its subordinate commissions and ministries (such as the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Finance and a commission overseeing state-owned assets) comprise the functionally differentiated and nationally centralized structure of the Chinese administrative state. The ministries draft laws, make and implement rules within their areas of authority and press their agendas in the informal bargaining and tussling of top-level bureaucratic politics. This functionally defined structure coexists with a geographic one. Each province has a provincial governor and provincial government and the structure is largely replicated at lower levels. The result of this structure is a pattern of “dual rule” in which the provincial branch of a central ministry (say, the Henan Bureau of Commerce) is accountable both to its headquarters in Beijing (the Ministry of Commerce) and to the local government of which it is a part (Henan province). This creates a problematic and pervasive tension between *tiao* (the vertical structure) and *kuai* (the geographic “piece”). The principal complaint during the Reform Era—which began with a wave of decentralization of power over economic policy and economic actors—is that *kuai* has come to dominate *tiao*, bringing excessive decentralization and inadequate responsiveness to central directives and discipline.

At the broad base of this pyramidal structure are the grassroots and, more generally, lower-level cadres who are the contact points between party-state and society, who interpret and implement the party’s and state’s directives, and who must do much of the hands-on work of governing. In recent years, there has been a good deal of concern and some flux in the metrics higher-ups use to evaluate lower-level (including grassroots) cadre performance. The economic performance of the areas in their jurisdiction has consistently been a principal criterion. Maintaining social stability has become an increasingly important component, potentially ruinous to a career when it is not satisfied. Particularly in the rural areas, keeping birth rates within the bounds established by sometimes-draconian population control policies has been another key factor. And in recent years there has been growing talk of “green GDP” (that is, environmental performance) and other “human development” or wellbeing-based measures of performance.

In addition to the major institutions of party and state / government, China’s institutional structure includes the courts and the military. The People’s Liberation Army occupies a peculiar and comparatively autonomous place in the PRC political structure (as it does in Chinese communist history). Departing from the internationally common model of subordination to a Ministry of Defense (and, in turn, the premier and/or president), the PLA answers largely to a Central Military Commission, the chairmanship of which is the third of the “big three” posts (along with state president and party general secretary) now regularly held by China’s top leader. The courts in China are comparatively weak, with extremely limited powers of judicial review, formal accountability to legislative bodies at the same level, staffing by party-vetted judges, and (although the pattern is increasingly complex and uneven) vulnerability in some cases to much political influence and interference.

As this all indicates, the Chinese political system has some distinctive and some broadly Leninist or residually communist traits. But it also has much in common with the “East Asian Model” (derived from the experiences of Japan, Korea, Taiwan and other similar entities during their periods of rapid development) and, more generally, the “authoritarian developmental state.” The key features of these models (and especially the East Asian Model) include many parallels to Reform Era China. The dominant policy goal has been rapid economic development by means of: market-consistent and relatively internationally open economic policies, but ones steered and constrained by the state; largely informal relationships between state regulators and regulated firms; and relatively informal, not densely law-governed economic relations among economic actors themselves. This all has coexisted with an absence of democratic politics: a lack of meaningfully contested elections for positions that exercise real political power; an absence of government truly under law; and repression of political dissent.

On some accounts, the “East Asian culture” (with its values of harmony, hierarchy, group-orientation, and so on) that China presumptively shares with the avatars of the East Asian Model resonated with and supported this model (and potentially limited its replicability elsewhere). On other accounts, the explanatory factors lay in more structural or situational factors, including the advantages that “late developing” states have in discerning a policy path to growth and transformation, and the disciplines and opportunities presented by the positions that they could occupy in a relatively highly integrated global

economy. In the East Asian Model's exemplars, of course, growth eventually slowed and authoritarian politics gave way to democracy, but only after reaching levels of development well above that of today's China and amid international and domestic pressures for political change that the regime in Beijing has not yet felt.

CHINA'S AUTHORITARIAN POLITICS: NEW CHALLENGES BORN OF REFORM

The crucial political question for contemporary China is whether its authoritarian political order can remain resilient amid new and daunting challenges—ones that are in many ways products of the economic success of the first waves of reform policies. From early in the Reform Era, the Chinese regime has relied on “performance legitimacy.” Deng famously declared, “to get rich is glorious” and, compared to pre-Reform-Era baselines, China as a whole has enjoyed extraordinary increases in wealth: three decades and more of roughly double-digit growth leading to a GDP of nearly \$4 trillion and to per capita incomes that have moved China into the lower-middle income group in the World Bank's rankings; the biggest poverty-reduction program in human history, lifting 300 to 400 million people above the very low standard commonly used in international comparisons; life expectancy, literacy and infant mortality rates well above the norms for countries at China's income level; a burgeoning middle class now nearing 100 million, and all that comes with it—tens of millions of private cars, more cellphone users than there are people in the United States, and so on.

But new challenges have come with this success. According to the Pew Global Attitudes survey, large majorities of Chinese citizens view inflation, inequality, corruption, pollution, and, increasingly, product safety as “big” or “very big” concerns. Growth has bred severe economic inequality. China's Gini coefficient—the standard economic measure of inequality—is significantly higher than in most developed countries, much of East Asia and many other developing countries. Urban to rural per capita income ratios are more than 3:1. The per capita income gap between China's richest and poorest provinces is an order of magnitude. The gap between the rich cities of the coast and the less developed and more rural hinterland is cavernous and growing. China has more than 100 billionaires (in U.S. dollar terms), second only to the United States. At the same time, many millions of peasants live in primitive conditions and 100 to 200 million internal migrants have left their homes, often to work at insecure jobs for modest wages in China's vast manufacturing and construction sectors.

This rising inequality, and discontent about some of the policies and practices that have produced it, have been among the key sources of China's mounting problems of social unrest. The number of “mass incidents”—a term with no clear or official meaning but that is generally thought to refer to protests of a relatively substantial scale or disruptive effect (and perhaps triggering a response from public security units)—has climbed sharply in recent years. It is now estimated at well over 100,000 annually. Less dramatically, millions of aggrieved citizens file petitions with the government and courts and the like (sometimes through special “letters and visits” offices at government and judicial organs) to register their complaints and to seek redress. Their grievances focus primarily on abuses at the hands of authorities or the authorities' inadequate fulfillment of their roles, including protection of citizens' rights and safety. Pervasive problems and, especially, dramatic incidents fuel media storms (often crossing the platforms of an increasingly free traditional media, harder-to-control nontraditional web-based media, and a burgeoning universe of web-postings) that reflect, and sometimes stoke, popular discontent with how China is governed (or not governed). Concern about these developments and what they portend—and the need to respond—underpinned the defining slogan of the Hu Jintao years: the quest for a “harmonious society.”

Among the biggest sources of discontent and unrest in recent years has been property seizures. Local governments, often acting in collaboration with real estate developers, have been taking urban land for redevelopment without the consent of—and with below-market compensation to—residents and businesses. Sometimes the victims of expropriation resist. This is the phenomenon of “nailhouses”—houses whose occupants are tough as nails and who risk being hammered down by the authorities. Sometimes, the houses quite literally stick up like nails, as in the case of the famous Chongqing nailhouse which perched precariously atop a small pillar of earth as the area around it was dug out for a construction site. The media savvy couple who owned the Chongqing house waged an impressive media and blogosphere battle and won a very substantial increase in compensation over the initial price offered. But that relatively happy outcome is rare among urban residents facing expropriation.

In some rural areas, the land expropriation problem is severe. Especially at the fringes of China's burgeoning cities, peasants who hold multi-decade land leases (the consequence of the policies of returning to household farming that were the cornerstone of the first wave of reform) have faced forced surrender of their land rights. There are rules for compensation. But the terms are somewhat vague and flexible. Payments sometimes are diverted corruptly before they reach those whose rights are taken. Sometimes peasants lack the documentation needed to establish their rights. And the maximum compensation to which rural residents and communities are entitled is based on the relatively low value of agricultural land, not the vastly greater market value of the land once it is taken and reclassified as urban land available for commercial, industrial or urban residential construction.

The regime has responded with some regulatory measures to address this growing source of rural discontent and the hard-pressed economic conditions of much of China's vast rural population, and to limit urban expropriation as well. As in many areas, implementation has been problematic (not least because local officials and local governments capture a large portion of

the economic surplus from real estate development), and the pro-equity policies have been modest in conception.

Environmental concerns are another trigger for popular dissatisfaction and action. Pollution is a serious problem, with China being home to more than half of the world's twenty lowest air-quality cities, with more than two-thirds of its major waterways severely polluted, and with Chinese (who comprise less than one-fifth of the world's population) suffering nearly one-third of the world's premature deaths due to pollution. Environmental issues have become a major trigger for popular protests (tens of thousands per year) and a major focus of China's emerging (although often besieged) NGO sector. In one remarkable (but rare) example, largely middle class protesters stopped an already-green-lighted chemical factory in the coastal city of Xiamen in 2007.

Several crises and scandals have become the focal points of another broadly related set of challenges born of perceived failures by the authorities to fulfill the fundamental—and, indeed, Confucian—duty of a good government: to keep the people safe. (This failure also has cast doubt as well on the regime's ability or will to follow the sage—and, indeed, Confucian—advice that remaining in power requires retaining the confidence of the people.) Among the most dramatic recent instances were the melamine-tainted milk product scandal and the Sichuan earthquake. In both cases, government failure to regulate—to detect and police food safety in a sector already known to be beset with such problems, and to enforce building codes in the construction of schools which collapsed at a disproportionately high rate in the earthquake zone—led to popular anger over the regime's failure to keep people (and particularly children) safe. Central authorities reacted with a combination of harsh penalties for dairy company officers, some punishments for local officials, expressions of sympathy and commitments to improve regulation, imposition of restrictions on initially critical press coverage, quashing of lawsuits brought or contemplated by parents of killed and injured children, and state-structured, relatively modest and in-principle discretionary compensation to victims.

Corruption scandals have been a more perennial variation on this theme. According to the World Bank cross-national comparisons, China ranks at around the thirtieth percentile from the bottom, ahead of Russia and some Southeast Asian states but far behind other large economies and the rest of East Asia. Notorious cases include the mid-1990s mayor of Beijing who was convicted for corruption in real estate development deals, the mid-2000s party chief in Shanghai who was jailed for misusing state pension funds (among other offenses), and the head of the state food and drug administration who was executed in 2007 for taking bribes to improperly approve drugs.

Other high-profile incidents arise from lower-level officials' abuses of citizens that catch on with the media (both old and new), among reformist and critical intellectuals and in popular consciousness. Sun Zhigang was a student mistaken for a migrant worker, taken into custody and beaten to death in a center where illegal internal migrants were kept pending forced return to their lawful place of residents. Cop-killer Yang Jia's case garnered significant public sympathy, partly because of popular anger over broader patterns of police malfeasance and partly because China's criminal justice system made so little accommodation for an obviously mentally ill defendant. To many Chinese observers, there was something all too typical—even paradigmatic—about the meme-generating incident in which a local official's son expressed confidence in his de facto immunity in a hit and run case by proclaiming “I am the son of Li Gang.”

So far, recent popular anger and discontent have targeted primarily the lower reaches of the party-state. There has been no hint of a repeat of the protests that led to the 1989 Tiananmen Movement's challenge to the top leadership's authority (although this is in part attributable to the regime's determination to prevent something like that from happening again). Opinion polls—including ones conducted by neutral and even foreign entities—show much popular dissatisfaction with local government and much higher ratings for the central leadership (although there are reasons to be somewhat skeptical about these results, given that such answers are consistent with the regime's own narrative).

RISING TO THE CHALLENGE? PATHS OF REFORM, REACTION AND RESILIENCE

It is clear that Chinese leaders know they face problems of existing or potential discontent and delegitimation. They and their advisers are also well aware of the arguments that China's Reform-Era successes—which have created an increasingly wealthy and economically and socially complex and sophisticated society, a large and rapidly growing middle class, and a country that has become greatly open to myriad foreign influences—may create pressure for profound political change. As one would expect of a party that triumphed against initially long odds and a regime that has survived several mortal perils (including some of its own making), China's rulers and those who advise them have considered several ways in which they might rise to meet these challenges, pursuing some while rejecting others.

First, democracy—long a part of Chinese communist rhetoric—would be, if implemented, a fundamental political change. China still ranks near the bottom of all major international comparative indices of democracy. In the World Bank global governance metrics, China scores far lower on the factors that capture level of democracy than it does on government effectiveness or even rule of law and control of corruption. Reform-Era China has experimented in limited ways with democratization. Beginning in the 1980s, China introduced elections at the village level. More than half a million rural localities hold elections now, but the extent of democracy varies. Roughly one third have free and open nominating processes.

Under half have secret ballots. Less than three-quarters have an open count of ballots. Incumbents and orthodox candidates have clear advantages and high success rates. Still, the elections often do offer means for monitoring and checking poor or abusive governance at the local levels. The village election model has not been extended to higher levels of governance. The focus of grassroots democratization in very recent years has shifted somewhat away from elections and toward other still-modest and largely experimental or fragmentary reforms, including: deliberative or consultative democracy—the opportunity for groups of residents to discuss at length budgets and expenditures (and sometimes other issues) with officials; or open governance initiatives to make government operations, decisions and rules more transparent to citizens; or opportunities for public input through hearings and comments on proposed laws and rules.

For slightly higher levels of government, including the county-level people's congresses and higher-level people's congresses, there has been little progress toward democracy. Unofficial and heterodox candidates have faced impediments, harassment and retribution. Their numbers have been small and their prospects for success dismal. For the National People's Congress, perhaps the most noteworthy democratic structural change was the elimination of a "rotten borough" system that had entailed severe underrepresentation of rural residents.

Advocates for more systematic and thoroughgoing democratic change have faced a severely hostile environment, with some of the most prominent and ardent facing lengthy prison terms. Examples include essayist Wei Jingsheng from the late 1970s Democracy Wall movement, several intellectuals and student leaders who inspired or steered the 1989 Tiananmen movement, and co-author of Charter '08 (a 2008 blueprint for constitutional and democratic reform) and Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo. As noted earlier, the top leadership has rejected Western-style electoral democracy, separation of powers and a full-fledged multi-party system as unsuited to China and a foreign plot to "peacefully evolve" China. They have instead favored strategies of coopting emerging economic elites and intellectuals, or pursuing only loosely institutionalized and limited democratization within the existing communist-party dominated authoritarian structure (the so-called "intra-party democracy" agenda). The question for the future is whether China can remain an exception to the pattern of changes seen elsewhere: strong pressures for democratization that have accompanied the attainment of relatively high levels of affluence elsewhere and that succeeded in achieving relatively peaceful democratic transformations in several of the states that were exemplars of the East Asian Model of development.

Second, movement toward the rule of law or at least rule by law has been another path of partial reform, whether as complement to, or substitute for, possible democratic change. China now ranks not far below median in the World Bank governance indicators for the rule of law. It ranks above average for its lower-middle (per capita) income group. By any measure there has been a vast expansion of law, legality and the legal system in contemporary China. Several million citizens each year bring civil law suits. Judgments are enforced at a rate that is troublingly low (below half) but that is consistent with what one finds in ostensibly robust legal systems elsewhere. Around 100,000 citizens sue the Chinese state annually under a law that permits administrative litigation against government entities, and they prevail at a rate that compares favorably to that of many systems in the West. Millions invoke legal rights and legal rules through the more informal processes of letters and visits and the like.

But these positive aspects are only part of the story. By the later years of the Hu Jintao administration, judicial policy had shifted toward taking policy and mass opinion into account alongside the law, and courts and potential litigants were pressed to handle disputes through informal mediation. High plaintiff success rates in the relatively small number of administrative law suits during the Reform Era may reflect that only the most serious and most winnable cases are brought in a system where reports of retaliation for challenging local authorities remain a problem. Problems of underenforcement and poor implementation plague some aspects of the system. The judiciary faces challenges of limited competence, resources, honesty and autonomy.

The quality of courts and lawyers is highly uneven, varying across more developed and less developed regions. The level of legality varies across highly political and more ordinary, often economic subject matters. It also varies across cases involving parties that are more or less tightly connected to—or influential with, or economically important for—local authorities. Those authorities can and do engage in "local protectionism" and other rule-of-law-undermining practices through their exercise of various levels of influence over courts, through party organs within the courts, party and government bodies that oversee the judiciary, and the government's control over judicial purse-strings.

Constituencies and social and economic forces favoring greater rule of law are formidable and likely durable: the functional demands of a complex and globalized economy; a rising middle class seeking and expecting autonomy and security; a fast-growing cadre of law-minded lawyers, judges and legally trained intellectuals; "winners" in China's reforms who see law as a means for protecting their gains; and "losers" who see law as a means for redress and social justice. But these all face still-formidable resistance and pushback from a regime that sees a robustly independent judiciary and legal system as possible means to a "color revolution" and legal intellectuals and activist lawyers as particularly nettlesome critics.

Third, China's leaders show signs of returning to a new version of an old tool: ideology. While old-style Maoist or communist doctrine now fails to move a jaundiced public, other ideas and ideals still can. These include, most prominently, nationalism.

China's new-won global influence and stature (underwritten by the dazzling economic growth of the Reform Era) and the international criticism and apparent lack of respect that great powers and others in the global community still direct at "China" are a volatile combination. Generally pro-regime intellectuals and commentators have begun to articulate a "Chinese model"—a different, Chinese way that has proven to be a successful route to development and stability. Although there is much official ambivalence about pressing (or even articulating) such a model, its underlying idea has provided an increasingly powerful tool, at home as well as abroad, to rebut foreign criticisms. It has also provided a means for the regime to appeal to, and claim leadership of, a growing popular nationalism (which regime propaganda has often stoked). On another front in the ideological war, the regime has adapted to the spread of the web in China. It has not only deployed the world's largest internet police force to shut down some dissident voices; it has also encouraged the expression of nationalist and pro-regime sentiments and even fostered the "fifty cent party" (people who post orthodox sentiments for a payment that is reputed to be one-half of the basic Chinese currency unit—less than a U.S. dime).

Fourth, and still more traditionally, there is the option of repression. The regime has maintained the requisite near-monopoly of coercive force. Building a "harmonious society" has included efforts to "harmonize" (read, suppress) perceived significant challengers to the status quo and party-state authority. China has undertaken massive investment to support the policy of "protecting stability" (*weiwen*), including creating a specialized paramilitary force for coping with internal unrest. The authorities have deployed these and longer-standing resources (such as police and networks of informants) against several seemingly or assertedly threatening targets, including: the Falun Gong spiritual movement (whose most extreme devotees have committed public suicide to protest the PRC's ban on the group as an "evil cult" and whose leader has called for the overthrow of the regime), and participants in mass ethnic unrest among Tibetans and Muslim Uighurs (whom authorities often brand as separatists and terrorists), as well as the conventional and smaller-scale targets such as participants in more isolated popular protests in the Han ethnic Chinese heartland and dissident intellectuals.

Finally, whatever mix of strategies the Chinese leadership applies to deal with what are, by any fair measure, daunting challenges, it would be rash to assume that the regime will not adapt and survive. The Chinese political system has been resilient. The Chinese state remains highly capable, well-stocked with competent officials and functionaries, and possessed of vast material resources and much valuable experience. In the World Bank global governance measures, China ranks substantially above the international median for "government effectiveness"—something particularly remarkable in such a vast and relatively poor country, and one facing tensions from ethnicity, inequality and rapid social change. The regime retains not only an effective monopoly of coercive force and a strong will to remain in power; it also continues to occupy virtually the entire space for organized politics in China. Moreover, Chinese citizens as a whole remain relatively satisfied with the regime and its ability to deliver the goods (with more than 80 percent telling Pew Global Attitudes pollsters that they are satisfied with the economy and that they believe the country is on the right track). And many are receptive to the leadership's argument that any radical political change risks social chaos and severe damage to the material well-being and the national strength and security that have been achieved under the Reform-Era regime's leadership and policies.

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