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CHINA

Democratic Values Supporting an Authoritarian System

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AS THE SOLE NONDEMOCRACY among our eight East Asian political systems, China provides a comparative benchmark for assessing the role of values in democratic transition and consolidation. In an age when democratic values enjoy high prestige, how does an authoritarian regime make itself legitimate in the eyes of its citizens? Or, on the contrary, does the spread of democratic values present a threat to an authoritarian regime's stability? How tight, in other words, is the link between political culture and regime type?

This chapter will show that many of the same democratic values that undergird the old and new democracies of Asia are also widespread in China. Yet in China, these values functioned—at least at the time of our survey—to engender citizen support for the nondemocratic regime. The key to this paradox is the elasticity of the idea of democracy itself. For most Chinese, the current Chinese regime is already democratic in many ways that matter to them. In what sense this is so is a major theme of the analysis that follows.

Our findings suggest that citizens do not always draw the same stark contrast between democratic and authoritarian regimes that political scientists normally do. Many Chinese rate their political system more highly on the scale of democracy than citizens do in countries whose political systems

are democratic in fact. Likewise, Chinese citizens trust their political institutions more than citizens in any of the other societies included in the surveys; people in China enjoy a sense of political efficacy equal to that of citizens in Japan and Taiwan; and people in China are more optimistic about their society's future democratic development than in any other society in the EAB survey except Thailand. These attitudes may be surprising. The analysis that follows explores their sources.

1. HISTORICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

At the time of our survey, the Chinese political system was what Linz and Stepan call a "mature posttotalitarian regime" (Linz and Stepan 1996b). Under the founding ruler of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Mao Zedong (1893–1976), the country had been a totalitarian system in the classic sense. Its features included a single ruling party, a dominant state, a charismatic ruler, a suppressed and atomized civil society, an enforced ideological orthodoxy, and rule by terror. After Mao's death, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Deng Xiaoping (the most influential leader from 1978 to 1992) initiated a policy of "reform and opening," which involved partial marketization of the economy, limited social and institutional pluralism, liberalization of control over people's private lives, and the embrace of globalization in order to spur economic growth.

Deng's regime replaced the command economy with a "socialist market economy." Economic reform started in the villages, where the government introduced a "responsibility system" that contracted state-owned land to individual peasant households and allowed peasants to determine the way they used the land. The new policy also encouraged citizens to operate privately owned businesses in both urban and rural areas. Special Economic Zones were established in the early 1980s to attract foreign investment.

Under reform and opening, the economy grew rapidly. From 1978 to 2002, annual per capita GDP growth averaged 9.68%. GDP per capita rose from $165 in 1978 to $1,106 in 2002 (in 2000 constant U.S. dollars).[1] Rural residents moved around the country looking for work, cities grew, and a large middle class emerged. Along with these trends grew aspirations to democracy, expressed in intermittent prodemocracy movements and student demonstrations starting in 1978 and peaking in the 1989 Tiananmen student demonstrations, which were supported by weeks of citizen demonstrations in nearly four hundred cities around the country (Nathan 1985; Goldman

1994; Goldman 2005; Goldman and Perry 2002; Zhang 2002). After a period of indecision and internal power struggle, the party violently repressed the 1989 prodemocracy movement and reimposed political control.

The party did not, however, permanently roll back either economic reform or social liberalization. These continued after Deng's death in 1997 under the leadership of Jiang Zemin (CCP General Secretary 1989–2002). At the time of our survey (March through June 2002), the party was preparing to transfer leadership to Hu Jintao (born in 1942). Based on Hu's image and the signals surrounding the transition, our respondents would not have expected marked changes in the ruling party's policies toward political pluralism, individual freedom, the economy, or in other domains; indeed, in the event, no radical policy changes occurred after the transition (Nathan and Gilley 2003).

From the point of view of a citizen, the Chinese political system in 2002 displayed a combination of old and new features. On the side of continuity with the past, the CCP was still a selective political elite consisting of about 8% of the population. Party members answered to tight political discipline from the party leadership in Beijing, which controlled their careers and issued bulletins instructing them what to think and say. Through its members serving as officials in state organs, the party controlled government agencies, the national, provincial, and local legislatures, and the courts. Party members dominated life in the villages and kept an eye on the daily activities of urban residents. The party exercised dominant influence in the military, finance, heavy industry, education, and journalism. In some spheres of the economy and culture the party shared influence with nonparty elites so long as they presented no challenge to the monopoly of political power.

Political life also showed some new features. Thanks to the growth of private and foreign-invested enterprises under Deng's economic reforms, the state was no longer the sole employer. The party gave up trying to make citizens believe in its ideology (as long as they did not publicly challenge it) and abandoned the classic Maoist control mechanisms of self- and mutual monitoring by citizens and mass campaigns against class enemies. While the media remained party controlled, they competed for market share by carrying sensational news and a variety of opinions on nonsensitive matters. The widespread use of the Internet, email, and instant messaging increased the government's difficulties in controlling the flow of information.

Modest institutional changes were introduced, but fell short of democratization. The National People's Congress (NPC) in 1979 passed a law that allowed for the direct election of delegates to township and county-level

people's congresses under controlled circumstances (Shi 1999b). Elected deputies to various levels of people's congress occasionally asserted some independence. For example, three provincial congresses elected candidates not endorsed by the CCP as deputy governors in 1987 and 1988. There were five such cases in the 1992 and again in the 1996 elections.[2] Some seven hundred party nominees to county-level offices were rejected by local people's congresses in each election.[3] The NPC itself started to play a more assertive role (O'Brien 1994b; O'Brien 1990).

The change that affected the largest number of citizens was the introduction in 1987 of semicompetitive elections for members and officers of village committees. The village in China is considered a self-governing grassroots unit of society rather than part of the hierarchy of government. Still, village officials are responsible for allocation of land (for agricultural use and housing), tax collection, family planning, and economic development. The village elections were introduced by the chairman of NPC, Peng Zhen, who thought the party's control over the villages depended on finding local leaders whom rural residents could accept. Over the course of a protracted struggle between central-level reformers and entrenched local officials, the village committee election process became increasingly competitive. By the third or fourth round of elections, which took place at different times in different villages, peasants learned that they could use the process to get rid of unpopular local leaders, although they could not affect the central government policies that all local leaders were obligated to enforce (Li and O'Brien 1999; O'Brien and Li 2000; Shi 1999c). At the time of our survey, 81.6% of the villages we surveyed had held elections, 70% of which involved multiple candidates.

The Chinese political system in 2002 was thus authoritarian, but had undergone significant liberalization affecting citizens' economic activities and private lives, while promoting a rhetoric and some minor practices of democracy.

2. THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

Given this rapidly changing environment, Chinese citizens could be expected to have a complex and perhaps internally contradictory set of ideas about democracy. Discussion of democracy had been pervasive in Chinese political life for over a century. Since the fall of the last imperial dynasty in 1911, every Chinese regime, no matter how authoritarian in practice, has claimed to pursue democracy for its citizens.[4]

But democracy can mean many things. After 1949, the Chinese communist regime indoctrinated its citizens in the idea of "socialist democracy." Based on a Marxist analysis of social classes, socialist democracy is described as more advanced than "bourgeois democracy" because it serves the majority of the population ("the people") while depriving of rights those who would exploit others or destabilize the state ("enemies of the people"). Under socialist democracy the ruling party listens to the people (the "mass line") and may consult with experts, but it does not adopt Western-style political competition or separation of powers, which the theory claims are tools used by the bourgeoisie to hoodwink the majority (Mao 1949).

To what extent are the Chinese public's ideas of democracy marked by these concepts, and to what extent are they instead influenced by global trends that identify democracy with civil liberties and political pluralism? The EAB survey posed an open-ended question, "What does democracy mean to you?" Each person was encouraged to give up to three answers. The responses were coded under a common scheme applied to all eight societies. The results are presented in chapter 1, table 1.3.

The table shows that China has a high level of "don't know/no answer" responses to this question, second only to Japan in the EAB surveys. Before proceeding with the rest of the analysis, it is important to find out whether the high level of item nonresponses in China was attributable to the fact that the meaning of democracy was really beyond the comprehension of many respondents (as the answer "don't know" implies), or was instead a response to the fear of answering such a controversial question when living under an authoritarian regime (Shi 1996). This issue—cognitive deficiency versus political fear—will affect our interpretation of both this table and the answers to other sensitive questions throughout the China questionnaire.[5]

Three statistical tests help to answer this question. First, if DKs and refusals were used by respondents to hide their true opinions, educated people would be more likely to give DKs and refusals than people with less education, since educated people are more likely to have opinions independent of official ideology that they are afraid to express. If, however, "don't know" really means "don't know," education should be inversely correlated to nonresponse. Second, we can assume that those who describe themselves as interested in politics are more likely both to provide a meaning for the word *democracy* and to be aware of any risks involved in sharing their views. Thus, under the political fear hypothesis those who say they are interested in politics should be more likely than other respondents to give nonresponses to

the question, while under the cognitive deficiency hypothesis nonresponses should be more likely to come from those who say they are not interested in politics.

Third, if the political fear hypothesis is correct, we should find item nonresponse to be positively correlated with a measure of political fear, while we expect to find no such correlation if cognitive deficiency is at work. The China version of the EAB questionnaire included two items designed to assess political fear, asking whether respondents were afraid of being reported if they criticized government policies or national leaders. Substantial numbers of people answered in the affirmative: 27.6% said yes to the first question and 22.5% to the second.[6]

The results of the three tests are displayed in table 9.1. The analysis separates "don't know" from "no answer" in order to see whether there is any difference in the correlates of the two forms of nonresponse. One might theorize, for example, that those who refuse to respond out of political fear are more likely to say "no answer" than "don't know." But there is no difference. The results in all six cells support the conclusion that both forms of nonresponse are the result of cognitive deficiency and that neither is the result of political fear. Less-educated persons and those who say they are not interested in politics are more likely to decline to answer the question with either "don't know" or "no answer." Although political fear exists in China, it does not affect respondents' decision whether or not to give substantive answers to this question.

Among those who gave substantive answers to the question, democracy was perceived in positive terms by every respondent, a remarkable degree of unanimity in a survey research setting. While democracy's image is overwhelmingly positive throughout Asia (the highest percentage of negative

TABLE 9.1 CORRELATION OFPOLITICAL FEAR WITH NA AND DK

(Pearson's *r*)

	NO ANSWER	DON'T KNOW
Education	-.078**	-.341**
Interest in politics	-.122**	-.245**
Fear of criticizing government	-.017	-.035

Notes: N = 3183.

** Correlation significant at 0.01 level (two-tailed).

responses was around 5%, found in Hong Kong and Taiwan), China was the only one of our eight political systems where the substantive responses were entirely positive.

Chinese were more likely than other respondents in Asia to associate democracy with populism ("by and for the people"). More than one-quarter of Chinese respondents gave answers in this category, compared to numbers under 10% in other parts of Asia, with the exception of Taiwan. The two most frequent responses that we coded under this heading were "the people are masters of the country" and "the authorities listen to people's opinions." Both of these responses are compatible not only with the doctrine of socialist democracy but also with classic Confucian ideas of benevolent dictatorship, since they do not require competitive political pluralism to be put into effect. We also coded in this category the more than 3.9% of respondents who defined democracy by reference to the official CCP concept of "democratic centralism."

The next-largest clusters of ideas about democracy were those associated with universal liberal-democratic values, which we coded as "political rights, institutions, and processes" and "freedom and liberty." Over one-fifth of the sample said that democracy involves political participation in ways such as voting in elections, exercising influence over decision making, and exercising majority rule. Here the Chinese sample stood around the middle of the Asian samples, mentioning participation less often than respondents in Thailand and Mongolia and more often than respondents in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, and the Philippines.

More than one-quarter of our respondents equated democracy with ideas like freedom of the press, freedom of belief, freedom of religion, and general political freedom. Some specifically mentioned freedom of association, even though it remains officially prohibited. Although this percentage is not low, all the other Asian samples gave higher percentages of responses in this category.

The analysis so far shows the mixed effects of decades of indoctrination in the official concept of socialist democracy plus a quarter-century's exposure to Western liberal ideas of democracy. To explore more precisely the relative influence of these two sets of ideas, we compared the percentage of respondents who gave answers in *only* the categories of "social equality and justice," "good governance," and "by and for the people" (who may be seen as thinking exclusively in terms of the ideas promoted by the party) with the percentage of respondents who gave answers in *both* the categories of "freedom and liberty" and "political rights, institutions,

and processes" (who may be seen as incorporating both prongs of the Western idea of democracy as rights plus participation).[7] The result of this exercise is that 18.3% of respondents defined democracy exclusively in populist and/or socialist terms, and 15.4% defined democracy in terms of both liberty and participation. This suggests that the official view of democracy remains dominant among the Chinese public but that views from the West have made considerable headway. Indeed, an additional 19.9% of respondents mentioned liberty or participation once, and 6.2% mentioned values in these categories more than once, implying that liberal notions of democracy have established a strong beachhead in Chinese popular thinking.

To probe further how popular liberal-democratic ideas are in China, the China questionnaire included six additional questions. The responses, which are reported in table 9.2, reinforce the conclusion that the concept of democracy among people in China is a mixed one. In the first two items, we asked respondents whether they would support selecting national-level leaders through competitive elections and a system of competition among multiple political parties. Both of these practices are central to liberal democracy and are ruled out in the official concept of socialist democracy. Seen from a liberal-democratic perspective, the responses were contradictory. While 84% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with having elections for national leaders, only 16.3% agreed or strongly agreed with multiparty competition. A liberal democrat would argue that elections for national leaders cannot be meaningful without political party competition to organize the election around competing interests. Most Chinese respondents, however, did not appear to make this connection.

Another standard component of liberal democracy is rule of law. We asked respondents whether it would be acceptable for the government to disregard the law when the country faces a difficult situation, and whether they think a judge should accept the views of the executive branch when deciding important cases. Nearly 86% of respondents believed the government should obey the law even in times of emergency. Yet nearly half were willing to see judges guided by the executive branch in important cases, while another fifth said they did not know the answer to this question; only about one-third dissented from this stance. These views show the influence of the ruling party's position. The party claims that the extraordinary measures it has sometimes taken in times of crisis are lawful. It also states that law is political and that judges should therefore accept the guidance of the party in important cases.

TABLE 9.2 LIBERAL CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRACY: CHINA

(Percent of respondents)

	STRONGLY LIBERAL	LIBERAL	NONLIBERAL	STRONGLY NONLIBERAL	DK
National leaders should be elected (agree)	16.7	67.3	6.0	0.2	9.9
Multiparty competition should be allowed (agree)	1.4	15.9	54.9	7.0	20.8
The government should obey laws even in a time of emergency (agree)[a]	85.6			3.4	11.0
On important cases, judges should seek the opinion of the local government (disagree)	2.2	33.5	42.5	2.1	19.8
The NPC should not constantly check the administration (disagree)	1.3	36.4	27.1	0.4	34.8
Political leaders should concentrate on their goals and ignore established procedures if necessary (disagree)	2.4	46.8	20.6	0.5	29.7

Notes: N = 3183.

Strongly liberal = strongly agree or strongly disagree, depending on the question. Liberal = agree or disagree. Nonliberal and Strongly nonliberal = the reverse.

[a] Original response categories are binary.

The last two questions were directed at the idea of constraints on political power. One asked whether respondents agreed that if the administration is constantly checked by the legislature (the National People's Congress), it cannot accomplish anything. The other asked whether respondents agreed that the most important thing for a political leader is to accomplish his goals even if he has to ignore established procedure. Respondents were again divided, with a plurality taking the liberal position on the question of legislative interference and a strong plurality taking the liberal position on the question of established procedures.

This exploration of what democracy means to Chinese respondents begins to explain the paradox noted at the outset of this chapter: that Chinese citizens support both the general idea of democracy and many of its specific components, while also supporting many attributes of what Westerners call authoritarian regimes—and they hold these views without an apparent sense of contradiction.

3. EVALUATIONS OF THE CURRENT REGIME

The Chinese regime also derives support from citizens' favorable perceptions of its performance. The EAB surveys invited respondents to evaluate their current regimes in several ways. One was to ask citizens to compare the degree to which the current and past regimes were democratic. The other was to ask citizens to evaluate the current regime's performance in providing both democratic liberties and effective public policies.

3.1. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE

We asked respondents to rate their current and past regimes on a 10-point scale. Since the other regimes included in this study are democratic (or in the case of Hong Kong, partially democratic), people in those societies were asked to rate, in addition to their current regimes, the regimes in place at the time of the "most recent authoritarian rule." In China, even though democratic transition has not occurred, we still wanted to get a sense of how people perceived the changes in political life that had taken place in the quarter century since Deng Xiaoping's rise to power. So we asked people to rate the system's level of dictatorship or democracy at two earlier points before the current period:

TABLE 9.3 PERCEPTIONS OF PAST AND CURRENT REGIMES: CHINA

(Percent of respondents)

REGIME TYPES	1970S REGIME	MID-1990S REGIME	CURRENT REGIME
Very dictatorial (1–2)	9.6	1.2	1.2
Somewhat dictatorial (3–5)	37.1	25.6	10.9
Somewhat democratic (6–8)	17.4	38.9	44.5
Very democratic (9–10)	4.3	6.4	18.4
DK/NA	31.6	28	25.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Mean on a 10-point scale	4.7	6.1	7.2

Notes: N = 3184.

DK/NA = Don't know/no answer.

before 1979 (Deng came to power at the end of 1978), and in the mid-1990s (when Deng's reforms were well advanced and appeared irreversible).

Table 9.3 reports the scores and mean ratings for the three time periods. The figures show that Chinese respondents perceived a marked level of political change in the democratic direction. DK/NA levels were the highest in Asia, ranging from one-quarter to nearly one-third of respondents, with the largest percentage of people feeling unable to rate the regime most distant in time. Over sixty percent of respondents described the current system as democratic in some degree. Only 12.1% rated it as somewhat or very dictatorial. As shown in figure 9.1, over 80% of respondents who answered the questions on the two regimes perceived a change in the democratic direction of 1 to 9 points in magnitude.

These figures are comparable to the other political systems in our study. In Japan, for example, 77% of respondents described the current system as democratic and 14% as dictatorial. In China, the mean evaluation of the old regime before Deng was 4.7, comparable to the means given to the authoritarian regimes in Korea, Taiwan, and the Philippines. The mean evaluation of the current regime was 7.2, higher than the levels in Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, and even Japan.

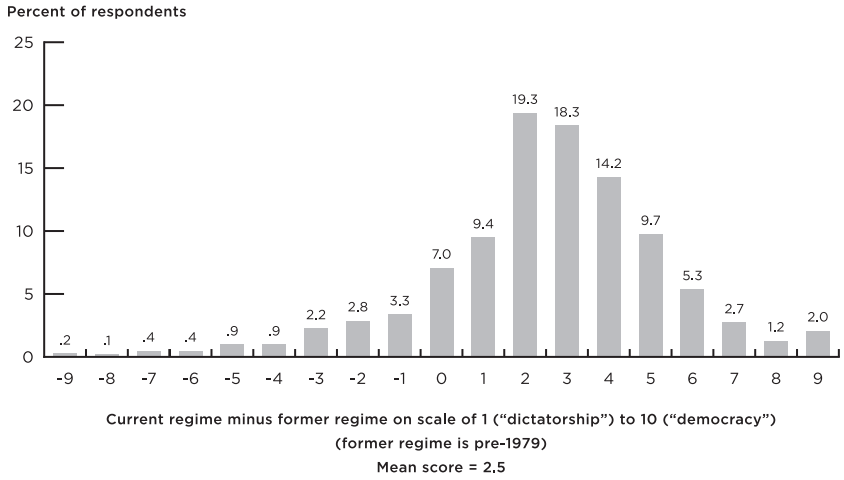

FIGURE 9.1 Perceived Regime Change: China

Indeed, the evaluation of the direction of change among citizens in China is equally or more positive than among the citizens of any other political system we surveyed except Thailand and Japan. This emerges in the comparison of the eight systems in table 1.7, chapter 1. Nearly 59% of Chinese who compared the current system with that before 1979 perceived a change in the direction of democracy. Excluding "don't knows," 63.9% of the population in China believed the nature of the regime had changed in a positive direction. If we add those who believe that democracy was continuing, then 89.8% perceived the regime in a positive way. Only 10.1% saw the regime as remaining authoritarian or as having retreated from a more democratic to a more authoritarian condition over the twenty years since the reform started in China in 1979. Respondents were more negative about the direction of change in four of the other seven societies in the EAB survey (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Mongolia, and the Philippines).

It may seem paradoxical that people living in an authoritarian political system evaluate their regime's level of democratic change more generously than respondents living in some real democracies. But the puzzle is resolved if we remember that the regime ratings we asked for are not objective measures against a universal standard, but are generated by respondents as a function, first, of their own conceptions of democracy, and second, of the

baseline against which they measure change. As we saw above, for many Chinese a paternalistic government that denies political competition is consistent with their conception of democracy. And for many, the limited increase in freedom they have enjoyed since Mao's death marks a real improvement from the past.

In a third-wave democracy like the Philippines, by contrast, respondents may measure the regime against a demanding set of ideals that came to the fore during the transition or which they idealize as having characterized the country's first experiment with democracy before World War II. In a mature democracy like Japan, citizens' current dissatisfactions may loom larger than positive changes that took place before many of our respondents were alive. The information on perceived regime change, then, does not measure the actual level of democratic development, but shows how change is perceived by ordinary citizens—a perception that may influence their level of support for the current regime.

3.2. COMPARING THE PERFORMANCE OF FORMER AND CURRENT REGIMES

To go more deeply into respondents' comparisons of the current regime with the past regime, we asked them to rate each of nine major government performance domains. The results for China are presented in table 9.4. Again respondents in China offered a relatively high proportion of "don't knows" (reflected in lower valid percentages in this table than in the versions of this table in the other country chapters). Nonetheless, the results are striking, and consistent with the discussion in the preceding section. There is a substantial consensus among people in China that there has been improvement since 1979 in the domain we call "democratic performance." Of the five areas we asked about, respondents found the greatest improvement in freedom of expression, followed by freedom of association (despite the fact that China outlaws the kinds of activities that are considered free association in the West, such as the organization of trade unions and political parties and participation in autonomous religious organizations). Citizens also saw improvement in judicial independence. By contrast, with regard to the ability of citizens to influence government, nearly half saw no change and only 39% saw positive change, reflecting the reality that significant steps in political democratization have yet to occur. Fewer

TABLE 9.4 **PERCEIVED PERFORMANCE OF CURRENT AND PAST REGIMES: CHINA**

	MEAN[a]	SD[a]	NEGATIVE CHANGE[b]	POSITIVE CHANGE[b]	NO CHANGE[b]	PDI[c]	VALID %[d]
Democratic performance							
Freedom of speech	1.00	0.67	2.9	85.0	12.2	82.1	80.4
Freedom of association	0.79	0.69	4.8	74.2	21.0	69.4	60.8
Equal treatment	0.50	0.93	16.2	60.4	23.4	44.2	77.3
Popular influence	0.26	0.82	13.8	39.0	47.1	25.2	61.7
Independent judiciary	0.49	0.91	17.1	61.8	21.1	44.7	50.2
Average	0.61	0.81	11.0	64.1	25.0	53.1	66.1
Policy performance							
Anticorruption	-1.21	1.05	83.2	12.4	4.4	-70.8	80.7
Law and order	-0.19	1.33	48.5	45.3	6.1	-3.2	89.6
Economic development	1.53	0.64	1.8	96.6	1.6	94.7	91.2
Economic equality	-1.01	1.28	74.7	21.3	4.1	-53.4	88.7
Average	-0.22	1.07	52.1	43.9	4.0	-8.2	87.6

Notes: N = 3183.

Past regime is defined as pre-1979.

[a] Scale ranges from -2 (much worse) to +2 (much better).
[b] Percent of valid sample.
[c] PDI (percentage difference index) = percent seeing positive change minus percent seeing negative change.
[d] Percent of sample giving a valid answer to this question.

than one-fifth saw negative change in any of the five areas of democratic performance. Clearly, the political liberalization that has occurred in China is acknowledged by the majority of respondents.

These findings contrast with outside evaluations such as the Freedom House scores on China's civil liberty and political rights (Freedom House, 1999–2003). From 1998 to 2002, China got the worst-possible Freedom House score, 7, for civil liberties and the next-to-lowest score, 6, for political rights. While the Freedom House ratings compare China to the standards of advanced liberal democracies, our respondents' point of comparison is 1979, and as argued earlier, the frame of reference used by many of them is the concept of socialist democracy.

We also asked about four areas of policy performance relating to the administration of society and the economy. On the overall economic situation, 96.6% said the situation today is better than in 1979. At the same time, however, nearly three-quarters said that the economy has become less equal. Opinions were also negative regarding the government's effort to control corruption, and were divided on the issue of law and order, with close to half the respondents saying the situation has gotten better and half saying it has gotten worse. Unlike the findings on democratic performance, these perceptions are in line with the views of outside experts, who believe the Chinese economy has grown rapidly while inequality and corruption have worsened. The views of the Chinese were also consistent with those elsewhere in Asia: most of our respondents in other societies also believed that the greatest improvements since the transition from the previous regime had taken place in the domain of democratic performance, while the new regime's performance in the policy areas we asked about had been less impressive.

4. THE STATE AND THE CITIZEN

In each of our eight political systems, the EAB survey tried to discover some of the key attitudes citizens hold toward the institutions of the state and toward themselves as political beings. The guiding theory is that democracies are healthy when citizens trust state institutions and see themselves as competent to perform the role of citizen. The China survey enables us to compare the levels of perceived corruption, institutional trust, and citizen efficacy in an authoritarian society to the levels of these variables in neighboring democratic societies.

4.1. CITIZEN EFFICACY AND SYSTEM RESPONSIVENESS

Even though the Chinese system does not fulfill the minimal attributes of what we define as democracy—freedom to organize and competitive elections—the regime nonetheless claims to provide responsive government under its concept of socialist democracy. Do Chinese citizens agree? We asked them about both sides of the citizen-government relationship: citizen's "internal efficacy" (that is, self-perceived empowerment) and government's responsiveness (sometimes referred to as "external efficacy") (Craig et al. 1990; Easton and Dennis 1967; Madsen 1987).

To probe the self-perceived empowerment of respondents, we asked them to tell us how they evaluated their own ability to understand the complexities of politics and their capacity to participate in politics. Chinese responses to this question are displayed along with those from Asian democracies in chapter 1, table 1.4. We found the Chinese somewhere in the disempowered side of our sample of Asian systems, ranged perhaps incongruously with the Taiwan respondents. In both systems around 60% of the public felt that they could neither understand nor participate in politics. In China, only 7.4% expressed confidence in their ability to do both. Only the citizens of Hong Kong felt more disempowered. The low sense of political efficacy in China is no doubt related to the fact that citizens really do lack channels either for knowing much about politics or for participating effectively. In the post-Mao period, Chinese citizens participated most actively in the local-level work unit, or *danwei* (Shi 1997). As economic reform destroyed the effectiveness of the *danwei*, effective new channels of participation were not created to replace it.

To assess respondents' views of government responsiveness, we asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following two statements: "The nation is run by a powerful few and ordinary citizens cannot do much about it," and "People like me don't have any influence over what the government does." Citizens were split in their responses. On the negative side, 36% believed that the government is run by powerful interests, and over 70% said that the government is not subject to their influence. Taking a more positive view were the nearly 42% of respondents who disagreed with the statement that the nation is run by a powerful few, and the 14.1% who said that people like themselves could have influence over government. (The rest of the respondents to each question gave "don't know" or "no answer" responses.) In short, views were mixed. Although most people did not think that the

government responds to popular influence, neither did most believe that the government is run by big interests.

These questions, however, implicitly refer to the central government. In China's system much resource allocation relevant to citizens' daily lives takes place in local governments and work units (for further discussion, see Shi 1997, chapter 1). To assess the perceived responsiveness of these levels of the system we asked three additional questions (in China and Taiwan only). First, "If you needed the help of government officials for something, would you ask for it?" Nearly 79% of respondents in China told us that they would. Second, did the respondent think that such a request would get a helpful response? Nearly 40% said yes, while slightly fewer than 40% were not sure. Third, we asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement, "There are many ways for people in our country effectively to influence government decisions." Some 34% agreed while 33.6% disagreed.

These responses suggest that Chinese citizens see their system as fairly responsive at the local level and less so at the central level. This reflects the reality that the Chinese system provides citizens with the possibility to exert influence over the output side of the policy process but not over the input side. In Almond and Verba's terms, the Chinese are politically competent as subjects, less so as citizens (Almond and Verba 1963). In this sense, the official notion of socialist democracy is more than a myth: it has some correspondence in citizens' perceptions of their own relationships with the state. At the same time, it falls short of—indeed, it does not aspire to—the same forms of citizen competence that liberal-democratic systems value most highly.

4.2. PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION

Corruption is a threat to the legitimacy of any regime, democratic or authoritarian. In China, charges of corruption were a leading issue in the 1989 prodemocracy movement, and the party has continued to treat corruption as a mortal threat to its stability (Shi 1990; Lu 2000; Nathan 2003). As table 9.4 showed, despite the government's efforts, in 2002 most respondents still believed that corruption had increased since 1979. To find out more about where they thought corruption existed, we asked respondents to specify their perception of the scope of corruption at two levels: in the local government and in the central government. The distribution of the answers to these questions is presented in table 9.5.

TABLE 9.5 PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CORRUPTION AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS: CHINA

(Percent of total sample)

	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT					
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	Hardly anyone is involved	Not a lot of officials are involved	Most officials are corrupt	Almost everyone is corrupt	DK/NA	Total
Hardly anyone is involved	3.6	1.9	0.2	—	2.5	8.3
Not a lot of officials are involved	4.5	**13.7**	0.7	—	**13.1**	**32.1**
Most officials are corrupt	2.1	9.7	4.9	0.2	**17.0**	**33.7**
Almost everyone is corrupt	0.3	0.8	0.6	0.2	2.0	4.0
DK/NA	0.3	1.6	0.4	-	**19.6**	**21.9**
Total	**10.9**	**27.7**	6.8	0.3	**54.2**	**100.0**

Notes: N = 3183.

Blank cell means no cases.

Percentages above 10 are in boldface.

As with a number of questions in China, we encountered a high proportion of DK/NA responses to this question. Just as 19.3% of respondents had been unable to evaluate the government's performance in fighting corruption (as seen in the "Valid %" column in table 9.4), so 19.6% of respondents were unable to say what degree of corruption existed at either of the two levels of government. But this uncertainty was not equally distributed. More than twice as many people did not know how to characterize corruption in Beijing as the percentage who did not know how to characterize it at the local level. This reflects the facts that the central government is far away from the lives of ordinary people, and that the regime-controlled media seldom carry news of central-level corruption.

Instead, the media portray corruption as a local phenomenon that the center is battling against. It makes sense, then, that among those who had a view, corruption was perceived as chiefly a local problem. Answering our question about the local level, 37.7% of respondents said that most or all officials were corrupt, compared to only 7.1% who said the same for the central government. This central-local contrast was the sharpest we observed in any of the eight political systems in the study. Moreover, those who saw corruption as systemic—that is, who said that most or all officials were corrupt at both local and central levels—constituted only 5.9% of the sample. This again was the lowest number in Asia, compared, for example, to 32.3% for Japan, and 42.1% for Taiwan.

When asked further whether they or their families had personally witnessed corruption or bribe-taking by politicians or government officials in the past year, only 20% of respondents in China said yes, the fourth-lowest percentage among our eight political systems after Japan, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Thus, more people suspected that corruption was prevalent than had direct knowledge of it. This is probably the result of the official media's energetic publicity for official anticorruption efforts. During pretest for the questionnaire, we asked those who said corruption was a serious problem, but had no direct or indirect evidence, to tell us how they knew about it. Most referred to the official newspaper, *People's Daily*, and named as examples the then famous cases of Hu Chengqing, former deputy governor of Anhui Province, and Cheng Kejie, former vice-chairman of the NPC, both of whom had recently been executed for corruption.

Corruption in China may be worse than our respondents think, but at the level of public perception, our findings suggest that as of 2002 the problem was less intense in China than in Asia's democracies.

4.3. TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Institutional trust gives room for maneuver at times when a regime encounters difficulties, and is therefore an important determinant of the political stability of any kind of regime, democratic or otherwise. With this in mind, we asked respondents to report how much they trusted sixteen institutions plus the country itself.[8] The results are reported in figure 9.2.

We found high levels of trust in four central-level political institutions: the national government, the NPC (national legislature), the CCP, and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The percentage of respondents claiming that they did not trust these institutions ranged from one to two percent, by far the lowest levels of distrust for any institutions across Asia.

The level of trust in local institutions was lower than that in central institutions, but still high compared to elsewhere in Asia. Seventeen percent of respondents reported that they did not trust the courts, 21% did not trust local government, and 23% did not trust civil servants. (Since there is no distinction in China between political appointees and career officials and little clarity about the difference between party and government officials, distrust of civil servants can be understood as distrust of power holders in general.) The most distrusted government institution was the local police station (*paichusuo*), distrusted by one-quarter of respondents. The finding is in contrast to the higher level of trust in the public security apparatus as an institution: only 18% of respondents claimed that they did not trust the public security bureau (PSB), which is the same level of distrust as the court system. These findings suggest that people in China trust political institutions that are removed from their daily lives more than they trust institutions with which they have regular contact. This is consistent with the traditional mentality that believes that the emperor is good even if local officials are bad.

Media in China play a different role from the one they play in democracies. Rather than independently providing information, the media serve the party and government to mobilize popular support. We asked respondents first whether the media in general can be trusted and then whether they trusted newspapers in particular. The analysis shows that the media enjoyed a high level of trust. Eight percent of respondents told our interviewers that they did not trust the media in general, and 15% said that they did not trust newspapers.

NGOs proved to be the least trusted institutions we asked about. This may reflect the tradition in both precommunist and communist China of citizen dependency on government. As nongovernmental bodies, NGOs

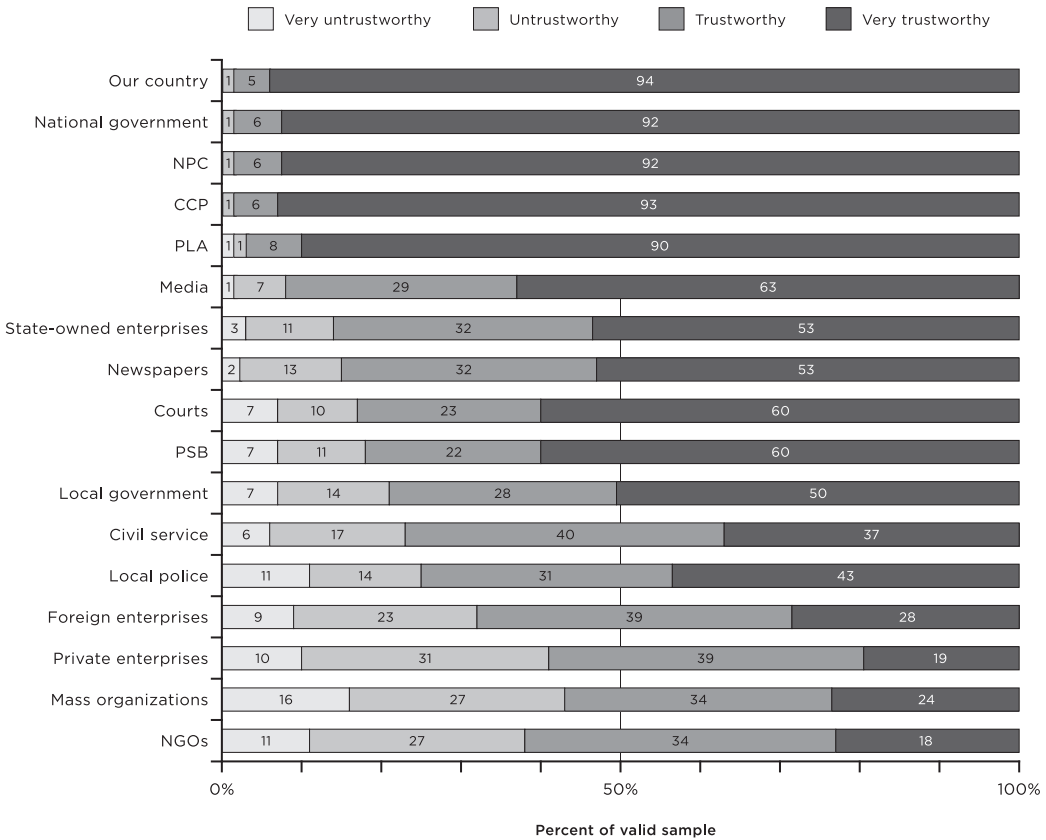

FIGURE 9.2 **Trust in Institutions: China**

are perceived to lack prestige and effectiveness; by contrast, citizens believe they can appeal to higher levels of government for help when they run into problems with local authorities. Additionally, NGOs say that they represent special interests, an idea that strikes many Chinese as selfish rather than public spirited. By contrast, government institutions say they represent the interests of whole population.

Why do political institutions in China's authoritarian system enjoy higher trust than similar institutions in Asian democracies? No doubt the regime's control over information contributes to this result. The fall-off in trust from national to local institutions reflects the fact that official media are allowed to criticize local officials, within certain limitations, but can only praise national institutions. In addition, people have closer contact with local government, and local governments' decisions have more obvious impacts on people's lives.

Another contributing factor is the widespread belief in norms of hierarchy and collectivism. In previous research I demonstrated that trust in both incumbents and institutions is correlated in China with these two cultural attributes (Shi 2001). This finding is supported by the regression analysis in table 9.6. The dependent variable is an index of respondents' reported levels of trust in five institutions: the central government, CCP, the NPC, local government, and the courts. The analysis shows that age and education have little impact on the dependent variable. Nor does media access affect institutional trust, a finding that suggests that the regime's propaganda is ineffective in shaping citizens' perceptions of the government. Income is negatively associated with institutional trust. This may be because those with higher incomes are more likely to be in business and to have direct contact with government agencies, generating feelings of distrust as a result of encounters with official corruption or other unpleasant interactions. Likewise, the perception that government actions have an influence over one's life is negatively correlated with trust, perhaps because those who perceive this influence are more likely to blame the authorities for whatever problems they have.

Three variables do exert a significant positive impact on institutional trust. Two of these are cultural variables that work as hypothesized. Both reciprocal orientation, which is the opposite of hierarchical orientation, and individualistic orientation, which is the opposite of collectivism, have statistically significant negative impacts on trust in political institutions.

The third variable that positively affects institutional trust is satisfaction with local government performance. The connection seems obvious: those

who are more satisfied with what government institutions have done are more likely to trust them.[9]

Our findings in this section call into question the claim made by some theorists of democratic transitions: that authoritarian regimes lack the safety cushion of public support enjoyed by democratic regimes because authori-

TABLE 9.6 REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: CHINA

	B	BETA
Constant	25.45***	
Age	.007	.033
Education (years of formal schooling)	-.002	-.002
Media access[a]	.007	.005
Annual family income	-.000*	-.049
Perceived impact of local government[b]	-.076***	-.083
Reciprocal orientation[c]	-.963***	-.098
Individualistic orientation[c]	-.688*	-.042
Satisfaction with local government performance[d]	1.725***	.382
Adjusted R^2=.193		

Notes: * p <.05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

The dependent variable is an index composed of five variables: trust in the courts, the central government, the CCP, the NPC, and the local government. It ranges from 0 (the respondent finds all five institutions completely untrustworthy) to 30 (the respondent finds all five institutions completely trustworthy).

[a] Media access is the number of times respondent listened to radio broadcasts and watched TV news in the past week.

[b] Perceived impact of government is measured by asking respondents if they think township and local governments and their polices have any impact on their daily life.

[c] Reciprocal orientation is measured by disagreement with the following statements: "If a conflict occurs, we should ask senior people to uphold justice"; "Even if parents' demands are unreasonable, children should still do what is asked of them"; and "When a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law come into conflict, even if the mother-in-law is in the wrong, the husband should still persuade his wife to obey his mother." Individualistic orientation is measured by disagreement with the following statements: "A person should not insist on his own opinion if people around him disagree"; "If various interest groups compete in a locale it would damage interests of everyone"; and "The state is like a big machine and the individual, a small cog, should have no independent status."

[d] Satisfaction with government performance is measured by a question asking whether the respondent is satisfied with the performance of local government.

tarian governments enjoy support only insofar as their leaders maintain attractive personal images (charismatic legitimacy) or their policies deliver economic benefits (performance-based legitimacy). In China at the time of our survey, performance-based legitimacy certainly existed, as shown above, but it had to some extent also been converted into what David Easton calls diffuse support (1975). The analysis in this section further shows that traditional values of hierarchy and collectivism contributed to generating diffuse support in China.

The existence of diffuse support might provide a degree of resilience for the Chinese regime if it encountered a downturn in some of its performance indicators, although there is no way of estimating the depth of this reservoir of support (Nathan 2003). Certainly, the data on institutional trust reinforce the sense developed in earlier sections of this chapter that the regime in 2002 faced no mass defection that might push it toward democratization.

5. COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

How committed are people in China to democracy? Some argue that the Chinese do not want democracy and prefer authoritarianism. Indeed, this is one of the arguments given by the regime for not introducing democratic reform. Others argue that there is no difference between people in China and elsewhere: the desire for democracy is built into human nature.

5.1. DEMOCRATIC ATTACHMENT AND AUTHORITARIAN DETACHMENT

We asked five questions in each of our eight Asian systems to explore people's attachment to democracy. The results are reported in chapter 1, table 1.8.

Like other people in Asia, the Chinese are overwhelmingly supportive of democracy. Strong majorities consider democracy desirable, suitable, effective, and preferable. China ranked in the middle of the group of political systems surveyed for four of the five democratic attachment variables. Only in the percentage of people who considered democracy "desirable now " was China was tied for last place, with Taiwan. But it ranked above both Hong Kong and Taiwan in the percentage of people who gave prodemocratic answers to the other four questions.

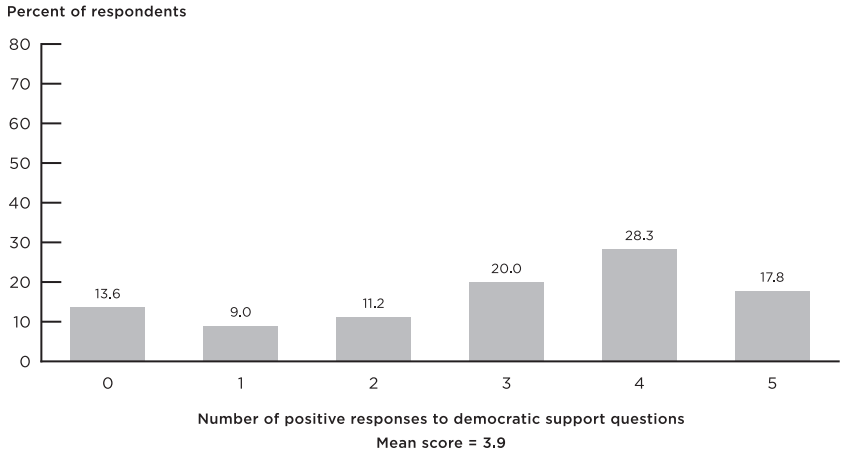

FIGURE 9.3 Democratic Support: China

Only in regard to democracy's priority over economic development did Chinese respondents give less than majority support, and again in this respect, the Chinese were not markedly different from respondents elsewhere in the region. Indeed, the size of the prodemocracy minority on this question was larger in China than in five of our other survey sites.

In short, the Chinese were generally as supportive of democracy as respondents in Asia's old and new democracies, and in some respects more so. This is further illustrated in figure 9.3, which shows that two-thirds of Chinese respondents gave two or more prodemocracy answers to our five democratic attachment questionnaire items.

The EAB survey also probed citizens' levels of authoritarian detachment, defined in this volume as the rejection of four types of authoritarian regime. Because it is illegal in China to call into question two of these authoritarian institutions (a strong leader and rule by a single party), we could only ask respondents how they felt about the other two: rule by the military and rule by technocratic experts. The China data are included in chapter 1, table 1.9. Here again, the Chinese did not stand out from other Asians. A majority rejected both authoritarian projects. A higher percentage was willing to accept military rule than in other countries, but the percentage was close to that in the Philippines.[10] Chinese rejected rule by technocratic experts at about the same rate as citizens in Asian democracies.

5.2. OVERALL COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY

Figure 9.4 summarizes the patterns of democratic attachment and authoritarian detachment in terms of five patterns of regime orientation (definitions are given in the notes to table 1.11, chapter 1; however, the China figure differs slightly from those in other chapters because we were only able to ask two of the four authoritarian detachment questions). The figure classifies those with the most consistent prodemocratic and antiauthoritarian views as moderate supporters of democracy, those with consistent antidemocratic and proauthoritarian views as strong opponents, and so on.

By these standards, the majority of people in China were committed to democracy. Over one-third of the population were moderate supporters and another 13% were skeptical supporters. These two groups represent close to half the population. Elsewhere in Asia, there was a greater prevalence of mixed views and of weak and strong opposition to democracy. However, China also had the highest percentage of opponents to democracy of all the nations studied. In this sense, opinion on democracy can be said to be more polarized in all three Chinese societies than it is elsewhere in East Asia.

The data show that modernizing social change has worked in China much as theory would predict, moving popular attitudes away from support for authoritarianism and toward support for democracy. For strong opponents of democracy, the mean number of years of education was 3.81, for weak opponents 6.57, for mixed group 6.34, for skeptical supporters 7.7, and

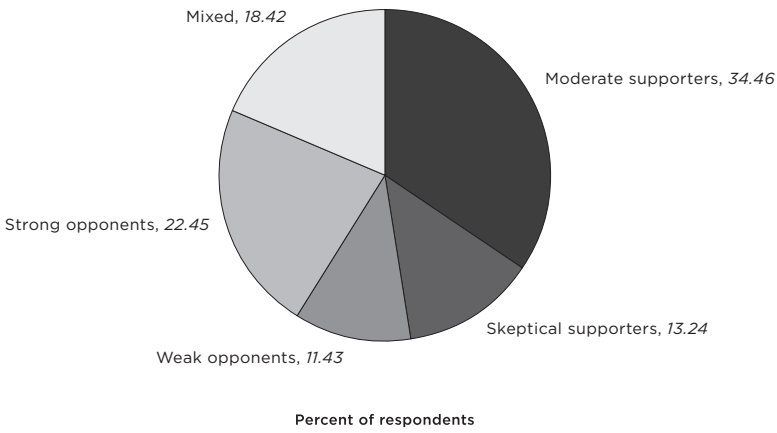

FIGURE 9.4 Patterns of Commitment to Democracy: China

for moderate supporters 8.9. In other words, the average strong opponent had not completed primary school while the average moderate supporter had nearly nine years of education. The mean yearly family incomes for strong opponents, weak opponents, mixed, skeptical supporters, and moderate supporters of democracy respectively were RMB 7,047 (approximately $859), RMB 9,106 ($1,110), RMB 9,240 ($1,126), RMB 14,075 ($1,716) and RMB 14,289 ($1,742).[11] That is, skeptical and moderate supporters of democracy earned on the average twice as much as strong opponents. Urban residents are more likely to support democracy than rural residents. Age also had an effect: strong opponents of democracy were on average nearly five years older than those in any of the three other categories.

6. EXPECTATIONS FOR CHINESE DEMOCRACY

The EAB survey tried to gauge citizens' optimism for the future of Chinese politics by asking them to predict the level of democracy of the regime five years into the future. The results are presented in chapter 1, table 1.12.

The findings for China reveal a pervasive optimism. Only 3.3% of valid respondents expected the future regime to have a score of 5 or below, the range we classify as authoritarian. All other valid respondents placed the future regime somewhere in the democratic range of 6 or above. These optimists in turn consisted of two categories: a minority of 13%, who considered the current regime authoritarian but expected it to democratize (the third and fourth rows in the table), and a large majority of 83.6% who considered the current regime already democratic and expected it to remain so or to become even more so. In short, respondents saw the country on a trajectory toward democracy, although from a variety of starting points.

This does not, however, reflect an expectation of regime change. As we saw in table 9.3, nearly two-thirds of respondents answering the question rated the current regime as already democratic.[12] For them, further movement toward democracy would mean the intensification of trends already visible in the current regime rather than a change in the type of regime.

7. CONCLUSION

Earlier chapters suggested that disillusionment with democracy in places like Taiwan and Japan does not portend inevitable retrogression to authori-

tarianism, because citizens reject authoritarian alternatives as strongly as they express dissatisfaction with democratic realities. Conversely, in China we cannot assume that widespread support for democracy portends a likely transition in the regime. On the contrary, the China case shows that a high level of popular support can be sustained for an authoritarian regime even as the forces of socioeconomic modernization and cultural globalization bring increasing public support for the abstract idea of democracy.

We have identified three factors that make this possible in the case of China (we do not have evidence for whether the same factors operate in these ways in other authoritarian systems). First, the regime has been able to define democracy in its own terms, drawing on ideas of good government with deep roots in the nation's historical culture and more recent roots in its ideology of socialism. Second, the regime draws support from the public's perception that it is performing better than the previous regime, in both the political realm (greater freedom and accountability) and some aspects of the policy realm (economic growth). Third, persisting norms of hierarchy and collectivism support trust in political institutions, especially those at the national level with which citizens have less direct personal contact.

While performance legitimacy—the second factor just listed—is vulnerable to changes in economic or political performance, the other two factors point to cultural roots of diffuse political support that are likely to change more slowly, if at all. This is why the spread of prodemocracy attitudes—which our analysis shows is certainly happening—does not necessarily point toward regime change in any foreseeable time frame. Such change could happen. But it is also possible that the spread of prodemocracy attitudes will generate even stronger support for the regime in power if it is able to continue to align its own image and performance with citizen values as these evolve.

NOTES

1. The per capita GDP with PPP adjustment in 2000 international dollars grew from $673 in 1978 to $4,568 in 2002; see http://devdata.worldbank.org/dataonline.
2. Interview with officials of the National People's Congress (NPC), conducted in Beijing in October 1993.
3. Interview with officials of the research department of the NPC, conducted in Beijing in 1999.
4. The trivial exceptions were Yuan Shikai's and Zhang Xun's attempted imperial restorations in 1915 and 1917 respectively.

5. Since China is the only nondemocracy in our study, we do not think the same question arises for the other seven surveys.
6. The fact that such high percentages of respondents said yes to these questions is itself a sign that they felt safe expressing controversial views to our interviewers. The interviewers were retired middle-school teachers who were instructed, of course, to give respondents an assurance of confidentiality. Apparently many respondents accepted this assurance.
7. Because of the different way they are calculated, these figures cannot be derived from the table. For the purpose of this analysis, respondents giving substantive answers to the question that do not fit into the two special categories we have just defined would be considered as responding in mixed ways to the influences of both the CCP and the West.
8. In the China questionnaire respondents were allowed to chose among three levels of trust and three levels of distrust for a 6-point scale. In figure 9.2 this scale has been collapsed into four categories for comparability with the figures in other chapters.
9. The relationship between political trust and government performance, incidentally, confirms again the validity of survey results gathered in an authoritarian society. If political fear explained the high reported levels of trust in Chinese government institutions, we would expect reported trust to correlate weakly or not at all with a respondent's satisfaction in the performance of government. Since it does correlate, we have reason to think that respondents' self-reports of their trust in government institutions are valid. This is an instance of the "external consistency" test for the validity of an indicator, and also applies to the other regression coefficients reported in table 9.6. The validity of an indicator gains credibility when the indicator is correlated with other variables in a theoretically predicted way. For discussion of the external validity test, see, among others, Balch 1974; Hill 1982; Citrin 1974.
10. The relatively low rate of rejection of the idea of military rule may have something to do with the episode during the Cultural Revolution when Mao ordered the military to intervene to stop warring civilian factions from killing each other. In 1989, the party also declared martial law in parts of Beijing to put an end to the hunger strike and prodemocracy demonstrations there, which many Chinese citizens view in retrospect as having posed a dangerous challenge to social order. Such experiences may have persuaded some Chinese that military rule is sometimes necessary in times of emergency.
11. The conversions use the 2002 exchange rate of U.S.$1 = RMB 8.20.
12. Tables 1.12 and 9.3 report different percentages of people who consider China a democracy and a nondemocracy because the former table reports percentages of the valid sample and the latter table reports percentages of the total sample.