

Political Culture, Citizenship, and Identity

From Communism to Consumerism

Marxism-Leninism is still important in Chinese politics, since the Communist Party proclaims that it is China's official ideology. Serious challenges to that ideology or the party are not permitted. The CCP also tries to keep communist ideology viable and visible by efforts to influence public opinion and values through its control of the media, the arts, and education.

China's media is much livelier and more open than during the Maoist period when it was totally under CCP domination and did little other than convey party messages. However, freedom of the press is still quite limited. Reduced political control of the media has largely meant the freedom to publish more entertainment news, human interest stories, and nonpolitical investigative journalism in areas that are consistent with party objectives. For example, in the summer of 2007, the news media helped expose the use of slave labor (including many children) in thousands of brick kilns and coal mines in two provinces in central China. But the state does shut down media outlets that provoke its political displeasure.

In terms of political restrictions, the arts are the area of life that has seen the greatest change in China in recent years. Books, movies, plays, and other art forms are sometimes banned, but much of the artistic censorship is now self-imposed by creators who know the limits of what is acceptable to the party-state.

Educational opportunities have expanded enormously in China since 1949. Primary school enrollment is close to 100 percent of the age-eligible population (ages six to eleven), but it drops to about 75 percent in middle and high school (ages eleven to eighteen), and only 20 percent at the university level. Scoring well on a national examination is required to go to college, and Chinese schools can be pressure-cookers for those who want to move up the educational ladder, which is crucial to getting a good job in the modernizing economy.

Political study is still a required but now relatively minor part of the curriculum at all levels, and more than 80 percent of China's students between the ages of seven and fourteen belong to the Young Pioneers, an organization designed to promote good social behavior, community service, patriotism, and loyalty to the party.

At its best, China's educational system produces spectacular results. A 2010 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) showed that students in Shanghai outperformed those in 65 countries on standardized reading, math, and science tests. But access to quality education in the PRC's most prosperous cities is light years ahead of that in the rest of the country. There are also many critics of the extreme test-centered focus of Chinese schools and the lack of attention to critical thinking and individual creativity that are essential to a hi-tech knowledge economy.

Internet access is exploding in China, with more than 400 million users by the end of 2010. Web connections are available even in some quite remote towns and villages. The government worries about the influence of e-mail and electronic information it cannot control. It has blocked access to certain foreign websites, shut down unlicensed cyber cafés, and arrested people it has accused of disseminating subversive material over the Internet.

Web access in China is tightly controlled by the licensing of just a few Internet Service Providers. They are responsible for who uses their systems and how. The government is investing huge sums to develop (with technical assistance from western companies) stronger firewalls and monitoring systems. The Chinese party-state knows

that cutting-edge technology is critical to its modernization plans. The party wants citizens to become computer literate. As with so much else in China, however, the party-state wants to define the way and dictate the rules.

Alternative sources of socialization and belief are growing in importance in China. These do not often take expressly political forms, however, because of the threat of repression. In the countryside, peasants have replaced portraits of Mao and other Communist heroes with statues of folk gods and ancestor worship tablets. The influence of extended kinship groups such as clans often outweighs the formal authority of the party in the villages. In the cities, popular culture, including gigantic rock concerts, shapes youth attitudes much more profoundly than party propaganda. Consumerism (“buying things”) is probably the most widely shared value in China today. Many observers have spoken of a moral vacuum. This is not uncommon for societies undergoing such rapid, multifaceted change.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the PRC constitution (as is the freedom not to believe in any religion). Organized religion, which was ferociously suppressed during the Mao era, is attracting an increasing number of adherents. Buddhist temples, Christian churches, and other places of worship operate more freely than they have in decades.

Religious life, however, is strictly controlled and limited to officially approved organizations and venues. Clergy of any religion who defy the authority of the party-state are still imprisoned. The Chinese Catholic Church is prohibited from recognizing the authority of the pope, although there have been recent signs of a thaw between Beijing and the Vatican.

The official number of Protestants and Catholics in China is about 14 million. But unofficial estimates put the figure at several times that and as high as 70–100 million.

Clandestine Christian communities, called house churches, have sprung up in many areas among people who reject the government’s control of religious life and are unable to worship in public. Although local officials sometimes tolerate these churches, in numerous cases house church leaders and lay people have been arrested and the private homes where services are held have been bulldozed.

Citizenship and National Identity

The views of Chinese citizens about what makes them part of the People’s Republic of China—their sense of national identity—are going through a profound and uncertain transformation. Party leaders realize that most citizens are sceptical or dismissive of communist ideology and that appeals to socialist goals and revolutionary virtues no longer inspire loyalty. The CCP has turned increasingly to patriotic themes to rally the country behind its leadership. The official media put considerable emphasis on the greatness and antiquity of Chinese culture. They send the not-so-subtle message that it is time for China to reclaim its rightful place in the world order—and that only the CCP can lead the nation in achieving this goal.

In the view of some scholars and others, such officially promoted **nationalism** could lead to a more aggressive foreign and military policy—especially with the country’s growing need for energy resources—toward areas such as the potentially oil-rich South China Sea, where the PRC’s historical territorial claims conflict with those of other countries including Vietnam and the Philippines.

Of course, it is the cultural tie of being “Chinese” that is the most powerful collective identity that connects people to the nation. The Chinese people are intensely proud of their ancient culture and long history. Their enthusiasm for hosting the

nationalism

An ideology seeking to create a nation-state for a particular community; a group identity associated with membership is such a political community. Nationalists often proclaim that their state and nation are superior to others.

2008 Olympics in Beijing reflected this cultural pride. They can also be very sensitive about what they consider slights to their national dignity. Many Chinese feel that Japan has not done enough to acknowledge or apologize for the atrocities its army committed in China during World War II. This has been a strain in relations between the two countries and has sometimes led to spontaneous anti-Japanese demonstrations by Chinese students.

China's Non-Chinese Citizens

The PRC calls itself a multinational state with fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups, one of which is the Chinese majority, called the Han people (Han being the name of one of China's earliest dynasties). The Han make up 91.5 percent of the total population. The defining elements of a minority group involve some combination of language, culture (including religion), and race that distinguish them from the Han. The fifty-five non-Han minorities number a little more than 100 million, or about 8.5 percent of the total population. These groups range in size from 16 million (the Zhuang of southwest China) to about 2,000 (the Lhoba in the far west). Most of these minorities have come under Chinese rule over many centuries through the expansion of the Chinese state rather than through migration into China.

China's minorities are highly concentrated in the five autonomous regions of Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Only in the latter two, however, do minority people outnumber Han Chinese, who are encouraged to migrate to the autonomous regions. The five autonomous regions are sparsely populated, yet they occupy about 60 percent of the total land area of the PRC. Some of these areas are resource rich. All are located on strategically important borders of the country, including those with Vietnam, India, and Russia.

The Chinese constitution grants autonomous regions the right of self-government in certain matters. But they remain firmly under the control of the central authorities. Minority peoples enjoy some latitude to develop their local economies as they see fit. The use of minority languages in the media and literature is encouraged, as is, to a certain extent, bilingual education. Minority religions can be practiced, though only through state-approved organizations.

The most extensive ethnic conflict in China has occurred in Tibet. Tibet is located in the far west of China and has been under Chinese military occupation since the early 1950s. Tibetans practice a unique form of Buddhism, and most are fiercely loyal to the Dalai Lama, a priest they believe is the incarnation of a divine being. China has claimed authority over Tibet since long before the Communist Party came to power. Tibetans have always disputed that claim and resisted Chinese rule, sometime violently, including in 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled to exile in India following the failure of a rebellion by his followers.

During the Maoist era, traditional Tibetan culture was suppressed by the Chinese authorities. Since the late 1970s, Buddhist temples and monasteries have been allowed to reopen, and Tibetans have gained a significant degree of cultural freedom; the Chinese government has also significantly increased investment in Tibet's economic development. However, China still considers talk of Tibetan political independence to be treason, and Chinese troops have crushed several anti-China demonstrations in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

There are more than 20 million Muslims in China. They live in many parts of the country and belong to several different ethnic minority groups. The highest concentration of Muslims is in the far west of China in the Ningxia Hui and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous regions.

The more secular Hui (about 10 million) are well assimilated into Han Chinese society. But there is growing unrest among Uyghurs (about 9 million) in Xinjiang, which borders several Islamic nations, including Pakistan and Afghanistan. Tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese exploded in Xinjiang in mid-2010, resulting in about 150 deaths and a thousand injuries. The government forcefully restored order and then arrested more than 1,500 people (almost all Uyghurs) in connection with the riots, twelve of whom were sentenced to death.

The Chinese government also has clashed with Uyghur militants who want to create a separate Islamic state of “East Turkestan” and have sometimes used violence, including bombings and assassinations, to press their cause. The PRC became an eager ally of the United States in the post-9/11 war on terrorism in part because China could then justify its crackdown on the Xinjiang-based East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Washington has included this group on its list of organizations connected to al Qaeda.

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China’s minority population is relatively small and geographically isolated. Ethnic unrest has been sporadic and easily quelled. Therefore, the PRC has not had the kind of intense identity-based conflict experienced by countries with more pervasive religious and ethnic cleavages, such as India and Nigeria. But it is possible that domestic and global forces will make ethnic identity a more visible and volatile issue in Chinese politics.

Interest Groups, Social Movements, and Protest

Truly independent interest groups and social movements are not permitted to influence the political process in the PRC in any significant way. The CCP supports official **mass organizations** as a means to provide a way for interest groups to express their views on policy matters—within strict limits.

Total membership of mass organizations in China is in the hundreds of millions. Two of the most important are the All-China Women’s Federation, the only national organization representing the interests of women in general, and the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), to which about 90 million Chinese workers belong. Neither constitutes an autonomous political voice for the groups they are supposed to represent. But they sometimes do act as an effective lobby in promoting the non-political interests of their constituencies. For example, the Women’s Federation has become a strong advocate for women on issues ranging from domestic violence to economic rights. The Trade Union Federation has pushed for legislation to reduce the standard workweek from six to five days. The ACFTU also represents individual workers with grievances against management, although its first loyalty is to the communist party-state.

Since the late 1990s, there has been a huge increase in the number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) less directly subordinate to the CCP than the official mass organizations. There is an enormous variety of national and local NGOs. These include ones that deal with the environment, health, charitable work, and legal issues. NGOs must register with the government, but they have considerable latitude to operate within their functional areas without direct party interference *if* they steer clear of politics and do not challenge official policies.

Although China has certainly loosened up politically since the days of Mao Zedong, the party-state is still very effective in monitoring dissent and preventing the

mass organizations

Organizations in a communist party-state that represent the interests of a particular social group, such as workers or women but which are controlled by the communist party.

formation of movements that might defy the CCP's authority. The extensive network of centrally-directed public security bureaus is the most formal mechanism of control. The authorities were quick to stifle responses to anonymous social networking calls for weekly peaceful gatherings in several Chinese cities to show support for the democracy movements in the Middle East and North Africa in early 2011.

In rural areas, the small-scale, closely knit nature of the village facilitates control by the local party and security organizations. Residents' committees are one of the major instruments of control in urban China. These neighborhood-based organizations, each of which covers 100 to 1,000 households depending on the size of the city, extend the unofficial reach of the party-state down to the most basic level of urban society. They used to be staffed mostly by appointed retired persons (often elderly women). But now their functions are shifting from surveillance to service. Many are led by younger and better-educated residents. In some cities, neighbors elect committee members.

The spread of private enterprises, increasing labor and residential mobility, and new forms of association (such as coffeeshouses and discos) and communication (including cell phones and e-mail) are just some of the factors that are making it much harder for China's party-state to monitor citizens as closely as in the past.

Protest and the Party-State

The Tiananmen massacre of 1989 showed the limits of protest in China. The party leadership was particularly alarmed at signs that several autonomous student and worker grass-roots organizations were emerging from the demonstrations. The brutal suppression of the democracy movement was meant to send a clear signal that neither open political protest nor the formation of independent interest groups would be tolerated.

There have been very few large-scale political demonstrations in China since 1989. Pro-democracy groups have been driven deep underground or abroad. Known dissidents are continuously watched, harassed, imprisoned, or expelled from the country.

Repression has not stopped all forms of citizen protest. The Falun Gong movement has carried out the biggest and most continuous demonstrations against the party-state. Falun Gong (FLG) is a spiritual movement with philosophical and religious elements drawn from Buddhism and Taoism along with traditional Chinese physical exercises (similar to *tai chi*) and meditation. It claims 70 million members in China and 30 million in more than seventy other countries. Its promise of inner tranquillity and good health has proven very appealing to a wide cross-section of people in China as a reaction to some of the side effects of rapid modernization.

The authorities began a crackdown on the FLG in 1999, which intensified after approximately 10,000 of its followers staged a peaceful protest in front of CCP headquarters in the center of Beijing. The authorities have destroyed FLG books and tapes, jammed websites, and arrested thousands of practitioners. Despite a few small FLG demonstrations, the crackdown seems to have been successful.

Labor unrest is growing, with reports of thousands of strikes and other actions in recent years. Workers have carried out big demonstrations at state-owned factories. They have protested the ending of the iron rice bowl system, layoffs, the nonpayment of pensions or severance packages, and the arrest of grass-roots labor leaders. Workers at some foreign-owned enterprises have gone on strike against unsafe working conditions or low wages. Most of these actions have remained limited in scope and duration, so the government has usually not cracked down on the protesters. On occasion, it has actually pressured employers to meet the workers' demands.

One of the biggest worker protests occurred in the spring of 2010 at a huge factory complex owned by a Taiwan firm in southern China where more than 300,000 workers—largely migrants from the countryside—assemble consumer electronics, including most of the world's iPhones and iPads. The protesters were targeting the 12-hour days, six-day work-weeks they say had driven several employees to commit suicide. The owners responded by putting up nets around the dormitory roofs to prevent despondent workers from jumping to their deaths, hired mental-health professionals to counsel employees, and built leisure facilities for workers. They also said that they would consult with local governments to improve conditions for its workers in China.

The countryside has also seen an upsurge of protests over corruption, exorbitant taxes and extralegal fees, and the government's failure to pay on time for agricultural products it has purchased. In areas benefiting from China's economic growth, people have protested environmental damage by factories whose owners care only for profit. Protests have also targeted illegal land seizures by greedy local officials working in cahoots with developers who want to build factories, expensive housing, or even golf courses.

Urban and rural protests in China have not spread beyond the locales where they started. They have focused on the protestors' immediate material concerns, not on grand-scale issues like democracy, and most often are aimed at corrupt local officials or unresponsive employers, not the Communist Party. By responding positively to farmer and worker concerns, the party-state can win support and turn what could be regime-threatening activities into regime-sustaining ones.

Although people are much freer than they have been in decades and most visitors find Chinese society quite open, repression can still be intense. Public political dissent is almost nonexistent. But there are many signs that the Chinese Communist Party is losing or giving up some of its ability to control the movements and associations of its citizens and can no longer easily limit access to information and ideas from abroad. Some forms of protest also appear to be increasing and may come to pose a serious challenge to the authority of the party-state.

Summary

Representation of citizen interests and political participation in China are carried out under the watchful eye of the Chinese Communist Party. The National People's Congress, the legislature of the PRC, has become more active as the country's focus has shifted from revolutionary politics to economic development. Elections, particularly at the local level, have become more democratic. The Communist Party has also changed significantly, not just welcoming workers, peasants, and political activists into its ranks, but even recruiting members from among China's growing capitalist class of private business owners. Although they are much more open than during the Maoist era, the media, the arts, and education are still ultimately under party supervision. Communist ideology is declining as a unifying force for China's citizens, and the ability of the communist party-state to control and influence its citizens is weakening. The Internet, religion, consumerism, and popular culture are growing in influence. These all present a challenge to the CCP, which now emphasizes Chinese nationalism and pride as sources of citizen identity. Some of the greatest political tensions in China are in parts of the country with high concentrations of non-Chinese ethnic minorities, such as in Tibet and the Muslim areas of the northwest. Protests by farmers and industrial workers with economic grievances have been on the increase, but these have not become large-scale or widespread.

SECTION 5

CHINESE POLITICS IN TRANSITION

Focus Questions

What are the major economic and political challenges facing the CCP?

What factors will influence the future of the democratic idea in China?

Why has the Chinese communist party-state been more durable than other regimes of its type?

Political Challenges and Changing Agendas

Scenes from the Chinese Countryside¹⁹

China has become much more modern and urban in recent years. But a majority of its people still live in rural areas. However, depending on where you look in its vast countryside, you will see a very different China. Take, for example, the following:

Huaxi, Jiangsu Province This rural town, the richest in China, looks much like an American suburb: spacious roads lined with two-story townhouses, potted plants on doorsteps, green lawns, and luscious shade trees. Homes have air-conditioning, stylish furniture and modern appliances, studies with computers, and gyms. Some have swimming pools. Health care is 100 percent free. Every family has at least one car (including Mercedes, Cadillacs, and BMWs). Huaxi has grown from a small, poor agricultural village to a wealthy town of 38,000 by developing industrial and commercial enterprises that are run by residents and employ labor hired from outside.

Changwu, Shaanxi Province This village of 250 families is located in a mountainous region in one of the areas known as China's Third World. Persistent poverty is still the common lot. The average income is less than \$100 per year. Most houses have only one or two rooms and are made of mud-brick with no running water, although electricity and telephone lines have come to the village in recent years. There are no paved roads. The poor quality land barely supports those who work it, mostly older women since the men and young women have gone to look for work in towns and cities. The children, dressed in grimy clothes and ragged cloth shoes, are not starving. But they do not seem to be flourishing either. Education, health care, and other social services are minimal or nonexistent.

Nanhu, Shandong Province This is a fairly typical Chinese village, nowhere near as prosperous as Huaxi or as poor as Changwu. Per capita income is about \$1000 per year. Houses are now made of brick, most families have a small color TV, and there are lots of cell phones. Paved roads and public buses link the village to the nearest town where the children go to school. Most men work in small factories, while women tend the fields and farm animals. But they are worried. Local enterprises are struggling to survive fierce market competition. One village-owned factory has gone bankrupt. Recently, the village has leased out some of its land to expanding businesses from the town with the hope that this will create jobs.

Zhaiqiao, Zhejiang Province In late 2010, a 53-year old popular village leader, Qian Yunhui, was crushed to death by a large truck not far from his home. Evidence and eyewitness reports pointed to possibility that he was pushed beneath the truck's wheels and then deliberately run over. Qian had risen to local prominence for his role

in protesting the construction of a power plant on prime village land for which the residents got no compensation. He was intensifying his efforts to expose the corrupt official and business people involved in the land grab when he was killed. Word of the incident along with graphic photos of Qian's mangled body spread rapidly via the Chinese blogosphere. The online uproar was so intense that the state-run media had to report on the incident and the provincial government launched a formal investigation, which ruled Qian's death an unfortunate accident. The truck driver was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison, and Qian's family was paid more than \$150,000, but there is widespread skepticism about the handling of the case and many suspect a cover-up.

Beiwang, Hebei Province This was one of the first villages in China to establish a representative assembly and hold democratic elections for local leaders. Among the first decisions made by the elected officials and the assembly was to give just a few families known for their farming expertise contracts to tend the village's 3000 pear trees rather giving each family in the village an equal number to look after. They believed that this would lead to better pear farming and would cause the non-pear-tending families to develop other kinds of economic activity. The local Communist Party branch objected that this would lead to too much inequality. The party leaders eventually agreed, under pressure, to go along with the new policy. In a short time, pear production zoomed. The new system proved to be beneficial not only to the families who looked after the trees, but also to the village as a whole because of economic diversification and the local government's share of the increased profits.

The above scenes reflect the enormous diversity of the Chinese countryside: prosperity and poverty, protests and peaceful politics. It is worth remembering that about 55 percent of China's population—that's more than 700 million people—live in the rural parts of the country. What happens in the rural villages and towns will obviously have a tremendous impact on China's political and economic future.

The Beiwang village case reminds us that not all politics rises to national or international significance. The question of who looks after the village pear trees may matter more to local residents than what happens in the inner sanctums of the Communist Party or U.S.-China presidential summit meetings. The victory of the Beiwang representative assembly and elected officials on the pear tree issue shows that even in a one-party state, the people sometimes prevail against those with power, and democracy can work on the local level.

The Huaxi scene shows the astonishing improvement in living standards in much of rural China. But huge pockets of severe poverty, like in Changwu, still persist, especially in inland areas far removed from the more prosperous coastal regions. Most of rural China falls between the extremes. It is in these in-between areas, such as Nanhu and Zhaiqiao, where the combination of new hopes brought about by economic progress and the tensions caused by blatant corruption, growing inequalities, and other frustrations may prove to be politically explosive.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Qian Yunhui and its aftermath also illustrate the impact of new technologies on politics in the PRC, even in the rural areas. Citizens have become empowered in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, to suppress, and the government finds itself having to be more sensitive to public opinion. The online uproar and the official response that followed, "offers a window into a new political reality in China, one that has profound implications for how the country is governed."²⁰

Economic Management, Social Tensions, and Political Legitimacy

The situation in the Chinese countryside illustrates a larger challenge facing the leaders of the PRC: how to sustain and effectively manage the economic growth that is the basis of public support for the ruling Communist Party. The CCP is gambling that continued solid economic performance will literally buy it legitimacy and that most citizens will care little about democracy or national politics if their material lives continue to get better. So far this gamble seems to have paid off.

But China's growth rate has been so high for so many years that some experts think it is unsustainable and may lead to crash landing for the economy. Soaring inflation, massive unemployment, or a burst real estate bubble could spell disaster for the country's economic miracle. How to cool growth without throttling it, will be a major test of the ability of China's technocratic leaders to govern the economy.

The government of the PRC also needs to find ways to restructure the economy so that its work force is less dependent on employment by export-oriented industries, which are very vulnerable to shifts in the global market. This will involve promoting industries that produce for the domestic economy and its huge untapped consumer market. At the same time, the Chinese government is encouraging its citizens to spend more and save less (in a way, the opposite of America's dilemma) in order to stimulate the domestic economy.

The enormous class, regional, and urban-rural inequalities that so clearly mark modernizing China have bred social instability in some parts of the country that could spread if the party-state fails to provide opportunities for advancement for the less well off. One of most formidable tasks facing the government will be to create enough jobs not only for the millions of laid-off industrial workers and the continuing flow of countryside-to-city migrants, but also for the 25 million or so new entrants to the labor force each year, including 6 million with college degrees.

China's Communist Party leaders will also have to decide how to further nurture the private sector, which is the most dynamic source of economic growth. Yet the government bureaucracy still puts daunting obstacles in the way of business owners and investors, and the state still directly controls vital sectors of the economy and the financial system.

Corruption affects the lives of most people much more directly than political repression. Despite well-publicized campaigns and often harsh punishments for offenders, corruption is still so blatant and widespread that it is probably the single most corrosive force eating away at the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party.

The public health system is in shambles, with AIDS and other infectious diseases spreading rapidly. The country lacks adequate pension and social security systems to meet the needs of its senior citizens of its rapidly "graying" population.

According to a detailed study by the World Bank, a range of indicators measuring governance—"the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good"—shows that the PRC fares considerably better than most developing countries at its level of economic development. But China has improved only slightly in some categories (overall government effectiveness and regulatory quality) or deteriorated somewhat in others (control of corruption and political stability) between 2000 and 2009.²¹ These categories bear directly on the party-state's ability to manage China's rapidly modernizing economy and radically changing society and portray some of the most important challenges facing the country's leadership.

China and the Democratic Idea

Two other World Bank governance indicators measure issues that are central to the democratic idea. The “rule of law” in the PRC has improved somewhat over the last decade, while “voice and accountability” has declined.

The PRC has evolved in recent decades toward a system of what has been called “Market-Leninism,”²² a combination of increasing economic openness (a market economy) and continuing political rigidity under the leadership of a Leninist ruling party that adheres to a remodeled version of communist ideology. The major political challenges now facing the CCP and the country emerge from the sharpening contradictions and tensions of this hybrid system.

As the people of China become more secure economically, better educated, and more aware of the outside world, they will also likely become more politically active. Business owners may want political clout to match their rising economic and social status. Scholars, scientists, and technology specialists may become more outspoken about the limits on intellectual freedom. The many Chinese who travel or study abroad may find the political gap between their party-state and the world’s democracies to be increasingly intolerable.

What are the prospects for democratization in China? On the one hand, China’s long history of bureaucratic and authoritarian rule and the hierarchical values of still-influential Confucian culture seem to be heavy counterweights to democracy. And, although some aspects of its social control have broken down, the coercive power of China’s communist party-state remains formidable. The PRC’s relatively low per capita standard of living, large rural population and vast areas of extreme poverty, and state-dominated media and means of communications also impose some impediments to the spread of the democratic idea. Finally, many in China are apathetic about politics or fearful of the violence and chaos that radical political change might unleash. They are quite happy with the status quo of economic growth and overall political stability of the country under the CCP.

On the other hand, the impressive success of democratization in Taiwan in the past decade, including free and fair multiparty elections from the local level up to the presidency, strongly suggests that the values, institutions, and process of democracy are not incompatible with Confucian culture. And though it is still a developing country, China has a high literacy rate, extensive industrialization and urbanization, a fast rate of economic growth, and a burgeoning middle class—conditions widely seen by social scientists as favorable to democracy.

Despite the CCP’s continuing tight hold on power, there have been a number of significant political changes in China that could be harbingers of democracy: the enhanced political and economic power of local governments; the setting of a mandatory retirement age and term limits for all officials; the rise of younger, better educated, and more worldly leaders; the increasingly important role of the National People’s Congress in the policy-making process; the introduction of competitive elections in rural villages; the strengthening and partial depoliticization of the legal system; tolerance of a much wider range of artistic, cultural, and religious expression; and the important freedom (unheard of in the Mao era) for individuals to be apolitical.

Furthermore, the astounding spread of the democratic idea around the globe has created a trend that will be increasingly difficult for China’s leaders to resist. The PRC has become a major player in the world of states, and its government must be more responsive to international opinion in order to continue the country’s deepening integration with the international economy and growing stature as a responsible and mature global power.