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### **Explaining the Persistence of Authoritarianism in China: Towards a Multivariable Approach**

#### **Abstract:**

There is no disagreement in the literature on the persistence of China's authoritarian regime. People differ on the way of explaining the phenomenon. Obviously, the issue is of profound importance in political science and law. In the literature, many scholars pursue a single variable approach, examining the issue from the perspective of resilience, regime inclusion, timing and sequence of using FDI, or national identity. The author argues that any single variable explanation is inadequate despite the coherence or elegance of such theories. Among those who have adopted the multivariable perspective in examining the phenomenon of China's persistence of authoritarianism, people tend to ignore some of the variables such as modernization, the cultural variable, the geo-political factor, and legitimacy in their analyses. This article has approached the issue by focusing on these four variables to explain China's persistence of authoritarianism.

**Keywords:** Authoritarianism, Modernization, Cultural Explanation, Geo-Political Factor, Legitimacy.

#### **1 Introduction**

There is no disagreement in the literature on the persistence of China's authoritarian regime. People differ on the way of explaining the phenomenon. Gallagher argues that the timing and sequencing of foreign direct investment (FDI) liberalization in China is a key factor of explaining delayed democratization.<sup>1</sup> She states that, "FDI liberalization preceded both the privatization of state industry and the development of a domestic private sector," providing the Chinese government "more time and more political space to pursue economic reform without political liberalization."<sup>2</sup> Gallagher's argument, however, may also point to the other direction that FDI brings into China western liberal ideas and the superiority of western political systems, together with Western technology and management methods. If that is the case, China should have introduced political reform at an earlier stage. In addition, her argument is not able to explain the remarkably high level of popular support for the authoritarian regime even at the beginning of this century.<sup>3</sup> Yan Xiaojun tries to explain the

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Gallagher, "Reform and Openness: Why China's Economic Reforms Have Delayed Democracy", 54 *World Politics* 338-72 (2002).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>3</sup> Teresa Wright, *Accepting Authoritarianism: State-Society Relations in China's Reform Era* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 13-14, 17.

resilience of China's authoritarianism from the perspective of regime inclusion.<sup>4</sup> He holds the view that the local people's political consultative conference plays the role of "assisting the ruling party-state to build, consolidate and retain political support and to prolong the longevity of the system."<sup>5</sup> Regime inclusion, however, requires that people have confidence in the regime. Whether people have confidence in the regime must be explained by other factors such as economic performance or preference for a particular type of regime. Besides, regime inclusion depends, to some extent, upon the legitimacy of the regime. Tsai uses the informal institution of solidary group to show that public goods can be supplied even when "formal institutions of bureaucratic and democratic accountability do not seem to have a major impact on village governmental performance and public goods provision."<sup>6</sup> Her explanation is that "social groups that are encompassing, embedding, and solidary can also make citizens more likely and able to use moral standing to reward officials for providing public goods."<sup>7</sup> While her book provides a sound explanation for the provision of public goods at the village level, the theory is not useful in explaining regime persistence or change. This is so because informal institutions work well only in small communities where people know each other well and are less mobile. According to Huntington, however, modern democracy is the democracy of the nation-state.<sup>8</sup> That explanation also reveals why village democracy in China does not have much impact upon regime change of the nation despite optimistic views on village committee election.<sup>9</sup> He Baogang explains the delay of democracy in China in terms of national identity.<sup>10</sup> According to He, democratization will lead to the separation or independence of Tibet or Taiwan. This explanation is true only if democracy in the sense of electing the provincial leaders is adopted far ahead of electing the national leaders. If democracy in China is firstly implemented at the national level, it is not necessarily true that a democratically elected central government will tolerate the separation or independence of Tibet or Taiwan. He fails to treat this sequence issue.

While the above authors examine a particular aspect of regime persistence or the provision of public goods, Wright uses several factors to show acceptance of authoritarianism by various types of people in China.<sup>11</sup> "[T]he political attitudes and behavior of the Chinese public derive from the interaction of

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<sup>4</sup> Yan Xiaojun, "Regime Inclusion and the Resilience of Authoritarianism: The Local People's Political Consultative Conference in Post-Mao Chinese Politics, 66 *The China Journal* 53-75 (2011).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>6</sup> Lily L. Tsai, *Accountability without Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (New Delhi: Adarsh Books, 1991), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Tianjian Shi, "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy", 51 *World Politics* 385- 412 (1999).

<sup>10</sup> He Baogang, "Why Is Establishing Democracy So Difficult in China?", 35 *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 71- 92 (2003).

<sup>11</sup> Wright, *supra* note 3.

three key factors” including “state-led economic development policies, market forces related to late industrialization, and socialist legacies.”<sup>12</sup> As single variable explanation is more likely to be problematic, Wright is moving in the right direction. Her research, however, ignores factors such as geo-political variable and cultural variable. Hu uses historical legacies, local forces, the world system, socialist values and economic development to analyze China’s difficulty with democratization.<sup>13</sup> Except for the factor of economic development, Hu focuses on pre-1949 or pre-1978 China rather than current China after 1978. This article uses a multivariable perspective to visit two frequently discussed factors explaining democratization. These factors are the modernization theory and the cultural explanation. In addition to these two explanations, the article also examines the geo-political factor and the resilience factor in explaining the persistence of China’s authoritarianism. Section I begins with the modernization theory. Section II focuses on the cultural explanation. Section III analyzes the geo-political factor. Section IV examines resilience or legitimacy. Section V reviews available survey results. Conclusion follows in Section VI.

## 2 Modernization

Lipset first raised the correlation between economic development and democracy.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, his research supported the conclusion that “the average wealth, degree of industrialization and urbanization, and level of education is much higher for the more democratic countries.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, the higher the rate of economic development the greater the propability for a country to become democratic. Huntington is a strong support of the modernization theory. According to Huntington, when a country moves up the economic ladder, the greater are the chances that it will be democratic.<sup>16</sup> Both Lipset and Huntington emphasize the importance of broad-based economic development. Huntington offers two major explanations why broad-based economic development is conducive to democratization:

Economic development created new sources of wealth and power outside the state and a functional need to develop decision making. More directly, economic development appears to have promoted changes in social structure and values that, in turn, encouraged democratization.<sup>17</sup>

Neither Lipset nor Huntington, however, considers economic development a sufficient condition for democratization. Lipset considers broad-based economic development a basic condition sustaining

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Shaohua Hu, *Explaining Chinese Democratization* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy”, 53 *The American Political Science Review* 69-105 (1959).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Huntington, “Will More Countries Become Democratic?”, 99 *Political Science Quarterly*, 193-218 (1984), p. 198-99.

<sup>17</sup> Huntington, *Third Wave*, supra note 8, p.65.

democracy,<sup>18</sup> but not necessarily a factor led to democracy.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Huntington remarks that “no level or pattern of economic development is in itself either necessary or sufficient to bring about democratization.”<sup>20</sup> The statistical analysis of Przeworski and Limongi supports such a cautious conclusion. According to Przeworski and Limongi, “once established, democracies are likely to die in poor countries and certain to survive in wealthy ones.”<sup>21</sup> Hence, narrowly focused factor on income does not reveal significant impact on democratization. The study of Acemoglu et al. reveals that “there is no relationship between changes in income and democracy” over the last 100 years, but there is a correlation between income and democracy over the past 500 years.<sup>22</sup> While they did not entirely reject the possible impact of income on democracy, their preferred explanation is that societies might embark on divergent development paths in the past, leading to different political regimes.<sup>23</sup> Recognizing the impact of income on democracy, Londregan and Poole concluded that “the estimated magnitude of the democracy-promoting impact of income is not large.”<sup>24</sup>

This review of the modernization theory shows that the case of China is quite consistent with the literature. I will provide statistical evidence related to changes in income, industrialization, education, and urbanization in China to better demonstrate the consistence.

During the last 30 years, the annual growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) in China was around 9 per cent. Unlike economic development in resource rich economies, the development of the Chinese economy has been broad-based. GDP per capita developed from 463 yuan in 1980 to 1644 yuan in 1990, 7858 yuan in 2000 and 29748 yuan in 2010.<sup>25</sup> Converted into US dollars, the GDP per capita in China reached USD 1,000 in 2003, surpassed USD 2,000 in 2007 and USD 3,000 in 2008. In 2010, the per capita GDP exceeded USD 4,000. This means that between 2003 and 2008, China was within the middle income range of USD 1,000 to 3,000,<sup>26</sup> which Huntington predicted that “transitions to democracy should occur primarily in countries at the middle level of economic development.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lipset, *supra* note 14, p. 86.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Huntington, *Third Wave*, *supra* note 8, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> A. Przeworski and F. Limongi, “Modernization: Theories and Facts”, 49 *World Politics* 155- 183 (1997), p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Daron Acemoglu et al., “Income and Democracy”, 98 *American Economic Review* 808-42 (2008), p. 812.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 812.

<sup>24</sup> John B. Londregan and Keith T. Poole, “Does High Income Promote Democracy?”, 49 *World Politics* 1-30 (1996), pp. 2-3.

<sup>25</sup> Data comes from various years of the *Statistical Yearbook of China* (Beijing: Statistical Yearbook Press).

<sup>26</sup> Huntington, *Third Wave*, *supra* note 8, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

China's urbanization rate also rose significantly. In 1980, the urbanization rate was only 19.39 per cent.<sup>28</sup> This rate increased to 26.41 per cent in 1990, 36.22 per cent in 2000 and 49.68 per cent in 2010.<sup>29</sup> Closely related to the increase of urbanization rate, the number of persons employed in urban areas almost tripled from 1980 to 2010. In 1980, there were 104.44 million persons employed in urban areas. Thereafter, the number of persons employed in urban areas rose to 202.07 million in 1997 and 346.87 million in 2010.<sup>30</sup>

Among the various indicators, education was considered much more important to democracy than per capita GDP, urbanization, and industrialization.<sup>31</sup> This is likely so as education increases the capacity of people in their public participation or deliberation of policy making. From this perspective, university education is critical in terms of deliberation of public policies. Evidence shows that economic development in China has considerably improved people's capability of receiving an university education. This can be seen from the number of university students per 100,000 inhabitants. While this figure was 116 in 1980, it rose to 180 in 1990, 493 in 2000 and 3,105 in 2010.<sup>32</sup>

The above statistical evidence does not reveal any significant impact of improvement in income, industrialization, urbanization, and education upon democratization in China. So far, China remains an authoritarian political regime. To the contrary, the case of China may prove that modernization and democratization are different things as pointed out by Huntington.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Huntington quotes Pipe with approval that "modernization requires no one political ideology or set of institutions: elections, national boundaries, civic associations, and the other hallmarks of Western life are not necessary to economic growth."<sup>34</sup> This appears to be consistent with the literature on law and development that economic development requires clear definition and enforcement of property rights<sup>35</sup> and the facilitation of contractual exchange and the enforcement of contracts by a formal legal system.<sup>36</sup> Law and development in China seems to be consistent with the view that a formal legal system defining and enforcing property rights and contracts is essential to very high rate of economic

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<sup>28</sup> Statistical Yearbook of China (Beijing: China Statistical Press, 1982).

<sup>29</sup> The figures come from various years of the Statistical Yearbook of China, *supra* note 25.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Lipset, *supra* note 14, pp. 78-79.

<sup>32</sup> The figures come from various years of the Statistical Yearbook of China, *supra* note 25.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>35</sup> Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History 6* (New York: Norton, 1981) (observing that the "existence of a positive return to saving is also dependent upon the structure of property rights.").

development.<sup>37</sup> Huntington's explanation that modernization and democracy are different things means that the casual link runs from economic development to cultural element. He says specifically that:

Successful economic development generates self-confidence and assertiveness on the part of those who produce it and benefit from it. Wealth, like power, is assumed to be proof of virtue, a demonstration of moral and cultural superiority.<sup>38</sup>

Modernization theory only indicates that broad-based economic development is a necessary condition for democracy. Once a political decision is made to democratize the political regime, modernization can better sustain democracy. Whether a country in the middle income range moves towards democratization depends upon many other factors. The case of China shows that fast rate of economic development may even prolong the authoritarian political regime. The confidence produced by fast rate of economic development, of course, is only one of the possible factors explaining China's persistence of its authoritarian political regime. As there are other factors supporting the current political regime, I will turn to the cultural or ideological explanation in the next Section.

### 3 Cultural or Ideological Explanation

Chinese society was deeply influenced by Confucianism before the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Thereafter, China has been under the ruling of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Both Confucianism and communism are conducive to authoritarian regimes.

Confucianism was developed during later Zhou Dynasty (770 – 221 B. C.). At that time, the Chinese society was mainly agricultural in nature. War was very frequent. Education was only available to a very small proportion of the population. Naturally, Confucianists emphasized hierarchy. In such a hierarchical society, people are divided into four classes.<sup>39</sup> They are scholars, peasants, artisans, and merchants.<sup>40</sup> This type of classification reveals the emphasis of agriculture and the downgrading of merchants.<sup>41</sup> The classification makes sense when it was relatively easy for rulers to monitor agricultural production but difficult to assess the production of commerce as transportation and communication was very inefficient and costly. Scholars were limited and they played the role as political advisors just as Confucius did.

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<sup>37</sup> Guanghua Yu and Hao Zhang, "Adaptive Efficiency and Financial Development in China: The Role of Contracts and Contractual Enforcement", 11 *Journal of International Economic Law* 459-94 (2008); Guanghua Yu, "Adaptive Efficiency and Economic Development in China: The Definition and Enforcement of Property Rights", 11 *Australian Journal of Asian Law* 82-112 (2009).

<sup>38</sup> Huntington, *Clash of Civilization*, supra note 33, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Feng You Lan, *Introduction to Chinese Philosophy* (Beijing: New World Press, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Deemphasizing the goal of wealth can be seen in the "Commentary on the Philosopher of Zeng", *The Great Learning, Four Books*, translated by James Legge and edited by the translation division of the Publisher (Changsha: Hunan Publishing House, 1991), p. 17 and p. 19.

In addition to the classification of people into four classes, the relations among various people were also defined. They include sovereign and ministers, father and son, husband and wife, brother and sister (old and young), and friends.<sup>42</sup> Among these five relations, three are among family members. While the other two are not among family members, they can be considered as family relations. For instance, sovereign and ministers can be treated as father and son and friends can be treated as brothers.<sup>43</sup> The hierarchical nature among the five relations is very clear. For instance, the ministers should be subordinated to the emperor and the wife should be subordinated to the husband. According to Confucius, different people shall play their role according to their position.<sup>44</sup> If people behave according to their position, chaos can be avoided at the family level and wars can be prevented at the societal level.

Confucius acted as a political advisor during his lifetime, persuading different rulers to adopt his ideas and conception of the good of society. His intention was to serve the rulers and strengthen their rule. Therefore, respect for authority was central within Confucianism. After the death of Confucius, Confucian values became the dominant ideology through official endorsement since the Han Dynasty (206 B. C. - 23 A.D.).<sup>45</sup> The institutionalization of Confucian values was carried out through the official examination system. This examination system was used to select officials. Those who succeeded well on the examination would be guaranteed certain posts according to their examination results.<sup>46</sup> As the content of the examination was strictly based upon books containing Confucian values,<sup>47</sup> public deliberation obviously became restricted as other values were downgraded.

Many Western scholars have commented the impact of Confucianism on democracy. Lipset observed that Confucianism was undemocratic.<sup>48</sup> Huntington shared the similar view that “Confucianism was either undemocratic or antidemocratic.”<sup>49</sup> Specifically, Huntington provides that:

Confucian societies lacked a tradition of rights against the state; to the extent that individual rights did exist, they were created by the state. Harmony and cooperation were preferred over disagreement and competition. The maintenance of order and respect for hierarchy were central values. The conflict of ideas, groups, and parties was viewed as dangerous and illegitimate. Most important, Confucianism

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<sup>42</sup> Feng, *supra* note 39, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *The Great Learning*, *supra* note 41, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Feng You Lan, *supra* note 39, p. 167; Brooke A. Ackerly, “Is Liberalism The Only Way Toward Democracy? Confucianism and Democracy”, 33 *Political Theory* 547-76 (2005), p. 555.

<sup>46</sup> Ackerly, *ibid.*; Feng You Lan, *ibid.*, p. 167 and pp. 255-56.

<sup>47</sup> “*Ji Shi*” in Book XVI of *The Confucian Analects* states that “when right principles prevail in the empire, there will be no discussions among the common people”, *Four Books*, *supra* note 41, p. 219.

<sup>48</sup> Lipset, *supra* note 14, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> Huntington, *Third Wave*, *supra* note 8, p. 300.

merged society and the state and provided no legitimacy for autonomous social institutions to balance the state at the national level.<sup>50</sup>

These two scholars are correct only when Confucianism is used by the ruling regime as the dominant ideology. History reveals that democracy did not originate in dynasty China. When Confucian values are not used as the dominant ideology, however, societies with the influence of Confucianism do not object to the transplantation of democratic political regimes. Taiwan provides a good example of relative smooth transplantation of a democratic political regime. Another good example of transplantation of democratic political regime is Korea. Empirical evidence suggests that Korea was still under the influence of Confucian values at the beginning of this century. The study of Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin reveals that the Confucian value of social harmony remains widely accepted.<sup>51</sup> Their survey also indicates that the value of family primacy is still widely accepted by the Korean population.<sup>52</sup> Most Korean people treat the state as a national family.<sup>53</sup> Despite the influence of Confucian values in South Korea, the country has successfully transplanted a democratic political regime. Their survey shows that even those who hold Confucian values support democracy.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast, Ackerly identifies *ren* (humaneness) as the foundation for Confucian democratic political thought in the Confucian tradition.<sup>55</sup> Confucian democracy, however, lacks empirical support. Despite the official endorsement of Confucian values by different dynasties in ancient China, public participation for the election of high level officials was never adopted. Confucian values were designed to serve the ruling class or to strengthen their political governance, these values failed to emphasize formal constraints on the exercise of power except that rulers should keep *ren* in their mind in guiding their actions. It shall also be pointed out that while Confucianism does not try to exclude other ideologies, it does not encourage the ordinary people to join political deliberation. From a normative perspective, O'Dwyer has argued that public deliberation in the form of democracy can be compatible with the preservation of Confucian tradition.<sup>56</sup> While his consequential approach is consistent with the transplantation of democracy in Korea and Taiwan, O'Dwyer fails to deal with the issue that a society like China has also been under communist rule for more than 60 years.

While communism differs significantly from Confucianism, communism shares the concept of elite rule with Confucianism. Leadership and representation of the people by the Communist Party of China

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., pp. 300-301.

<sup>51</sup> Chong-Min Park and Doh Chull Shin, "Do Asian Values Deter Popular Support for Democracy in South Korea?", 46 *Asian Survey* 341-61 (2006), p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Ackerly, *supra* note 45.

<sup>56</sup> Shaun O'Dwyer, "Democracy and Confucian Values", 53 *Philosophy East and West* 39- 63 (2003).



(CPC) are assumed rather than through actual authorization or delegation.<sup>57</sup> From this perspective, public deliberation of important policies is not encouraged and participation of the public in the selection of higher level leaders is not adopted. In the eyes of the CPC during its early formative years, the destination of the future of communist Chinese society appeared to them to be very clear. All that was needed was to implement the plan. Those who opposed the communist plan were considered enemies of the people and should be suppressed. Under the current CPC regime, such a utopian ideal is no longer pursued. This does not mean, however, that the CPC is enthusiastic about the adoption of a democratic regime.

History shows that the abandonment of communist rule has been brought by popular demand. East Europe provides a very good example. Two major factors have significantly influenced the popular view in East Europe. One is geo-political factor which will be further discussed in the next Section. The other is the superior economic performance of the economies of West European countries and the United States at that time. While writing in a slightly different context, Huntington's remarks below are quite relevant on how economic superiority may affect regime change or borrowing:

Increases in hard economic and military power produce enhanced self-confidence, arrogance, and belief in the superiority of one's own culture or soft power compared to those of other peoples and greatly increase its attractiveness to other peoples. Decreases in economic and military power lead to self-doubt, crises of identity, and efforts to find in other cultures the keys to economic, military, and political success.<sup>58</sup>

More specifically, Huntington says that "In large measure, rise and decline of democracy on a global scale is a function of the rise and decline of the most powerful democratic states."<sup>59</sup>

Compared with East Europe, the case of China is different. China's economic reform was initiated by the State and preceded political reform. State led economic development and the early emphasis of FDI reduced political pressure on regime change. When the state began to introduce measures for the expansion of contractual commercial activities, part of the population both in the rural area and in the urban area started to benefit from enhanced living standard. FDI producing labour intensive products has also increased employment when China started to show its clear comparative advantage in producing labour intensive products in the 1980s and 1990s. Unlike capitalists who are independent from the state, foreign invested enterprises did not press for regime change. Gallagher even argued that FDI induced competition was identified as domestic versus foreign rather than public versus private, insulating the CPC from political charges.<sup>60</sup> Naturally, the state enjoyed great freedom to carry out

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<sup>57</sup> See paragraph one of the General Principles of the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, available at <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64156/65682/4475081.html> (accessed June 10, 2012); paragraph 7 of the Preamble of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/15/content\\_1367387.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-03/15/content_1367387.htm) (accessed June 10, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Huntington, *Clash of Civilization*, supra note 33, p. 92.

<sup>59</sup> Huntington, supra note 16, p. 206.

<sup>60</sup> Gallagher, supra note 1, p. 344.

economic reform during the early stage. While a small proportion of the population became relatively worse off, most people in different sectors enjoyed rising living standard.<sup>61</sup> Lau and his colleagues have similarly argued that welfare improvement of the majority brought by the economic reform reduced the threat of political instability.<sup>62</sup> As economic improvement brought by economic reforms has been initiated and controlled by the CPC with a strong socialist legacy,<sup>63</sup> the political regime to a large extent has been accepted by the public so far.

As has been analyzed, Confucianism is not very conducive to the development of democracy.<sup>64</sup> Confucianist societies, however, may transplant democracy if there is a political will as the case of Taiwan has demonstrated or Confucian values can be consistent with democracy as the case of South Korea has revealed. When Confucianism and communism are combined together, the process of democratization will take a longer time. China, North Korea, and Vietnam are three cases supporting this point.

There are limits in resorting to the cultural variable. Huntington has discussed several factors to question the cultural obstacle.<sup>65</sup> First, Catholicism was used to explain the resistance of democracy, but Catholicism has become pro-democratic.<sup>66</sup> Second, cultures are dynamic and are evolving through time.<sup>67</sup> Cultures also interact with other variables such as economic development. Economic development promotes diversity. This is so as decentralized innovation and competition on the market creates wealth outside governments. Differential wealth ownership results in diversified values and preferences. Diversity requires the change of traditionally held values of Confucianism which is based on an agricultural society and communist values which emphasizes equality and deference to party rule. While diversity moves towards greater degree of public participation as people try to express their views if public policies affect people's interest differently than policies on a homogeneous group of population under old regimes, economic development may move in the direction of choosing China's own model of democracy as people's confidence increases.

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<sup>61</sup> For a detailed analysis of welfare change of people in different sectors, see Wright, *supra* note 3.

<sup>62</sup> Lawrence Lau, Yingyi Qian, and Gerald Roland, "Reform without Losers: An Interpretation of China's Dual-Track Approach to Transition", 108 *Journal of Political Economy* 120- 43 (2000).

<sup>63</sup> See Wright, *supra* note 3, p. 2. Also see Sebastian Heilmann and Elizabeth J. Perry eds., *Mao's Invisible Hand* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center: Distributed by the Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>64</sup> For a contrary view that Confucianism is conducive to or at least compatible with modern democracy, see Joseph C.W. Chan, "Democracy and Meritocracy: Toward a Confusion Perspective", 34 *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 179- 93 (2007); also see Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Huntington, *Third Wave*, *supra* note 8, p. 311.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Just as modernization by itself is not an adequate explanatory variable, so is the cultural explanation. The next Section examines the geo-political variable in explaining the persistence of China's authoritarianism.

#### 4 The Geo-political Variable

Geo-political factors play important roles in the transplantation of democratic political regimes. One mechanism the geo-political factor works to shape the democratization of other nations is the role model. Smaller nations or less developed nations tend to learn from and borrow democratic institutions from the more advanced core nations they admire. When commenting on the impact of culture on regime change, Huntington claims that “if it were not for the changes within the Catholic Church and the resulting actions of the Church against authoritarianism, fewer third wave transitions to democracy would have occurred and many that did occur would have occurred later.”<sup>68</sup> In addition, he refers to the major sources of influence in the world then including the European Community, which specified democracy as a precondition to joining the community, the United States, and the Soviet Union in their active promotion of democracy in the later 1980s.<sup>69</sup>

In attributing the receptivity to German and US constitutional review practice to geopolitics in Korea and Taiwan, Ginsburg provides:

Both polities were small and vulnerable, characteristics that can lead to quick adjustments to changing international conditions. Both countries (along with postwar West Germany) found themselves as United States allies engaged in political-ideological confrontation with Communist regimes that claimed to be the legitimate government of their peoples. Their legitimation in these confrontations came from identification as embodiments of liberal values against Communism. As such, throughout the Cold War period, the United States provided an important “reference society” against which progress was measured. America, and to a less extent Germany, was where elites went for training, where dissidents went for exile, and was the source of technology, capital, and ideas.<sup>70</sup>

Scholars in political science or law, however, have not paid adequate attention to the influence of geopolitical factors in the process of China's democratization. In explaining China's delayed democratization, Gallagher compared the case of China with that of Korea and Taiwan. According to Gallagher, state-led development in Korea and Taiwan relied very much upon the domestic private sector whereas state-led development in China relied heavily upon FDI.<sup>71</sup> It is the development of the private sector in Korea and Taiwan which led to political change and eventual democratization.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>70</sup> Tom Ginsburg, “Confucian Constitutionalism? The Emergence of Constitutional Review in Korea and Taiwan”, 27 *Law & Social Inquiry*, 763- 99 (2002), pp. 790-91.

<sup>71</sup> Gallagher, *supra* note 1, pp. 36-68.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Development of the private sector by itself, however, is not adequate for regime change. Gallagher's focus is too narrow. She not only ignores the cultural factor but also the geo-political variable.

Geo-political factors may, however, also operate to resist learning from other nations. It is the author's argument that political hostility between the US and China from 1940s to 1970s and lack of political trust during the beginning of this century are a contributing factor of China's delayed process of democratization. This relation works through the mechanism of nationalism. In addition, wars or hostility reduces people's rationality in assessing alternatives. Right after the founding of the People Republic of China (China) in 1949, US and China respectively and in sequence joined the Korea War<sup>73</sup> which resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides. In addition, US and China were also involved in the Vietnam War.<sup>74</sup> In contrast to the Korea War in which soldiers of China and soldiers of the United Nations led by the US fought directly, China's involvement in the Vietnam War was much more indirect. Unlike the Korea War, however, the Vietnam War lasted much longer. Both wars caused a great deal of hostility between China and US. Fighting wars to protect the nation requires a strong government. The Chinese government's partial success in these wars enhanced the regime's legitimacy among the public at large. When nations are at war or engaged in political hostility, transplantation of foreign regimes such as democracy becomes much harder.

Political liberalism in the former Soviet Union occurred at the end of 1980s when the hostility between the US and the Soviet Union was considerably reduced. The reduction of hostility between the US and the Soviet Union can also explain the process of democratization in East Europe. Despite the pulling factor of the European Community which enjoyed a much higher living standard, East Europe's process of democratization was not promising due to the intervention of the Soviet Union. Only when the Soviet Union itself decided to liberalize its political system and shifted its policy to non-intervention, did the East European countries begin to carry out measures of liberalization. From this perspective, the non-intervention policy of the Soviet Union can be considered as the pushing factor in the process of democratization of the East European countries. Furthermore, the European Community was much less hostile towards East European nations than the hostility imposed by the US on North Korea, Vietnam, and China.

An additional case to explain my argument is Cuba. Cuba is a very small nation. It is closely located to the US in terms of geography. From an economic perspective, the gains to be realized from its trade with the US are enormous. In addition to trade, potential FDI from US is likely to significantly benefit Cuba. Unlike the East European countries, there was not much external constraint on Cuba's autonomous decisions on its choice of political regime. Neither the Soviet Union nor China was likely or able to intervene had Cuba decided to move towards a democratic political regime in 1980s or 1990s. All these tend to suggest that Cuba would become democratized ahead of the East European countries. This did not occur. A likely explanation is the hostility between the US and Cuba. Ever since the establishment of the socialist regime in Cuba, the hostility of the US towards Cuba's political system has been high. Under political hostility, the US imposed various types of economic sanctions on

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<sup>73</sup> Phil Williams et al., *Security in Korea: War, Stalemate, and Negotiation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

<sup>74</sup> Cheng Guan Ang, *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War* (London, New York: Routledge, 2010).

Cuba at different times. The US also planned several unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the government of Cuba. Despite the hostility and economic sanctions, Cuba remains so far an authoritarian regime.

Further to the hostility, the US also acted in different ways which promote nationalism in China. Despite the normalization of China-US relations in 1979, the US has kept its policy of selling weapons to Taiwan. Although the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979<sup>75</sup> promised to make available such defense weapons as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability, pursuant to the 1982 Shanghai Communique, the United States would not sell Taiwan a greater number of weapons than it did before 1979 and it intended to reduce its sales of arms to Taiwan.<sup>76</sup> Despite its promise, the Bush Administration authorized the sale of 150 F-16 fighters to Taiwan in 1992.<sup>77</sup> More recently in 2010, the Obama Administration initiated the sale of USD 6 billion worth of Patriot anti-missile systems, helicopters, mine-sweeping ships and communications equipment to Taiwan.<sup>78</sup> In September 2011, the Obama Administration again announced a package of USD 5.85 billion to refurbish and upgrade Taiwan's fleet of F-16 fighters.<sup>79</sup> To the majority of Chinese people, such actions constituted interference with China's domestic affairs.

The recent position of the US on the disputes over the South China Sea between China and the Philippines or Vietnam also tends to strengthen nationalism in China. China has persistently claimed and maintained sovereignty over the Nansha Islands (the Spratly Islands) and the Xisha Islands (the Paracel Islands) "by ways of discovery, naming, mapping, control, public and private use, administrative allocation of jurisdiction, and other manifestations of authority throughout history".<sup>80</sup> Before France occupied some of the islands in the South China Sea in the 1930s, no other nation made sovereignty claims to the islands in the South China Sea.<sup>81</sup> In 1938, Japan also recognized China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands, perhaps for a selfish purpose.<sup>82</sup> During the Second World War, however, Japan replaced France and illegally took over the entire chain of islands in the

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<sup>75</sup> <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/tra01.htm> (accessed July 3, 2012).

<sup>76</sup> <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/communique03.htm> (accessed July 3, 2012).

<sup>77</sup> Zhang Qingmin, "The Bureaucratic Politics of US Arms Sales to Taiwan", 1 Chinese Journal of International Politics 231- 65 (2006).

<sup>78</sup> John Pomfret, "U.S. Sells Weapons to Taiwan, Angering China", Washington Post, January 30, 2010, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed July 3, 2012).

<sup>79</sup> Mark Landler, "No New F-16's for Taiwan, but U.S. to Upgrade Fleet", The New York Times, September 11, 2011, available at <http://www.nytimes.com> (accessed July 3, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> See Shen Jianming, "China's Sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands: a Historical Perspective", The Chinese Journal of International Law 94-157 (2002), p. 102.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

South China Sea.<sup>83</sup> After Japan's defeat, it renounced its claim to the South China Sea Islands.<sup>84</sup> According to the Cairo Declaration made in 1943, China, the United Kingdom and the United States announced that all territories Japan had illegally taken from China should be restored to China, including the South China Sea Islands put by Japan under then Taiwan's jurisdiction.<sup>85</sup> The Cairo Declaration was reconfirmed by the Potsdam Proclamation in 1945.<sup>86</sup> At the San Francisco Peace Conference in 1951, both France and Vietnam represented at the conference made their claims to the South China Sea Islands, but their "claims were ignored at the conference in particular and by the international community in general."<sup>87</sup> Although China did not attend the conference, Premier Zhou Enlai issued a statement reiterating China's sovereignty over the South China Sea Islands.<sup>88</sup> The Soviet representative appealed to recognize China's sovereignty over Taiwan, the Xisha Islands and the Nanshatsuntao Islands including the Spratly chain.<sup>89</sup>

The Philippines only started to claim its sovereignty over some of the Nansha Islands in 1956 and South Vietnam started to encroach upon some of the Xisha Islands in 1959.<sup>90</sup> These and many other claims were repeatedly rejected by the Chinese Government either by official statement and declaration or by war.<sup>91</sup> Due to the rich natural resources, the disputes between China and other nations, such as the Philippines or Vietnam, have recently been intensified.<sup>92</sup> Despite the clear history of which the US is well aware, the US appears to side with the Philippines and Vietnam regardless of China's concern and interest. While the dispute between China and Vietnam over Nansha Islands and Xisha Islands is continuing, the *Roger Revelle*, a US Navy research vessel, visited Tien Sa Port in Vietnam on June 22, 2012.<sup>93</sup> With respect to the dispute between China and the Philippines over the Scarborough Shoal, the US also explicitly sided with the Philippines by its intention to increase its military assistance to the Philippines.<sup>94</sup> This raises the issue why the US tries to reduce the influence of China in Asia. One of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pp. 146-52.

<sup>92</sup> Roberto Tofani, "Hardened Lines in the South China Sea", Asia Times, July 4, 2012, available at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/NG04Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/NG04Ae01.html) (accessed July 4, 2012).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Goeff Dyer and Roel Landingin, "Obama in Show of Support for Philippines", Financial Times, June 9, 2012 available at <http://www.ft.com> (accessed July 4, 2012).

the major political reasons is that the US is not willing to accept China's leadership or dominance in Asia.<sup>95</sup> Professor Huntington, a well-known and influential political scientist in the 1990s explains:<sup>96</sup>

For over two hundred years the United States has attempted to prevent the emergence of an overwhelmingly dominant power in Europe. For almost a hundred years, beginning with its "Open Door" policy toward China, it has attempted to do the same in East Asia.

Under such a political mentality, the US recently announced its policy of returning to Asia. While it may not try to establish military bases in countries surrounding China, it does have the intention of using the military bases of countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam for short term purposes when the need arises.<sup>97</sup>

Obviously, the popular view in China is that the US does not want to have a united or coherent Asia with China playing a relatively important role. Most people in China also do not understand why US is stepping up its efforts to curtail China politically and militarily when China is not only the US's largest trading partner in Asia but also the US's largest governmental bond holder. To many Chinese people, the US' attitudes toward China's peaceful emergence and development are puzzling. This may also explain why most elites in contemporary China tend to go with the Chinese government on reform policies.

A potential counterargument is that the process of democratization is entirely a domestic matter. Whether a country decides to adopt a democratic regime or an authoritarian regime should be a matter for its own people. This counterargument is normatively correct, but positively inaccurate. If core nations can exert influence upon other smaller nations or less developed nations on their choice of political systems, the actions of core nations can also function in ways affecting the delay of democratization of smaller nations or less developed nations. The geo-political factor of the US does affect nationalism in China in a subtle way. Further empirical studies can shed better light on this point. As nationalism reduces or resists foreign influence, the geo-political factor of the role of the US does negatively affect the public opinions or perception of introducing liberal political regimes from the US. To generalize at a lower level of abstraction, US hostility prolongs authoritarianism in North Korea, China, Vietnam, and Cuba. It has to be pointed out that China as a core nation has also exerted some negative influence upon North Korea and Vietnam on their delayed democratization.

Geo-political factors also affect cultural elements. When nations are at war or engaged in hostility, the cultural identity issue becomes a serious concern. This is one of the main causes that the US has had great difficulty establishing peace and order during the Iraq War and the War in Afghanistan, not to mention setting up a stable democracy in these two countries. Otherwise, there would be popular support of the US efforts in building a new regime when the old authoritarian regime has been overthrown in these two countries.

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<sup>95</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, supra note 33, pp. 228.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-29.

<sup>97</sup> Craig Whitlock, "US Eyes Return to Some Southeast Asia Military Bases", *Washington Post*, June 23, 2012, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed July 4, 2012).

If there is anything to be derived from the positive to the normative, two points need to be emphasized. The first point to be generalized from this discussion of the geo-political factor is that nations are able to shape the political system of others or learn from each other easier or better under friendly or peaceful conditions. Why the Chinese political system is more democratic now than it was under Mao's rule is the better relations between China and the US and Europe. Obviously, the significant trading and investment relationship China is enjoying with the West is vital to China's ever improving political regime. If we believe that China's political regime will become more democratic regardless from the substantive point of view or from the procedural point of view there is no need to expect that China will quickly adopt any Western style of democracy in the short term.

An even more important point I want to emphasize is that nations should adopt certain soft version of cosmopolitanism. If we do not divide clearly between us and them, mutual learning will become easier. With the development of transportation and communication, the free flow of people and information tends to make nations adjust their system according to changing circumstances. History is replete with examples of terrible consequences because of the sharp division along ideological lines among nations. The pursuit of communism in the former socialist countries led to the persecution or the deterioration of human rights conditions of millions of people in these countries. The division resulting from the Cold War has also caused a tremendous welfare loss to this world. If we do not pay attention to the methods of pushing western style of democracy, the outcome may not be as good as we desire or expect. Pursuing any type of ideology to the extreme may result in the treatment of human beings as means rather than ends. Cosmopolitan views based humanity is more likely to solve problems among or within nations.

## 5 Resilience or Legitimacy

A residual category on the persistence of China's authoritarianism focuses on resilience. There are two basic approaches. One deals mainly with the process or institutional change of China's political regime. The other analyzes resilience from the standpoint of outcome or welfare.

Nathan's study, for instance, examines four aspects of CPC's institutional change. These aspects include: "1) the increasingly norm-based nature of its succession politics; 2) the increase in meritocratic as opposed to factional considerations in the promotion of political elites; 3) the differentiation and functional specialization of institutions within the regime, and 4) the establishment of institutions for political participation and appeal that strengthen the CPC's legitimacy among the public at large."<sup>98</sup> Norm-bound succession convention makes orderly transfer of power possible. More specifically, term and age limit increases regime legitimacy. Meritocratic considerations in the promotion of political leaders reduce factional fighting and increases regime performance. The differentiation and functional specialization of institutions within the regime increases specialization and professionalization. Political participation at the local level<sup>99</sup> and intellectuals' advisory input at the policy formulation level increase regime support. Yan's research as explained in the Introduction section is also based on

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<sup>98</sup> Andrew J. Nathan, "China's Changing of the Guard: Authoritarian Resilience", 14 *Journal of Democracy* 6-17 (2003), pp. 6-7.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.



process or institutional change.<sup>100</sup> Local people's consultative conference's efforts have consolidated the political support of the regime.

The outcome or welfare based approach, on the other hand, analyzes the outcome or welfare impact of regime reform. Lau and his colleagues<sup>101</sup> for instance, argue that China's dual track<sup>102</sup> approach to structural reform of the economy for transition is Pareto efficient. This is so as the newly created system of market allocation of resources provided new opportunities or benefits to new comers while the existing state planning system implicitly compensated potential losers under the old regime. According to Lau and his colleagues, Pareto-improving reform reduced political resistance of reform.<sup>103</sup> Although their research does not explicitly use the term resilience, the effect of their research is close to the category of resilience. An implication from their research is that Pareto-improving reforms attract political support. Wright offers another outcome or welfare-based approach to resilience.<sup>104</sup> While Wright's approach is also process-oriented, she has focused, to some extent, on the welfare effects of various types of people in China, explaining that factors of change have improved the welfare of people in most social-economic sectors.<sup>105</sup>

Resilience, however, is not an independent variable. It covers and interacts with other different variables. For instance, process oriented approach actually touches upon the variable of legitimacy. Regimes enjoying high legitimacy are relatively stable. Political reform in China related to age and term limit of office increases legitimacy as entrenchment of non-performing or corrupted leaders becomes more difficult. This factor, together with meritocratic promotion and functional specialization, improves legitimacy through regime performance and reduction of politics. Expansion of individual input and participation in public governance enhances legitimacy through the perception of populism.

Outcome or welfare based approach not only focuses on performance legitimacy but also is related to modernization. Other things being equal, performance enhances legitimacy. From this perspective, the study of Lau and his colleagues and the research of Wright can be used to explain the persistence of China's authoritarianism on the ground that reform improves legitimacy. In addition to the variable of legitimacy, outcome or welfare based theories overlaps with the variable of modernization. While traditional modernization theory emphasizes the correlation between economic development and the likelihood of democratization, the theory also leaves room that economic development will not necessarily lead to political democratization. The case of China provides evidence that economic development or welfare improvement of the general population strengthens China's authoritarianism instead through the enhancement of regime legitimacy and confidence in building its own system.

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<sup>100</sup> Yan, *supra* note 4.

<sup>101</sup> Lau et al, *supra* note 62.

<sup>102</sup> Dual track system means that resource allocation was done both by the planning system and through the market during China's economic transition.

<sup>103</sup> Lau et al., *supra* note 62, p. 100.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *supra* note 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

## 6 Review of Survey Results

Democracy is supported by values such as popular sovereignty, commitment to the equality of citizens, and the principle of majority-decision making with adequate protection of minority rights. From this perspective, popular views on their right and intention to participate in the deliberation and formation of public policies and the election of higher level political leaders are of vital importance. If this is the case, popular views or perception on the role of government or the ruling party in China provides an indication of people's demand of democracy. In China, the ruling party and its government have exerted a great deal of control over the selection of higher level governmental leaders, the media, and the establishment of non-profit organizations. If demand of democracy is high, people's perception of the role of government over their lives should be very high. The research of Nathan and Shi reveals, however, that approximately 72 percent of Chinese citizens consider the role of national and local governments insignificant in their daily lives.<sup>106</sup> Such a public perception is an indication of lack of popular demand of Western democracy in China.

To counter tyranny of the majority, democratic regimes require the constitutional protection of fundamental rights of minorities and the conception of equality of citizens. If citizens are truly treated as equal moral concerns, freedom of expression is important. Freedom of expression, of course, does not mean that the view of each person will be adopted on every occasion. Strauss says: "Where there is a great deal of agreement within our society, and our own legal culture, on certain matters, there is also a great deal of disagreement."<sup>107</sup> He specifically provides:

One thing we do, then, when we accept a legal system, is in effect to say to our fellow citizens that we are not going to insist on having everything our own way. More precisely, we are saying that we recognize that there is intense disagreement about certain moral matters; that if society is to function, some of those matters must be authoritatively resolved, and everyone must live with the resolution; and that we understand that the institutions we establish to resolve these disagreements might sometimes reach the result we do not favor. In any large and heterogeneous society – that is, a society that must confront different issues, and in which there are many different views, - nearly everyone will lose occasionally.<sup>108</sup>

While certain individuals' view may not be adopted on every occasion, they are entitled to express their views. Without free expression of views, relevant institutions are not able to know the preferences of society in the formulation of political decisions. In addition to this instrumental goal, freedom of expression is closely related to permanent human development.<sup>109</sup> Individuals may also have moral rights against the government (the majority).<sup>110</sup> To protect the fundamental rights of individuals, the

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<sup>106</sup> Andrew Nathan and Tianjian Shi, "Cultural Requisites for Democracy in China", 122 *Daedalus* 95-123 (1993), p.102.

<sup>107</sup> David A. Strauss, "What is Constitutional Theory", 87 *California Law Review* 581- 592 (1999), p. 588.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, (Currin V. Shields ed.) (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1956), pp. 14, 16, and 21.

<sup>110</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977), ch. 5.

constitution of democratic regimes contains bills of rights. The operation of such democratic regimes requires tolerance of different views of individuals in society. The research of Nathan and Shi, however, shows that “few than 20 percent of the Chinese respondents were willing to allow sympathizers of a deviant viewpoint to express their views in a meeting as compared to 40 to 75 percent of the populations in the other countries in their studies.”<sup>111</sup> Lack of tolerance is conducive to authoritarianism.

Lewis-Back and Stegmaier’s study reveals that retrospective evaluation of economic or fiscal conditions plays an important role in the political fate of elected officials all over the world.<sup>112</sup> Studies in China also indicate that economic performance and promotion of provincial leaders are closely correlated.<sup>113</sup> Revenue maximization, however, is not normally related to the election of political leaders in democratic regimes. Gao’s study suggests, however, that at the county level in China, a 10 percent increase in revenue growth would increase the odds of being locally promoted in the following year by five percent.<sup>114</sup> He thereby challenges the perception that “the party is on a slippery slope of decay and disintegration.”<sup>115</sup>

The above empirical studies show that the authoritarian regime in China is still considerably safe. This goes to the issue whether popular support of the current regime can be attributed to the variables analyzed in this article. Unfortunately, nobody has a survey design which is close or similar to the variables examined in this article. All I can do is to draw some empirical support to some of the variables whenever there is clear evidence.

Wright has reviewed several popular surveys and come to the conclusion that “recent survey data indicate substantial popular support for the authoritarian ruling regime and weak interest in liberal democratic principles.”<sup>116</sup> While she attributes the result to state-led economic development, market forces related to late industrialization, and socialist legacy, the factor of culture is certainly relevant in shaping the popular perception in China. As the socialist regime in China has its own conception of democracy, the public considers the current regime somewhat democratic. A popular survey conducted by Shi in 2002 reveals that over 60 percent of respondents described the current system as democratic

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<sup>111</sup> Nathan and Shi, *supra* note 106, p. 113.

<sup>112</sup> Michael Lewis-Back and Mary Stegmaier, “Economic Determinants of Electoral Outcomes”, 3 *Annual Review of Political Science* 183- 219 (2000).

<sup>113</sup> Zhiyue Bo, *Chinese Provincial Leaders: Economic Performance and Political Mobility Since 1949* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), p. 139; Hongbin Li and Li-An Zhou, “Political Turnover and Economic Performance: The Incentive Role of Personnel Control in China”, 89 *Journal of Public Economics* 1743- 62 (2005), p. 1756.

<sup>114</sup> Gang Gao, “Retrospective Economic Accountability under Authoritarianism: Evidence from China”, 60 *Political Research Quarterly*, 378- 90 (2007), p. 387.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 389.

<sup>116</sup> Wright, *supra* note 3, p. 17.

in certain way.<sup>117</sup> On a subtle issue of the official view of socialist democracy and Western concept of democracy, a slightly more people share the official version of democracy.<sup>118</sup>

Similar to other East Asian nations or regions, most people in China consider economic development more important than democracy.<sup>119</sup> People's view on economic development goes to the variables of legitimacy and modernization. With respect to legitimacy, Party and state-led economic development has clear positive impact on legitimacy. On the issue of society and economy, 96.6 percent expressed the view that the economy today is better than in 1979.<sup>120</sup>

With respect to the variable of legitimacy through process or institutional change, there is significant positive perception among the public. On the point of regime change from 1970s to 1990s then to the beginning of this century, “over 80 percent of respondents perceived a change in the democratic direction.”<sup>121</sup> With respect to future change, the Chinese are equally or more positive than people in other East Asian nations or regions.<sup>122</sup> More specifically, Shi's survey shows that people found considerable improvement in freedom of expression.<sup>123</sup>

As for the position whether China's economic development will lead to democracy, the survey shows positive response but not along the line of Western concept of democracy. Shi's survey indicates that the “Chinese are overwhelmingly supportive of democracy.”<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, urban residents are more supportive of democracy than rural residents.<sup>125</sup> The Chinese concept of democracy is, however, more closely related to populism.<sup>126</sup> While there is a considerable support (84 percent) of having elections of national leaders, only 16.3 percent agreed or strongly agreed with multiparty competition.<sup>127</sup> That result

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<sup>117</sup> Tianjian Shi, “China: Democratic Values Supporting an Authoritarian System”, in Yun-han Chu, Larry Diamond, Andrew J. Nathan, and Doh Chull Shin, eds., *How East Asian View Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 219.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

indicates that China is likely to have a different type of democracy. Peerenboom may be right that China is likely to adopt a soft authoritarian or communitarian type of democracy.<sup>128</sup>

## 7 Conclusion

This article has examined the persistence of China's authoritarianism in terms of lack of multiparty competition for the election of high level executive or legislative leaders. While recognizing the contribution and coherence of single variable explanation of various scholars, I prefer a multivariable approach to the analysis of the issue on explaining China's lack of a western style of democracy. The multivariable approach with a focus on China is obviously not new as several researchers have already done work in this area. My contribution is to focus on different variables explaining the persistence of China's authoritarianism to which others have not adequately paid attention. These explanations include the modernization theory, the cultural variable, the geo-political factor of the US' role in China's democratization process, and legitimacy. Although the process of democratization in China is very slow, the dynamics of forces and particularly the pursuit of individual rights in contemporary China will gradually lead to political changes in China. Given the very successful economic development and China's experience of gradual reform of its institutions during the past 30 years, a likely process is towards political transparency and accountability first under the one party rule in the short run and gradually towards the liberalization of people's freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Freedom of expression and freedom of the media is democracy as public reason. Democracy as public reason is conducive to the establishment of external monitoring mechanisms to make sure that political leaders have to work for the best interest of the larger society. While Western style of democracy may not likely to be adopted in China in the near future, democracy in terms of public reason and as an external monitoring mechanism over political leaders will develop nevertheless. If that is the case, the means and methods of moving towards a future democratic society have to be dealt with. I will leave that task elsewhere.

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<sup>128</sup> Randall Peerenboom, *China's Long March toward Rule of Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 513.