1 INTRODUCTION

ASK MOST AMERICANS whether it is possible to have economic freedom without political freedom, and the answer will be an unequivocal "no"—yet this seemingly contradictory and unstable situation has characterized China for more than thirty years. Despite the country's dramatic economic growth and liberalization, political freedoms have been severely constrained, and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has allowed no challenge to its rule. With the exception of village elections, there have been few signs of increased political liberalization, and in fact there is some evidence of political constriction.

What accounts for this counterintuitive reality, and what might lead toward liberal democratic change? Unlike other countries, where authoritarian political leaders have faced international constraints that have pressed them to undertake democratization, today's China is almost entirely invulnerable to foreign threats and entreaties. The world's other major powers tend to tiptoe around the Chinese leadership, out of fear that angering China will inhibit profitable economic relations with its market. Thus, to a large extent, China's political future will be determined by relations between the ruling party-state and the Chinese people. Without public pressure for systemic political reform, the current ruling elite is unlikely to initiate it.

Given this political environment, it is crucial that we understand the concrete ways in which China's dramatic economic reforms have changed state-society relations, both in terms of politics and economics. Indeed, because relations between the ruling CCP and society have *not* become increasingly strained, China has flouted the expectations of Western policy makers and academics, especially since the early 1990s. Despite a marked upsurge in popular

unrest in China since that time, public pressures for systemic political change have been virtually absent, and public support for CCP rule has remained high. Although this does not preclude the development of societal pressure for democratization in the future, the present political proclivities of the citizenry cry out for an explanation.

This book argues that the political attitudes and behavior of the Chinese public derive from the interaction of three key factors: (1) state-led economic development policies; (2) market forces related to late industrialization; and (3) socialist legacies. Throughout China's reform era, these factors have shaped popular political attitudes and behavior by influencing public perceptions of socioeconomic mobility, material dependence on the party-state, socioeconomic status relative to other groups, and political options. In the post-Mao period, and especially since the early 1990s, these variables have given most major socioeconomic sectors—including those that in other countries have pressed for democratic change—reasons to tolerate or even support continued CCP rule and to lack enthusiasm for systemic political transformation.

First, this confluence of state-led economic development policies, market forces, and socialist legacies has led to upward socioeconomic mobility for large segments of the population, including private entrepreneurs, professionals, rank-and-file private sector workers, and farmers. This is not to argue that economic improvement alone has caused political satisfaction. The crucial factor is that in China, most citizens appear to believe that the authoritarian national government has facilitated the country's—and, therefore, individual citizens'—economic rise.

Second, key sectors—particularly private enterprise owners and state-owned enterprise workers—have had privileged relationships with the CCP. In China, the state has retained control of key economic resources; consequently, groups enjoying a special connection to the state have been rewarded with economic prosperity and security. In turn, this has given those groups a material interest in perpetuating the political status quo, along with a reason to fear liberal democratic reform that might threaten their political advantage.

Among rank-and-file state sector workers, further considerations have been in play. China's late opening to global markets has engendered intense competition for desirable jobs. When coupled with lingering socialist policies that have provided special benefits to state sector workers, these individuals have had a material interest in protecting their privileged status. In addition, because members of this group have espoused socialist values such as

support for state-mandated social welfare guarantees, the continued socialist rhetoric and policies of the central regime have given these individuals an ideal interest in supporting the political status quo.

Farmers and private sector workers have been far less materially reliant on the party-state in the reform era. The relative economic independence of these groups has diminished their incentives to support the existing political system, making them more open to political change. Yet, inasmuch as socialist policies have continued to guarantee land rights to these individuals, their basic livelihood has been protected by a state-provided safety net. Further, as with state sector workers, to the degree that farmers and private sector workers believe that such protections *should* be provided by the government, these groups' potential ideal interest in systemic political transformation has been undercut.

Third, state-led development policies and market forces associated with China's late opening to the global capitalist system have engendered a polarized socioeconomic structure with an economically well-off minority and a poor majority. Within this highly skewed socioeconomic hierarchy, private enterprise owners and professionals have been at or near the top. From the perspective of most members of this wealthy minority, liberal democratic rule has not been appealing. The wide gulf between the rich and poor has bred divergent lifestyles and interests that have limited any potential feeling of common cause or trust between the upper and lower "classes."[1] Without such feelings, wealthy individuals have had little motivation to press for mass political empowerment or to desire majority rule. For private enterprise owners who have profited by paying low wages and by working their employees relentlessly, the political enfranchisement of the lower "class" has been particularly undesirable—especially because relatively poor individuals have displayed clear socialist economic expectations and values.

Farmers and rank-and-file workers in both the state and private sectors have constituted the vast lower tier of China's polarized economic hierarchy. Although these groups would seem to benefit from majority rule, they have had countervailing reasons to accept the political status quo. As noted earlier, state sector workers have continued to receive benefits from the party-state that have been unavailable to other poor individuals. Meanwhile, farmers and private sector workers, who have generally been rising in socioeconomic status, have tended to feel that the central party-state has facilitated rather than thwarted their economic advancement. In addition, their basic sustenance

has been protected by the government's guarantee of land rights to those with rural residence registration.[2] The socialist values of individuals in China's lower socioeconomic tier also have worked against their potential interest in systemic political change.

At the same time, socialist legacies have privileged urban residents over those with rural residence registration, engendering clear divisions within China's lower "class." Rather than feeling a sense of common cause and interests, unskilled laborers with urban and rural residential registrations have tended to view each other as competitors and with mutual disdain. As a result, they have had little inclination to press for their common political enfranchisement.

Fourth, the reform era has witnessed a perceived widening of political options within the existing system and a diminution of appealing political alternatives. Since 1987, rural residents—including both disgruntled farmers and prosperous private entrepreneurs—increasingly have been able to elect local leaders. In addition, the general citizenry has had a growing ability to voice its grievances through petitions and legal adjudication. Although in some authoritarian countries such a partial political opening has led to greater public pressures for democratization, in China this widening of possibilities for political participation has been perceived as an attempt by central authorities to rein in corrupt and ill-intentioned local elites. As a result, potential political dissatisfaction with the overall political system has been undermined.

CHANGES IN STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS IN THE ERA OF REFORM

The variables just outlined have aligned in somewhat distinct ways in the first and second phases of China's post-Mao era.

The Early Reform Era (Late 1970s to the Early 1990s)

In the first phase of China's reform era, which encompassed the late 1970s through the early 1990s, China's form of state-led development featured relatively gradual and circumscribed economic reforms that allowed individuals to engage in commerce in limited markets and to form small-scale private enterprises. Meanwhile, socialist economic policies generally persisted in the state sector, such that most urban workers (especially those in central state-owned enterprises) continued to receive welfare benefits provided by the party-state. Externally, as China slowly opened its economy to the interna-

tional capitalist system, it faced an increasingly competitive and integrated global market wherein a surplus of unskilled workers was readily available to mobile capital owners.

Economic Inequality During this era, economic inequality rose in comparison to the Maoist period (1949–76), leading to a substantial rise in socioeconomic polarization. When China embarked on economic reform in the late 1970s, its Gini coefficient—a statistical measure of wealth distribution—was among the lowest in the world, standing at 0.15 (with 0 reflecting perfect economic equality, and 1 indicating perfect inequality). Indeed, the degree of economic polarization in China was low even in comparison with other socialist states. China's level of material inequality more than doubled over the course of the 1980s, reaching a Gini coefficient of 0.386 in 1988. Viewed against the backdrop of China's recent egalitarian past, this economic imbalance generated substantial public discontent among those at the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum—especially given the widespread belief that those at the top garnered their riches through unjust or corrupt practices. At the same time, during this period the vast majority of China's rural residents experienced substantial improvement in their financial circumstances, and most urban dwellers also enjoyed rising or stable economic conditions.

Economic Dependence and Political Options In addition, this era witnessed a gradual but general decline in levels of economic dependence on the party-state. Farmers were allowed much more independence in growing and selling crops; increasing numbers of urban college graduates were not assigned jobs by the state; and skilled and savvy state-owned enterprise workers began to enter the private sector. In terms of political options, many citizens harbored bitter memories of the tumult and hardship of the Mao era, yet their dissatisfaction with the political system was undercut by their relief at the rise of party leaders with a more pragmatic orientation toward economic and political development.

Political Unrest The confluence of these factors from the late 1970s through the 1980s paved the way for some political unrest in China, which materialized in such cases as the Democracy Wall movement of 1978–80, the student protests of 1986–87, and the massive student-led demonstrations of spring 1989. Yet even before the brutal crackdown of June 4, 1989, the vast majority of citizens showed little interest in pursuing systemic political change. Although some of the protests of this period—especially those in spring 1989—involved

large numbers of citizens, participants generally were urban students and intellectuals, with some state-owned enterprise workers as well. Few private entrepreneurs were involved, and virtually none of China's rural residents—who at the time constituted roughly three-fourths of the population—took part. Further, even when protestors of this period called for "democracy," many exhibited an explicit commitment to socialist economic values.[3]

The Late Reform Era (Early 1990s Through the Present)

The second phase of China's reform era began in the early 1990s and continues today. This era has featured a dramatic acceleration and expansion of state-led economic privatization and marketization. In addition, the CCP leadership has moved from tolerating the private sector to embracing it—and has even invited private businesspeople to join the Communist Party. In the process, many of China's private entrepreneurs have become extremely wealthy. At the same time, the restructuring of large state-owned enterprises has resulted in the unemployment of tens of millions of state sector workers, as well as a substantial diminution of the social welfare benefits formerly provided to them by the party-state. Further, increasing numbers of rural migrants have moved to the cities, improving their economic fortune (as well as that of their families back in the countryside) by working in China's burgeoning private enterprises. Meanwhile, since 1992, China has much more fully opened its economy to the international capitalist system, leaving its unskilled laborers more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the global market.[4] These factors have influenced popular perceptions of socioeconomic mobility, dependence on the state, relative socioeconomic status, and political options. The result has been greater public tolerance of, and even support for, the existing CCP-led political system.

Socioeconomic Inequality: The Numbers Perhaps the most important overall feature of the late reform period has been the development of an even more highly polarized socioeconomic structure. By 1995, economic inequality had grown to such an extent that China's Gini coefficient stood at 0.462. As of 2007, estimates ranged from 0.496 to 0.561.[5] By way of comparison, in 2004 the Gini index of the United States was around 0.45, and in 2005, Brazil stood at roughly 0.56.[6] Thus, within three decades, China moved from a position among the most economically equal countries in the world to the ranks of the most unequal. Reflecting this imbalance, as of 2006 the wealthiest 20 percent of Chinese citizens earned more than 58 percent of China's income, while the poorest 20 percent took in only 3 percent, making for a top-to-bottom ratio of

more than 18 to 1. In contrast, the top 20 percent of the United States' population earned just over 50 percent of the national income, and the bottom 20 percent earned slightly more than 3 percent, with a top-to-bottom ratio of roughly 15 to 1.[7] Further, in China, this inequality has emerged suddenly, under the same political system that until recently castigated the evils of economic polarization.

The overall result is a socioeconomic structure that resembles an "onion dome," with roughly 15 percent of the population occupying the narrow upper level and the remaining 85 percent forming the wide base. Using the income categories of China's National Bureau of Statistics, in 2007 those in the top level earned 60,000 yuan or more per year. In official statistics, this included both the "upper stratum" and the "middle stratum." With earnings between 60,000 and 500,000 yuan/year, the "middle stratum" represented approximately 12 percent of the population. Those in the "upper stratum" (with more than 500,000 yuan/year in income) included no more than 3 percent of the citizenry.[8] The remaining 85 percent earned less than 60,000 yuan/year. In reality, most in this group lived on far less, as China's national per capita income in 2006 was only about 16,000 yuan.[9]

Socioeconomic Inequality: Public Perceptions In a 2006 survey, 2.3 percent of China's citizenry described themselves as "wealthy" (*furen*), while 75.1 percent described themselves as "poor" (*qiongren*).[10] A separate 2006 study presented a less stark picture: .5 percent self-identified as "upper class," 5.4 percent as "upper middle class," 39.6 percent as "middle class," 29.1 percent as "lower middle class," and 24.5 percent as "lower class." Still, even in the more moderate findings of the second study, more than half of the respondents considered themselves to be of "lower" economic status. Further, this latter study finds that, between 2002 and 2006, the percentage of the population who perceived themselves to be "middle class" shrank, while the percentage of those who viewed themselves as "lower class" rose.[11]

The Onion Dome, Sector by Sector In the second phase of China's reform period, the onion dome's narrow "middle" and "upper" strata have included owners of medium and large private enterprises (defined by the party-state as having eight or more employees) and professionals (such as lawyers, medical doctors, accountants, and engineers). As noted earlier, many members of this group have had strong incentives to perpetuate the political status quo. Given the polarized economic structure, as well as the socialist economic preferences

of those at the lower end of China's socioeconomic spectrum, liberal democratic (or majority) rule likely would result in policies (such as higher taxes to support income redistribution) that would threaten the prosperity of well-off individuals. For private entrepreneurs who have garnered their wealth through their connections with the ruling party-state, political change would similarly threaten their economic advantages. In addition, as the perceived gap between the upper- and lower-level tiers of China's socioeconomic structure has grown, those at the top have enjoyed a lifestyle that has increasingly diverged from that of those at the bottom, leading to a diminished sense of commonality in values across socioeconomic strata that has worked against the wealthy group's potential ideal interest in liberal democratic change.

At the bottom of China's onion dome-shaped socioeconomic structure have been rank-and-file state and private sector workers, self-employed small-scale entrepreneurs, and farmers. Given their relatively poor economic conditions and their majority status, these groups might be expected to find mass political enfranchisement desirable. Yet, as noted above, many in this group do not feel the need to press for systemic political change. Those at the lower level of the onion dome have tended to support socialist economic ideals, including greater equality and strong labor protections. Even as the ruling CCP has promoted economic privatization and marketization, it has retained at least some commitment to socialist economic values. Consequently, without alternatives that do a better job in upholding these economic priorities, those of limited economic means have had little reason to believe that a change in the political status quo will improve their material circumstances. On the contrary, they have had cause to fear that such change would unseat the only entity that appears to have the commitment, power, and economic resources to improve their daily circumstances—the central government. This perception has been strengthened by the widespread belief that socialist economic policies are "right" and moral. Thus, when relatively poor citizens have engaged in protest in the late reform period, rather than calling for an end to CCP rule, they have urged the party to live up to its socialist rhetoric.

Particular segments of China's lower economic group have had further reason to tolerate the political status quo. For most state sector workers—especially those employed in state-owned enterprises (SOEs)—the second phase of the reform era has been jarring. Although in the early 1990s, SOE employees continued to enjoy secure employment and pay, relatively lax working conditions, and high social status, since the mid-1990s SOE workers have been

laid off or forced to retire in droves. Subsequently, they have been forced to compete with unskilled rural migrants (whom most city dwellers view as social inferiors) for jobs with low and often delayed pay, extremely long hours, and draconian working conditions. Furthermore, even SOE employees that have retained state-owned enterprise employment typically have faced job insecurity, reduced pay and/or benefits, and more demanding working conditions. At the same time, both current and former SOE workers have remained dependent on the state for their livelihood. Despite their somewhat diminished privileges, those who still are employed by SOEs hold the most desirable jobs available to unskilled workers. They also continue to receive some state-provided benefits, such as subsidized education, medical care, and pensions. Even those who have been laid off are eligible for state-provided privileges that are unavailable to other unemployed workers, including job training, employment assistance, and even small loans.[12] Because the livelihood of current and former SOE workers has rested largely on their continued connection with the party-state and their privileged status relative to other workers, they have had reason to support the existing CCP-led political system and to oppose the political empowerment of those who do not enjoy similar state-provided benefits. Consequently, even when retrenched SOE employees have engaged in public protest, they have evidenced little desire to replace the CCP-led political system with liberal democratic rule. Instead, they have voiced their criticisms from the left, calling for the socioeconomic benefits and protections that they feel that they—as workers—deserve.

Also at the low end of China's socioeconomic hierarchy have been former rural residents who have migrated to the cities in search of employment—most of whom are private sector workers or are engaged in individual enterprises such as street-side sales and services. Just as former SOE workers have done, former rural residents have endured exacting working conditions and received minimal income. Yet unlike retrenched SOE employees, rural migrant workers have been rising in socioeconomic status and have not received special benefits from the party-state. To the contrary, the government often has discriminated against rural migrants. Yet at the same time, China's still nominally socialist regime has ensured the basic survival of these rural migrants by granting them land in their village of origin. Further, because central authorities have made some attempts to address the work-related grievances of rural migrant workers (for example, by requiring that private business owners sign contracts with their employees and provide some job security

and workplace protections), these vulnerable laborers have had a diminished interest in unseating the current political leadership.

The final group at the bottom of the socioeconomic structure is farmers, who tend to be poor. Although their income and living standards have progressed much more slowly than that of other groups, farmers have had some incentives to support the central government. Since the late 1980s the ruling CCP has supported local village elections in the countryside as a way to remove corrupt and malevolent local officials. To the extent that these elections have been successful in this aim, rural residents' satisfaction with central authorities has been bolstered. The national government's successful effort to end rural taxes (begun in 2000) has further worked in this direction.[13] Finally, as has been the case with rural migrants, farmers depend on the state for the land on which they rely for their basic needs. On balance, they have shown only tenuous support for the existing political system. As of this writing, they are China's most volatile and politically dissatisfied group.

Overall, in the second phase of the reform era the Chinese people's perceptions of state-led development policies, market forces related to late industrialization, and socialist legacies have engendered a clear popular interest in accepting and even perpetuating CCP rule rather than pursuing systemic political change. This helps to explain why capitalist economic development has failed to breed increased public pressure for liberal democracy in China. Of course, the present constellation of factors is not static and will change. As explained in Chapter 7, the variables that have led to the public's current toleration of an authoritarian government also suggest circumstances under which Chinese citizens may be expected to pursue systemic political transformation.

DO CHINA'S CITIZENS REALLY SUPPORT THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO?

Before examining the social support (or at least acceptance) of China's existing political order, it is necessary to lay out the evidence that such social support (or acceptance) exists. Should one wish to understand only the absence of politically oriented activism between the 1990s and the present, the most obvious explanation is that the public simply fears repression, especially in the wake of the violent crackdown of June 4, 1989. As political scientist Theda Skocpol warns, political passivity should not be confused with political support.[14] The lack of political dissent surely has derived in part from the fact that post-1989 CCP elites have been unusually unified in their views toward economic reform

and in their determination to maintain the party's unchallenged power. Without a split in the political leadership, dissidents have had little hope that collective action might result in political reform.[15] To use the language employed by scholars of contentious politics, since 1989, China's "political opportunity structure" has been largely closed.[16]

Even when the "political opportunity structure" has opened slightly in the post-1989 period, few have taken advantage of it. For example, in 1998, when a small group of intellectuals and workers capitalized on U.S. President Bill Clinton's impending visit to China to announce the formation of the China Democracy Party (CDP), central authorities did not take decisive repressive action for roughly four months. CDP activists used this opportunity to expand, yet only a few thousand citizens joined the party nationwide. The vast majority of CDP members were seasoned dissidents who had led earlier political movements (especially the Democracy Wall movement of 1978–80 and the student-led protests of 1989) and had been punished for their political activities. Very few "new" activists joined the CDP's ranks.[17]

Perhaps an even more telling example is the public response to the January 2005 death of former CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, who had been under house arrest since 1989 because of his perceived support for the student demonstrators. In fact, the event that sparked the protests of 1989 was the death of Zhao's mentor, former CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang, and many anticipated that Zhao's death might spur a similar event. Cognizant of this, ruling CCP elites suppressed the news of Zhao's passing and mounted a substantial security effort to prevent any sort of public "disturbance." Initially, central elites refused to hold any official memorial service, but they later agreed to hold a small public funeral at the official Babaoshan Cemetery, where about fifteen hundred citizens appeared without invitation to pay their respects.[18] Although there is no doubt that the CCP's security efforts prevented many known activists from attending, it is striking that so few common citizens tried. Even in Hong Kong, where through the 1990s massive crowds gathered annually to memorialize June 4, 1989 (and where restrictions on public gatherings have been far more lax), no more than ten thousand gathered to pay their respects to Zhao.[19] Similarly, in November 2005, CCP General Secretary Hu Jintao agreed to hold an official memorial service to mark the ninetieth anniversary of Hu Yaobang's birth. Reportedly, four of the nine members of the Standing Committee of the CCP Politburo argued against holding the memorial, fearing that the event could spark public unrest. Yet,

these concerns proved unfounded, and the event passed with nary a public murmur.[20]

Meanwhile, especially since the early 1990s, millions of Chinese citizens have participated in tens of thousands of yearly protests. According to the Chinese Ministry of Public Security, in 2005 there were 87,000 "disturbances to public order," up from 74,000 in 2004, 58,000 in 2003, and 10,000 in 1996.[21] During this time span, the number of yearly participants rose from 730,000 (in 1993) to 3.8 million (in 2004).[22] Protestors' major grievances have revolved around large-scale SOE layoffs, inadequate pensions, unpaid wages, excessive taxes, and land requisitions. Although virtually none of the demonstrations in this period have been explicitly political, their leaders have been subject to official punishment. Yet despite the real likelihood of repression, people have continued to take to the streets. Thus, it cannot be argued that fear of repression has cowed the Chinese public into quiescent submission. Despite the clear risks involved, the populace *has* engaged in many collective acts of public contention in the post-1989 period.

In addition, there is substantial evidence that the popular unrest that has spread since the early 1990s does not denote widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling regime. To the contrary, demonstrators of virtually all stripes have expressed belief in the legitimacy of the overall political system and faith in the willingness of central leaders to address the people's concerns. Simultaneously, protestors generally have not criticized the political system from a Western, liberal perspective. Instead, as noted previously, they generally have called on ruling elites to live up to their socialist claims to legitimacy.

These attitudes have been apparent in each of the major sectors that has participated in the collective "disturbances" that have appeared since the early 1990s. One of the largest such groups has included former state-owned enterprise workers.[23] Within this sector, sociologist Ching Kwan Lee finds that protestors consistently "pledge[] their support for socialism and the central leadership. . . . Conspicuously absent in the vast majority of labor protests is any hint of demands for independent unionism or for democratic rights of political participation, or challenges to regime legitimacy. The most politicized demand to date is removal of specific officials, without questioning the system of communist rule."[24] A second major component of recent "mass disturbances" has been rural migrant workers in the cities, most of whom have found jobs in the private sector. Within this group, Lee shows that explicitly class-based Maoist rhetoric has not been apparent, yet "leftist" rather than "liberal"

attitudes have remained predominant. As Lee reports, sociologist Isabelle Thireau and historian Linshan Hua find that aggrieved migrant workers refer to themselves as "'the people,' 'the workers,' and 'the masses,' appealing to officials as their 'protectors,' identifying them as 'father and mother of the people,' 'protective god,' 'fair judge,' 'uncles,' 'directing comrades,' or 'servants of the people.'"[25] A third major category of protestors has included rural residents.[26] Among them, political attitudes and behavior have exhibited broad similarities with their urban counterparts. As documented by political scientists Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li, a preponderance of aggrieved rural activists have engaged in "rightful resistance" that presses local authorities to live up to what the disgruntled citizens believe to be the righteous claims and legitimate policies of central authorities.[27] These individuals "seldom press for wider civil and political rights to association, expression, and unlicensed participation; nor do they often question the legitimacy of existing laws and policies, not to mention the right of unaccountable leaders at higher levels to make laws and policies."[28] Further, O'Brien and Li state, "there is little evidence that most [rural activists] consider rights to be inherent, natural, or inalienable; nor do most of them break with the common Chinese practice of viewing rights as granted by the state to ensure community well-being rather than to protect an individual's autonomous being."[29]

Public Opinion Survey Results

Surely, the language employed by protestors is in part a tactical decision, designed to minimize the potential ire of political authorities and maximize the possibility that ruling elites will lend a sympathetic ear. Yet the political views expressed by protestors also have been articulated by broad swaths of the populace that have not participated in demonstrations. Indeed, scores of public opinion surveys and interviews conducted in the latter years of the reform period suggest that there is a remarkably high level of popular support for the CCP-led authoritarian political system.[30] Further, this appears to be the case both in urban and rural areas. For example, in a 1995–99 survey of Beijing residents, political scientist Jie Chen found that a "clear majority" expressed "strong support" for the current (authoritarian) political regime, or "considered the current regime legitimate."[31] Similarly, in a 1999 survey of residents in Shanghai, Chongqing, Guangzhou, Shenyang, Wuhan, and Xian, political scientist Wenfang Tang asked respondents whether the CCP-led political system should be changed; 44 percent said "no," and 31 percent responded that

they "did not care so long as their lives could be improved."[32] In rural areas, similar statistics emerge. In a 1999–2001 survey of villagers in four counties conducted by political scientist Lianjiang Li, 80 percent expressed a "high" or "very high" level of confidence in the central government, 4 percent reported "low" or "very low" confidence, and the remaining 16 percent stated that their confidence was "so-so."[33] In Li's 2003–5 survey of villagers in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, 75.7 percent of respondents thought that the "Party Center and the State Council sincerely cared about farmers," and 77.6 percent believed that "the Center welcomed farmers petitioning."[34]

Nationwide surveys have uncovered almost identical public attitudes toward China's current political system. In the 2001 World Values Survey (WVS) and 2002 East Asian Barometer (EAB), respectively, 97 percent and 98 percent of respondents expressed "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in the national government, while 98 percent (WVS) and 92 percent (EAB) expressed "quite a lot" or "a great deal" of confidence in the CCP.[35] Further, 72.9 percent of WVS respondents reported being "fairly satisfied" (67.1 percent) or "very satisfied" (5.8 percent) with "the people in national office," while only 1.5 percent reported being "very dissatisfied." In addition, 94.8 percent expressed "a great deal" (33.5 percent) or "quite a lot" (61.3 percent) of confidence in China's national legislative body, the National People's Congress.[36] Similarly, a 2008 survey by World Public Opinion found that 83 percent of Chinese believed that they can trust the national government to do the right thing "most of the time" (60 percent) or "just about always" (23 percent). Meanwhile, 65 percent expressed the view that "the country is run for the benefit of the people." Among the nineteen nations (both democratic and not) surveyed in this poll, Chinese citizens displayed the greatest trust in and support for their political system.[37] Further, the Chinese public seems to believe that the existing system is not static or frozen but, rather, open and changing in a positive direction. In the 2001 WVS, 67 percent stated that they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the "way democracy is working" in China, and in the 2002 EAB, 88.5 percent reported being "quite satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the "way democracy is developing" in China.[38]

In rural areas, these views may derive in part from citizens' experiences with local elections. The 1987 Organic Law, which officially sanctioned local rural elections, provided that village committees of three to seven members were to be chosen by all adult registered voters, with all voters eligible to stand as candidates for election.[39] According to the Ministry of Civil Affairs, by

1999, 86 percent of all Chinese villages had elected village committees.[40] In 2003, the Carter Center estimated that in about 40 percent of all villages, elections have been free, fair, and competitive.[41] For some scholars and observers, these elections clearly signify a first step toward higher-level democratization. Most of the research on local elections, however, indicates that this is not the case. In reality, local elections never were seen by ruling elites as a trial run for higher-level democracy; rather, local elections were viewed as a means to strengthen the legitimacy of the ruling regime, remove corrupt local officials, and ease the implementation of unpopular central policies, such as those related to birth control.[42]

More important, in the many cases in which democratic principles have been violated in local rural elections, villagers do not seem to have blamed the central regime. Rather, they often have appealed to central elites to enforce legally mandated electoral procedures. And, in many cases, central authorities have stepped in to do so, even annulling the results of fraudulent or unfair elections.[43] Further, in localities where more truly democratic village elections have occurred, it appears that the goals of the central authorities are being achieved. As documented by political scientists Lianjiang Li and Kevin O'Brien, residents of such villages appear to be willing to comply with unpopular policies.[44] In addition, local activists against corrupt village officials often run in and even win elections for village committees.[45] When the central government does step in to enforce election rules, its legitimacy is strengthened. Overall, then, village elections appear to have increased public support for the central party-state while simultaneously enfolding potential opponents into local government bodies.[46] This may be an important contributor to apparent public satisfaction with the way that democracy is "working" and "developing" in China.

Related to these popular views, social trust appears to be much higher in China than in most countries around the world.[47] In the 2001 WVS, 54.5 percent of Chinese respondents agreed that "most people can be trusted." By comparison, in the United States, 35.8 percent of WVS respondents (in 2000) agreed with this statement.[48] Indeed, if one correlates levels of interpersonal trust and political freedom, China is the biggest outlier in the world, evidencing an almost unheard-of combination of exceptionally high levels of social trust and very low levels of political rights and civil liberties.[49] Interpersonal trust is important because it has a demonstrated connection to political trust. As reported by Jie Chen and Chunlong Lu, "the empirical evidence from the 2000

World Values Surveys show[s] that generalized trust increases people's faith in political and public institutions in all countries surveyed."[50] This finding also is supported by a wide array of studies of "social capital" in Western democracies.[51] Similarly, in China, Tang's six-city survey finds that social trust "promoted individuals' confidence in various national and local public institutions."[52] Tang concludes that "[interpersonal] trust can therefore increase support for the system in democratic as well as non-democratic countries."[53]

Looking at another indicator of popular political views, surveys show that an overwhelming majority of Chinese citizens prioritize social stability and economic prosperity over liberal political freedoms and rights. For example, in Jie Chen's 1995–99 Beijing surveys, "over 90 percent of respondents preferred a stable and orderly society to a freer society that could be prone to disruption."[54] And in Tang's 1999 multicity survey, nearly 60 percent of respondents agreed that "the most important condition for our country's progress is political stability. Democratization under the current conditions would only lead to chaos."[55] Further, when asked to identify their criteria for good government, 48 percent of Tang's respondents chose "economic growth," while only 11 percent selected "democratic elections" and 7 percent "individual freedom."[56] Similarly, in a 1995 Beijing survey undertaken by political scientists Daniel Dowd, Allen Carlson, and Mingming Shen, 56 percent of respondents named "national peace and prosperity" as their most important value, while only 5.8 percent chose "political democracy" and 6.3 percent "individual freedom."[57] In the 2001 WVS, when respondents were presented with four options, 40 percent chose economic development as the top national priority, while only 5 percent chose "seeing people have more say" in their work or community. In another set of four options, 57 percent chose "maintaining order" as their top priority, 26 percent chose "fighting rising prices," 12 percent chose "seeing people have more say in government," and about 5 percent chose "protecting freedom of speech."[58] Additionally, in Tang's 1999 six-city survey, 67 percent of respondents reported being satisfied with their "freedom of speech."[59]

Concurrently, many Chinese citizens have shown a preference for socialist economic benefits and guarantees. For example, in the 2001 WVS, 52.8 percent responded that "government ownership of business should be increased," as compared to 20.2 percent who believed that "private ownership of business should be increased" (18.3 percent fell in between). When asked in the same survey whether society should pursue the more socialist goal of "extensive welfare" or the more neoliberal aim of "lower taxes," 47 percent chose "extensive

welfare," and 14 percent "lower taxes"; virtually all of the remainder either leaned toward "extensive welfare" (18 percent) or was undecided (14.8 percent).[60] Similarly, a late 2004 nationwide survey undertaken by Chunping Han and Martin King Whyte finds that "very large majorities . . . would like the government to take measures to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality."[61] Preferences for socialist values are especially apparent among those who feel that their socioeconomic status has declined in the reform era. As Tang finds in his 1999 six-city survey, "the lower social classes were more anti-Western than others and still adhered to revolutionary ideologies" (that is, Marxism-Leninism and Maoism).[62] Such sentiments have been particularly apparent in the rhetoric of former state-owned enterprise workers who have taken to the streets in protest. Overall, recent survey data indicate substantial popular support for the authoritarian ruling regime and weak interest in liberal democratic principles.

Variations in Trends

It is important to recognize the demographic and geographic variations that appear within these general trends. With regard to demographics, age and economic status appear to be particularly influential. Various surveys show a positive correlation between age and general regime support (i.e., the older the respondent, the more supportive). In Jie Chen's 1995–99 Beijing surveys, for example, nearly 100 percent of respondents aged fifty-six or older expressed a "medium" or "high" level of support for the regime. Among respondents aged eighteen to twenty-five, the corresponding figure dropped to 65 to 70 percent. In the groups falling in between, regime support rose in almost stair-step fashion with increased age.[63] Similarly, Tang's 1999 six-city survey finds that younger citizens display more acceptance of liberalization and democratization.[64] Regarding economic status, Chen's surveys show a similar stair-step increase in regime support as a respondent's self-assessed economic status rises.[65] Even so, the gap is not massive; when placed on a scale of 6 to 24 (from low to high regime support) in surveys conducted in 1995, 1997, and 1999, the bottom economic quintile scores an average of 18.6, the middle quintile averages 19.3, and the top quintile averages 19.9.[66] In other demographic measures, variation also exists but is more subtle. Looking at gender, women appear to be slightly less supportive of the regime than are men.[67] With regard to occupation, in Chen's surveys, college students and state-owned enterprise workers report slightly less regime support than do white-collar professionals and private entrepreneurs.[68]

In addition, researchers have documented local variations in political attitudes and behavior. Some of this work seems to support the notion that capitalist economic development and democracy are linked. There is some evidence to suggest that citizens in locations with more thriving and liberalized local economies are more interested in democracy than are those in less well-off areas. For example, in a study of prosperous Wenling City in Zhejiang province from 1999–2004, economists Xuebing Dong and Jinchuan Shi conclude that "in regions with very strong private economies, the local public comes to expect greater democratic rights: with economic power comes political power."[69]

However, a closer look reveals a more complicated reality. Most strikingly, it appears that in more economically prosperous areas, it is not common people who seek and gain greater political rights, but rather the new economic elite. As Dong and Shi note, members of this elite may support democratic processes, but they do so not because they believe in liberal democratic rights for all; rather, they believe that they "are able to use democratic processes to their advantage."[70] Similarly, political scientist Kellee S. Tsai finds that, among private entrepreneurs, only the well-to-do have the necessary resources and leverage to press for greater political inclusion.[71]

In this sense, it may appear that China's capitalists are, in fact, behaving as their counterparts did in the earliest industrialized nations. For example, in England around the time of the Industrial Revolution, private capital holders first sought democratic rights only for themselves; they did so to protect their economic well-being from a predatory authoritarian state.[72] However, research on China's emergent private entrepreneurs finds an important difference from the English case: the authoritarian state is not seen as an enemy that must be weakened but, rather, as an ally that will aid in pursuing and protecting the interests of private capital. Thus, as Tsai shows, even China's most "assertive" entrepreneurs typically "find ways to have their needs met without demanding democratic solutions."[73] Indeed, surveys by Bruce J. Dickson suggest that private entrepreneurs in more prosperous areas are more likely to believe that they can best meet their needs through joining and working within the existing authoritarian party-state.[74]

Other studies further contextualize these findings. In various comparisons of private entrepreneurs in different localities, scholars argue that locational variations in political attitudes and behavior are not fundamentally explained by differences in the level of economic prosperity but, rather, by differences in the orientation of local government officials toward the private economy.[75]

Overall, it appears that when the local village authorities are either supportive of the private sector, or themselves control the privatization of public enterprises, private entrepreneurs become more politically integrated in the local party-state and less interested in meaningful local-level democracy.[76] When local officials are unsupportive or indifferent toward the private sector, private entrepreneurs show less interest in working with existing CCP-dominated political institutions and groups and are more likely to support local democracy as a means to press local authorities to be more attentive to the private sector's needs.[77] At the same time, even in these areas, there is little evidence that private entrepreneurs desire broader democratization of the central political system.

Of course, the political views of the Chinese public are sure to change over time. To begin, because younger citizens appear to be less supportive of the existing regime and more interested in liberal democratic principles, public opinion in China may become more supportive of democratization with generational change. Additionally, in Jie Chen's 1995–99 surveys of Beijing residents, general regime support displayed a gradual decline as time passed.[78] Interestingly, when broken down by economic status, those in the two lowest quintiles registered a slight increase in support for democracy over the course of Chen's surveys, while those in the middle, upper-middle, and upper quintiles registered a nominal decrease.[79]

Despite these variations, the overall conclusion of these survey data is clear: Despite nearly three decades of dramatic economic reform and growth in China, as of this writing, popular support for the CCP-led political regime is strong, and public interest in liberal democratic change appears weak. Further, those at the lower end of China's socioeconomic spectrum display a substantial commitment to socialist economic values. As a result, while public protest has been extensive in the second phase of the post-Mao period, popular pressure for systemic political reform has not emerged.

CAPITALISM AND DEMOCRACY

This reality flies in the face of the pervasive expectation that capitalist economic development will bring societal pressures for liberal democratic change. In this sense, reform-era China is a crucial case for scholars interested in the relationship between capitalism and democracy. What it illustrates are the circumstances under which the prevailing wisdom does not hold true—namely, in state-led late developers with a socialist past.