Book Reviews

Will China Democratize?
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Will China Democratize? is a selection of essays which have appeared over almost three decades (1986–2013) in the *Journal of Democracy* (*JOD*). The *JOD* is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, a democracy-promoting organization, which is in turn funded by the US Congress. *JOD*'s articles are primarily commissioned by its editors; so it is perhaps inevitable that most will assume the importance of China becoming a liberal democracy. This collection of articles has none presenting a popular line of thinking in recent years among many of China's reformers and intelligentsia that China's democracy will necessarily have "Chinese characteristics"; and there is no author presenting the Chinese government's perspective on adopting liberal democracy.

Having said that, the 28 essays are primarily written by China specialists or Chinese members of the "opposition" (most of whom live outside of China), and are thoughtful analyses that are well worth reading. The major topics are the state of democratization in China today, social forces for and against democratization, prescriptions for how China could democratize, and predictions about how and when China will democratize.

Many of the authors predict that the Chinese Communist Party will no longer rule China and that authoritarianism will collapse within a fairly tight time frame, usually no more than ten years. They propose a plethora of concepts and theories, often focusing on the assumed democratizing forces set in motion by economic development; yet in the end, the reader is left wondering, in some cases 15–25 years after these predictions were made, why they failed to materialize. Why did Arthur Waldron's predictions (1998) that by 2008 the Chinese Communist Party would no longer rule China, or that "The world will not tolerate an authoritarian solution" (p. 83), not come true? And how correct is his assertion that "The communist regime … has no other tool [than force] to sway the people" (p.79)? Andrew Nathan (2003) elegantly analyses the concept of China's "authoritarian resilience" as resulting from gradual institutionalization, and helps us understand the enduring strength of the Party-state. Given the enormous challenges still facing the regime as it modernizes, failure is an option, but as Nathan says, it is not inevitable. Bruce Gilley and Minxin Pei, on the other hand, conclude that the regime is not resilient. Gilley (2003) argues that China will experience either institutional breakdown or a democratic breakthrough, and Pei (2012) dismisses China's "authoritarian resilience" as mere temporary "regime survival" due to strong economic growth and political repression. Its survival is based on "inherent flaws" that are "uncorrectable" (pp. 102, 104, 108). But how long is "temporary"? Pei has long predicted the regime's demise, but how many years before the validity of such predictions expire? Has An Chen (2003) proven correct, ten years on, that capitalism and the development of a middle class would not lead to democracy, that authoritarianism in China need not be justified politically, because that is the way China has (almost) always been? Certainly, Jean-Philippe Béja's (2009) pointing to China's obsession with materialism as limiting the opposition's ability to mobilize

China's angry citizens has thus far been validated. So has Henry Rowen's (2007) conclusion that the regime's legitimacy rests on its ability to keep social order – a conclusion empirically validated by a Roper poll, in which Chinese ranked stability second as a social value, whereas worldwide its average ranking among various nations' citizens was 23rd (p. 28, n. 13). Do people in China, then, have a different prioritization of values than in Western liberal democracies that leads them to think differently about freedom and democracy? Indeed, the book's many prescriptions to reform China, to make it into a liberal democracy, at times appear more like a call to change Chinese culture, to have Chinese leaders *and people* think and act more like someone raised with Western cultural and political values. Some of the contributors' perspectives seem animated by a belief that everything negative is "communist," rather than being "Chinese" or even "Asian"; but if China's corruption can be attributed to communism, then how can we explain corruption in Taiwan?

Some of the authors' assumptions have proven flawed (China's emphasis on law and order is a fig leaf for repression and will lead to revolt); confounded by events or trends (economic success, international recognition, materialism, nationalism); or distorted by their own ideological assumptions (the Chinese people are miserable under Party-state rule; or that the low percentage of workers and peasants and high percentage [compared to the general population] of well-educated individuals in the Party turn it "into an elite-based alliance" able to deny "potential opposition groups access to social elites" [Pei, p. 107]). Arguably, the Chinese leadership has been able to retain its legitimacy because of its own choices and decisions to reform that have led to a significant growth in the people's rights and civil society – without Western-style democratization. Despite predictions to the contrary, the Party-state regime has survived, perhaps showing that development, stability and national pride in China's "standing up" are still, more than 30 years after reforms began, more valued by the Chinese people than freedom of speech and multi-party national elections. And as some articles note, a broad spectrum of Chinese intellectuals and reformers seem to believe that gradual change and reform is the most the government can handle.

Gazing out on a world littered with failed and "illiberal" democracies in countries that have endorsed the Western model, one wonders why China's leaders would rationally conclude that China would be better off today if it had become a liberal democracy in 1979, or even in 2009. If China analysts reframed their focus away from democratization to "good governance," they would find that China has already come a long way in relinquishing its ideological roots and embracing key features of a democratic system: growing pluralism within society and the Party, a growing civil society sector, legal reform, transparency and participation, as well as the accumulation and growth of meaningful "rights" in China, such as the "right" to education, healthcare, private property, travel and economic growth. It hardly adds up to liberal democracy, but it is far from the authoritarian political system that existed in 1979.

The awareness of many authors that China's leaders face the conundrum of authoritarian governments trying to modernize – that they are damned if they do reform, and damned if they don't – strengthens their arguments. The value of this volume is that it is a collection of articles representing a collage of prescriptions, predictions and analyses, each one different from the other, reflecting the complexity of the issues facing China's governance today.

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