Prospect for Democratization in China

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Prospect for Democratization in China

I. Introduction

The purpose of this project is to delve into the under-investigated topic of the prospects of democratization in China. The magnitude of this topic’s importance certainly does not justify the woefully few numbers of scholarly work on it. Unlike other communist regimes which transitioned to democracy in the 1990s, China proved to be far more resilient and entered the 21st century as a fletching superpower.

In recent decades, as observers lamented that the Middle Kingdom might perhaps be insusceptible to the democratic waves that awash other middle-income countries; however, some cracks began to show. Although the prospect for democratization seemed dim at best to far-off observers’ eyes, it is likely that incremental changes are occurring within the country resulting from China’s sustained economic growth. This growth has bread inequality, and nepotism. Economic growth has also promoted modern communication technology and politically aware middle class. Combinations of these factors might slowly erode the power at the center. Eventually, this might lead to democratization in the country.

To address the prospect for democratization in China, this paper is organized into four main parts, not including the conclusion. First, we shall go over the definition for democracy, democratization, and theories that explain how it works. Second, we shall introduce our case study of China into the paper and go into details about factors impeding the country’s ability to democratize. Third, we will explore signs that the CCP robust governmental impetus is gradually giving way to democratization. The fourth section will conclude the paper.
II. Literature Review

Close to end of the 20th century, the so-called “Third wave” of democratization erupted as the numbers of fletching democracies sprouted on the political map by two-fold, which might have hinted at the ideal possibility of a “global democratic revolution”.\(^1\) Up until now, the most popular theoretical assertion was that of the modernization theory, a theory that modernization and its overwhelming capacity to penetrate all aspects of society and the transformation of its values, could increase the possibility for the emergence of democratic political institutions.\(^2\) To add to its luster, the 20th century’s last decade saw the rapid growth of the Asian tigers of South Korea and Taiwan, and their eventual success in democratization.\(^3\) After a country integrated itself with global trade then such integration would enable economic growth and through that the resources to upgrade your work force to produce even more valuable goods for greater gains. These developments led to the emergence of a substantial pool of educated and highly politically sensitive middle class who would demand for greater says in political matters. Such demands could culminate in democratization.

Contrarily, China managed to hold out against this democratic wave after crushing a massive protest as graphically demonstrated at Tiananmen Square in 1989. So, it is necessary to look at factors that made China so exceptional, when majority of former Communist countries have already democratized decades ago. Scholars such as Samuel Huntington believed that China’s driving cultural value of Confucianism and its emphasis on familial bonds and obedience to authority as the anti-thesis to Western democratic values of individualism and

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3. Ibid, p. 36
freedom, concluding that “Confucian democracy is clearly a contradiction in terms”.4 Whereas Francis Fukuyama, argued that Huntington had overemphasized these values, even though Confucianism itself possess ways that could cohabit with those of democracy such as egalitarian implication, education, and its relatively tolerant nature.5

Despite this, there are scholars like Yu Liu and Ding Ding Chen argued there are reasons for being optimistic about democratic prospect in China, predicting it to embark on democratization by as early as the 2020s. They argued that albeit Western skepticism due to certain peculiarities of the country such as “authoritarian resilience”, “illiberal adoption”, China is approaching that point of its development where it is “vindicating” the modernization theory, that economic growth directly contributes to political liberalization.6

Perhaps China would have its own unique kind of democracy, ones where the executive would undoubtedly be far more powerful than ones we are used to in the West. In China, the people’s understanding of democracy is one that possess “Chinese characteristics” and perhaps because of that 62.9% of the respondents in the Asian Barometer Survey characterized China as rather “democratic”.7 But this is public opinion and would easily change as the usually political environment of China changes. As the older generations make way for the new, so too would values of liberal democracy slowly creep in. Growth of civil society, numbers of collective actions and nongovernmental organizations would serve as valuable training ground for experiences in political participation. The growth in civil society organizations and popular political awareness, might have had profound impact on the CCP’s strategic thinking as it

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5 Ibid, p. 26
7 Yu Liu and Ding Ding Chen, p. 48
incentivized the latter to maintain a whopping budget of 514 billion RMB, comparable to that of the military simply for internal security.\footnote{Ibid, 48} Taking these factors into account, it might only be a matter of time before we see any political mobilization of so massive a scale that even the CCP bureaucratic titan would not be able to handle.

To help guide the analysis, this thesis adopts historical institutionalist approach. A method that requires the usage of history as an analytical instrument alongside focusing on how culture and tradition shaped the institution which in the broad scheme of matters, shapes political outcome.\footnote{Steve Steinmo, “Historical Institutionalism”, \textit{Approaches and methodologies in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective} (2008): 118-138.} Through exploring important empirical events, we should be able to appreciate the cultural, social and historical agency that shaped China into the exceptional case that it is. Explaining how it has proved far more resilient than any other countries to democratic element, while also identifies factors that support its prospect for democratization.

\section{Democracy and Democratization}

Before our primary case study of China is introduced, I believe it is necessary to devote a portion of this paper towards defining what democracy is, how democratization is possible and the theories that explained this process.

\subsection{Democracy:}

First of all, we should define democracy? Nowadays, the word is utilized by such diverse range of politicians of different ideologies and practices that it became a “debased” currency in political marketplace.\footnote{Phillipine Shmitter and Terry Karl, “What Democracy is...and is not”, \textit{Journal of Democracy}, Vol.2, no 3, (1991), p. 3} Afterall, we live in an era when majority of the world’s population
endeavor for greater degree of freedom and improvement in their way of life. And politicians are aware of that, which certainly makes the task of defining it a bit more challenging. According to Phillipine Shmitter and Terry Karl, modern political democracy is a system of governance in which the citizens are capable of holding their rulers accountable to their action or inaction by indirectly asserting their influences over elected representatives who would either compete or cooperate with one another.\textsuperscript{11} For such an apparatus to be established require several components, most notably that of the citizens as they are referred to as “the most distinctive element” in democracy.\textsuperscript{12} System of governance is required to be institutionalized (various patterns are habitually known and practices by the majority/all of the populace) preferably through that of a body of law.\textsuperscript{13} Many scholars seemed to have shared another agreement that democracy requires the sharing of power between various groups of people, who all share the rights to express themselves and compete for the chance of influencing the decision-making process. Taking this into account, it could be added that modern democracy offers various means by interest and values could be expressed, either as collective groups or as individuals. Such arrangement inevitably leads to “civil society”, as these citizens would not only prevent arbitrary exertion of power by the ruler/governing bodies but they themselves also grew to become more civic minded and better informed on political matters.\textsuperscript{14}

Another definition for democracy, is rather broad and loose. What is deemed as “electoralism”. A state only needs a fair regular election, and it could be considered a democracy. Some would go so far as to consider elections without substantial part of the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 4
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 5
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 4
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 7
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
populace to still be eligible as democratic.\textsuperscript{15} Then there is the identification of democracy with that of majority rule. It is democratic, as long as the governing body make decisions and actions after the consent of half of the eligible voters regardless of how that majority was possible in the first place (such as the electoral college, parliament etc.).\textsuperscript{16} Majority rule could result in the so-called “tyranny of the majority”, a situation when majority decisions could impede on the interests of the minority. However, through constitutional provisions, federalism, consociationalism, the rights of minorities could be violated by majority and that the minority parties can play key roles in the government.\textsuperscript{17}

Fareed Zakaria brought up to mind what he defined as “liberal democracy”. To him, unlike the mentioned above suggests, free and fair elections (free and fair is not a requisite) is not sufficient for a true democracy. For a country to be a liberal democracy, it has to abide by the rule of law, possess mechanism for separations of powers, and fully embrace basic liberties we have learned to enjoy such as that of speech, religion, property, and association.\textsuperscript{18} Unfortunately, for those dreaming of global democracy, it seemed like rising numbers of demagogues such as Boris Yeltsin of Russia and Carlos Menem of Argentina have exploited democratic mechanism to get themselves elected, only to rule through presidential decree right after. Whereas Iran already ranked poorly in terms of democratic practices, imposed further restrictions on their citizen’s ability to express themselves.\textsuperscript{19} So if one were to solely follow the definition that democracy which includes holding regular free and fair elections, than perhaps over half of them could be considered as illiberal. Another element that has to be added into the mix for a

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 6
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 6
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 7
\textsuperscript{18} Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy”, \textit{Foreign Affairs} (November 1997), p.22
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 23
democracy to be illiberal is what Zakaria defined as “constitutional liberalism”. Which refers to the tradition deeply embedded in the course of Western historical development, which emphasized and seek to guard individual freedom against external sources most notably the church, state and/or society.  

For this to be possible there was the introductions of checks and balances into the government, rule of law, and secularism, which we nowadays characterized as the “Western Model”. It could even be said, that constitutional liberalism and democracy are of two opposing sides, whereas the former emphasize limitations on governmental authority, the latter is accumulation of power from the mass. As James Madison briefly pointed out “the danger of oppression in a democracy came from the majority of the community”. As pointed out above, as were the case for Russia and Argentina, leaders especially of developing countries were able to utilize the authority they gained to justify various actions to coerce their opponents, through brutal crackdown and/or limiting the rights of their citizens if necessary. So, it seemed like a sufficiently long history of constitutional liberalism is also necessary to ensure the excess of democracy could be limited, which unfortunately not many countries have. Marc Plattner is of the same opinion and argues that liberalism and democracy are two sides of same coins. In the words of Plattner, the adjective “liberal” in liberal democracy emphasized not on the matter of who rules “but how that rule is exercised.” Through its limitations of power, most notably in a binding Constitutions and popular acceptance of the rule of law, the rights of individual or in our modern-day terms basic human rights are guaranteed.

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20 Ibid, 25-26  
21 Ibid, 27  
22 Ibid, 30  
24 Ibid, 172
There are dozens more papers, with scholars debating over definitions for what could be constituted as democracy. But in this case, we should perhaps define it loosely enough while also possessing elements deemed necessary for a functioning democracy. It should be a form of government that not only allow the majority of its population to participate in free and fair election but also possess the mechanism by which it could ensure that governmental institutions do not infringe upon the rights of individual especially freedom of speech, association and property.

II.2. Democratization:

Now that we have settled the contentious nature of defining democracy, we should now explore how such form of government could emerge. By democratization, Samuel Huntington describes it as not the study of democracy but regime change. Democratization means the “end of authoritarian regime, the installation of democratic regime and the consolidation of democracy”.\(^{25}\) That shall be the straightforward definition with which we shall follow. Of course, just like the challenged for those who wish to define democracy, democratization also brings with it another set of problems. As there are multiple theories to happen and even a preferred means of it happening.

According to Russel Barsh, the interconnectedness of democracy and development specifically political institution and economic growth had been subjected to heated discussions amongst Europeans. Although it was initially centered on the European countries which were at comparable level of modernization, later on it was also applied to those of developing countries

as the process of decolonization escalated.\textsuperscript{26} We could argue that the growth of international economic institutions and the possibility of imposing conditions upon these emerging nations provides the Europeans with the incentives to do so.

Samuel Lipset brought forward arguably the most popular theory for democratization, that of economic development. Ever since ancient time, men believed it was a given that it was usually within wealthy societies where the environment fertile for the mass to participate intelligently in politics while equally capable of avoiding manipulations and resisting the repressions of authoritarian figures. Such observation still holds true in our modern days. Economic development and the multiple other developments brings such as urbanization, industrialization, improved standard of living and education. Lipset argues that as a country’s population shifted from traditional means of living to a more modern one, social, political, cultural, economic changes would occur. Industrialization requires huge portions of people to move from rural areas into urban cities to work in factories, which leads to urbanization. Through constant contacts with other of various socio-economic background these individuals would develop a highly civic mindsets that encourages tolerance, rationality, cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{27}

It is assumed that through education, men’s outlook of the world would become more all-encompassing, they became more open to differing opinions in our increasingly globalized world, and less attracted to radical/extremist doctrines.\textsuperscript{28}

Like Lipset, but more specific, Ronald Inglehart argues for what he called “modernization-led democracy”. To him, if the early stage of industrialization requires greater

\textsuperscript{27} Samuel Lipset, “Social Requisites of Democracy” \textit{The American Political Science Review 53}, No.1 (1959) p. 75 & 86
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 80
degree of centralization accompanied by a shift from traditional to more progressive values then perhaps in the post-industrial society (when the service sector generates more wealth than the manufacturing one), and the requirements for independence for the society to functions could severely weaken central authority.\textsuperscript{29} For authoritarian regimes, economic growth (from which most of them gained their legitimacy), serves as a double-edged sword. As countries modernize, their requirements for better educated workers with capacities for independent thinking, also means they are more effective in and inclined to political participation. As greater numbers of people feel more secured economically, so to would they devote more of their times toward broader issues, for example political rights and expression, governmental tyranny, inequality etc. Even our case study of China is no exception, its rapid and sustained economic growth might give way to popular demand for democratization.\textsuperscript{30}

Through this overly optimistic assessment of democratization, however, it seemed almost like every nation on earth are bound to become democracies. Most of us might have wished for Inglehart’s assertion to be correct. Unfortunately, the case for China is not as straightforward. There are many powerful factors, ranging from culture to the powerful grip of the CCP on China that have served, and will serve as bulwark against China’ ability to democratize as well. Factors which we shall address in the next section. As of now we shall explore in greater details on components necessary for democratization and see how China would hold up to it.

II. Chinese Exceptionalism and Obstacles

We should do well to appreciate the resilience of Chinese culture and its unique set of political institutions, entirely alien from foreigners, instead of viewing modernization and

\textsuperscript{29}Ronald Inglehard, “How Development Leads to Democracy” p. 37.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid p 48
democratization (both phenomena are of mostly Western characters) from our admittedly Eurocentric lenses. Culture and tradition albeit abstract and complex, serves as the foundation for a people’s understanding of their country’s internal working and its relations to the world. As Henry Kissinger himself appreciated the complexity of a country with a history stretched back thousands of years, as that of China alongside its one billion strong population. Chinese people who are today capable of understandings the monosyllables written during the age of Confucius. Furthermore, books and arts are enriched by millennium old stories of Chinese civilization. In his monumental book *When China Rules the Word*, Jacque Martin constantly stresses that it could almost be considered as fool hardy to impose our Western centric views upon a country with an impressive historical vision of itself, especially a country that might one day eclipse the might of the Western world. It is entirely possible that its growing position of strength would severely undermine any credibility that democratic transition would bring in terms of benefits to the People’s Republic of China.

For this part of the thesis, I shall first investigate Chinese unique historical and political development that directly influenced its current authoritarian method of ruling. Alongside it there is also the long tradition of the clear absence of the rule of law and the government’s effectiveness in placating the educated class to assist their grip on power. Next, we shall view initiatives taken by the CCP in response to their apparent vulnerability to growing problems within China, both internal and external. Most importantly are their tightening control over the propaganda agencies and their desire to assert greater dominance in Cyberspace.

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II.1. Political Institution and Rule of Law:

For throughout its entire existence, there is a preferred governmental system that could loosely be referred to as a “Constitution”, that hailed the Emperor’s rule is absolute, yet he is obliged to exercise his power paternally. Serving as a kind of paternal figure for his subject, but these children do not advance beyond the ethical circle of the family principle, neither do they gain for themselves independence and civil freedom –understanding without free reason and imagination.\(^{33}\) To carry out the Emperor’s policies, requires cadets of highly well-trained officials the basis for which Max Weber could refer to as a meritocratic bureaucracy. These officials are selected through rigorous examination which succeeded in getting those governors “distinguished itself by abilities of mind and body”, official stations are therefore occupied by mostly men of the greatest intellect and education.\(^{34}\) Through such method of rule Hegel succinctly stated “equality prevails in China, but without any freedom, despotism is the mode of government”, a statement which still rang true to our time.\(^{35}\)

When it comes to the rule of law, Francis Fukuyama spends an entire chapter reminding us of this absence of one of the core components of democracy in China. The concept that all are equal, and no one is above the law is non-existent. So already, the concept of constitutional liberalism we brought up in the previous section, which many experts in democracies argued as one of the primary requisites for democracy and democratization is down in the water. Unlike, the Hong Kong Special Administration Region of the People’s Republic of China, mainland China had no experiences of the rule of law, let alone the basic freedoms of individual rights, introduced to the former by the British before they transferred the territory to China in 1997. In

\(^{33}\) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “The Philosophy of History”, 123  
\(^{34}\) Ibid, 124  
\(^{35}\) Ibid, 125
China, the CCP ruled by law, that is it utilizes legal instruments to exercise their own authority and maintenance of public order.\footnote{Francis Fukuyam, “Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrialization Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy” (2015) p. 357} Impressively, this is aided by their powerful state apparatus, or meritocratic and effective bureaucracy based on competitive examinations, which the Chinese civilization have practiced for throughout their two thousand years of history as mentioned above.\footnote{Ibid p. 374} The CCP bureaucratic behemoth has also proven very adapted at maintaining their reign of power. Unlike most authoritarian regimes, who relied heavily upon force and repression, the CCP is relatively flexible and capable of co-opting their people, a carrot and stick kind of policy. In the eyes of foreign observers and the people, the raison d’etre for the CCP seemed to be its “performance legitimacy”, which view that the CCP would continue to cling onto power as long as it maintains its stellar economic growth.\footnote{Yu Liu & Ding Ding Chen, “Why China will Democratize” p. 41} So even though we should not make any lofty assumptions that Chinese lives in great degree of freedom along the lines of developed democracies, the current level of legality and freedom is sufficiently high for Chinese to live in comfortably while bettering their economic conditions through access to global trade.\footnote{Ibid, p. 363}

**II. 2. Emperor and His Eunuchs (Carrot and Stick)**

During our discussion of democratization, scholars such as Lipset and Inglehart observed that economic growth/modernization would eventually increase the possibility of democratization. In summary: Through industrialization and urbanizations, people are concentrated in more tightly knitted metropolitan areas, greater contact with diversity and developing a more civic mindset. Improved standard of living ensure they would have spare time to focus on contemporary issues and participate in politic. Education, most notably required in a
modern society—post-industrial society—would emphasize on individual agency and rights that would most likely be dissatisfied with central authority. In China’s case, they might be mistaken. At least for now. As the CCP had proven to be highly successful in placating their educated middle class, arguably the most dangerous class in the country, under control. They harnessed the intellectual prowess of their middle class by winning over their allegiance and in doing so assist them in their rule. The social goods such as social prestige, political influence, material goods provided by the state is certainly attractive for those who successfully received higher education.⁴⁰ In other words, the Chinese state promotes academic activities that foster the state’s interest while discredits and suppresses independent criticism. As historian Arthur Wright accurately puts it:

“the literate elite. ... entered alliance with the monarchy. The monarch provided the symbols and the sinews of power: throne, police, army, the organs of social control. The literati provided the knowledge of precedent and statecraft that could legitimize power and make the state work.”⁴¹

By the monarchy, we are of course referring to the CCP. The party have certainly proven adept at learning from history such as those the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and Tiananmen of 1989, that the educated class were not given privileges they believe are their due, then they revolted. Nowadays, major universities are showered with massive sums of government spending, thereby allowing education to serve as a crucial pillar of authoritarian resilience.⁴² In addition, to provide an outlet for students’ dangerous tendency for social protests, the state offer
various means for public service to prevent agitations for democratization.\textsuperscript{43} However, it is important to note that Chinese scholars nowadays are not working in isolation, but in a global academic context, which is bound to ensure their exposure to ideas incompatible with the CCP’s continued rule. For all of Xi’s effort to tow the universities in line with states policies through compliances, there is no telling when the educated elites desire for independence would erupt.\textsuperscript{44} Perhaps during times of economic downturn, we might witness dramatic changes as the government loses its capacity to placate the alienated intelligentsia.

\textbf{II.3. Governmental Action}

In addition, there were also aggressive actions taken by the CCP recently to protect China’s “ideological security” from Western “subversion”. When Xi Jinping came into office in 2012, the CCP was at its nadir. Inflictions of crony capitalism and corruptions within the CCP ranks were widely reported on. With the Bo Xilai case of 2012 being the case in point, as the ambitious leader of Chongqing was jailed after his wife murdered a British national, reinforcing public grievances against party officials.\textsuperscript{45} In response Xi marshaled other senior leaders to his objective of launching a grand anti-corruption campaign and programs of winning the hearts and minds of the Chinese people.\textsuperscript{46} It is the latter, which concerns us. Xi was determined to reassert party control over the all-important propaganda agency which was formerly under state bureaucracies but now dominated by loyal party members, exerting more control than it ever had in decades.\textsuperscript{47} This centralization of power over the agency also means that Xi might have been

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\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 14
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 19
\textsuperscript{45} Daniel Ma & Niel Thomas, “In Xi We Trust: How Propaganda might be Working in the New Era”, \textit{China’s Economic Arrival} (2018), p.74
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 73
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 75
\end{flushright}
wary that there are rooms for lower-officials to undertake actions without top-down authorization (the controversial documentary of Under the Dome which painted urban China in unfavorable light, being one example). Shrewdly aware of the potential and threat of modern information technology, the South China Morning Post noted the aggressive nature of Xi’s speech when he urged the party to be “combative” online and “wage a war to win over public opinion” by forming a “strong internet army to seize the ground of new media”.48 The CCP did not fail to appreciate by now the accepted fact that online public opinion is its “highest priority”, which explained Xi’s moving quickly to establish a Central Leading Group on Internet Security and Information (known as Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission as of March 2018). Its purpose is censorship of China’s massive online platform (to put matters into perspective, there is currently one billion users for Tencent’s WeChat), enhancement of digital propaganda, set global internet standards and assist China’s rise as a technological powerhouse.49

II. 4. Propaganda:

Xi Jinping said “The disintegration of a regime often begins in the realm of ideas. Political upheaval and regime change may occur overnight, but the evolution of ideas is a long-term process. However, when the defensive line on the plane of thought is breached, other lines of defense are hard to hold”.50 Perhaps in an effort to hide their political weakness, the CCP ramped up its effort to criticize the West for seeking to "subvert" the CCP’s grip on power through their endeavor of diffusing “neoliberalism” and “universal values”, such as concepts of democracy and the rule of law.51 A researcher of the CCP party school, Tang Aijun graphically

48 Ibid, 76
49 Ibid, 77
51 Ibid, 2
highlights Chinese grievances against what they deemed as Western subversion through his essay, as he advocate for Beijing creating a system of “ideological risk early-warning mechanism” to only seek out ideas deemed “detrimental” to regime security but eradicate them as well.\textsuperscript{52} His interpretation of threat is divided into external and internal threats. With the primary external threat, not surprisingly being “ideological penetration” of China by Western states, while the internal ones are “various trends of thought, non-mainstream values, and other pressures on and challenges to the dominant ideology”.\textsuperscript{53} It is interesting to note that these Western “universal values” such as freedom, democracy and human rights (used as the main form of infiltration) were written in quotations, almost as a form of mockery. His counter was that neoliberalism, the values of individualism and freedom is incompatible with Chinese values of collectivism, equity and justice (without a rule of law?), and would have a negative effect on party’s leadership and socialist state system.\textsuperscript{54} To discredit democracy, he grimly called out Western states promotion of democratic values as their “competing with us for strategic positions, the hearts of the people…and ultimately overthrowing the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese socialist system”.\textsuperscript{55} Because China does not conform to the West ideas of liberal democratic values, the Chinese government is unjustly labelled as totalitarian and despotic.

To appreciate such blatant outcry against Western values, one only has to take a brief look at China’s so-called “Centuries of Humiliation”. Briefly speaking, it was initiated by the British crushing victory over the then ruling Chinese Qing dynasty. Unequal treatise were

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 2
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 6
\item \textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 7
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 8
\end{itemize}
imposed by Westerners, one of the worst rebellion incited by foreign influence (The Taiping Rebellion), the Chinese Civil war, and Sino-Japanese wars, all were prime examples of foreign subversion that did much to damage Chinese national pride and decimate a huge portion of the country population.\textsuperscript{56} Foreign observers and scholars should do well to appreciate how such knowledge deeply imbedded in Chinese conscience could do much to tarnish their views on Western ideologies and values, especially democratic ones. Chinese leaders could just as easily manipulate the invocation of such history to mobilize anti-western sentiments amongst the public if needed.

Before ending this part of the thesis and to put matters into perspective, it could be useful to view Chinese views of their current regime dominated by the CCP. Andrew Nathan demonstrated that the Chinese had proven to be an exception. Most members of the Chinese middle class, in contrary to expectations, avoid challenging the regime.\textsuperscript{57} Due to their broad level of approval for the current ruling regime, it is to be expected that in comparison to some countries, the Chinese middle class might not be responsible for democratization as we hoped.\textsuperscript{58} If we went by Nathan’s definition for who could be considered as middle-class, then it is people who “chiefly rely on mental labor, support themselves through wages, can obtain professional employment with relatively high incomes and relatively good working environments and the corresponding level of family consumption and leisure life….\textsuperscript{59} With this definition, it is estimated that around 23\% of the Chinese population makes up the middle class.\textsuperscript{60} A rather substantial number, yet there are key characteristics that made them stand out. They are very

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 57-58
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 7
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 8
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 9
dependent on state-owned or governmental institutions which explained why the bulge of the
Chinese middle class are civil servants, state-enterprise employees, and staffers of institution.
Unlike most private sector jobs, younger generation prefer these as they offer more wages and
benefits.\(^{61}\) They are also relatively recent. As such, a majority of Chinese middle class are mostly
first-generation who starting to live a way of life previously unknown to them, so it is fair that as
of now they still see political participation, human rights and democracy as distractions.\(^{62}\)
Finally, these Chinese middle class are barred from the kind of political associations which are
integral to democratic societies. To placate the population the government does allow staff-based
(instead of mass-based) organizations to advocate for certain issues rather than protest.\(^{63}\) Due to
the middle class’ sense of insecurity of their economic fortune, they are constantly wary of
governmental actions from the top while also disdaining the mass of lower class at the bottom of
the socio-economic spectrum. Such anxiety understandably served as a powerful deterrent from
their engaging in political actions that could prove detrimental to their livelihood.

In another research on democratization in China, the political culture of the people was
examined. Bear in mind that even the most meticulously conducted understood the flawed nature
of interpreting a political culture entirely different from one’s own. According to Andrew J
Nathan, political theorists placed values as belief in governmental importance, political efficacy
and political tolerance as key indicators for democratic prospect among selected group of people.
\(^{64}\) The result was rather unfavorable to say the least. As approximately 72 percent of the Chinese
surveyors stated that both national and local government played no role in their daily lives.\(^{65}\) It

\(^{61}\) Ibid, 10
\(^{62}\) Ibid, 11
\(^{63}\) Ibid, 11
\(^{65}\) Ibid, 99
certainly is ironic, considering that the CCP stretched their growing tentacles towards most aspects of Chinese lives, the latter fail to realize its control. If the result is to be taken as accurate for most of the Chinese citizen, then the prospect for democracy seems bleak as the Chinese people already felt as if they are living in a relatively free environment without knowing the infringement of governmental actions. So are less likely to demand a transparent and more responsive government due to their lack of importance. When it comes to political efficacy, or something that motivates people to engage in political activities and if absent cause them to withdraw, we saw that China scored rather low. Alongside their lack of knowledge of governmental action, the confidence especially of the less educated Chinese citizens in the CCP capacity to better themselves, might have done much to explain the resilience of the ruling CCP.

Part III. Cracks in the Structure?

Regardless of how imposing the million strong army of the CCP is, the modernization theory is likely to prove the CCP’s eventual demise. Of course, due to the lack of transparency of the country, many of the following assertions are mainly based on assessment of social, economic, and political trends in China.

III.1. Economic Problems

It might be possible that the CCP is falling victim to its own economic growth. As the hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens are lifted from poverty, so too would their expectations from the government increase, yet the government might lack sufficient means to supply their

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66 Ibid, 106
67 Ibid, 111
Inequality to be expected for a country which had opened the flood gate of free-market capitalism. Although it was initially an abstract concept, the gap seems to ever widen and as folks from rural areas moved into urban ones they are constantly reminded of consumer products that are simply out of their reach perhaps for their entire life. A survey taken in Shanxi province in March 2010, saw 38.59 % stated that their “greatest wish” was to “narrow the income gap”.\(^{69}\) If there is anything we should do well to learn from history, it is that the more people envy the economic conditions of others which lead to the greater their level of political discontent. China is no exception.

Although in the decades after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms, inequality did emerge, yet people still have the utmost confidence in social mobility and their ability to bring themselves out of poverty. In 2004, people believed inequality was the result of a meritocratic system, as it is only natural that those of greater abilities deserve to enjoy greater amounts of wealth and there is nothing unfair about such a system. But as the survey conducted by Harvard professor Martin Whyte shows, in just two years, such optimistic view was reversed, as corruption were now regarded as the principal justification for the China’s growing income gap.\(^{70}\) Additionally there is the drainage of the state’s coffer for inefficient enterprises. Although China had introduced elements of capitalism into its economy, a majority of its industries are still state-owned. These conditions mean that by continued investments in underperforming industries might lead directly to the reduction in economic growth rate. If the CCP wished to back down, then they would have malcontented workers and even managers to deal with later down the line.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{68}\) “China’s Poverty Line is not as Stingy as Commentators Think”, *The Economist* (June 20, 2020)

\(^{69}\) Yu Liu and Ding Ding Chen, p. 44

\(^{70}\) Ibid. p. 45

their actions are in contrary to the political legitimacy of the CCP to help improve the economic conditions of the people.

III.2. Corruption:

It is worth excavating further into the problems of corruption as way before Xi entered office. The Chinese government was aware of the problem and in response, it has so far implemented probably over 542 anti-corruption regulations, laws, and major policies as of 2007.\textsuperscript{72} In 2007, 104 cases involving public officials were reported by Chinese citizens and around 9.3 were investigated. So, of the 12.9 million public official of 2007 at least 1.1 percent of them punished; 1.91 of 1,000 public officials were prosecuted annually. In comparison to the US, this rate is almost 39 times higher (only 1,000 of out 20.3 million government employees). As Ko and Wang mentioned, however, since official corruption statistics had the tendency to under-report on the degree of corruption, the issue might be even more serious than we thought.\textsuperscript{73}

So, when Xi was inaugurated as president in 2012, he has taken corruption to be one of his primary tasks and took even tougher measures than his predecessors.\textsuperscript{74} This could only mean that the issue is rampant enough that could threaten the CPP’s legitimacy. Whereas our democratic society, guarantee individual rights and liberty, China enjoys no such rights and liberties. To Chinese leaders, their justification for continued rule is based on almost aggressive devotion to the proud Chinese tradition of meritocracy. Only those of great virtues and abilities

\textsuperscript{72} Kilkon Ko and Cuifen Wang, “Structural Changes in Chinese Corruption”, \textit{The China Quarterly}, no. 211, September 2012, pp.719
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.729
\textsuperscript{74} Nieves Zúñiga, “China: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption”, \textit{Transparency International}, April 10, 2018, p. 1
are fit for leadership positions. How would the Chinese people react, if the leaders on whom they have entrusted their well-being, engaged in highly unvirtuous acts of corruptions? On a survey conducted by the Transparency International’s 2017 Global Corruption Barometer, 73% of the Chinese public surveyed believed that corruption is increasing. It also just happened that this placed China as the most corrupted of all the countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Another data we have is that from the Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI), that investigate on how businesspeople and country experts perceive the corruptions of the public sector of certain countries. Data show that the perceptions of corruption have improved slightly from 36 in 2014 to 41 in 2017 (with 0 being highly corrupt and 100 totally clean). Even so, China still comes at 77th out of 180 countries, not exactly the most impressive records. In some cases, perception is more important than reality. As long as the perceptions of people continued to be at such high level of negativity, it does not matter if corruption in China is not as widespread as most data suggested.

III.3. Political Problems:

Most autocratic regimes, when pressured by rising cost of maintaining their firm political grip and dwindling resources would gradually undertake economic reform. Min Xin Pei argued that China is no exception, as the country is incrementally taking steps in changing its political institution to become relatively more accountable to its people. The emergence of the rule of law serves as a case in point. Through the increase in authority of the legal system, institutional norms and public awareness of the legal system would soon shed light on their individual rights.

75 Ibid, 2
76 Ibid, 3
77 Ibid, 3
By introducing aspects of the rule of law to appease its population and enable foreign investments, the CCP also shot itself in the foot the more the legal system is embedded in the Chinese public conscience. If the people dared to appeal to the law and justice, the CCP would be highly vulnerable to such appeals, and could suffer heavy damage to its credibility and legitimacy.⁷⁹ Already there were cases of people filing suits against illegal government infringement upon their private property rights, as peasants report government officials seizing their property and private entrepreneurs lashed out against local officials responsible for shutting down their business and were harassed.⁸⁰ Lawyers have become very assertive in protecting their clients against the government. Although it also means they would pay for their determination by suffering under governmental actions, it also forged a stellar reputation for a few numbers of these lawyers.

Just like most democratic countries (including the illiberal ones), China also possesses a national legislature in the form of the National People’s Congress (NPC). Officially the NPC, as the national legislature, it is the highest organ of the state. Candidates are elected by provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities under the central government and the armed forces. These delegates of almost 3,000 are elected on a term of five years and convenes only for a short time once a year, simultaneously with the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress (CPPCC).⁸¹ However, the NPC is far from the strongest organ of the government as it kneeled to the authoritative power of the CCP, so pretty much a “rubber stamp”.⁸² Most members could simply not be considered as genuine legislator in the American, or British sense. There are

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⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 69
⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 70
⁸² Minxin Pei, p. 71
around 150 exceptional members of the standing committee, however, that we could argue as similar to the Western counterparts in that they have the rights to deal with legislative problems when the NPC is not in session. \(^8^3\) Overall, they could be seen as merely an instrument to provide legitimacy to the decisions taken by the executive organ, the State council. Key decisions and appointments are usually agreed upon by the CCP before it was passed on for “considerations”. \(^8^4\) But this was the 1980s, as the members became ever more educated and the older deputies replaced by the younger ones, it too is to be expected that the organ started to assert its capacity to counter the CCP. There are signs of resistance, in the form of negative votes. Most notably, their willingness to express disapproval of candidates for official positions, of whom they think lacked the competence and are being appointed for factional reasons, as were the case for Li Yuanchao who received up to 80 negative votes and 37 abstentions (even though he still got 96% support). \(^8^5\)

Another was the case for property law in 2006, which did not pass-through legislation as smoothly, opening up a broad arena for political struggles. Certain groups such as the left considered that through legitimation of private property, officials who had made much gains from thievery of state-owned assets could be protected. But this was mere observation, as the protracted struggle might have simply been the difficulty in defining what “property” is. \(^8^6\) Rather, inspiring for democratic prospect is the NPC’s commitment to the law. They had served as critics of reports from heads of the judiciary, which in a way demonstrate growing disappointment with the current Chinese legal system. Such as when the candidate for chief prosecutor had 35% support.

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\(^8^3\) Tony Siach, p.2  
\(^8^4\) Ibid, 4  
\(^8^5\) Ibid, 7.  
\(^8^6\) Ibid, 7
voting against him because of both his age and poor qualification. More impressive, was when half the delegates voted against the report of the procurator-general. Many reformers hoped that through greater professionalization, and with time, as the old guard gave way to the younger dynamic generation, they would be even more aggressive in expressing their views and play greater role in decision/policy making. If events continued to move forward, we might see the emergence of governmental organs exerting greater level of autonomy from the CCP that could perhaps even balance itself against the latter. Their commitment to law, might cultivate a country-wide environment where the population have grown used to the experience of equality in front of the law and hopefully the flourishing of the rule of law. As of now, this is pure observation.

If we were to shift our attention towards China’s “experiment” with democracy, perhaps we might see further hints of creeping democratization in the making. For the CCP to maintain its legitimacy, it often requires the party to be responsive to the Chinese citizens and for that to be possible the government started instituting something called “deliberative democracy”. This could be seen as an ingenious means to reduce political tension, as the CCP is shrewd enough to not merely apply brutal force but also compromise. Through this practice, citizens are able to discuss and share political views with the government via official channels. Usually this is done by conducting public hearings, suggestion boxes online, and questionnaires.

The deliberate process began since the 1990s in villages, then evolved to encapsulate towns by the 2000s. This could be seen as another effective means by which the CCP hoped to compromise with the Chinese public to satisfy their desire for public engagement as mentioned

87 Ibid, 7
88 Rebecca Liao, “China’s Experiment with Democracy”, HuffPost, May 28, 2014
89 Ibid.
above. Perhaps the CCP believed that this course of action is deemed safer than that of competitive electoral democracy, as this is predicted to weaken the current one-party domination. Deliberative democracy, on the other hand has no such danger. As the government is able to hear people’s concern on certain policies which could be utilized to present an image of a more accountable and responsive government, without enabling them to challenge the CCP. In other words, the mass is able to participate in the decision-making process but does not change the current power structure.\textsuperscript{90} It is important that we appreciate the scale of their participation. As of now there are over 905,000 elected committees and a whopping 3.7 million elected officials. To put matters into perspective, this is far grander than even modern-day France’s merely 37,000 popularly elected commune governments and the US’s 85,000 local governments.\textsuperscript{91} Most of the issues addressed, however, are of local concerns such as water supply, salaries for workers, and land contracts. These so-called deliberative democracy in China could perhaps develop into the so-called “local freedom”, or local elections, local enactment of laws, and local budget oversight. Although issues discussed as mentioned, are rather minor, these seemingly trivial issues could lead to “great freedom” at a national level.\textsuperscript{92} Through these experiences, civility and respect among the residents would emerge, as these villages in a sense could be seen as microscopic testing ground for democracy. Once they had indulged in participation of local affairs, who are to stop them from applying these skills to broader use. There are even impressive efforts to make the elections conducted on a local level to be free and fair, almost as if they were determined to break the iron grip of the CCP to dominate them.\textsuperscript{93} For example, candidates are required to make

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
speeches and list down the platform on which they would run for elected office, just like their Western democratic counterparts. Some even banned CCP or organizational nomination.94 Understandably, the CCP leaders were worried about this perceived threat at their doorstep and so undertook actions to undermine it. Th CCP branch gradually take control away from local government through its elite private meetings and specifically decreed that the CCP rural branch should “deliberate and decide major issues concerning the economic development and social progress in the village.”95 So that only after the latter reached a decision would their desire then be communicated to the village. Unfortunately, elements of democracy seemed to have already trickled into daily discourse (as we shall see later in the form of digital technology). From 1993 to 2005, “mass incidents” or what we would usually call mass protest in the form of strikes, demonstrations, traffic blocking, building seizures etc. have increased by almost tenfold (8,700 to 87,000). One Chinese activist brought to mind one of the core pillar of democracy, the rule of law as the basis for their “rightful resistance” against governmental action. In the word of Huang Qi whose statement made him sound like a citizen from a liberal democracy “We make sure to follow the law of the People’s Republic of China,…we consider it our God-Given duty to criticize and to bring attention to this.”96 Unfortunately, there are no recent statistics to show changes in numbers of mass political movement except for the case of the over 1 million men protest Hong Kong from 2019-2020, which ended with the “Hong Kong National Security Law”.97 A controversial law which essentially dealt a death blow to Hong Konger’s hope for

94 Ibid.
96 Huang Qi, interviewed on All Things Considered, NPR, (May 21, 2008)
democracy, although ramifications of this course of action have yet to develop. Perhaps, this might serve as lessons for Chinese of the mainland rather down the line.

III. Information Technology:

Our final segment shall be focused on arguably the potentially important cause for democracy, which is modern information technology. In the book *Digital Technology and Democratic Theories*, the readers are brought to mind the commonly accepted fact that digital technology are inherently liberating. Through harnessing it, democracy should have a much easier job spreading itself across the world, as individuals gain access to information and are made aware of diverse ways of living from various corners of the globe, which would not only enrich their individual experiences but strengthen their level of autonomy as well.98 The Arab Spring, only added credibility to such views, as in the spring of 2011, several Middle Eastern countries suddenly and almost simultaneously erupted from their long period of oppression in a call for democracy. Many journalists and scholars admit that the Internet tipped the balance heavily in favor of the agitated people.99

Then suddenly, such views took a dark turn, as these technologies could very much be the cornerstone for a dystopian society where digital technology could infringe upon our individual privacy and erode democratic elements in society.100 According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center and Elon University’s Imagining the Internet Center amongst 979 tech experts, innovators, businessmen, politicians, researchers and activist in asking about their

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100 Ibid
prediction of potential effects of technology on democracy, at least 49% viewed it unfavorably.\textsuperscript{101} They say that technology will “mostly weaken core aspects of democracy and democratic representation in the next decade”. Of course, the numbers of people involved are rather few, so it might not necessarily be an accurate depiction of the broader general public’s opinion. But the logic they brought up sounded plausible. Digital technology could be used to manipulate facts to undermine people’s trust in institutions and one another. Without social trust, people’s confidence in democratic processes and institutions could be low.\textsuperscript{102} Jonathan Morgan went into further details pointing out three key problems digital technology could bring. There is the use of social media platform to spread disinformation, the role of profit-driven companies in circulating selective information to citizens and collecting information from them, and the terrifying prospect of surveillance through digital platform by state actors (as is the case for China). Such government surveillance capability threatens the citizens’ ability to feel secure when engaging in political activities, most notably for countries which are inexperienced in democratic environment.\textsuperscript{103}

Theorists of digital democracy claims that ICT enable democratization as it provides almost instantaneous communication between individuals and groups and ensure greater level of political participation by providing them a safer to conduct political discourse, and these various ideas could be easily disseminated to shape opinions of large swathe of the public.\textsuperscript{104} Ernie Wilson even argues that digital media also possess features that mirrors that of democracy, such as participation, openness, and proactive role in content creation and that of competition, rights, 

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Neal A. Palmer and Douglass D. Perkins. p. 459
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responsibilities and active political functions. Furthermore, even people at the rock bottom of economic spectrum have access to this cheap accessible platform, providing massive potential for changes in every fabric of society.

In addition to believing digital technology as a powerful arsenal for democracy, the same Ernie Wilson is also aware of its negative effects. Just as it could support democratic grassroot movements, so to could it amplify the reach of the central government. As of now, China boasts the largest system of censorship in the world which requires intense cooperation amongst governmental monitor and technology/telecommunication companies submitted to CCP rule, popularly known as the “Great Firewall of China”. The CCP suppression of information on the SARS outbreak, or even more recent the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic should ring a bell or two. Even until now, it possesses great leverage in its ability to restrict internet use for the sake of “stability”, and Chinese leaders are more forthcoming, protecting their own interests. It is certainly true, Chinese consumers still have access to great range of information. But the flip side of the coin is that, to maintain abilities to facilitate and manipulate national discourse, the government has also devoted a considerable portion of its revenue towards its online presence of official news organizations (for example, Xin Hua). Investments in China Telecom ensured that Internet service provider start-ups found it harder to establish foothold, which means greater government control on information spreading across the Internet. Even so this does not entirely

106 Neal A. Palmer and Douglass D. Perkins. p.463
107 “The Great Firewall of China”, Bloomberg News, November 5 2018
108 Ibid, 464
110 Ibid.
prevent Chinese citizens from experimenting and accumulating experiences in journalism, as they now had an arena in which they could produce information from an almost infinite other selections through other mediums.\textsuperscript{111} By 2010, 420 million Chinese Internet users are identified as bloggers, which makes up 20\% of China’s population (also 20\% bigger than the current US population and this was ten years ago). Their celebrity status and influences resemble that of their Western counterparts, to the point that they could constantly push against the established social norms.\textsuperscript{112} Because of their heavy weight, authorities had no choice but to respond. It is true they still possess the power to delete controversial posts, but this is done in a very public view and public agitation could be expected.\textsuperscript{113} Even if certain posts are censored, there is a loophole in the form of conveniently screenshotting the controversial message for another time.\textsuperscript{114}

In another demonstration of balancing between carrots and stick, the CCP also permit online protest to a certain degree but clamp down hard if the issue broadens to a national level. The decisive and swift response by the CCP goes to show the power of the central information infrastructure. Highlighting their strength further is their demanding of censorship compliance from the tech giant Google and even forcing it to leave Chinese market, appreciating the danger of ICT on authority of the government.\textsuperscript{115} Instead, China possesses its own version of Facebook and Twitter such as Wechat and Weibo, so that the government could conveniently control flows of information. Again, Chinese citizens demonstrated remarkable ingenuity in the face of governmental censorship. In one effort by the government to stem Internet pornography, the Chinese public made a word play out of the word “cao ni ma” to mock the government, which

\textsuperscript{111} Neal A. Palmer and Douglass D. Perkins. p. 467
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 467
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 467
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 467
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 468
could mean “grass-mud horse” (Bolivian Alpaca) or the obscener translation of “fuck your mother”. Another activist, uses the well-known video game of *World of Warcraft* to satirize the governments so called “harmonization” aka censorship program.\textsuperscript{116} There are even various means to outright subvert governmental oversight, by accessing the Internet through unregistered portals, hiding digital trails or the most recent one of using special software such as NordVPN.\textsuperscript{117}

There might have already emerged signs of growing distrust and comfort of resistance against state apparatus. As mentioned previously, a rather substantial numbers of Chinese are deeply passionate in the art of blogging and the investigating journalistic spirit it brings. Which means that when a high-speed train crashed and no reports were heard from the Railways Ministry, the Chinese citizens forced the government’s hand to launch a full investigation on the matter. Zhan Jiang has referred to this phenomenon as the “microblogging revolution”, and now a newfound relationship with the government is taking shape “with just one person’s effort, conditions wouldn’t change…but with the power of the Internet, things will be different.”\textsuperscript{118}

To sum up the ascending might of communicative technology, especially its more positive implications for democratization, that is the “bonding and bridging” capacity it brings to the table.\textsuperscript{119} Even with massive sums of governmental resources pooled to impede upon its erosion of state’s authority, already Chinese youth grow up in an era far more than previous generations could have imagined. Through digital platform, they have already garnered substantial experienced and values necessary for the proper functioning of civil society, especially that of corporations and associations through facilitating networks of local organization. Their

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, 468
\textsuperscript{117} Jamie Cambell, “Does NordVPN Work in China?”, GoBestVPN, (August 17, 2019).
\textsuperscript{119} Neal A. Palmer and Douglass D. Perkins. p. 471
expectations for the government grew day by day, and it is clear that ICT is bound to accelerate the rate of political development in the country.

VI. Conclusion for Democracy in China

Considering what was discussed above, both the favorable and unfavorable arguments pose by scholars expressing and information that either provides an optimistic or pessimistic outlook on the democratization of China, the prospect seemed mixed at best. The best we could do is to speculate on its possibility based on incomplete data drawn from scholarships conducted by scholars who dedicated huge portions of their research in a country that could hardly be described as transparent. On one side, there are countless of obstacles both in the form of political culture, and authoritarian resilience which is capable of coopting or outright preventing dissenting elements. On the other, there are signs that might hint at the decline of the regime, such as its incomplete ability to satisfy the Chinese population in its entirety, decline of economic growth rate, emergence of democratic elements in rural areas, development of respects for the rule of law and the decisive impact of information technology. Ever increasingly, evidence pointed to Chinese exerting their own autonomy over the government via the use of information technology. Exceptional as China and formidable as the CCP may be, that would not mean their ever-increasing middle class who are ever more concerned about political matters and rights could be clamped down so easily. Admittedly, the lack of transparency proved difficult for scholar to attain anything more than an educated guess pertaining to their analysis of Chinese politics. What we do know from evidence listed above is that the Chinese governmental apparatus does not have complete total control over Chinese society. Yet it is still important to remain vigilant, as there is no way of predicting when democratization would occur, nor in what
fashion. Perhaps it might happen suddenly just like what happened in the USSR when we least expected it as the incremental steps taken by the CCP to appease its people proved to be its undoing. Just like how the reforms introduced by Soviet leadership led to its own collapse. As the older generations make way for the new, so too would values of liberal democracy slowly creep in. Increase in number of civil society organizations, numbers of collective actions and nongovernmental organizations would serve as valuable training ground, for experiences in political participation. This growing restlessness and dynamic might have had profound impact on the CCP’s strategic thinking as it incentivized the latter to maintain a whopping budget of 514 billion RMB, comparable to that of the military simply for internal security.\textsuperscript{120} Perhaps it would be in the form of a mass protest erupted in response to unjustified and arbitrary governmental action, coordinated by the powerful instrument of digital technology. For now, the best we could do is to continue speculating, as whether China would democratize or not.

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