

China's Model of Democracy

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Abstract

In a world where democracy is regarded as a universal value, the political legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s rule seems to be a suspect. There are calls for democratizing China's political system, implicitly after the fashion of Western liberal democracies, in particular the American model. Few scholars have questioned the desirability of building a democracy in China, yet it is far from being clear what China's model of democracy should be. This article will highlight major features of China's political system and elaborate a China's model of democracy.

Keywords: *political legitimacy, the Chinese Communist Party, China's model of democracy, the American model, China's political system, political reform*

1. Introduction: The CCP's Rule and the Issue of Political Legitimacy

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

– Romans 14:4

It is taken for granted in the Western media and academe that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has an issue of political legitimacy.¹ Since China scored very low on a series of widely used international indexes on political openness and governance, it is claimed, the CCP's rule is in a serious legitimacy crisis.² As Minxin Pei presented it, China is one of the most authoritarian political systems in the world according to the Polity IV Project; is almost completely "unfree" according to the Freedom House; and is one of the most corrupt countries according to Transparency International. China

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was ranked in the bottom third of the eighty countries surveyed in terms of “quality of governance ranking” according to one group of the World Bank and was considered a weak state according to another group of the World Bank. China found itself next to the legion of failed states and most repressive countries in terms of “voice and accountability” and also in the company of weak states such as Nicaragua, Cambodia, Papua New Guinea, Egypt, and Mali in terms of “regulatory quality”. China was no better than Namibia, Croatia, Kuwait, and Mexico in terms of “government effectiveness”, was comparable to Belarus, Mexico, Tunisia, and Cuba in terms of “political stability”, and was in the company of Mexico, Madagascar, and Lebanon in terms of “rule of law”. (Pei, 2006: 5-6)

In comparative terms, China and the United States stand worlds apart in all these measures. The United States received a constant score of 10 on a scale from -10 to 10 from 1946 to 2007 in terms of “authority trends”,³ and China’s scores were ranged between -9 and 5 during the same period. More specifically, China’s score was 5 between 1946 and 1949 but fell to -8 in 1949 as a result of “R” (“Revolutionary Change Events”). And it received a constant score of -7 from 1977 to 2007.⁴

In terms of the Freedom House scores in 2008, the United States receives scores of 1 for both “political rights” and “civil liberties” on the scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the most free and 7 the least free and has a status of “free”; and China receives a score of 7 for “political rights,” 6 for “civil liberties,” and “not free” status.⁵

The United States is also less corrupt than China. According to the 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index produced by Transparency International, the United States is ranked 18 with a confidence range between 6.7 and 7.7 on a 1-10 scale (10 being the least corrupt) and China is ranked 72 with a confidence range between 3.1 and 4.3.⁶

Yet not all of these measures are useful and meaningful. The scores from Polity IV for both China and the United States have ignored significant historical variations. A constant score of 10 does not shed any light on the historical evolution of the authority in the United States from 1946 to 2007, in particular the damage the 2000 presidential controversy and the subsequent Bush years did to the credibility of the democratic system in the country. Nor is it meaningful to give China a constant score of -7 for the period of 1977 to 2007, completely ignoring the major events of the country in the interim.

Moreover, it is not clear why the United States should receive a positive score of 10 and China a negative score of 7 instead of vice versa. Had an authoritarian regime been regarded more desirable, the scores would have been reversed.

But do these low scores really constitute evidence for a legitimacy crisis in China? “Legitimacy,” according to Dolf Sternberger, a German political

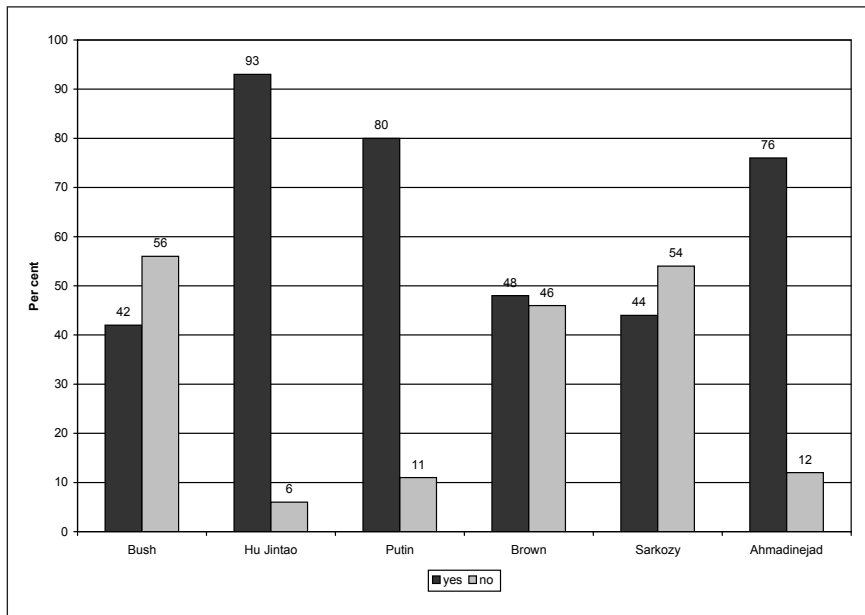
philosopher, “is the foundation of such governmental power as it exercised both with a consciousness on the government’s part that it has a right to govern and with some recognition by the governed of that right.” (Sternberger, 1968) In other words, whether a regime is legitimate or not does not depend on the “expert” opinion of Western scholars but on the recognition of the government and the governed that the regime has right to govern. In spite of these low scores, the CCP government has no legitimacy issues. Externally, the CCP government is legitimate in the eyes of 169 countries in the world⁷ and all international organizations. Internally, it is legitimate in the eyes of the Chinese people in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macao, and even Taiwan, though the last one does not recognize the CCP rule over itself.

A survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China in November 2008 provides more details about how the Chinese look at their own government. The survey was conducted in 500 urban neighbourhood committees in 18 prefectural-level cities and 100 towns and villages in 20 counties. The total sample is 10,000, including 7,000 in urban areas and 3,000 in rural areas. According to the survey, 91.5 per cent of respondents have confidence in China’s future directions; 95.1 per cent agree that the socialist political system with Chinese characteristics is a right match to China’s situation; and 86.4 per cent are confident about the prospect of building a comprehensive well-off society by 2020.⁸

In contrast, people in democracies neither are confident about their leaders in handling world affairs nor trust their abilities to ensure right policies for their own countries. First, people in major democracies are less confident about their leaders in correctly handling world affairs than people in authoritarian countries are about their leaders. According to a 2008 World Public Opinion poll,⁹ politicians of some major democracies are not particularly inspiring in their own countries. To a question, “How much confidence you have in a leader to do the right thing regarding world affairs,” neither U.S. President George W. Bush nor British Prime Minister Gordon Brown nor French President Nicholas Sarkozy received more than 50 per cent in the category of “a lot/some confidence” (Figure 1). Among the three, Brown did the best, with a score of 48 per cent. Those who have confidence in him are more than those who lack confidence in him (46 per cent). More French distrust Sarkozy in handling world affairs (54 per cent) than those who trust him (44 per cent). And Americans mostly have no confidence in Bush as a world leader. Fifty-six per cent of the people distrust him as a world leader and only 42 per cent have some confidence in him.

Leaders of authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, are much better regarded in their own countries. In Iran, 76 per cent of people believe that their president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, can do the right thing regarding world affairs while only 12 per cent don’t. In Russia, 80 per cent trust Vladimir Putin

Figure 1 Confidence in Politicians as World Leaders



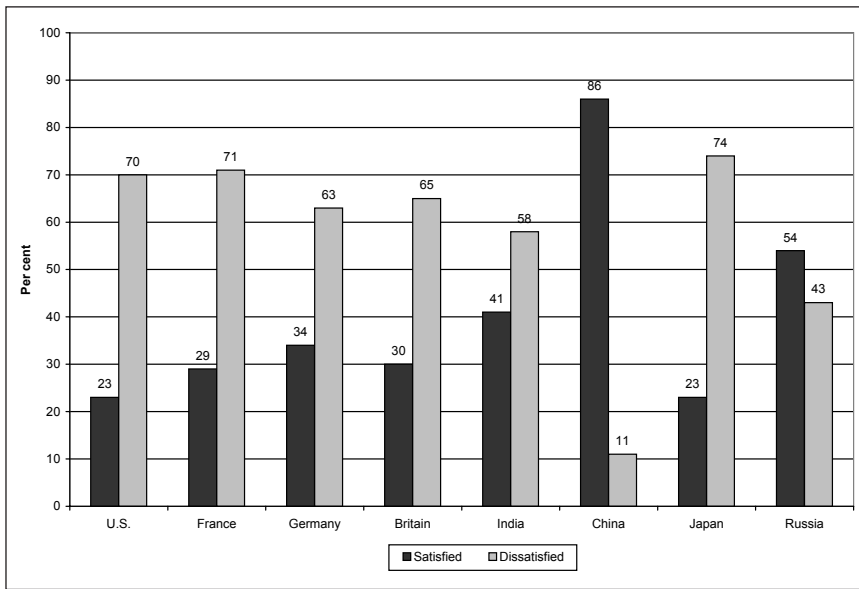
Source: <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org>

on world affairs and 11 per cent don't. In China, the overwhelming majorities (93 per cent) have confidence in Chinese President Hu Jintao to do the right thing regarding world affairs and only 6 per cent don't.

Second, majorities in major democracies are dissatisfied with the way things are going in their own countries. According to a 2008 24-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, 58 per cent of the people are dissatisfied with country direction while 41 per cent are satisfied in India; 63 per cent of the people are dissatisfied with country direction and 34 per cent satisfied in Germany; the split between the dissatisfied and the satisfied in Britain is 65 per cent vs. 30 per cent; 70 per cent are dissatisfied while only 23 per cent are satisfied in the United States; 71 per cent are not satisfied and 29 per cent are in France; and 74 per cent are dissatisfied with country direction and 23 per cent are satisfied in Japan (Figure 2).¹⁰ Clearly, people in these democracies are not happy about how their countries are governed.

However, people under authoritarian regimes are much more optimistic about the way things are going in their countries. In Russia, 54 per cent of the people are satisfied with the way things are going in their country. The Chinese are the most optimistic of all: 86 per cent of them are satisfied with their country's direction.

Figure 2 Satisfaction with Country's Direction



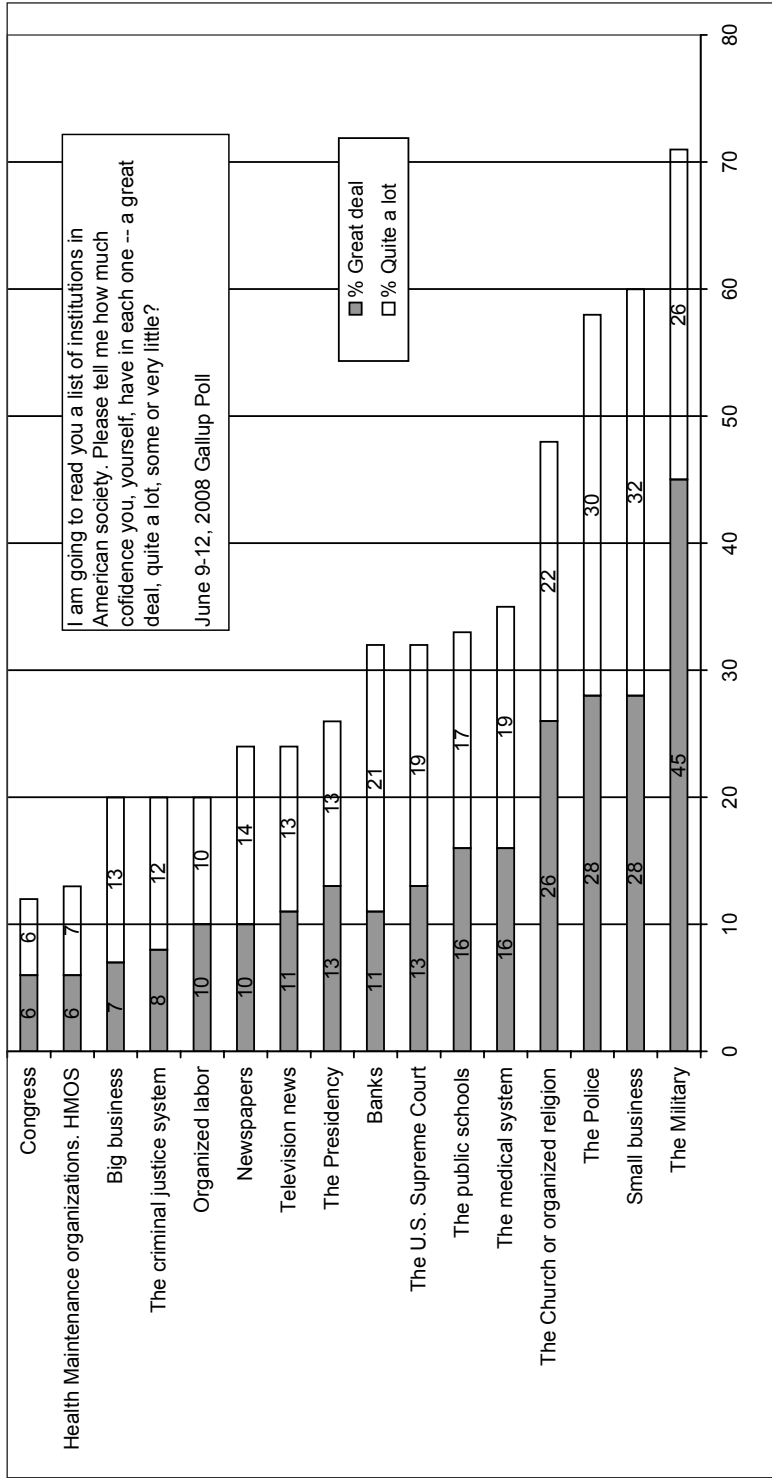
Source: <http://www.pewglobal.org>

Finally, majorities in some democracies have lost confidence in the key institutions of their own countries. Few Americans, for instance, have faith in any of the three major institutions of their own democratic system. In a Gallup poll taken on June 9-12, 2008 asking people how much confidence they had in a list of American institutions, none of the three branches of the federal government received high ratings. In the favourable categories of “great deal” and “quite lot”, the U.S. Supreme Court received a combined rate of 32 per cent; the Presidency 26 per cent; and Congress 12 per cent (Figure 3).¹¹ These are hardly inspiring numbers for a model democracy with no legitimacy problems. Or should we justifiably contend that the United States has a serious legitimacy problem?

2. Features of China's Political System

China's political system is unique in the world with several key features. First, its legislature is neither one-chamber nor bicameral. There are two parallel houses in the legislative branch: the National People's Congress (NPC) and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Between 1949 and 1954, the CPPCC functioned as the legislature. A coalition of political elites from different political parties and

Figure 3 Confidence in American Institutions



Source: <http://www.gallup.com>

social groups, the CPPCC established the People's Republic of China (PRC) and promulgated the Common Program (the provisional constitution of the PRC) in 1949.

Mao Zedong served as its chairman from 1949 to 1954. When the first National People's Congress was elected as the legislature in 1954, however, the CNPPCC was allowed to exist along with the NPC, primarily as an organization of political consultation. In addition to Mao Zedong (1949-1954), six people have occupied the position of the head of the CPPCC: Zhou Enlai (1954-1976), Deng Xiaoping (1978-1983), Deng Yingchao (1983-88), Li Xiannian (1988-93), Li Ruihuan (1993-2003), and Jia Qinglin (2003-2013). Among them, Li Xiannian was the only one who was not a concurrent Politburo member; and Deng Yingchao was the only woman and a concurrent full member of the Politburo. All the rest were Politburo standing members. Both Li Ruihuan and Jia Qinglin are ranked No. 4 in the Politburo Standing Committee.

The Eleventh National Committee of the CPPCC has 2,237 deputies from 34 social groups. Among them, 892 (39.9 per cent) are CCP members and 1,345 (60.1 per cent) are not. There are 395 female deputies, taking 17.7 per cent.¹² Externally, the leaders of the CPPCC are often treated as if they were leaders of an upper house in the legislature. Domestically, the CPPCC functions as a political consultation organ. There are also 3,164 local CPPCC organs at three levels of local government (provincial, municipal, and county levels) with 615,164 local deputies.¹³ Instead of an arm of the legislature, the CPPCC has helped to absorb social talents from various sectors, lowering the risk of forming an independent opposition party in China.

Second, China is a federal state in form and a unitary state in essence. The National People's Congress (NPC) is the highest organ of state power in the PRC (Article 57 of the 1982 PRC Constitution), but the NPC has no statutory power over people's congresses of lower levels. People's congresses are established at the four levels of local government (provincial, municipal, county, and township levels) (Article 95), and local people's congresses at different levels are local organs of state power (Article 96). According to the Organic Law of the Local People's Congresses and Local Governments, local congressional, government, and judicial leaders are all elected or ratified by the local people's congresses.¹⁴ Therefore, they are accountable to the local people's congresses. In lawmaking, the provincial-level people's congresses are almost as powerful as the National People's Congress. They may adopt and promulgate local regulations, which must not contravene the Constitution, the statutes, and the administrative rules and regulations, and shall report such local regulations to the Standing Committee of the NPC and the State Council for record. In the meantime, the people's congresses of the provincial capitals and other cities approved by the State Council will have to get their local

regulations approved by the standing committee of the provincial people's congress, and the standing committee of the provincial people's congress then reports such local regulations to the Standing Committee of the NPC and the State Council for record (Article 7 of the Organic Law). No other local people's congresses have legislative powers.¹⁵

However, the central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has powers over personnel issues at the provincial level. Consistent with the principle of the Party controlling the cadres, the CCP decides candidates for all important positions at the provincial level including the provincial Party committee, the provincial congressional leadership, the provincial government leadership, and the provincial judicial leadership. In theory, provincial Party secretaries are supposed to be elected by the provincial Party committee. But almost two thirds of current provincial Party secretaries have been transferred from outside the provincial units. Out of four centrally administered municipalities, only Liu Qi was elected locally. Tianjin's Party Secretary Zhang Gaoli was transferred from Shandong; Shanghai's Party Secretary Yu Zhengsheng was transferred from Hubei; and Chongqing's Party Secretary Bo Xilai was transferred from the Ministry of Commerce. Moreover, Guangdong's Party Secretary Wang Yang was transferred from Chongqing; Jiangxi's Party Secretary Su Rong was transferred from the Central Party School; Sichuan's Party Secretary Liu Qibao was transferred from Guangxi; Shaanxi Party Secretary Zhao Leji was transferred from Qinghai; Qinghai Party Secretary Qiang Wei from Beijing; Heilongjiang Party Secretary Ji Binxuan, Shandong Party Secretary Jiang Yikang, Zhejiang Party Secretary Zhao Hongzhu, and Hebei Party Secretary Zhang Yunchuan are all from the central apparatus. Moreover, all but six provincial Party secretaries are concurrent chairmen of the provincial people's congresses and all provincial governors (mayors and chairmen of autonomous regions) are deputy secretaries of their respective provincial Party committees.

Third, China is a party-state. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)¹⁶ by force in 1949, and the CCP has been dominant in state power ever since. With more than 75 million members, the CCP is the largest political party in the world.¹⁷ It is also one of the oldest political parties in the world with a history of 88 years. As a ruling party, the CCP is dominant in decision-making on all foreign and domestic affairs. The CCP's Political Bureau (Politburo), especially its nine-member standing committee, is the decision-making organ of the PRC. The National People's Congress, the highest organ of state power according to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, usually approves policies proposed by the Politburo Standing Committee, and the State Council is the apparatus to implement these policies. There is a significant overlap between the Party and the state apparatuses. Top state leaders such as the chairman

of the National People's Congress Standing Committee and the premier and the executive vice premier as well as the chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) have to be members of the Politburo Standing Committee. And vice premiers, some state councilors, vice chairmen of the Central Military Commission, and the first vice chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee are also members of the Politburo. Finally, almost all top political elites in the state apparatus, the provinces, the military, the business, and the academe belong to the Central Committee of the CCP.¹⁸ Most importantly, the People's Liberation Army is an army of the CCP, not an army of the PRC. The Central Military Commission (CMC) of the CCP controls the PLA, and the chairman of the CMC is the commander-in-chief.

Nevertheless, the CCP of 2009 is different from the CCP of 1949. First, the CCP is more institutionalized in 2009 than in 1949. Although the national Party congress is supposed to be held once every five years, this was not true until late 1970s. There were long gaps between congresses from 1949 to 1973. The first national Party congress after 1949 (the Eighth Party Congress) was not held until 1956, 11 years from the previous congress, and the second national congress (the Ninth Party Congress) was held in 1969, 13 years after the Eighth. It was not until 1977 when the CCP began to have regular congresses once every five years. The past seven congresses have been held as scheduled, without any major interruptions.

Second, the CCP has basically solved the problem of succession. During Mao's era, one successor died of torture and one died of a plane crash. In the early years of Deng's era, one Party chairman and two general secretaries were dismissed. It was not until 2002 when the first smooth power transition took place. Jiang Zemin stepped down from the positions of power without being disgraced, and Hu Jintao took over these powerful positions peacefully.

Third, the CCP has been the driver behind China's phenomenal economic performance of the past three decades. With an annual growth rate of 9.7 per cent from 1978 to 2008, the CCP outperformed all the other regimes in the world in economic growth. During the same period, the annual growth rates were 3.0 per cent and 2.7 per cent for the United States and Japan, respectively.

3. A China's Model of Democracy

There have been three arguments against democratization in China.¹⁹ The first is that democracy does not fit China.²⁰ Of course, those who make this kind of arguments do not say that democracy does not fit China; they argue against Western-style democracy – which is usually characterized as having multiple parties, general elections, and separation of powers among three branches – in

China. Deng Xiaoping probably was the first to raise objections to copying Western models of democracy, in particular U.S. model. In his speech on December 30, 1986, Deng pointed out:

In developing our democracy, we cannot simply copy bourgeois democracy, or introduce the system of a balance of three powers. I have often criticized people in power in the United States, saying that actually they have three governments. Of course, the American bourgeoisie uses this system in dealing with other countries, but when it comes to internal affairs, the three branches often pull in different directions, and that makes trouble. We cannot adopt such a system.²¹

China's leaders after Deng also expressed similar objections. According to Jiang Zemin, democracies are relative and specific, not absolute and abstract; and there are varieties of democracies in the world. China does not intend to impose its own political system on others; nor does it tolerate others trying to impose their political system on it.²² Although Hu Jintao is willing to draw on useful results of the political civilization of mankind, he insists on adhering to China's own path of political development in the meantime.²³

On March 9, 2009, Wu Bangguo, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee and No. 2 Politburo Standing Member, made it clear in his speech to the NPC Session that China shall never simply copy the system of Western countries or introduce a system of multiple parties holding office in rotation, a system with the separation of the three powers or a bicameral system.²⁴

Some scholars also support this view. The fact that the Western liberal democracy is successful in western countries, as Song Luzheng, a blogger who is a resident of France, argues, should not be taken as an argument for promoting Western-style democracy in China. The success of western democracies is not replicable because of their unique historical circumstances. First, western countries realized their primitive accumulation through wars, colonization, and robbery. Second, democratization in western countries was implemented through a gradualist approach. It took them more than 200 years to have genuine general elections. The United States, for instance, did not have a general election of all the people until 40 some years ago.²⁵ His conclusion is that democracy is good but western-style democracy is not good for China. In fact, many people who hold this view argue against promoting western-style democracy in other non-western countries as well. Citing examples of India, Russia, Thailand, and Taiwan, they pointed out the negative consequences of democratization in non-western countries in general.²⁶

Fang Ning, a research fellow and deputy director of the Institute of Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), published an article in February 2009 in the *People's Daily* against the introduction of a multi-party system into China. Entitled "China must not engage in Western

multi-party system,” the article criticized the multi-party system in the West and argued against its introduction to China. In the West, Fang pointed out, political parties are controlled by private capital, in particular major capitalists. Since it is very costly to get elected in such a system, whichever party that wants to take power has to be supported by capitalists. In the United States, the cost for running elections in 2004 was US\$2.51 million on average per senator with a maximum of US\$31.48 million and US\$0.51 million per congressman with a maximum of US\$9.04 million. Moreover, multi-party competition has a tendency to expand social differences and is not conducive to social harmony and stability. In order to compete for voters, political parties tend to polarize voters and dramatize their differences, causing and deepening social divisions. This divisive politics has resulted in serious negative consequences in many developing countries while in a transition of industrialization and modernization. China is in the golden period of development as well as in a period of serious social conflicts. Various problems have emerged as a result of rapid social and economic development. China should minimize these problems. Therefore, China must not engage in such a multi-party system. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is not a representative of any interest group but the representative of the entire population of China. It can produce policies that will maximize the benefits to the whole society and the whole nation.²⁷

Fang Ning also cited three reasons against democratization in China in an interview. First, competitive elections will result in money politics. Second, they will exacerbate social divisions. Third, costs are too high. If China were to conduct competitive elections now, it would have nominal gains but inviting real troubles.²⁸

The second argument against democracy in China is that China is not ready for democracy at this stage of development. In this view, China is not ready for democracy at this stage of development for three reasons. First, democratization in the current international environment is nothing but a means by which western countries, in particular the United States, attempt to interfere with other countries’ internal affairs. If a ruling party of a country does not listen to the command of the United States, the United States would instigate a “color revolution” by supporting its opposition party to overthrow the ruling party. Second, there will be chaos during the transition from a new democracy to a mature democracy. There is no guarantee that this transition will be short and painless. Taiwan is a good example. In the past eight years, Taiwan dropped from the leader of the four little tigers to the laggard of the four little tigers in terms of economic growth, witnessed high suicide rates and unemployment rates, and has been divided into blue and green camps. Third, China is a developing country with a population of 1.3 billion people. Considering the fact that the overall quality of the Chinese people is not high

and that China is surrounded by a group of hostile countries, democratization in China would likely result in chaos. Democratization will also slow down China's pace of development, enlarging China's gap from the developed countries.²⁹

The third argument against Western-style democracy in China is that China has already established a democracy with Chinese characteristics. Liu Xirui, a professor of the National School of Administration, announced in April 2007 that a China's model of democracy has been basically established. This model has four characteristics. First, it recognizes the sovereignty of the people. All the power of the government comes from the people. On this point, the China model of democracy is no different from the western liberal democracy. Democracy, rule of law, freedom, human rights, equity, and universal fraternity are all common values of the mankind. Second, the China model is one of representation (*daibiao zhi*) while the western liberal democracy is one of delegation (*daiyi zhi*).³⁰ The system of delegation in essence is a system of elite rotation in which voters have power only at the time of election. Once the election is over, the delegates will no longer be subject to the will of voters. The system of representation, on the other hand, is more democratic because representatives are accountable to voters and follow their mandate in their representation. The theory of "three represents" is an extension of this principle of representation. Third, the China model of democracy is composed of democratic mechanisms for both the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China. In the Party, these are the Party congress system, democratic life system of the Party members, and collective leadership of the Party organizations. In the state, these are the people's congress system, people's participation, self-government of villages and urban neighbourhoods, autonomy of ethnic minority regions, and political consultation with democratic parties. Finally, China has also experimented with various forms of democracy, especially at the grassroots level.³¹

Before we proceed to evaluate these objections, we need to have a functional definition of democracy. Democracy, according to Robert Dahl, is a function of two mechanisms. On the one hand, politicians should be allowed to compete for power, i.e., contestation. On the other, citizens should be allowed to participate in selecting leaders, i.e., participation. (Dahl, 1972)³² According to these measures, the current political system in China is neither completely undemocratic nor fully democratic. In China, citizens do vote. They directly decide grassroots leaders and elect deputies to the people's congresses of counties (county-level cities and urban districts) and townships. The deputies thus elected then elect deputies to the people's congresses of the next higher level. And the deputies to the people's congresses of provincial units elect deputies to the national people's congress. However, there is no constitutionally sanctioned contestation for power.

Throughout the history of China, contestation for power has been the norm rather than the exception. Yet contestation for power is usually backed by military forces. In the 1920s, territorially based military warlords competed for political power in China. In the late 1940s, two political parties (the CCP and the KMT) also competed for power with military forces. In fact, the PRC was born of the contestation between the CCP and the KMT. To avoid military contestation, there should be separation of military forces from political parties.

Currently, the People's Liberation Army is the military of the CCP; and there is no evidence that the CCP is willing to give up its control over the military. On the contrary, one of the historical missions of the PLA, according to Hu Jintao, is to provide support for the CCP's rule³³ and the PLA generals have voiced their objections to turning the armed forces of the Party to those of the state.³⁴

Until the CCP gives up its monopoly over the military and security apparatus, it is unlikely that genuine political contestation will take place in China. It does not appear that Hu Jintao is going to transform the military from the Party to the state any time soon. Nor is it likely that his successor will be engaged in such transformations in his first five years in office.

Moreover, it is not likely that the CCP will allow a competitive multi-party system in China. Currently, there is a multi-party system in China. In addition to the CCP, there are eight political parties in China. They are Revolutionary Committee of Chinese Guomindang, China Democratic League, China Democratic National Construction Association, China Association for Promoting Democracy, Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party, China Zhi Gong Party (Public Interest Party), Jiu San (September 3) Society, and Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.

These political parties were all established before 1949 and were all political allies of the CCP. These political parties have been well integrated into the political system under the CCP's leadership. Out of eight chairpersons, six (Zhou Tienong, Jiang Shusheng, Chen Changzhi, Yan Junqi (f.), Sang Guowei, and Han Qide) are vice chairpersons of the National People's Congress Standing Committee and two (Wan Gang and Lin Wenyi (f.)) vice chairpersons of the CPPCC. In addition, six executive vice chairpersons of these parties (Wang Zhizhen (f.) of Jiusan Society, Chen Zongxing of Nonggong, Luo Fuhe of Minjin, Li Wuwei of Minge, Zhang Rongmin (f.) of Minjian, and Zhang Meiying (f.) of Minmeng) are also vice chairpersons of the CPPCC. Wan Gang, chairman of China Zhi Gong Party, is both a vice chairman of the CPPCC and minister of Science and Technology. It is inconceivable that these parties would compete for power with the CCP.

In addition to these nine parties, there are also political parties in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan. There are 12 political parties (groups) in Hong

Kong that participate in elections but none of them operate beyond the boundaries of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.³⁵ There are also 12 political parties (groups) in Macao, but these groups are less contentious than those in Hong Kong and they are all local political groups in Macao.³⁶ Although there are 147 legal political parties in Taiwan,³⁷ only two of them truly matter in politics. The KMT is now the ruling party with Ma Ying-jeou as Taiwan's president and 81 seats in the Legislative Yuan. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was the ruling party from 2000 to 2008 and is now the second largest party in Taiwan with 27 seats in the Legislative Yuan.³⁸ However, they are both local political parties of Taiwan. A major political party on the mainland from 1920 to 1949, the KMT would come back to the political stage on the Mainland only when Taiwan agrees to be unified under the People's Republic of China.

From this perspective, we can object the third argument against democratization in China: China has already established a democracy with Chinese characteristics. China has its own political system with its own legitimate government. But it does not mean that this legitimate government is the outcome of a democratic process. The first argument that democracy does not fit China is objectionable as well. Grassroots democracy has been implemented in China for more than two decades. It is not clear why democracy can not be introduced to China as a whole. It is true that the CCP's policies have benefited millions in China in the past three decades. But the CCP has not been subject to competitive elections.

The second argument is more convincing. China is in a major economic and social transformation, for which a strong polity is required. The CCP has proved to be an effective ruling party, and its economic performance in the past three decades is unparalleled in the world. Although it is ideal to implement a more democratic system through general elections among candidates from multiple political parties, it is also likely that China may degenerate into competition with arms.

Nevertheless, the question remains on what a model of democracy is good for China when China is ready for democracy. There is not a single model of democracy in the West. There are parliamentary models as well as presidential models. In a parliamentary system such as in Great Britain, the key political leader, the prime minister, is not directly elected. In a presidential model such as in the United States, the president is popularly elected. China's institutional setup is a parliamentary system. In this system, the premier is nominated by the president and elected by the National People's Congress. It is conceivable that China would improve its congress system by allowing direct elections of its deputies to the National People's Congress.³⁹

China's model of democracy, therefore, could have the following characteristics. First, it may be a parliamentary system. Second, candidates

from multiple parties should be allowed to compete for seats in the National People's Congress. Third, voters in different constituencies would directly decide candidates for seats in the NPC through secret ballot.

China's NPC system has two distinctive features. First, the number of deputies is very large. The numbers of NPC deputies range from 1,226 in the First Congress to 3,497 in the Fifth Congress (Appendix Table 1). Currently, there are altogether 2,985 deputies in the Eleventh National People's Congress from 35 electoral units (constituencies) (Appendix Table 2).

This is the largest congress in the world. It is 4.5 times as large as the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, which has 646 members; 5.3 times as large as the lower house of India's parliament (the Lok Sabha), which has 545 members; and 6.7 times as large as the House of Representatives of the United States, which has 435 members.

The reason why there are so many NPC deputies is that China is a country with a large population of multiple nationalities and a large territory.⁴⁰ Although the NPC has the largest number of deputies in absolute numbers in the world, it does not necessarily have the largest number of deputies in proportion to the population. Per million people, the NPC has only 2.3 deputies while the House of Commons of the United Kingdom has 10.6 MPs. If we add MPs from the House of Lords, which are 743, to the Parliament, the rate goes up to 22.8 MPs per million. This is because there are altogether 1,389 members of the Parliament in the United Kingdom and there are only 60,975,000 people in the country.

In other words, the NPC has to have many deputies to have sufficient representation of the underlying population. Yet, on the per-million basis, there are too few NPC deputies. Anhui's population, for instance, is 62 million, larger than that of the United Kingdom. But it has only 114 NPC deputies. Hunan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Guangdong, Sichuan, Shandong, and Henan all have larger populations than UK, but none of them has more than 170 NPC deputies.

The second feature of the NPC is that the NPC sessions are usually very short. The NPC meets once a year, for only five to 26 days (Appendix Table 3). In contrast, the U.S. Congress meets for nine and a half months a year; France's Parliament meets for nine months a year; the National Diet of Japan meets for 150 days a year; and even the Belgian Federal Parliament meets once a year for 40 days.⁴¹

The reason why NPC sessions are usually short is because the NPC has too many deputies and many of these deputies have their own jobs. It is not realistic to ask a congress of almost 3,000 people to meet for six months or longer. For this reason, a standing organ of the NPC is necessary. Therefore, the NPC sets up a standing committee of about 170 members. According to Article 57 of the PRC Constitution, the NPC is the highest organ of state

power and its permanent body is the Standing committee of the NPC. The NPC Standing Committee exercises a broad range of powers and meets twice a month, for seven days each. The Standing Committee of the Eleventh NPC is composed of 174 members, including one chairman (Wu Bangguo), 13 vice chairmen, and 160 standing members.⁴²

To establish a parliamentary democracy, China will have to first establish a rule of law. The Chinese Communist Party organizations should gradually phase out from the daily operations of the government.

4. Concluding Remarks

It is wrong to evaluate the legitimacy of the CCP rule by relying solely on “expert” opinions of the Western academia and media because they are in no position to judge whether the CCP has right to rule or not. To assess the legitimacy of any political regime, we need to see whether such a regime is receptive to the governed. From this perspective, the CCP has no legitimacy crisis. It has been recognized as legitimate internationally as well as by the people of China.

Moreover, the CCP leaders and their policies in fact are better received by the Chinese people than their counterparts in Western democracies. More than nine out of ten people (93 per cent) in China consider President Hu Jintao a trustworthy world leader, while less than fifty per cent of the people in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States have any confidence in their respective leaders (Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy, and George W. Bush) to do the right thing regarding world affairs. The majority of the Chinese people (86 per cent) are satisfied with the way things are going in China, but in most major democracies no more than 35 per cent of the people are satisfied with their country’s direction. Most amazingly, the Americans have mostly lost confidence in their democratic institutions. They have more confidence in the public schools than in the U.S. Supreme Court; more confidence in banks than the presidency; and more confidence in health maintenance organizations (HMOs) than in Congress. The only 12 per cent of the people have any confidence in Congress, in contrast to 71 per cent in the military.

China’s political system has three distinctive features. First, its legislature is neither unicameral nor bicameral. The National People’s Congress is the highest organ of state power, and the CPPCC serves as an advisory body for the NPC. Second, China is a federal state in form and a unitary state in essence. The NPC has no statutory power over provincial-level people’s congresses but the Central Committee of the CCP can manage provincial leaders at will. Third, China is a party-state. As the largest party in the world, the CCP has dominated the NPC, the State Council, and the military. The CCP

is able to maintain its monopoly over power partly because of its economic performance of the past three decades.

There are three arguments against democratization. The first is that democracy, i.e., Western liberal democracy, does not fit China. The argument is that Western democracies are not replicable because of their unique historical circumstances; that democratization in non-Western societies has often produced some undesirable consequences; and that Western multi-party system is particularly unfit for China because of money politics and polarization of social groups.

The second argument against democratization in China is that China is not ready for democracy at this stage of development for three reasons. First, the United States may intervene in China's domestic affairs by exploiting political divisions as a result of democratization. Second, China may miss the opportunity for further development. Third, democratization in China may result in chaos.

The third argument against Western-style democracy in China is that China has already established a democracy with Chinese characteristics. The China's model of democracy has four characteristics. First, it recognizes the sovereignty of the people. Second, the China's model of democracy is one of representation, a more democratic system than the system of delegation. Third, the China's model of democracy is composed of democratic mechanisms for both the CCP and the PRC. Fourth, China has also experimented with various forms of democracy. Since China already has a system of democracy, therefore, there is no need for democratization.

According to a well-received definition introduced by Robert Dahl, democracy refers to both contestation and participation. Politicians compete for vote by citizens. In this sense, the current political system in China is not fully democratized. There are elections but not general elections. There are competitions for offices but not from different political parties.

Historically, contestation for power is more of a norm than an exception in China. Yet competing parties are often competing with armed forces. In the 1920s, territorially based military warlords competed for political power in China. In the 1940s, two major political parties competed for power with military forces. As long as the armed forces in China are the army of the Party instead of the army of the state, it will not only be difficult but also dangerous to contemplate multi-party competition. Until the CCP gives up its monopoly over the military and security apparatus, it is unlikely that genuine political contestation will take place in China.

From this perspective, we may object the third argument, i.e., China has already established a democratic system of sort. We can also object the first argument that democracy does not fit China. For China has experimented with democratization at the grassroots level for more than two decades. There is

no reason why similar experiments can not be implemented at higher levels. The second argument seems more convincing. As a major country with the largest population in the world going through major social and economic transformations, a strong polity is required.

In the meantime, however, China's political system can be gradually modified to be more democratic. In the future, a parliamentary democracy should be established in China with the following features. First, a rule of law should be established. Second, the Chinese Communist Party should phase out from the daily operations of the government. Third, candidates from different political parties should be allowed to compete for seats on the NPC. Fourth, voters should be allowed to directly elect deputies to the NPC. Ultimately, political reform should not be for the reform's sake. Nor should it be used to please foreign governments, scholars, and journalists. Political reform, including democratization, should improve the performance of the political system to better serve the interests of the people.

Appendix Table 1

Number of Deputies to National People's Congresses

Congress	Year	Total No. of Deputies	Female Deputies	Minority Deputies	(person)	
					% to Total Deputies	
					Female Deputies	Minority Deputies
First Congress	1954	1226	147	178	12.0	14.5
Second Congress	1959	1226	150	179	12.2	14.6
Third Congress	1964	3040	542	372	17.8	12.2
Fourth Congress	1975	2885	653	270	22.6	9.4
Fifth Congress	1978	3497	742	381	21.2	10.9
Sixth Congress	1983	2978	632	403	21.2	13.5
Seventh Congress	1988	2978	634	445	21.3	14.9
Eighth Congress	1993	2978	626	439	21.0	14.8
Ninth Congress	1998	2979	650	428	21.8	14.4
Tenth Congress	2002	2985	604	414	20.2	13.9
Eleventh Congress	2007	2985	637	411	21.3	13.8

Sources: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/yb2004-c/html/W2301ae.xls>
<http://china.yinet.com/view.jsp?oid=28296467>
http://www.zibo.gov.cn/art/2008/3/14/art_1484_10141.html

Appendix Table 2
Deputies to the National People's Congress of the
People's Republic of China (2009)

Province*	Deputies	Population (2004)	Rate**
Beijing	58	14,927,000	3.9
Tianjin	45	10,236,700	4.4
Hebei	122	68,090,000	1.8
Shanxi	70	33,350,700	2.1
Inner Mongolia	59	23,844,000	2.5
Liaoning	110	42,170,000	2.6
Jilin	68	26,619,000	2.6
Heilongjiang	103	38,168,000	2.7
Shanghai	64	13,523,900	4.7
Jiangsu	157	74,325,000	2.1
Zhejiang	91	47,195,700	1.9
Anhui	114	62,280,000	1.8
Fujian	61	35,110,000	1.7
Jiangxi	80	42,835,700	1.9
Shandong	181	91,630,000	2.0
Henan	166	97,170,000	1.7
Hubei	124	60,161,000	2.1
Hunan	118	66,977,000	1.8
Guangdong	159	78,047,500	2.0
Guangxi	88	48,890,000	1.8
Hainan	19	8,178,300	2.3
Chongqing	61	31,442,300	1.9
Sichuan	147	85,953,000	1.7
Guizhou	66	39,037,000	1.7
Yunnan	91	44,152,000	2.1
Tibet	20	2,634,400	7.6
Shaanxi	67	37,050,000	1.8
Gansu	48	26,190,000	1.8
Qinghai	21	5,390,000	3.9
Ningxia	19	5,877,100	3.2
Xinjiang	60	19,631,100	3.1
Hong Kong	36	6,883,000	5.2
Macao	12	457,000	26.3
Taiwan	13	22,689,000	0.6
People's Liberation Army	268		
Total	2985	1,311,115,400	2.3

Note: * This refers to provinces, centrally administered cities, autonomous regions, and special administrative regions.

** Rate refers to the number of deputies per million people.

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2008-03/03/content_7708230.htm

Appendix Table 3
National People's Congress Sessions

	First Session	Second Session	Third Session	Fourth Session	Fifth Session
First NPC	14	26	16	11	
Second NPC	11	12	21	17	
Third NPC	15				
Fourth NPC	5				
Fifth NPC	8	14	12	14	15
Sixth NPC	16	17	15	19	18
Seventh NPC	20	16	16	16	14
Eighth NPC	17	13	14	13	15
Ninth NPC	15	12	11	11	11
Tenth NPC	14	10	10	10	12
Eleventh NPC	14	9			

Source: http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-11/15/content_2221419.htm

Notes

1. For a survey of the issue of legitimacy in East and Southeast Asia, see White (ed.) (2005).
2. For a survey of the literature on the CCP's legitimacy crisis, see Schubert (2008).
3. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/usa2.htm>
4. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/chn2.htm>
5. <http://freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2008&country=7372>
6. http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2008/cpi2008/cpi_2008_table
7. <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/fyrth/t328655.htm>
8. http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2009-01/23/content_10709632_1.htm
9. For details, see http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/488.php?lb=brglm&pnt=488&nid=&id=
10. For details, see "Some Positive Signs for U.S. Image: Global Economic Gloom – China and India Notable Exceptions", *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, 12th June 2008. <<http://pewglobal.org/reports/pdf/260.pdf>>
11. Jeffery M. Jones, "Confidence in Congress: Lowest Ever Any U.S. Institution", *Gallup*, 20th June 2008. <<http://www.gallup.com/poll/108142/Confidence-Congress-Lowest-Ever-Any-US-Institution.aspx>>
12. <http://china.zjol.com.cn/05china/system/2009/02/26/015289283.shtml>
13. <http://china.zjol.com.cn/05china/system/2009/02/26/015289283.shtml>
14. For a complete text in Chinese, see http://www.chinaorg.cn/zcfg/01_fl/2007-05/22/content_5013426.htm

15. For details, see Bo (2004).
16. For a study of the Chinese Communist Party in comparative terms, see Shambaugh (2008).
17. http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2007-10/08/content_6845380.htm
18. For a detailed analysis of the Seventeenth Central Committee of the CCP, see Bo (2009).
19. In addition to these arguments against democratization in China, there are also concerns that democracies may underperform. Bryan Caplan, for instance, finds it baffling that democracy is supposed to be a bulwark against socially harmful policies, but in practice it gives them a safe harbour. For details, see Caplan (2007). Of course, the author is not arguing against democratization. He simply points out the failures of democracy and explains the causes for these failures.
20. A Chinese blogger has developed a parody, saying that democracy does not fit the United States. In this blog, the blogger argues that although democracy is a good system, it does not fit the United States for three reasons. First, the history of the United States is too short to be suitable for democracy. Second, American culture is too individualistic to be suitable for democracy. Third, the population of the United States is too large to be suitable for democracy. For details, see “论美国不适合实行民主制”. <<http://cnmpq.com/html/33/1/1067/1.htm>>
21. Deng Xiaoping, “Take a Clear-Cut Stand against Bourgeois Liberalization” (30th December 1986), *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, Vol. 3, Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1993, p. 195 (English translation, <http://web.peopledaily.com.cn/english/dengxp/vol3/text/c1630.html>).
22. Jiang Zemin, “The Goal of Political Reform Is to Perfect Socialist Political System” (2nd April 2001), *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, Vol. 3, Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 2006, p. 236.
23. Hu Jintao, “Speech at the Grand Rally of People from All Walks of Life Marking the Fifty-fifth Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC)” (21st September 2004), *Remin Ribao*, 22nd September 2004, p. 2.
24. http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2009-03/09/content_10974257.htm
25. Song Luzheng, “我为什么认为民主不适合中国—兼与颜昌海先生商榷”, 27th January 2009. <<http://blog.ifeng.com/article/2099462.html>>
26. Huashan Menghu, “西方式民主不是普世价值并不适合中国，中国式民主亦应大力完善和推进” <http://military.club.china.com/data/thread/1011/2540/36/66/9_1.html>; and Song Luzheng, “2008年：西方民主一元化阶段的终结” <http://www.zaobao.com/special/forum/pages6/forum_us081229a.shtml>. One blogger even “argued” against democratization in the United States. See “论美国不适合实行民主制,” 22nd June 2007 <<http://cnmpq.com/html/33/1/1067/1.htm>>.
27. Fang Ning, “我国决不能搞西方的多党制”, 9th February 2009. <<http://theory.people.com.cn/GB/40557/83676/142457/8767191.html>>
28. Wang Qiang, “‘中国式的民主’路在何方？-- 访中国社会科学院政治学研究所副所长房宁”. <<http://news.sohu.com/20070524/n250195708.shtml>>
29. “中国现阶段不适合实行民主制度”, 1st May 2007. <<http://ido.thethirdmedia.com/article/frame.aspx?url=http%3a//ido.3mt.com.cn/article/200705/show710861c30p1.ibod&rurl=&title=%u4E2D%u56FD%u73B0%u9636%u6B>>

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30. The difference between the two is not clear. A blogger has developed a sarcastic parody to describe the contrast between the *daiyi zhi* and the *daibiao zhi*:

“资产阶级专政的国家普遍采用的是代议制，无产阶级专政的国家普遍采用的是代表制，两者有着本质的区别。具体的不同，闲人想到了五个。

1. 代议制是公民选举，代表制是代表选举。
2. 代议制是募捐选举，代表制是拨款选举。
3. 代议制是普遍选举，代表制是内部选举。
4. 代议制是虚伪民主，代表制是人民民主。
5. 代议制是先选后定，代表制是先定后选。

可能还有其它，请各位补充。”

These can be translated as follows: “Countries of capitalist dictatorship commonly adopt a system of delegation, and countries of proletarian dictatorship usually adopt a system of representation. The two have fundamental differences. Specifically, I can think of five differences. First, the system of delegation is vote by citizens; and the system of representation is vote by representatives. Second, in the system of delegation funds for election have to be raised; and in the system of representation funds for election are allocated. Third, the system of delegation is general election; and the system of representation is internal election. Fourth, the system of delegation is fake democracy; and the system of representation is people’s democracy. Fifth, in the system of delegation there is an election before decision; and in the system of representation decision precedes election. There may be others, you are welcome to add them on.” <<http://home.cyoul.com/html/77/174477-10465.html>>

31. Liu Xirui, “中國的民主模式已經確立”, 25th April 2007. <<http://politics.people.com.cn/BIG5/30178/5664377.html#>>
32. See also Schumpeter (1954). According to Schumpeter, democracy is a method by which politicians compete for votes and elected officials make decisions on behalf of the electorate.
33. For details, see Bo (2007: 359-364).
34. David Shambaugh argues that the PLA is becoming more autonomous from the CCP under the fourth generation leadership. For details, see Shambaugh (2004).
35. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Hong_Kong
36. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_in_Macau
37. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_political_parties_of_the_Republic_of_China. The 147th party in Taiwan is the Communist Party of the Republic of China established by Chen Tianfu, a cousin of Chen Shuibian (former president of the Republic of China). <http://www.dwnnews.com/gb/MainNews/Forums/BackStage/2009_4_6_18_5_18_31.html>
38. For details, see Bo (2008).
39. For a list of suggestions, see Nathan (2006).

40. <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/14576/28320/35193/35194/2649738.html>
41. For a list of 45 parliaments with the length of their respective sessions a year, see Cai (1992), Appendix 11, pp. 344-345.
42. For a detailed list, see http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2008-03/12/content_7781570_1.htm

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