



Department of Political Science –Politics, Philosophy and Economics

**“Political Participation in China and the Intertwined Communist Party’s Economic Path: The Interdependence Between Popular Values and Divisions in Voting, and Economic Policies”**

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## **1. Introduction**

The concept of political participation is complex and multi-layered. While its definition straightforwardly refers to the degree in which citizens' preferences and actual actions influence the course of politics, which in turn will affect their lives, many other aspects are more intricate to analyse. An important element to consider when dealing with political participation is the socio-cultural environment in which the pool of people scrutinised live; what is their level of well-being and their values. Moreover, the economy, especially its development within the society or nation of interest, undoubtedly plays a central role in shaping political participation tendencies. The economic realm is, however, also determined by politics and policies, since the governmental power on reforms and economic measures is undeniable, both in liberal and authoritarian states.

The objective of this work is to thoroughly analyse the degrees of political participation performed by the People of China. In particular, it aims at investigating the influential power exercised by the structural conformation of the Authoritarian Eastern Regime on the common citizens' view of politics, along with their perception of individuality within the political environment. As pointed out in a significant portion of the already-existing studies on the matter, the depths of Chinese political participation lack the required scholarly attention as a consequence of an involuntary theoretical oversimplification. The absence of a rule of law, as commonly interpreted by the Western societies of the world, in fact, limits the variety of studies regarding Chinese politics and policies. Thus, the first section of this work focuses on the deeply rooted Chinese classical traditions engraved in the doctrine of Confucianism, briefly explaining its general philosophy and how it applies to different aspects of the citizen's life and, in turn, to his political pillars.

The following chapter navigates the informed attitudes of voters to democracy and elections, particularly in the context of the on-going process of national modernisation. A series of views on the juxtaposition of state and society is also provided. Furtherly, this section reports statistical and theoretical findings on the dissimilarities between the urban and the more rural areas of China, explaining the role of class and traditional values. Likewise, other social factors – namely sex, age and education – are taken into consideration as key variables influencing political orientations.

Lastly, a supplementary portion of the following study concerns the linkage between the developed considerations on participation in Chinese politics and the singular path of economic policies and reforms adopted by the Communist Party. It proves to be especially relevant to disclose the direct effect of an unprecedented approach engaged by the Republic and rendering the country one of the leading Emerging Powers, within the unparalleled example of national prosperity that has lasted for over two thousand years.

## **2. Chapter I – Contextualising Chinese Political Culture**

Joseph Nye claims the concept of ‘power’ is parallel to that of ‘love’, in that they both are extremely used notions, almost omnipresent in our lives, and yet lack a clear definition to help measure them. The two most mainstream descriptions of power involve reaching a desired outcome by changing the course of events or, conversely, avoiding any unwanted change (Nye, 2011). American political theorist Robert Dahl combined, in a way, the two visions, by affirming that power is the ability to make others do what they would not otherwise do (1961). This rationale can be referred to as the ‘first face of power’, or ‘hard power’, and rotates around forceful acts of coercion. Nye adds a discussion on the conformation of reality as a mixture of tangible social forces and structural, less visible, ones. A relevant analysis on power should, thus, be able to tell them apart.

Specifying who is the actor of influence, who are his subjects, how the power relation comes about, why it does and in which context, then, is as important. A nation’s level of power is measured in terms of its “population, territory, natural resources, economic strength, military force and social stability” (Nye, 2011, p.8). Although, this latter interpretation ignores the obtainment of the desirable outcome: countries which are powerful in theory happen not to achieve their goals. A crucial element they are missing is the soft power’s dimension, formed by the second and third faces of power. The former refers to the capability of executing co-optive actions and setting the national, but mainly international agenda in such a way to prioritise a party or a country’s interests. Shaping others’ preferences by means of ideas and beliefs, instead, is the key to the latter, the ‘third face’ (Lukes, 1974).

### **2.1 A “Faces of Power” Framework**

Placing the Republic of China in a ‘faces of power’ paradigm is functional to pinpoint its current role on the world stage. If, during the ‘century of humiliation’ started with the Opium Wars, China’s coercive power was almost inexistent, annihilated by the European hard power, under Mao’s guide the country became an anti-capitalist and anti-oppression bulwark. In this combination of regained hard and soft powers, or ‘smart power’, China advocated in fact for armed revolutions in oppressed nations; namely Asian, African and Latin American ones. Beijing joined the 1955 Bandung Conference between freed Asian and African countries, starting to put the basis of a desired future as the ideological leader of this new community (Kurlantzick, 2007).

Paradoxically enough, in an attempt to set an example, the revolutionary Maoist government started the ‘Great Leap Forward Program’, which resulted in an exhaustion of the labour class. The supposed conversion of rural China into an industrial power resulted in major famines and destructions perpetrated by the governmental Red Guards (Kurlantzick, 2007). As a consequence, the grip on foreign affairs loosened and China collapsed again on itself. The solution was officially presented later by one of Mao’s successors, Deng Xiaoping, who had been unsuccessfully suggesting economic reforms to his former President and could now implement them himself. Deng’s attention went to building a solid foundation for his country, economy and military-wise.

The evolution and current economic aspects of the Republic, however, will be fully discussed in another chapter of this piece. For now, a simplistic framework is sufficient: Chinese hard power is, nowadays, easily embodied by its economic and military capacities. In parallel to the millions of Chinese escaping situations of extreme poverty as a result of the massive industrialisation, an increase in military spending, which appears to be higher than showed by Purchasing Power Parity measurements, happened. Such data are attributable, again, to the widespread industrialisation and the creation of low-cost labour to sustain it, constituting a vicious cycle (Robertson & Sin, 2015). If such a growth is sustainable is object of debate among economists and politicians all over the world.

Turning to the country’s soft power, the discussion becomes even more entangled, if possible. Primarily, as pointed out by the American journalist Kurlantzick, the Chinese standpoint on leverages of economic nature, like investments and aid, falls within the soft power category, creating a wide grey area between the first and second faces of power. Additionally, “since the middle of the 1990s, China has become an international power, a nation with global foreign policy ambitions. China may become the first nation since the fall of the Soviet Union that could seriously challenge the United States for control of the international system” (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 5). Even if, during the 80s of the XX century, the Chinese population looked up at liberal America as a model to which aspire, at the turn of the decade, the government introduced heavily nationalist campaigns and a system of social control. Moreover, as already specified, in its transition from in-ward to out-ward foreign policies, Beijing’s attention has focused more on developing countries, much like the Republic itself, than on the Western world, in what could be considered a farsighted global strategy.

What Nye referred to as a ‘nation’s brand’ - its culture, government-funded programs and, of course, the appeal of a strong economic hard power – is, in China, skilfully differentiated based on

the elitist or more common nature of the target. This explains why China's image is promoted not only within Asia, but in Africa and Latin America as well. The reason why a second attempt to globalize the message of communist China is now being met with success foremost derives from the growing sense of nationalism felt by its citizens, who, representing one third of the global population, become widespread living advertisement for mainland China everywhere (Kurlantzick, 2007).

In order to better understand Chinese political culture and soft power, however, we ought to examine the millenary ideological and moral culture from which most aspects of its today's political life emerge. In fact, by dissecting the country's History, it is possible to reconstruct an evolutionary and revolutionary development, one which is still very present in the cognitive process of the People of China.

## 2.2 The Confucian Doctrine

A fundamental *fil rouge* connecting China's different historical stages can be identified in Ruism (deriving from *ru*, the disciples of the doctrine), better known as 'Confucianism'. It comprises a vast set of social, cultural, ethical and religious disciplines named after its original author, who lived in China at the turn of the sixth and fifth centuries BC, during the pre-Imperial Era: Confucius. The past 'Confucian Cultural Sphere' was not solely constituted by China, though, because Korea, Vietnam and Japan experienced its spread too, due to the high level of migratory movements from mainland China. Therefore, Confucianism soon became a "wondering soul" (Lee, 2017).

Such a doctrine revolves around the concepts of 'self-cultivation' (*xiushen*) and 'Heaven' (*Tian*). More specifically, according to East Asian Religions Professor Joseph Adler, Steng's view on religion adequately applies to Confucianism more than any other Western interpretation; for him, Ruism represents a "means to ultimate transformation" (Adler, 2014). Here, *sheng*, translated with 'Sagehood', is the ultimate stage of said individual transformation. This concept then spreads to the familiar, communitarian and national spheres, a path dutifully followed during the Imperial Era, when Confucian documents were actively promoted and therefore shaped the civil services' branch of the territory's administration. Adler furtherly pinpoints the doctrine's non-theistic and not commonly institutionalised character that place it outside the macro-group of religions since it rather draws on the more civil ideas of the family and the academy (Adler, 2014).

In contrast, historian and sinologist Yu Ying-shih argues that the importance of Confucianism's role in China is a direct result of its institutionalisation. For him, only the advent of modernization was able to deprive the doctrine of its influence on China's traditional culture (1991). Although, a basic theoretical common ground can be found in the two interpretations provided by Adler and Yu: both point out that, differently from Western religions such as Christianity, Confucianism lacks its own internal system of organisation. Thus, in Yu's opinion, the dependence on existing national structures. In more recent times, Ruism has found its seedbed only at the academic level and in small communities, once again reconnecting to the concept of a doctrine built on the civil ideas mentioned by Adler.

The decline of Confucian social and political institutions started during the late Qing dynasty, in the first years of XX century. Kang Youwei, a politician and philosopher of the time, was one of the first supporters of establishing Confucianism as the state religion, going as far as creating a 'Confucian Church'. This was a clear attempt to emulate a Christian organisation in the nation-religion relations. Alongside Kang, a number of scholars initiated the Confucian Religion Movement in parallel with the formation, in 1911, of the Republic of China. As Confucian Philosophy Professor Ming-huei Lee defends, the Movement rapidly got neglected by the population due to its inability to evolve at the modern times' rhythms. Millenary traditions could not suit a newly-formed Republic (2017).

Another, later, example of Ruism-promoting movements in China was Jiang Qing's Political Confucianism, aiming at the institutionalisation of the doctrine. The key aspect of Jiang's crusade laid in the contrast of two distinct dimensions within Confucianism; the first regarding the relation between mind and nature, the *xinxing Ruxue* or 'life Confucianism', and the second, *zhidu Ruxue*, which is translated in 'institutional Confucianism'. For the founder of Political Confucianism, the tendency of Taiwanese and Hong Kong scholars to look at Confucianism as the starting point of democracy was extremely erroneous. He furtherly advocated for replacing Marxism in the mainstream national ideology with Confucian values (Jiang, 1989).

A first rudimentary analysis then results: following this movements' considerations, the overall propensity to accept Western models of politics as the more practical ones has insinuated in the very way of approaching political matters. While completely dismissing the passing of time resulted in failure for the defenders of Confucianism, the polar opposite path is equally dangerous. Thus, Jiang's

proposal of rejecting any Occidental interpretation of democracy in favour of a type of government that acquires its political legitimacy from the people, the divine and History.

Although, for some, this stream of thinking is as interesting and safe from populist propaganda as it is unpractical in modern China. Ming-huei Lee provides a stimulating critique of Qing Jiang's political Confucianism in his 'Confucianism: Its Roots and Global Significance'. In Lee's understanding, Jiang commits a theoretical mistake by neglecting the hierarchy posed by Confucius himself between the life Confucianism and the less important institutional Confucianism. What results from this erroneous take on the matter is the impossibility of integrating the personal dimension, dealing with individual conviction, and the communitarian one, discussing responsibility. Furthermore, Lee holds that "attempting to restore Confucianism to the status of national ideology in modern China would be very much like attempting to restore the ideal of Caesaropapism in the West, which renders the scheme an impractical and temporally dislocated exercise" (Lee, 2017, pg. 110). The total opposition of Western democracies and Ruist political traditions could then be a flawed interpretation of the Chinese political theory necessary to contemporary China.

Undoubtedly, as a consequence of the long Confucian tradition, Chinese political theory has its basis in the Ruist political philosophy, which "refers to the ideological system formed by Confucianism on the basis of having fully grasped and condensed the fundamental law of political life" (Xin, 2019, pg. 3024). Through their different interpretations of Ruism, the *Shidàfu* could improve their political positions and put them into practice. This was due to the fact that this philosophy favours a "people-oriented" doctrine, as Xin Luo Yang remarks. A key aspect of Confucianism is its, purely theoretical, hierarchical structure based on benevolence, morality and the concept of 'kingdom'.

For Shufang Wu, contemporary China is witnessing a *xiandaihud*, a modernization, of Confucianism to render it a powerful political instrument for the Chinese Communist Party (2015). Even if the spread of Soviet Marxism to China represented an obstacle to traditional Confucianism up to the 1980s, the intervention of Deng Xiaoping, the then-leader of the CCP, redirected the country's politics toward Maoism. Even though Xiaoping's intentions were primarily focused on enhancing a series of economic reforms, theoretical considerations were to be made.

The modernization process of Ruism would indeed ideally follow one of three main intellectual approaches. The first concerns a 'creative interpretation' of traditional texts through modern lenses,

adapting the basic ideologies of Confucius to the contemporary world. A second take on the issue involves focusing on the very core of the doctrine's teachings and eliminating superfluous 'superstructures'; this can happen as far as Marxist theories are used to evaluate what is essential and what is not. Finally, a rather 'cosmopolitan' interpretation suggests that Confucianism should interact with different and foreign cultures in order to maintain a realistic presence within the pressing circumstances of the global society. Accordingly, Ruism would necessitate of a constant and massive consensus from the people (Wu, 2015).

Wu adds that, in a pragmatic analysis of the current Chinese politics, "the real motivation is not to bring any change to the current political order based on the CCP's leadership, but rather to strengthen and perpetuate it" (2015, pg. 319). To Professor Gong Ke, it is unquestionable that Confucianism is strictly linked to both Marxism and Mao Zedong's Thought. In fact, Mao's Thought can easily be considered a derivation of the doctrine itself (Gong, 2006). Still, relevantly, a minority of scholars sustains an intrinsic futility of Confucianism when transposed into modern times: the ancient principles appear to be source of recurrent tensions passing through Chinese society, becoming an impediment rather than a useful tool (Liu, 1996).

### **2.3 The Sinicization Process**

The mentioned re-Sinicization of the political environment, already become a vital point of the indoctrination surrounding the CCP in the 1980s, turned into a necessity almost a decade later, right after the 1989 mass assassinations of Tiananmen Square. The violent acts of the government against thousands of students and workers called for an emergency injection of nationalism into the social fabric at the hands of the Party. To exacerbate this dynamic, the large popular criticism against social discontinuity and stark bribery originating in the state-capitalist narrative undertaken (Ford, 2015).

In an attempt to shape a quasi-Confucian set of virtues to suit the one-Party vision, the CCP introduced in its own vocabulary typically Ruist concepts starting at the end of the last century. As current American Assistant Secretary of State for International Security, Christopher Ford, outlines, past heads and officials of the Party, such as Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao, have made use of expressions like

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1: From Jiang Q's work, "The Political Significance of and the Problems Facing the Revival of Confucianism in Mainland China".

2: Under Hu Jintao's rule.

‘socialist political civilization’<sup>1</sup> and ‘spiritual civilization’<sup>2</sup> (2015). Going as far as creating an actual ‘Policy Research Office’ to develop research on the best possible uses of Confucian notions to obtain popular consensus (Brady, 2010).

One of the Sinicization’s strong points is an ideological distance from the liberal democratic concept of ‘one-person-one-vote’, which results in instability and inconsistency, according to some. A more efficient process of appointing the adequate personalities with the highest governmental positions could develop through an examination system, complying to meritocratic standards (Bell, 2008). A striking Western analogy is Ancient Greece’s Plato’s advocacy for a technocratic oligarchy, pinpointing the public good as the objective. Probably coinciding with Plato’s argument, Bell identifies the main issue in a general tendency to be intellectually limited, irrational and only consider short-term interests when forming a political opinion (2008).

A beautiful metaphor, originated in ‘A Visit to a Confucian Academy’, explains East-West dissimilar views on the revival of Confucianism like this: “the dragon is sick and can’t survive in its current state. Liberal democrats want to slay it and build a foreign-looking political animal out of the wreckage - an animal that looks like either Scandinavia (left-liberals) or the United States (right-liberals). And we shouldn’t worry too much about differences in population, culture, history, education, and levels of economic development. In contrast, Confucians want to feed the sick animal traditional medicine, gently admonish it when it strays from morality, and stroke it when it behaves properly, with the aim of restoring the dragon to what it used to be - an auspicious and awe-inspiring creature that rarely pulls out its claws and won’t bother too much with the lives of the smaller animals” (Bell, 2008).

The cited Academy, in the province of Guiyang, is Qing Jiang’s, the scholar we have cited for his radical opinions on institutional Confucianism. He expresses his ideological preference for a ‘Sage-King’, a figure that originates in prehistoric China’s mythology and combines the wisdom of a Sage with the power typically held by Kings, very much like Machiavelli’s description of the perfect Prince as a balance between Fox and Lion, smartness and strength (1532).

Jiang suggests “reviving the traditional civil service examinations that would test for knowledge of the Confucian classics, among other things, so that at least the first grade of ‘meritocrats’ could rule” (Bell, 2008), Through examinations, an ethical groundwork is set, as well as the proper vocabulary for the political actions to come, overcoming problems of illegitimacy.

The Confucian celebration of meritocracy is shared by the CCP's projected narrative. In a way, it justifies the presence of certain officials in the governmental ranks and aims at dethroning the American model of electorate democracy. Zhang Weiwei mentions the usage of a "vigorous process of screening, opinion surveys, internal evaluations and various small-scale elections" in the 'selection plus election' actuated by the Party (2012). The International Relations Professor goes as far as hypothesising that the institution currently guiding China could be one of the most meritocratic. Exemplifying this statement, the *Keju* system, a public exam utilised for over a millennium to select officials of the government and the *cursus honorum* future leaders have to follow in the years previous to their presidential terms in order to be as ready as possible.

Notably, restrictions are also put in place, such as the maximum of 10 years of office for the General Secretary, the President and the Prime Minister. Furthermore, decision-making processes take place within the Party's Politburo's collectivity to avoid dangerous tendencies toward personality cults, a reality during the Cultural Revolution. The results, as reported by Zhang in 2012, are popular surveys reporting an unmatched percentage of Chinese people being optimistic about the future of their country. Some could argue against this data and call for an overall lack of awareness or, worse, of individual freedom to express one's opinion. Once again, though, the risk of interpreting citizenship as it is conceived in the Occidental liberal democracies is very present.

How is the concept of citizenship understood, then, in Chinese traditional culture? By merely taking into account the Confucian vocabulary, it is evident right away that there is not a correspondent word for 'citizenship'. For many, this is only the starting point of a longer sceptical critique: since Confucianism conflicts with a capitalist version of the market, classic democracy and the relevance given to the individual, preferring instead the community's centrality, as a consequence a Confucian form of citizenship is not feasible (Nuyen, 2002).

Although, an immediate limitation in such an interpretation presents itself; the pure notion of citizenship is not indivisible from the aforementioned liberal principles. Furtherly, Nuyen argues for an actual common origin of modern capitalism and Confucianism, highlighting Smith and Quesnay's links to Confucius's thinking, to the point where the latter was referred to as 'The Confucius of Europe'. In fact, he "borrowed many key ideas from Confucianism, including the idea of *laissez-faire*, thought by some as a counterpart of the Chinese notion of *wu-wei*" (Nuyen, 2002, p. 129).

The incompatibility of a greed and profit-driven system with Confucianism is equal in degree to the discordance between said system and the idea of citizenship. Moreover, personal rights are the key to achieve a wholesome Confucian ideal. Namely, as David Bell reminds in regards to the Han Dynasty period: the possibility to testify against family members, to receive respect from the offspring by law or the concept of *li*, easily translated in ‘property’ (1999). Even if what this implied was that one’s freedom had to be safeguarded because of a specific social position occupied, Nuyen contends it should not be assumed for citizenship to be inherently related to “the idea that each individual is free to act in his or her own interest without having to put group interests above individual interests” (2002, p. 130).

Concerning the topic of meritocracy among citizens, Confucianism favours an educational equality, being the academy one of the main civil ideas it draws on and, in addition, it defends equal opportunity of access to the public examinations. Indeed, a meritocratic way of thinking, one that categorises people according to the inequality of functions and, consequently, rewards, is relevant later on in people’s lives. Confucius himself wrote: “By nature close together, through practice set apart” in his ‘Analects’<sup>3</sup>.

Consequently, supporters of communitarianism largely advocate that the idea of citizenship cannot prescind that of community and its resulting duties. Keith Faulks, author of ‘Citizenship’, proposes a postmodernist conception, where the individual is affected by the community around him. This would happen within the Aristotelian assumption that human beings are primarily political animals (2000). Wenfang Tang points out the peculiar conception of democracy within China, supporting its drastic separation from individualistic, liberal forms of democracy (2016).

Accordingly, Ching draws attention to the ‘community’ as a complex network held together by the individual relations of social beings. She explains how the Chinese standpoint perfectly reflects this line of reasoning (Ching, 1998). In which way a person moves within this network depends on the *xin*, a Confucian and Mencius’s ‘heart and mind’ rationale, which does not separate rationality from the emotional realm in the process of making personal decisions. In fact, believing in the exclusive adequacy of analytical thinking for the public sphere is a Western bias, according to many. What is there implied is the presence of a ‘thin citizenship’, based on the duality of the public and the private. On the other hand, China’s traditional doctrine pushes for a ‘thick citizenship’, meaning the interdependence of rights and duties, conceptualised in moral terms and not merely legal ones. Such

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3: From “Analects”, 17:2.

an approach translates in the constant search for harmony, encouraging therefore differences instead of suffocating them (Nuyen, 2002). Also, a word like *minben*, ‘people as roots’, trespasses the limits of theory to become central in economic circumstances, since in order to treat people as the foundation of a tree – the community –, it is necessary to put them in the condition of providing for the less capable, such as children and elders.

Hence, the suggestion of a ‘citizen’s income’ to enable the singular to do so and have a certain consistency; what Mencius referred to as a “constant heart”<sup>4</sup>. The final stage of the great design would be its realisation all over the world, since the cited harmony cannot be achieved where Confucianism clashes with barbarian currents of thought (Nuyen, 2002).

### **3. Chapter II – Chinese Society Among Divisions and Common Values**

The harmonic system desired by Chinese traditional culture, thus, not only foresees a balance with the world as a whole, but with Heaven itself: what in Chinese is referred to as *Tianxia*. Nuyen claims “it might be said that Confucianism endorses a notion of membership of a world community that might be called ‘Heavenly citizenship’” (2002, p. 137). However, keeping in mind that the topics discussed up until now constitute the ideological fundamentals of the Chinese political behaviour, to which extent they transpose to the reality of things? Is the notion of morality and equality of opportunity present in contemporary China? How do the recent History and the material events affect citizens’ participation in the political life of the country? To answer these and many other more pragmatical questions, a wide analysis of the social, economic and governmental texture is necessary.

In the first portion of this chapter, the existing levels of political awareness and information in China are discussed, along with an overview of the Chinese path toward modernisation and democratisation. Additionally, an overall disclosure of Chinese society and its relation to the state, and possible third stages for policy, is provided. The following section explores the urban and rural dimensions in relation to elections, democracy and politics as a whole. Here, Chinese values are analysed to outline actual trends in voting tendencies, as well as the public’s preferences for either authoritarianism or democracy. To do so, data on grassroots elections and city-elections is evaluated and discussed.

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4: From Mencius III, 3.

Lastly, a set of additional social variables are read in relation to political participation with the final aim of tracing new, relevant existing relation.

### **3.1 The People's Levels of Awareness During Modernisation and Democratisation Processes**

In 1962, Philip Converse developed a model to track the change in attitude of voters during an election campaign. The two assumptions he builds it on are: first, there is a positive correlation between an exposure to communications of political scopes and a level of political awareness; second, there is a negative correlation between the uncritical acceptance of such communications and the degree of political awareness (1962). The useful equation of this model can be composed as the following (McGuire, 1969):

$$\text{Pr(Support)} = \text{Pr(Exposure)} \times \text{Pr(Acceptance/Exposure)}$$

Where,

$\text{Pr(Support)}$  = Probability an individual will support a policy

$\text{Pr(Exposure)}$  = Probability of exposure to a message favoring the policy  $\text{Pr(Acc.}$

$\text{IExp.)}$  = Probability of accepting the message, given exposure to it

Converse's model has, however, been depicted as unidimensional because "based on the consistency between attitude - issue position - and ideas which make up a belief system" (Voinea, 2016, p. 323). In the 1970s, then, scholars realised that the complexity of ideology patterns had to be measured including beliefs, values and cultural attributes, as well as general attitudes. As Carmines remarks, more recent studies analysing the political tendencies of those years uncovered an "increased fractionalization of party vote shares, higher levels of volatility in aggregate and individual electoral behaviour, the weakening of class-based political alignments [...] and the emergence of new parties" (1991, p. 65).

Additionally, 'issue competition' also referred to as 'party competition through selective emphasis', regards the importance of the inter-party fight for votes in that political factions set the agenda according to their own interests. At the same time, subjectively less relevant matters get

dismissed (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010). Such dynamics are built around the notion of spatial theories; according to this widespread modern interpretation, in fact, the spatial dimension within which different parties act and decide is fundamental to their political outcomes. Historically, the dichotomy liberal-conservative is seen as the focal point of spatial models, but it has been argued that, nowadays, ideological realms are much more complex and interwoven (Stokes, 1963).

Bonnie Meguid, throughout a study on European parties, argues in favour of the idea that political parties build their decisional-processes around issues based on their power and influence on the issues themselves, rather than on the position of said issues. Her theory challenges the basics of spatial theories and tries to shed light on the influence of more mainstream parties' tactics on niche ones'. Through research on Western European political factions, Meguid furtherly contends that "competition between party unequals has ramifications for the long-run competition between mainstream party equals" (2005, p. 357). Undeniably, though, an efficient way for mainstream parties to politically capitalize on issues of interest is to either keep accentuating their centrality, or link any possible new matter as naturally deriving from the original issues highlighted (Carmines & Stimson, 1989). It follows that political awareness' levels in the electorate can enhance or diminish such an influence on agenda-setting, especially in open elections.

Geddes and Zaller, then, conclude that "people in the middle levels of awareness will be more susceptible to change than people at either extreme. The most aware citizens are heavily exposed to political communications, but, just because they are highly aware, they scrutinize them in light of prior beliefs and may then reject them. The least aware, in contrast, pay so little attention to politics that they are likely to escape influence. Finally, people of moderate awareness are fairly heavily exposed to political communications, but are unable to subject them to real scrutiny; hence, their susceptibility to persuasion is greatest" (1989, p. 321). Furtherly, they point out that those who are considered to be the most politically aware are also the easiest subjects of persuasion, since they are more likely to engage with the political communications of above. Where resistance to persuasion is caused only by a combination of awareness and predisposition causes like beliefs or personal interests (Geddes & Zaller, 1989).

Thus, the question of how well Chinese people are informed, or, in fact, 'aware', of democracy presents itself right away. A large body of scholarly work attempts to determine the level of popular consciousness on this particular system of government. In particular, Korean Professor Youngho Cho believes that the multiple perceptions of democracy have been only partly analysed in their nature,

dismissing the more convenient investigation on the effective level of knowledge held by the common citizen of the world. He prepared a ‘Comparative Assessment of Informed Understanding about Democracy among Global Mass Publics’, epitomizing the data provided by the World Values Surveys, to determine it in 49 of the existing nations. The survey questioned on two essential democratic characteristics – namely, free elections and civil liberties – and two non-essential characteristics – military takeover and religious authority -. Respondents had to indicate which, in their understanding, are the necessary features of a democratic system; the final percentage of correct total evaluations by each nationality group is also provided.

Through such means, he found that China, alongside Vietnam, India, Jordan and Egypt “constitute the least informed group of countries about democracy” (Cho, 2015, p. 248). The reasons are a low exposure to democratic policies and a recent history characterised by a general social poverty. The Chinese respondents, de facto, could not distinguish which of the four aspects belonged to democratic governments and which did not. While the 72% and 65% identified as essential, respectively, free election and civil liberties; 65% and 78% of the surveyed deemed as important military takeover and religious authority. These responses resulted in the lowest real number of correct responses not only out of the East Asian nations, but of all the 49 nations sampled (Cho, 2015, p. 247, Table 1: Continued). What we can deduce, then, is a public confusion regarding the fields of both Nye’s faces of power and doctrinal beliefs, such as Confucianism, with more democratic facets.

Since the end of the XIX century, indeed, China has had the primary objective of growing, both in wealth and power. Nonetheless, the layout of these first face of power’s basic ingredients was relevantly commenced only with the post-Mao reforms and the parallel aperture to the rest of the world, especially Western nations (Guo, 2012). Xiaoqin Guo reports that, at the beginning of the millennium, Chinese aspirations turned more toward modernization and democratisation, despite many general, and not only foreign, scepticisms about the longevity of the Chinese Communist Party, promoting such goals. In fact, according to Waldron, among others, Chinese communism’s destiny is either an evolution into a federalist system, much like the US model, or the outbreak of a civil war (1998).

Others opt to bet on a top-down democratic and gradual transition away from the current system of government. In this view, China can be looked at as the specular image of Hungary or Taiwan, where the communist government transformed itself through reforms, rather than leaving its place to a new ruling elite. The possibility of a bottom-up conversion is unlikely because of the combination

of a strong state and a weak society. Substantially, no other entity but the CCP can handle a major change of nature of the state itself, especially because Chinese society is foreign to the formation of independent actors or contrasting leaders.

For some, such a state of things is the direct result of a combination of Confucian traditions, Leninist institutionalism and economic path undertaken (Guo, 2012). As already explained, Confucianism exalts the community over the individual and the responsibilities of each over their rights. Moreover, the exaltation of the academy and the division of functions outline a clear elitist class, in contrast with the rest of society, thus avoiding, in a way, societal revolts due to the perceived trustworthiness of the reformers belonging to the Party. The second state-empowering factor is Leninist institutionalism; that is, the lack of a division of powers that, in turn, lay in the sole hands of the CCP. This organizational tendency developed under Mao Zedong's government, which ruled over the legislative and the military branches. By being able to differentiate between a "people's commune system in rural China and the *danwei* – the work unit - system in urban China [...] the Party maintained a highly centralized political structure, extending its control to grassroots governments in the entire society" (Guo, 2012, p. 6).

Even though the citizens' freedom has grown in more recent times, compared to the Maoist period, the main characteristics of Leninism mentioned above persist and cause the underdevelopment of a strong civil society (Fewsmith, 1999). Lastly, in order to fulfil the economic growth Beijing aspires to, a stronger State is necessary. Consciously, a significant increase in wealth is desirable for every single nation on the planet, but what differentiates China, once again, is its uniqueness. The state is the most populous in the world and the third largest as well, right behind Russia and Canada. Only under Deng Xiaoping's authority China has started a stage of actual economic growth, considering that the previous centuries had been defined by an overall and extensive level of poverty. This improvement run parallel with Deng's neo-authoritarianism and its reforms, once more proving the importance of a forceful State. Whereas social reforms were declassified as non-priorities.

The juxtaposition of the state and society was delved into by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas, in 1962. In his 'The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere', he talks about the multifaceted public sphere as being in between state and society. Originating in the West during the Renaissance, the public sphere went from being in complete contrast to the state institution to structurally mutate in the grey area between the two realms, with the advent of mass society and the welfare state (Habermas & translated by Burger & Lawrence, 1991). It can be of the liberal kind, as

well as the plebeian, or even regimented, when speaking about societies with massive industrial characteristics and run by an authoritarian dictatorship, much like China in the definition of Mao Zedong's 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Philip Huang criticizes Habermas's considerations because either too specific or too general to be applied to China, due to its foreignness to the birth-place of such sphere and the impractical use of the its varieties. Huang advocates for the definition of the public sphere as a 'third realm', additional to society and the state, which has been present in the Chinese socio-political dimension since the Qing-dynasty period. He explains its nature by using a clear analogy "with the influence of two parents on a child. If we speak of a child only in terms of the influences of its parents, we can easily be drawn into a simplistic argument over which parent's influence was greater. In so doing, we fail to observe what is truly important: growth and changes within the child itself" (Huang, 1993, p. 225).

Moreover, especially at the very beginning of the Republic of China, the public third realm, comprising the merchant and peasant aspects of society, would influence local rural areas and not national urban ones, as Habermas pinpoints happened instead in the West. The strength of the state enhanced when the Communist revolution exploded and therefore distanced even more the governmental elites from a societal integration. Huang sustains that what followed was the institutionalisation of the third realm, bringing the example of the creation of mediation and adjudicatory offices and chambers within the national civil justice system, whereas such practices were left to the grey area of the public sphere before the Party came to power. Unsurprisingly, the tug of war between society and the national system was characterised by a deep inequality at the community-level, easily explained by the opportunism of those appointed to represent the state's interests (Huang, 1993).

Following the late 1970s' reforms, the state's direct influence shrunk considerably, increasing the local communities' independence. The third realm has grown especially because the Party does not consider relatively small towns and villages to be an actual threat for its authority and socialism in general. Huang clarifies the CCP's favourable position, anyway, explaining how only an internal crisis would permit for societal organizations to become independent from the state. This is also evident in the "state-imposed organization of society into segmented communes, brigades and work units" (Huang, 1993, p. 237). Therefore, the strong nationalistic origins met a social dimension, becoming the seedbed for a working third realm.

### 3.2 The Rural/Urban Division

Within the context of Chinese divisions in rural and urban areas, an interesting study published in 2018 makes an attempt at explaining the variable connections between values and voting. The authors found that democratic values expand easily in the urban middle-class areas, where levels of education are higher. The voting participation in grassroots elections in these areas is therefore high as well. Although, they report that over 70% of the Chinese, living in both rural and urban areas, approve of the authoritarian leadership of the CCP. Such a paradox can find its solution in the people's desire to limit the power of corrupted officials, such as those mentioned by Philip Huang, by entrusting democratic bodies to occupy as much space as possible. Specifically, in semi-competitive elections, the number of people voting is usually higher, being they more convinced by the power they actually hold as voters (Kennedy, Liu & Nagao, 2018).

Unfortunately, contradicting this popular perception, “in most single-party systems in the developing world, the primary purpose of elections [...] is not to provide voters with a choice of policy alternatives or governing elites, but to recruit new individuals into the present ruling elite, promote other individuals within that elite, and to renew the legitimacy of the elite and its mode of governance in the minds of the electorate. To assess such elections in terms of whether they provide the electorate with a set of policy choices is to misconstrue the nature and significance of the exercise” (Barkan & Okumu, 1978, p. 88). A furtherly opposing view suggests instead that people leaning toward a democratic understanding of politics, when under an authoritarian regime, generally refuse to vote in protest against the ruling system (Chen & Zhong, 2002). However, Kennedy, Liu and Nagao respond to this argument by highlighting the lack of any provable causal relationship between voting and holding a preference for democracy.

Adding the ‘education’ variable to the frame, then, accentuates its influence on political preferences and, consequently, voting. To face and solve the risk of gathering the opinion of the less educated, governments could spark the dialogue about policies only with the more educated, falling in the exact opposite problematic path. In this regard, Fishkin, He, Lusking and Siu point out that the right solution “is between representative but uninformed mass opinion and informed but unrepresentative elite opinion – between the democratic values of political equality and deliberation” (2010, p. 435).

Interestingly enough, the 2013 China General Social Survey reported a bending trend between education and voting; particularly, the most and least educated presented the same low levels of voting attendance in elections. Moreover, Chinese people with college degrees were also found to be the less prone to opt for democratic means of politics, both in rural and urban portions of the country because of their authoritarian context (Kennedy et al., 2018). Key explains: "probably a major consequence of education for opinion consists in the bearing of education on the kinds of influences to which a person is subjected throughout his life. The more extended the educational experience, the more probable it is that a person will be exposed to the discussions of issues as they arise. When, as so often occurs, the current discussion is heavily loaded on one side, it might be expected that this educationally conditioned exposure would have some bearing on the direction of opinion" (1961, p.92). Such an interpretation outlines a 'mainstream model', as Geddes and Zaller put it, one thriving on the central tendency of those controlling any kind of communication (1989).

In recalling Nuyen's take on 'thick citizenship', then, where boundaries of rights and duties often overlap, it is evident how, in China, the Party emphasises the act of voting as a duty, rather than a right through such a mainstream model (Shi, 1999). "Through media, the CCP fosters a sense of duty to vote in local elections and also advocates the importance of indirect elections at the municipal, provincial and central levels" and "rural and urban grassroots elections represent the CCP attempt to promote party-state vision of participation and democracy" (Kennedy et al., 2018, p. 92). Numerous critiques have accordingly been moved to Chinese capitalism and neoliberalism. Particularly, in relation to their negative outcomes on the rural society of China. Sargeson, among others, explains how an economic and social development following these frameworks ends up damaging the sense of self of people inhabiting the rural portion of the country, for instance by encouraging urbanization and land-taking to obtain profits (2013).

On the topic of grassroots elections and grassroots democracy in general, researchers Gui, Cheng and Ma defend a positive stance. For them, the increase in such practices, effectively started in 2000, is the clear symptom of a retreating totalitarianism, one leaving now space to the public's needs in an unprecedented manner. Moreover, class struggle and its links to the regime's ideology would be slowly disappearing from people's lives. Despite acknowledging the high levels of corruption and media controlling on the Party's behalf, it would seem that political participation and local independency is being rightfully enhanced (2006). As a practical example, the authors report is: "direct elections of residents committees have been held in various major cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou" (2006, p. 8).

In its rural counterpart, the, competitive by Organic Law, elections of Villagers Committees should provide an uncertainty of outcome for voters in the countryside, meaning that the electorate is actually influencing the results of the election it takes part in (Kennedy, 2002). Although, apparently, the great majority of candidates elected for leading positions within villages are Party members; they in fact range from the 60%, up to the 83% of the total number of village leaders (Liu, 2000). While these data could appear legitimate, they are not in light of Lü's point about how the same central government reports only less than 5% of the population is actually composed by party-members (2000). However, Political Science Professor Kennedy conducted a study on villages electing their leaders through township governments' elections of candidates and through open nominations – elections comprising unprogrammed numbers of Party and non-Party origins - and found that “in more than 70% of the villages with open nominations, the villagers elected non-party members” (2002, p. 471). **Table 1** provides the numerical prospect sustaining his statement:

*Table 1 Village Leader Party Membership by Village Leader Selection Type for the Last Village Election*

	<i>Villager Nomination</i>	<i>Party Branch Nomination % (Number of Leaders)</i>	<i>Township Nomination</i>
VL is a party member	27 (3)	61 (3)	86 (6)
VL is not a party member	73 (8)	39 (2)	14 (1)
Total	100 (11)	100 (5)	100 (7)

(Kennedy, *The Face of “Grassroots Democracy” in Rural China – Real Versus Cosmetic Elections*, 2002, p. 473)

It follows that “the more open the nomination process in a competitive election, the greater the level of uncertainty” (Kennedy, 2002, p. 482), where uncertainty of election outcome represents a basic necessity for a democratic system. In this study, villages' inhabitants result highly aware of the needed policies, their role and their environment, by harnessing open elections and promoting their spread in the countryside areas. Such a promotion would happen naturally, according to Chinese Professor Li, who identifies ‘free and fair village elections’ as the necessary input for a higher degree

of political efficiency in rural areas. In turn, more efficiency brings about higher numbers of active participants, who, in a reasonable amount of time, can reshape how elections and policy in general are seen there (Li, 2003).

However, Li's take on these elections' power sheds new light on the previously-touched topic of top-down democratisation. Indeed, by basing his theory on antecedent scholarly works, he argues that grassroots elections are the starting point of not only a national democratisation, but also of a resilient civil society, conscious about the importance of popular rights. On this, he reports Zhenyao Wang<sup>5</sup>'s opinion by highlighting: "after villagers have realized that they can defend their rights and interests by voting out corrupt and coercive village cadres, they may want to do the same at the township level, and thus demand that township heads be popularly elected" (Li, 2003, p. 649). In Schubert's words, grassroots elections are a 'Trojan Horse of democracy' in the nation (2002). In other words, they increase the 'external efficacy' – the degree to which the government acknowledges people's problems and actively attempts to resolve them by following the public's suggestions – held by inhabitants of the rural, and in turn the urban, portions of the state (Li, 2003).

While the large majority of scholars supports grassroots elections as the ideal seedbed for democracy, we ought to address relevant opposing positions offered by a number of scholars. For instance, Professor Kin-sheun Louie considers faith in an overall democratisation of China to be ill-advised and the direct result of an excessive amount of optimism; the process could, at best, have a peripheral reach (2001). Strictly linked is the position of Oi and Rozelle who, by leading a research on 32 Chinese villages, established that the real decision-making power tendentially rests in the hands of the Secretary appointed by the Party, independently of the elections' outcomes (2000).

However, Li underlines how, in an empirical study conducted by Guo and Bernstein within the Province of Guangdong, the fairly elected candidates successfully challenged the CCP officials because empowered by their electorate in unprecedented ways (2003). And, again, "in order to hold onto the new ground they have gained, villagers may work hard to ensure that free elections continue to be held. In the long run, repeated elections may gradually induce a far-reaching change in villagers' understanding of political legitimacy" (Li, 2003, p. 662).

Researchers Chen and Lu have approached the same issue and, in 2011, conducted a survey in the Chinese cities of Beijing, Xi'an and Chengdu to assess the elapsing relation between China's

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5: See Wang's "Village Committees: The Basis for China's Democratization" (1993) and Shi's "Village Committee Elections in China: Institutional Tactics for Democracy" (1999).

urban middle-class and democratisation. Acknowledging the existence of two theoretical approaches to the topic, the neoliberal and the more state-dependent one, the authors emphasise the undeniable importance of the Party's role. In fact, the CCP employs 60% of the survey respondents, pushing the whole middle-class toward a preference for the authoritarian regime. In contrast, the lower classes, being they less directly dependent from the government, result more democratically-inclined. Therefore, the priorities of urban areas inhabitants' verge on claiming individual rights, but not on the removal of authoritarianism, since it suits their social self-perception and level of income (Chen & Lu, 2011).

The study focused on political participation in elections and petitions, separately, finding that voters leaning toward democratic means of representation prefer petitioning instead of directly voting. This diagnosis would better explain the concept introduced by Chen and Zhong regarding abstention from voting among those supporting democracy (Chen & Lu, 2011). Henceforth, a higher level of political participation, deriving from a successful process of popular democratisation, can either start from lower classes' petitions or involve more middle-class Chinese in anti-authoritarian movements, creating a space of independence from the state.

On the other hand, Dong-Kyun's study reports the puzzling reality of lower classes supporting more traditional stances. The researcher argues that a too-small body of literature exists on the psychological implications hidden behind such dynamics, adding an explanation on how "state policies can condition the social background for the operation of social psychological mechanisms" (Dong-Kyun, 2014, p. 520). The imputed causal mechanism is triggered by an uneven distribution of resources and education, emphasizing the disadvantage inhabitants of the rural areas have to face.

However, the author also suggests a shared objective of Chinese people has come to be social stability, which in turn would explain rural conservative preferences. Insisting on this particular aspect is important because it hints at the possibility of a complete turn in basic rural beliefs in the near future, when supporting a more open central government will mean advocating for constant change (Dong-Kyun, 2014).

Similar to Chen and Lu's work, an analysis of deliberative democracy was conducted in the city of Wenling, in 2010. The work presents the concept as the public's power to influence policies via free and fair dialogues and immediately challenges the impressionistic assumption seeing deliberative democracy as the final stage of evolution for a democratic system (Fishkin, He, Luskin

& Siu). The outcome of the Deliberative Poll held in Zeguo Township in Wenling City is here investigated to assess its level of success, in terms of deliberative democracy thresholds. It was found that the chosen Deliberative Poll on which infrastructural projects citizens prioritised was conducted in the most socially efficient way possible; it comprised an inclusive sample of people and it registered a high level of transparency on the government's behalf. Such information becomes relevant in light of the relatively numerous legislative public hearings and Deliberative Polls held in the country (Fishkin et al., 2010).

While the findings stand true, it remains not clear which exact role do Chinese Deliberative Polls have. A critical consideration is moved by American scholar Sunstein: the power of the 'law of group polarization'. What this entails is that, arguably, groups taking part in a discussion tend to extremize their position to the point of polarising it completely. The law of group polarization favours arguments defending the already-existing group preference and it enhances the perceived social pressure to agree with the majority (Sunstein, 2000). Since Deliberative Polls are conceived with the objective of promoting public dialogues, Sunstein's point is of relevance and helps the discussion on the real nature of consensus, particularly in the Chinese authoritarian context. However, whereas the means of Deliberative Polling could radicalise the non-democratic power in the hands of the centralized institutional organisms through a lack of competitiveness, it also puts said institutions in a position requiring more accountability from them. What results from the 2010 study, then, is the likelihood for democratisation to be forwarded by the simple acknowledgement of the citizens' priorities and requests (Fishkin et al.).

In an equally interesting study conducted by Fan and Yan, 'Social Mobility and Political Participation in Urban China', the citizens' degree of involvement in politics was measured and divided in three main categories: voting participation, voluntary participation and mixed participation (2019). Specifically, the former relates to the individual's engagement in any political election. In fact, within this category voters respond to governmental demands homogeneously, meaning that their involvement in politics is at the highest possible level. An example of voting participation can be found in the examination of Neighbourhood elections (Fan & Yan, 2019).

Where, instead, the fields of interest are of Non-Governmental and Social Organizational nature, the two authors refer to voluntary participation. Here, individuals are personally inclined to participate homogeneously to the political life of their city, especially because the governmental degree of institutionalisation is lower than in the previous case. Lastly, mixed participation involves national

corporatist actions. Being it representative of the middle-ground between voting and voluntary participations, both individual motivation of the citizens and Party institutionalisation can be observed to be at moderate levels. It was found that “there is an asymmetry in the patterns of adaptation of upwardly mobile and downwardly mobile people in voluntary participation, but this does not exist in voting and mixed participation” (Fan & Yan, 2019, sec 6, par. 1). The authors also come to the conclusion that modernisation, along with marketization processes, have boosted Chinese social openness and, with the spread of urban grassroots elections, the levels of stability are being increased, even under the strict ruling of the CCP.

When the categories of voting and mixed participation connect, namely in a moderate to high level of state institutionalization and in the centrality of the destination effect, we can detect once again a regime-oriented role of the middle-class. Substantially, “when people rise to higher class status in China, they tend to become politically conservative and interested in building alliances with state agencies by taking part in local People's Congress elections, neighbourhood elections, and other state corporatism organization's activities” (Fan & Yan, 2019, sec. 6, par. 3). Therefore, both class origins and class goals are important factors in the political life of urban China.

### **3.3 Two Additional Variables: Gender and Age**

In addition to class and rural/urban divisions, a plethora of other variables shapes political participation in China. We hereafter take into consideration two of them; namely, gender and age. The choice is guided by the awareness that differences in social stances, which could be affected by discriminations and degrees of participation in the work-force, dictate the individual's relationship with politics and his or her perception of self in such an important context. Political participation is one of the basic indicators for both gender equity and fairness in different interests' representation. We, therefore, ought to lay out a number of considerations to have a wider insight into Chinese society's dynamics.

Starting from the Chinese Communist Party itself, we can observe the number of female members being 12% of the total up to 1959, while in the wider span of the first twenty years of the Party, their inclusion touched a peak of 22.6% (Zeng, 2014). However, the CCP's gender inclusivity rate has encountered a rough arrest and started an evident decrease in the following decades (as shown in *Table 2*). The trend became clear as soon as the 90s started; female engagement in politics was then described as ‘one low and three small’, where ‘low’ refers to the general number of politically-

involved women, whereas ‘small’ is the percentage of women with higher-level occupations, of women with leadership responsibilities, and of women working within crucial sectors (Training Base for Women’s Federation Officers, 1993).

*Table 2: The Percentage of Women Representatives in the NPCC and its Standing Committee.*

Year	1954	1959	1964	1975	1978	1983	1988	1993	1998	2003	2008
Women Representatives (%)	12	12.3	17.8	22.6	21.2	21.1	21.3	21.0	21.8	20.2	21.3
Women in Standing Committee (%)	5	6.3	17.4	25.1	21	9	11.9	12.3	12.7	13.2	16.6

(Zeng, “Women’s Political Participation in China: Improved or Not?” *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 15(1), 2014, p. 138)

The Party has enrolled a total of 280 women in its lines in the decade going from 1980 to 1989 in the Yanggao County of Shanxi, as reported by Li and Wang. The number is approximately equal to 12% of the recruits’ total, and presents a significant cutback of 203 female Party members, if compared to the 1970-1979 decade (1991). The two authors depict three main concerns when investigating the reasons for such a reduction. First, a ‘structural gap’ justifying the prevalent tendency of enrolling highly educated, often intellectuals, female subjects, and their employment as government organ cadres. Moreover, recruits were preponderantly under the age of thirty-five – roughly the 87%. Second, an incoherence of distribution is easily identified, especially in rural areas, where 74 party-branches have employed only one woman and 88 counties none at all. And third, a further incoherence in the type of roles and outcomes damages the internal functioning of the CCP by caging the female figure into stereotypical ‘duties’, which keep her from performing her job in the best possible conditions (Li & Wang, 1991).

Consequent to these discrepancies, the very act of joining the Party is perceived differently among women of different upbringing, social class and age. A substantial lack of female employment, then, edulcorates the Party’s power over large numbers of citizens, denying them a just form of representation in politics. Wen Ding illustrates two of the principal takes on women’s participation in the political life of their country: “the question of women being aware of [the possibility of] participation in politics and government and the necessity of becoming a part of the power structure” (1992, p. 24). Specifically, he reports that, in China, the first one is commonly viewed as too theoretic and less pragmatic in its analysis of society, whereas the second presents the exact opposite flaw

because focused simply on the effective means of female participation. This latter understanding raises questions about the Chinese women's self-awareness as potential sources of empowerment for their society, and about how female members of the government are representing the female portion of said society. Ding then proceeds to illustrate the commonly-perceived strong and weak points of the female attitude, coming to the conclusion that traditional stereotypes, along with the lack of opportunity, "make for a general objective reason for the rarity of women intellectuals participating in politics" (1992, p. 29). Comparatively with the rest of the world, in 2012 China ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> out of 188 countries for female presence in the National People's Congress of China, with a score of 21.3%, while the world's average stood at 20% (Inter-Parliamentary Union).

Furthermore, Zhang believes that many Chinese women actively avoid the, already scarce, number of opportunities they are presented with because of discrimination against politically-involved women has resulted in violent acts against them in many occasions throughout the nation's history, resulting in educated women turning down a governmental position to keep to themselves. Communist practices tend to "reify traditional sex roles by associating them with the efficiency of a rational division of labour" (Robinson & Parris, 1990, p. 153). As a consequence, Chinese women have a blurred, and partially distorted, sense of political participation (Ding, 1992).

Similarly, high-level positions in sectors unrelated to the governmental one suffer from gender inequity. It must be noted, then, that women appear to be aware of their disadvantage in the work place, as well as about the different requirements they are subjected to. As an example, there is a 7.1% gap between women and men in managerial positions with a college and postgraduate education. The same academic performance's gap results to be of 9.7 percentage points in favour of female students (All-China Women's Federation & National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). It follows that Stanley Rosen's suggested measurement of female political participation – namely, the percentage of women in power structures – gets extremely downsized (1995).

The direct involvement, or lack thereof, of women into political occupations translates into instances of political participation for the rest of the category. Accordingly, Dr. Benxiang Zeng argues: "high-profile women politicians would contribute to political gender equity, but a broader participation in politics from the grassroots female population is more important and fundamental" (2014, p. 136). The author explains how social structures, ideology and politics affect both political representation and participation among females, and points out the discrepancy between women's

key role in the flourishing Chinese economic dimension and their limited access to the country's politics.

In 2005, Wu attempted to provide a precise enough definition of women's political participation in China. To do so, she identified five key indicators: aspiration and capacity, positions covered in government, positions covered in leadership and decision-making sectors, participation in mass organizations, and the broadness of issues covered by female influence and ideas (Wu, 2012). As a result, data proved that Chinese women come across the so called 'glass ceiling'. The term indicates an "unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4).

At the grassroots level, the level of female participation in politics is parallelly low, if not lower. In fact, in villages or small towns all over the country, the traditional feudal stereotypes find a prosperous seedbed; here, women's self-perception is inevitably at loss, when compared to that of men. From the national survey conducted by *All-China Women's Federation* and the *National Bureau of Statistics of China*, in 2011, resulted that 61.6% of men and 54.6% of women believe the most appropriate sector for men is the public and political life, while the household is that of women. Moreover, the same survey reported that female involvement in both mass and grassroots organisations is strikingly small: while the almost totality of Chinese women is concerned about internal and foreign politics, only the 18.3% actually introduces proposals for change within the communities they live and work in.

On the other hand, Rosen makes a point of highlighting the role of the Women's Federation (WF) in combining the socialist realm with a post-socialist one; specifically, the women's right organization's leadership is reserved to those following a strictly non-Marxist path of policies, while at the more local level, members of the organizations are encouraged in their different ideologies and point of view. The WF has, since its 1949 foundation, supported grassroots activities managed by women, or with high numbers of female workers. The organization has radical views on the idea of a 'feminine Chinese woman', one which promotes the stereotypical feudal beliefs on females, and therefore promotes a 'strong Chinese woman', who is able to compete against men at any level (Rosen, 1995).

Such a message is in stark contrast with the development of Chinese popular culture, according to which highly ambitious women's efforts lead them to unhappiness in life. Despite this, Rosen argues that women have been uniting more and more against any kind of sexual discrimination. For instance, the government's lack of interest toward implementing female candidates' quotas in competitive elections has triggered a reaction among members of the WF and Chinese women in general. With the Cultural Revolution of the mid-60s, then, quotas have been implemented and rendered mandatory in any national election, demonstrating that, while the Party is in extreme need for improved levels of gender equity, Chinese civil society and mass organizations have the power to ignite change. As little as it may be.

Interestingly, in the research study published in 2018 by *Cogitatio*, Kennedy, Liu and Nagao found that gender was not majorly influencing political behaviour, particularly during the voting process, as it may be expected. Despite being Chinese females marginally less likely to go to the polls, other variables were discovered to be way more influential. One of these is undoubtedly age: within the sample of adults gathered, in fact, the majority of the respondents under 45 years of age – roughly corresponding to 60% of the total – did not vote in a number of analysed urban and rural elections, while only the minority of over-45 avoided expressing their political preferences in those same situations (Kennedy et al., 2018). This result is furtherly confirmed by Professor Xiong, who registered a voting turnout comprising the 64% of older residents and only the 36% of the younger ones, in the 2008 urban election taken as example. He discloses, moreover, how inhabitants of the rural areas, too, follow such a pattern (Xiong, 2008).

The explanation advanced by the researchers follows once again the steps of an elapsing relationship between education and democratic values. As the authors of 'Voting and Values: Grassroots Elections in Rural and Urban China' put it: "Older respondents tend to have lower levels of education especially in the countryside. Thus, we expect them to display a high level of duty to the state" (Kennedy et al., 2018, p. 95). In addition, it is contended that older generations have a tendency toward more democratic views of politics, since generational differences were discovered to be the highest-scoring factor of influence for shaping individual democratic values in the addressed 2013 Chinese election (Kennedy et al., 2018, Table 7).

Inglehart's 'theory of inter-generational value' poses two different interpretations on how people of different ages shape their beliefs. The first, the so-called 'socialization hypothesis', directly connects one's former – childhood's – socioeconomic status to the later adult's solid values; whereas

the ‘scarcity hypothesis’ suggests the subject will value more what he was denied as a child, or teenager. Similar is the notion of ‘generation cohorts’ as societal subcultures reflecting, among several conceptions, the political developments occurring during the first years of life of a generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). It is furtherly true that a generation’s values successfully spread nationally when empowered by the majority of the population and, in turn, become the mainstream interpretation in the country’s most influential fields (Inglehart, 1997).

Lloyd Rogler adds momentum to the inter-generational value theory by highlighting how shared experiences can shape a whole generation’s perceptions (2002). This becomes especially relevant in a country with high-speed increments of economic, social and political powers – or, Nye’s ‘faces of power’ – like China. Indeed, Chinese citizens belonging to the Republican Era generation, ranging from the fall of the Qing Dynasty to the Civil War years, have common traditional values, deeply rooted in the doctrine of Confucianism (Xing, 1995).

Differently, people born during the end of the Consolidation Era, just before the Cultural Revolution, share similar values with those born right after the Revolution’s explosion. “The Cultural Revolution escalated the discrediting of traditional education, and ideological moderation was actively suppressed to try to create a classless society that valued equality, conformity, and self-sacrifice for collective interests” (Egri & Ralston, 2004, p. 212). While, lastly, within the latter’s years, the spectrum of beliefs was proven to significantly change again because of the advent of the ground-breaking social and economic reforms wanted by the Chinese government, which initiated the Social Reform Era (Egri & Ralston, 2004). This period, still ongoing, is commonly depicted as the zenith point of materialism and individualism, and an overall preference to renovate traditional values.

In correspondence to this last statement, but in stark contrast to what Kennedy et al. found, Finifter and Mickiewicz identify a direct correlation between aging and the level of resistance to change (1992). Correspondent opinion were advanced by Chinese experts, such as Zheng, who described how younger generations of citizens are more open toward changes of social and economic nature (1994). Admittedly, the evaluation of personal rights naturally translates into a general critique against the authoritarian government. What this entails, then, is that those born at the end of last century are more prone to evaluate democratic visions of politics.

The entirety of these observations easily transposes into waves of conservatism during periods of profound political instability – such as the early-1900s period -; of overall adherence to Communist stances in the very middle of the century; and, as already reported, of openness in the contemporary relative political stability of the country (Egri & Ralston, 2004). “The results [...] indicate a trend that the younger generations, while keeping the same traditional cultural values as their preceding generations, have moved toward Western-style values and behaviours but clearly still retain commonalities with previous generations as well” (Yi, Ribbens & Morgan, 2010, p. 614).

Putting these findings in relation to generational differences in the various fields of occupation, it is important to also remind how graduates entering the work-force before the 1990s saw themselves getting assigned a position directly by the government, with nearly no say in the decision. The Party’s presence was partly dulcorated by the completely covered educational expenses for those pursuing a higher-level education (Yi et al., 2010). The Reforms changed such aspects of the system, though, paradoxically rendering managerial and leadership positions more difficult to enter by adopting a more liberal approach.

In conclusion, it could be argued that gender and generational variables within the Chinese society have influenced the government’s actions as much as the contrary has occurred. In fact, based on levels of education and kind of upbringing, the Chinese People tend to support the CCP more, or less. An undulating trend was registered in regards to the spectrum of beliefs belonging to the individual. Especially in the wake of the 1980s’s Reform Period. Parallely, where the Party has opened up to a relatively conspicuous share of gender diversity in its first decades of rule, the data show a significant standoff at the beginning of the 80s. The traditional feudal values, then, obviously still shape the very conception of womanhood and, consequently, what is considered to be the adequate, subordinate, role of females in society.

The watershed dividing one distinct period of the recent Chinese history, one characterized by inclusion and “ideological moderation”, from one of materialism and individual pursuits, thus, seems to be the Social Reform years. In the following portion of this work we turn to the study of this particular turn of events in greater detail. By offering a brief review of contrasting theories on the matter, the purpose remains objectively investigating any resulting outcome of societal changes, and what they mean for political participation.

## **4. Chapter III – China’s Socio-Economic Path**

In the following, and last chapter, then, the discussion turns to the interdependent relationship between social and economic policies, actuated by the Chinese government, and the levels of political participation, along with possible influences on the spectrum of values belonging to the People of China. The focus of the first section will verge around the already-mentioned Social Reform Era – and the transition to one interpretation of Socialism to another -, under Deng Xiaoping’s guidance, as well as the integration of the newly created class of businesspeople into politics. A second, and last portion of the chapter, will report and discuss the latest directions taken by the now-President Xi Jinping, socially and economically speaking, and the role Chinese people have within this context.

### **4.1 The Reform Era of Deng Xiaoping**

China’s economic history, starting from the very foundation of the People’s Republic of China, is one of the most mesmerizing ever witnessed in the world. The alleged Napoleonic statement, according to which “China is a sleeping dragon. Let her sleep, for when she wakes, she will make the world tremble” was, then, extremely farsighted.

From a Western, and predominantly American perspective, the Republican period is conventionally divided into two main parts, according to the different approaches chosen by Chinese leaders in terms of social and economic policies, and the foreign responses to them. From 1949 to, arguably, the beginning of the 1970s, a ‘policy of containment’ was actuated against the People’s Republic of China and its expansionist ambitions. Infamously, the newly-founded Republic faced the Korean War with the Soviet Union and North Korea, while on the opposing side South Korea and the United States lead a high number of mainly-Western states. The conflict caused hundreds of thousands of casualties on both sides and is formally still ongoing. In light of a subsequent polarization of America’s relations with Asia, US President Nixon abandoned the containment approach, in favour of a ‘policy of engagement’, aimed at integrating China into the international stage, along with the rest of the continent’s countries.

From a strictly-Chinese point of view, the beginning of Mao Zedong’s Presidency was characterised by dire economic conditions, mainly deriving from the last Civil War. Mao based his

government's approach on Marxism, therefore focusing on an equal distribution of wealth and resources. Moreover, the President aimed at a popular neglect of not only capitalism and inequality, but also of simple materialism (Walder, 1986). In order to achieve this objective, the Party swiftly centralized the country's economic apparatus, while concentrating on the development of the agricultural sector, upon which China's limited strength thrived at the time. Conversely, private entrepreneurialism was condemned as an anti-state stance, and therefore largely discouraged. The agricultural reforms brought about the five years – 1958 to 1962 – best known as 'The Great Leap Forward'. During this period, the nation built a solid basis for what would thereafter become one of the most powerful world economies. In fact, the striking economic growth, combined with a heavy process of globalization, taking place in the 70s, enhanced a financial empowerment of China's economy.

As much is explained, according to Professor Li Yining, by the planned economic system on which China was based from the 50s to the 70s of the last century. He explains how, in developing countries, establishing enterprises on such a system is both costly and inefficient. Furthermore, the major inequality problems with Chinese agriculture remained largely unsolved because of the inhumane increase of work load and too little support from other sectors of the economy (2018). Li sustains the later interpretation of Party President Deng Xiaoping can be defined as the beginning of a 'Dual Transformation' from a planned economy to a market economy system – the institutional transformation -, and from a traditional agricultural society to an industrial one – the developmental transformation – (2018).

Deng Xiaoping's political vision indeed diverged consistently from Mao's in its evaluation of Socialism. During the 1978 Third Plenum of the Eleventh National Party Congress, in fact, the then-President of the Party affirmed "poverty is not Socialism. Socialism means eliminating poverty". Accordingly, Deng encouraged large increments of wealth for certain industries and regions of the country, claiming for it to be the best way to reach the needed economic stability. The President was probably partly influenced by "classical liberal economists and philosophers, such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill, [who] argue that free trade among individuals, corporations, and nations brings good to both national economies and the world economy as a whole" (Chen & Zhong, 1998, p. 35).

According to Harry Harding, the post-Mao period can be summarized by five key aspects: the tendency to favour a restored link between the CCP and society by reducing the levels of political

interference in citizens' every-day life; the increase of possibilities for people to make their voice heard in matters of political affairs, even if with certain limitations on the freedom of political expression; the attempt to reinvigorate the institutional system by renewing its workers, usually introducing younger and higher educated officials and by allowing them to have greater independence from the Party's direct scrutiny; the measures to improve the relationship between the elites and society to better reduce the overall instability that had been created during the latest years of Mao Zedong's ruling – in turn, doing as much would have secured a smoother process of leadership succession; and, lastly, the path to redefine China's official ideology within and outside its borders (1963).

Some experts insist that, as a result of a strong connection between the Chinese people and the kind of policies adopted, the Reforms can be considered to be the citizens' making, rather than the government's – vision which is especially relevant to focus on in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square's events (Liu, 1996). Nonetheless, the period is defined as one of *gaige yu kaifang* ('reforms and openness'), and increasingly escalated from a system based on collective local business, to one built mainly on private enterprises (Guiheux, 2006). China's economy shifted from being planned to being mixed (Zheng, 1994). Notably, the first steps toward such a radical change were made through a capillarization of power, where Maoism had encouraged its total centralization, instead. Key points of the systematic passage therefore were: erasing inadequate past convictions on Communism, define the extremes of private property, enhance a continuous process of innovation and urbanising many rural areas (Li, 2018).

The same official vocabulary used in official documents by the Party started to include references to the private sector at the end of the 1980s. The reforms' results came to a halt right after the 1989 massacre of Tiananmen Square, but President Deng swiftly set 'socialist market economy' as definition of the country's renovated goal, inspiring the mass opening of private activities (Guiheux, 2006). Guiheux also reports that, in the 1992-2002 decade alone, private companies grew by 33%, while state and collective ones registered a -2.73% and -7.6% respectively. During his Presidency, he made a point of improving foreign relations, especially with Japan and the United States, by implementing their mutual trades and importing these countries' entertaining products like the Party had ever done before. Parallely, Deng cultivated China's friendship with the ideologically closer Soviet Union, in order not to lose any of the advantages granted by diplomacy (Vogel, 2012).

While China's economy grew consistently in width, along with its trade connections, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and a proper legal framework built around the private sector's necessities, major inequalities in citizens' well-being appeared too. The new social category of private entrepreneurs benefitted from Deng's guidance albeit merely constituting the 5% of the total workforce, even years after the reforms, in 1999 (Lu Lu, 2002). Consequently, Marxists argue for a return to the Maoist Era, while reformers counter that private entrepreneurship is the highest form of patriotism, reminding Qing Dynasty's China's years (Guiheux, 2006).

In 2001, the then-General Secretary of the CCP Jiang Zemin displayed his vision on the best possible combination of members for the Party<sup>6</sup>. Jiang, in fact, advocated for a 'Three Represents Theory', envisioning an inclusion of representatives from different social classes to better represent the majority of people, develop production, and assess a cultural progress<sup>7</sup>. Such an approach was interpreted by the majority as the right solution to the failures Communism has faced in other national contexts, such as the Soviet Union (Guiheux, 2006). In 2002, as a consequence, the percentage of private entrepreneurs in the Party's lines jumped by more than 10 percentage points – from 19.9% in 2000, to 30.2% (Zhang, Ming & Liang, 2004).

Naturally, the emergence of a new class, as powerful as that of private entrepreneurs, has had major effects on the Chinese political dimension. As we have already seen, some representatives are members of the Party, but their participation is multileveled in that it reaches the national and local Congresses, grassroots elections, and popular associations. As a direct consequence, then, the 'co-optation of selected individuals' takes place, exposing the system to high risks of clientelism happening (Dickson, 2003). The motifs can be of various nature, points out Dickson; for instance, businesspeople may be interested in material – e.g. land - and immaterial – e.g. information – resources, or in social status. Despite this possibility, Guiheux claims it is still one of the best courses of action, to include as many society's representatives as possible (2006).

A second circumstance created by the inclusion of the private sector into the political realm is corporativism and the formation of popular organizations. In other words, the attempt to link the public and private field with a horizontal revolution of mass organizations, where associations were once organised vertically (Dickson, 2003). The three central - and largest in number – associations are the 'Private Entrepreneurs', the 'Self-Employed Laborers' and the 'All China Federation of

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6: July, 1, 2001. Jiang Zemin at the 80th Anniversary of the founding of the CCP.

7: The theory was then enshrined in the CCP Constitution at the 16th Party Congress of 2002 and in the preamble to the Constitution, in 2004.

Industry and Commerce'. It is however essential to point out that membership to these organizations is often compulsory (Guiheux, 2006). In turn, as many suggest, the status and power acquired by Chinese civil society, since the first years of the 1980s, is likely to have major effects on its political path and orientations (Harding, 1994).

Focusing more on a democratic perspective, then, is the next step to understand how the newly-found social construction can trespass into the political structure of China. According to Professor Gordon White, among others, the Reform Era will eventually lead to a complete democratisation of the country (1993), while other scholars argue that China is inherently based on an authoritarian political tradition (Goodman & Segal, 1992). Chen and Zhong conducted a survey on the matter to establish which direction will post-Deng China take; particularly, will the country go down the democratisation path which has historically defined the emergence of other national democracies?

The two authors draw their conclusions on data gathered during a public survey in the city of Beijing, in 1995. The three cardinal points of democratisation they outline in their research are the following: “competitive elections of government officials with multiple candidates, equal protection and rights for all people regardless of political views, and an independent media with the freedom to expose and criticize government wrongdoing” (Chen & Zhong, 1998, p. 31). For each of these items respondents were asked to decide whether or not they are indeed democratic values, along with the request of their personal opinion on the value of each point and, consequently, on democracy. Competitive elections scored 93.6% of the surveyed deeming it a democratic aspect; equal protection and rights for everyone’s result was 85.5% instead; finally, free and independent media scored 94.4% (Chen & Zhong, 1998, Table 1). Finding the majority of responds not to be pro-totalitarian – or pro-authoritarian -, and relatively favourable to a democratisation of the governmental apparatus, then, was strikingly feasible.

Acknowledging the existence of a correlation between socio-economic satisfaction of the Chinese People and their take on democracy is furtherly relevant to our focus. Chen and Zhong report Inglehart’s stance – according to which there is a positive correlation between the two aspects -<sup>8</sup>, and its diametral opposed view, concluding that citizens’ life satisfaction can be considered a key factor in the emergence of a democratic system even if the maintenance of the status quo will likely deter the most advantaged from pursuing any change in the current scheme of things<sup>9</sup>.

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8: See Ronald Inglehart’s “Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society” for further clarifications.

9: From a study conducted by Finifter and Mickiewicz in 1992.

The latter observation becomes extremely significant in light of the survey's discovery that, while 90% of sampled Chinese were satisfied with their income levels, more than 20% less were also satisfied with their perceived social status. The data thus confirms what had been already noted by Guoming and Xiayang in 1993: a double-edged series of effects unfolded in the post-Reform Period. Whereas the material possibilities of citizens were drastically improved, a reassessment of the social strata has also caused an increase in the levels of uncertainty in people's lives (Guoming & Xiayang, 1993).

The 1998 evaluation of the Beijing survey also underlines the centrality of free-market values in the context of political beliefs' formation. The two researchers agree on yet another causal relationship between pro-market values and democratic ones. Based on the considerations of other scholars, such as Gibson, Duch and Tedin with their work 'Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union', their analysis speaks volumes about the individual voter's dimension; where he, or she, tends to evaluate a more liberal standpoint, in line with the free-market principles, there is a strong possibility for a correlated preference toward democracy as well. The mentioned principles are best summarized by "free competition, individual initiatives, and rights to own properties are very likely to support such democratic norms as equal protection, individual rights, and competitive elections" (Chen & Zhong, 1998, p. 35).

In order to assess the impact of marketization within the Chinese society, the survey questioned respondents about their ideal economic structure for China – centralization and state ownership on one side, and a free-market economy with private ownership on the other -. Clearly, the Party has always generally advocated for a direct state control over all means of production by pointing out which risks the free-market implies; namely, inflations, debts and depreciations (Chen & Deng, 1994). As reported in *Table 3*, the group surveyed largely opted for a solution envisioning state ownership and a planned economy when the presented item was "private vs. state ownership of the means of production" – for over the 60% of the total -. While they expressed a preference – with the highest partial measurement at 33.1% - for the exact opposite option when presented with the item "planned vs. free-market economy".

**Table 3:** Support for Free-Market Values, Beijing, 1995.

	Mostly state-owned or planned economy % (N)	Half-and-half mixed economy % (N)	Mostly privately owned or free-market economy % (N)	Can't tell % (N)	Total % (N)	Factor
Item for economic structure:						
Private vs. state ownership of the means of production	61.4 (418)	14.7 (100)	5.6 (38)	18.4 (125)	100 (681)	.65
Planned vs. free-market economy	20.2 (137)	24.6 (167)	33.1 (225)	22.2 (151)	100 (680)	.63

(Chen & Zhong, "Defining the Political System of Post-Deng China: Emerging Public Support for a Democratic Political System". *Problems of Post-Communism*, 45(1), 1998, p. 36)

The reported contradiction seems to prove again that the fairly new social class of private businesspeople is actually demonised, in a sense, by the rest of the population, therefore following what was believed to be true under Mao Zedong's government: the final goal of capitalism is to take advantage of the exploited and alienated proletariat (Gold, 1991). However, it has been demonstrated that, when compared to Soviet marketization as narrated in 1993 by Willerton and Sigelman<sup>10</sup>, the Chinese interpretation of it is proved to be perceived as less of a threat to the citizens' well-being (Chen & Zhong, 1998). In fact, the survey's respondents held enough mixed beliefs to alter their responses based solely on the research's formulation of questions.

In one of his articles for *World Politics*, Jack Donnelly maintains that human rights, the essential basis of any democratic system, and a rather quick economic development are two concepts destined to clash, at least in the short-run period (1984). For Zheng, democracy in China is, if not unlikely per se, extremely ostracised by an essential "lack of economic dynamism" deriving from the Maoist period (1994, p. 257). Consequently, an undivided process of marketization common to all of China was not possible if not supported by the adequate set of policies; political decisions, however, have always been functional to the well-being of the national economy. Neo-authoritarian schools of thought argue that authoritarianism is, in fact, the most efficient of the forms of government, economically-wise, because able to increase the levels of investments. Moreover, in the particular case of Communist China, the CCP can successfully and, most importantly, equally mobilize resources across different regions (Zheng, 1994).

10: See Willerton & Sigelman's "Perestroika and the Public: Citizens' View of the Fruits of Economic Reform".

Overall, though, if socio-political reforms are interpreted to be the equivalent of a process of democratisation, it would also be safe to say that they would increase the level of governmental accountability and trustworthiness while, at the same time, including the electorate more and more. Hence, those within the Chinese context supporting the introduction of reforms are most likely campaigning for democracy itself, as well (Chen & Zhong, 1998). Nonetheless, pro-reform citizens need the adequate platforms of discussion, the freedom to take part in popular movements aimed at discussing social change, being it strictly connected to economic development. The Chinese Communist Party represents, as for now, the biggest obstacle on the path to the people's inclusion into the decision-making process.

This change must come from an empowerment of social forces and their actions, ones able to detach themselves from the central government's route. By turning once again to Zheng Yongnian's position on the topic, we can assess that he interestingly points out how "as the economy develops, social forces are likely to develop and strengthen in relation to the state" (1994, p. 258). At the time of his work's publication - 1994 - the author identified a series of necessary steps in China's path to a more democratic structure. Firstly, it is important to improve the state-society links in a way that can keep pace with the enormous economic development. Secondly, the rise of a new elitist class would ensure a succession of power from the Party to a more popular-based political force. Thirdly, the people must be involved in the agenda-setting process of the government. And, lastly, enhance the liberal propensity held by Chinese intellectuals (Zheng, 1994).

What we can gather from the above-reported observations is that China could possibly transform into a democracy, were its structural faults solved in such a way to render it an actual option. Although, such popular movements are directly dependent on the Party, which is the only centralised power capable of organising the good and services' production's major outcomes.

## **4.2 Xi Jinping: Maoist Revival or innovation?**

It has been proposed that China has undergone three different 'revolutions'. The first being Mao's 40s Communist revolution, which instituted the CCP as the leading and only Party in the country; in the second half of the 1970s, as already discussed, President Deng Xiaoping ignited a second revolution with his set of social and economic reforms, along with a gradual openness to foreign policy; the third, and last, revolution started in 2012, when Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao

as President of the CCP. The now-leader of the Party indeed engaged into a reversed process of ‘reforms and openness’, while parallelly attempting to promote Chinese values at a global level. His ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism With Chinese Characteristics for a New Era’ was enshrined into the Chinese Constitution during the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, just like it had happened with Mao (Economy, 2018).

At the beginning of his office, Xi officially declared his idea of politics to be in consonance with Deng Xiaoping’s. Professor Fewsmith calls attention to the President’s desire for a ‘developing socialism’, one based on adaptation to the scientific and technological processes of development, reminding to the People about Deng’s ambitions at the beginning of his Reform period. Concomitantly, Xi stressed the nation’s recent historical sufferings and sacrifices as the right motivation for change, posing the Party at the heart of national cohesion. The recurrent theme of humiliation and the ‘lost decade’ under Xi’s predecessors, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, in fact, seemed to isolate the core problem in a lack of reforms (Fewsmith, 2013).

Economy however reports many see Xi Jinping’s approach as a partial return to Maoism. Admittedly, the President has centralised power in his hands all over again, taking it from the institution of the Politburo Standing Committee, created during the Social Reform Era. Furthermore, he has proceeded to self-proclaim himself as leader of all the most important committees within the Party – among these, the one dealing with National Security and Economic Reform. A series of pronouncements of loyalty was imposed on all the top officials of the Party, and an anti-corruption campaign against all the CCP’s enemies was started, as well. Notably, the government’s involvement into the societal and the economic realms met a sharp halt under Deng Xiaoping’s more liberal years, but Xi Jinping’s rule has been focused on taking all the released control back (2018). Such actions are, as noted by Groot, in total accordance with Gramsci’s opinion of Communists: they seek legitimacy not only by defeating direct political rivals, but by owning every single alternative stream present in popular associations such as civil societies or trade unions (2004).

Scholar Jessica Chen Weiss presents a slightly different interpretation while highlighting how the new-found ‘Chinese model’ advocated for by Xi, although it appears to be less liberal and experimenting than his predecessor’s visions, is also rather independent from any foreign insight. She adds that its main objective has to do more with securing a prestigious spot nationally and internationally, than undermining liberalism per se. The General Secretary is adverse to exporting the

Chinese model outside the country's borders as much as he is against importing a foreign approach to politics, making sure China's position is as strong as it is sui generis (Weiss, 2019).

'Chinese economic uniqueness' builds on three particular cornerstones: a major internal market, a hierarchical authoritarian government aiming for a shift away from planned economy, and a great amount of labour (Naughton, 2006). Another important factor in Chinese impressive economic path is an overall tendency to being pragmatic and to experiment. Professor Yuen Yuen Ang, while analysing global developing strategies, contends that 'directed improvisation', indeed, is the unique strong point of the Chinese economic development; the term indicates the combination of a top-down management and a bottom-up improvisation. Essentially, while the Party is in charge of emanating general guidelines, its officials can locally interpret them and, therefore, "improvise". What results is a cycle of weak institutions being enhanced by emerging markets which, in turn, empower said institutions enough to preserve the status of the markets (Ang, 2016).

Even though President Xi Jinping seems to focus his efforts mainly on a stricter governmental guidance, many note the flexibility of his decision-making process. For instance, while he imposed the sovereignty of Beijing on the South China Sea by increasing the presence of its army - and hard power - on the existing islands, therefore parallelly diminishing Hong Kong's influence in the area, he also advocates for the well-known plan of instituting a Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) across the continent. The BRI would involve seventy countries and more than two-thirds of the global population (Hillman, 2018). Moreover, the Initiative has been associated with the functionalist approach embodied by the European Coal and Steel Community in the second post-War period<sup>11</sup>. Specifically, "China's approach maximizes flexibility, through which the BRI can readily respond to variations in practice. This reflects a largely instrumental approach to law and an adaptive and pragmatic attitude" (Wang, 2019, p. 53).

Characteristically, Chinese projects for the near future are in complete accordance with the country's political culture in that a 'middle-of-the-road strategy' is concerned. There is a notable lack of radicalisms and extremisms, in fact, according to Hueng Wang, who claims that contemporary China takes into account the fragile equilibrium of political relationships, liberalism and financial investments (2019). The scholar adds a consideration about Chinese soft law as being the first tool utilized by the CCP to gain legitimacy over its actions, leaving being a more austere approach. However, a hardening of such a means is foreseeable in order to promote the nation's standards

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11: From Ferdinand's "Westward Ho—the China Dream and "One Belt, One Road": Chinese Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping".

abroad, as well as in specific internal sectors (Wang, 2019). This prediction goes hand in hand with Xi's clear objective of making China the first Superpower in the world.

In line with the idea of a Chinese strategic flexibility, is Jiayu Wang conclusion on the umbrella term that is 'C-ism' – where the 'C' stands for Communist ideologies and concepts and '-ism' refers to the fixed discursive items relevant to the topics -. Wang divides the term into three different representations: as an axiom, an attribute, and a process. The former represents the more judgemental values associated with Communism as interpreted by the Party, meaning that “there must be an authoritative and undebatable theory as universal truth that guides the politics; abandoning them would shake the ‘foundation’ of the ‘statecraft’ or ‘Party-craft’, and may cause drastic changes to China’s politics and the whole country” (Wang, 2017, p. 429). 'C-ism' as an attribute is based on the division among functions and single identities deriving from their point of origin. Thus, in Marxist terms, the structure of all attributes appears to be the economy and the consequent ambition to create a peculiar cultural rule around it, as unique as the Chinese political culture demands it to be. Finally, the 'process representation' is the field on which Sinicization takes place, deviating from any other interpretation of both Communism and Socialism. In particular, China's ever-changing profile asks for the CCP to continuously adapt the set principles of these doctrines in quantity, while never muting the basic quality of their essence (Wang, 2017).

On the other hand, as we have already seen, many China scholars see President Xi Jinping's government as one attempting to strengthen and renovate Maoism. Under this assumption, then, the characteristic Chinese flexibility is not as prominent as depicted by Wang, principally because of the Party's need to regain mass support. Aiming his and his men's attention at promoting nationalism, Xi can operate in the interest of both regime-supporters and more liberal Chinese thinkers and intellectuals. In pure Leninist fashion, the current President of the Republic points toward a 'nationalist emotionalism' which poses the Party's policies and ideology as a priority for CCP members and common citizens (Zhao, 2016; Fewsmith, 2013). Although, the General Secretary cannot revive Mao Zedong's cult of personality, not in the modernized and globalised dimension of things; it would represent a long-term risk to do so.

One of the most noteworthy 'modern adaptations' of Mao's centralised vision of power can be, surprisingly, found in a set of reforms which saw the light of day in 2014. These new policies concern the internet governance, and can be summarized in the creation of a specialized unit called the Central Leading Group for Cybersecurity and Informatisation and in the increased power conceded to the

State Internet Information Office. Together, the two bodies promote a specific line of development for the Chinese online media and scrutinize all the content shared within the country's geographical borders, as well as strengthening China's international presence by easily promoting its mainstream values abroad (Creemers, 2015). "The importance that information technology has in the eyes of the central leadership in many areas of social control, political reform, and economic development [has been highlighted]. Informatisation is no longer seen as an add-on to traditional policy tools and practices, but as a core facilitator of a new governance approach" (Creemers, 2015, p. 13).

Beijing's final scope seems to be a 'cyberspace sovereignty', globally speaking, which would involve every standing nation's right on the flow of information from and into its territory. Zhao talks about a Chinese 'Internet Army' comprising well over two million people and committed not only to the censorship of any anti-Party leak, but also to replace any negative information about the government with a work advocating for the polar opposite view. The Internet Army, along with a series of policies reinforced by contracts with major financial businesses, such as *Alibaba*, forms China's Great Firewall, which literally compartmentalises the population's free access to any worldwide platform. The slogan used – "Only the Party makes China walled" – plays on the similarity of pronunciation between *Gèng qiàng* ('stronger') and *Wéiqiàng* ('walled') (Zhao, 2016).

Censorship in China officially comprises seven areas that were officially banned with a 2013 Directive of the Party. They are: universal values, freedom of speech, civil rights and society, judicial independence, Chinese capitalism, and the faults of the Party over the years (Carlson, 2013). Such a Directive directly clashes with Xi's declarations on democracy as a 'means of solving problems', rather than a decoration, and the stress put by the General Secretary on the resolution of public disputes through consultation of all interested parties. The process reportedly takes place in the context of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, after the United Front Work Department (UFWD) scrutinizes the possible representatives, outlining furtherly what is meant with the expression 'democracy with Chinese characteristics', which is an additional version of the terms 'China model' and 'China dream' (Wang & Groot, 2018).

However, Wang and Groot rightfully note that "if consultative democracy equals political participation, its representative institutions should be central to CCP legitimacy" (2018, p. 570), and while Xi's efforts are concentrated into promoting this perception, the Party's Congress and Conference bodies are largely criticized to be void of any real competence in decision-making (Wang & Groot, 2018). These dynamics would, in turn, aggravate the ideological gap between Maoism and

the current Party's vision; in fact, the legitimisation of specific requests coming from elitist portions of the population without a fair process of selection, while being superficially operated by the originally Maoist UFWD, would have been defined by Mao Zedong himself as 'anti-Party elements' (Schubert, 2014).

Furthermore, it is noted how such a lack of transparency and accountability has started eroding the even the same social elites' consensus for the Party. Parallely, ethnic and religious policies actuated by the centralised government have the sole outcome of dividing even more those deemed as 'legitimate' from all the rest; a diverse pool of people and ethnicities inevitably calls for a strong, yet unfair stance on the CCP's part. The Party's officials take part in acts of repression against minorities in their local dimensions, without fearing any consequence from Beijing (Wang & Groot, 2018).

Conclusively, Xi Jinping is popularising a 'Chinese version' of consultative democracy which, at first, would appear as a revival of Mao's ways of government, but actually acts on terms of a modernised system of censorship as well as of a promotion of rather fictitious legitimacy coming from below. Despite a re-centralisation of power in the Party's hands, and having posed a halt to the Social Reform Era, what the General Secretary is following is more of a Gramscian interpretation of Communism. In fact, Xi has made a point of eradicating enemies starting from political ones and not underestimating any social opposite stance. In addition, his acquired and ambiguous legitimacy comes from an intelligently-publicised nationalism, that leverages on decades of invasions, humiliation and sacrifices suffered by the Chinese People. In this fashion, the authoritarian Communism of the Chinese Communist Party is destined to continue his legacy in the hands of strong politicians, and with the fundamental basis of the most prominent of the world economies.

## **5. Conclusion**

The People's Republic of China possesses a political culture deeply rooted in Confucian and feudal traditions. The related values of communitarianism and fair distribution of resources have characterised the Chinese Communist Party's decisions ever since the 1949 Communist Revolution led by Mao Zedong, but they are inevitably being challenged in the wake of modernisation. China's *Faces of Power* are unprecedented, in particular when compared to other developing countries, and comprise a great military power, the biggest economy on the globe, and the ambitious plans of promoting the CCP's ideology abroad through a well-thought network which bypasses the obstacles posed by the West's Great Powers.

The intention of this work was to shed some light on the current levels of political participation within the country. What was overall discovered is a combination of the major control measures put in place by the Party, especially in the most recent years under President Xi Jinping, and a relatively strong civil society. China's unique path has comprised an original version of Socialism, as well as of Communism and Liberalism, rendering its socio-economic texture one of the most discussed in the world. In fact, while many argue that democracy will never take hold of the nation, given how vital is the authoritarian system for such a large and populous territory, others interpret globalization and modernisation as the right triggers for a democratic conversion.

Additionally, the increasing decisional power demonstrated in local and grassroots elections has the potential to enhance popular discourses around policies and changes. Democratic visions regarding individual and human rights have been spreading throughout China since the mid-70s, and Xi's strict decrees seem to prove this point exactly. He seems aware of what type of threat a further economic and trade boost – such as the BRI – represents for an enclosed society and his attempts at containing it in an ever-changing world scenario are likely to become futile without a strong guide. China's future will reasonably be decided by Xi Jinping's successors and their visions for the country, but new generations of businesspeople and entrepreneurs – fuelled by the inferior social classes - could force the Party to either morph into a non-authoritarian entity, or disappear completely.

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Facoltà di Scienze Politiche–Politics, Philosophy and Economics

“Partecipazione Politica in Cina e il Percorso Economico scelto dal Partito Comunista ad Esso Connesso: La relazione di Interdipendenza Tra i Valori e le Divisioni Popolari nel Processo di Voto, e le Politiche Economiche.”

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Giugno 2020

L’elaborato intende indagare il livello di partecipazione politica in Cina e la natura dei valori comuni al suo popolo. Inoltre, come si evince dal titolo, un aggiuntivo obiettivo del lavoro è analizzare i principali approcci, e relative politiche, adottati in materia economica dal Partito Comunista Cinese nell’ultimo periodo del 1900, fino all’ascesa al potere dell’attuale Presidente e Segretario Generale Xi Jinping.

In apertura del primo capitolo, mirato a contestualizzare la cultura politica cinese, il quadro teorico delle *Faces of Power* introdotto da Joseph Nye è funzionale a distinguere le forze sociali dalle più astratte controparti strutturali, componenti fondamentali della realtà politica. Tracciando un percorso storico dagli albori della Repubblica Popolare Cinese fondata da Mao Zedong nel 1949, si osserva come l’iniziale obiettivo governativo fosse centralizzare il potere nelle mani del Partito. Infatti, a seguito del ‘secolo di umiliazioni’ cominciato con le Guerre dell’Oppio, il Presidente prioritizzò la ripresa economica della nazione nel tentativo di liberarla da qualsiasi oppressione proveniente dagli stati d’Occidente. I suoi sforzi risultarono nel ‘Grande Passo Avanti’ dell’economia cinese, che diede effettivamente inizio ad una ripresa finanziaria senza precedenti, ma pose un’enorme pressione sulla classe operaia. In concomitanza con la crescente forza militare di Pechino, la *First Face of Power* (o *Hard Power*) cinese si è rivelata essere fin da subito una degna avversaria degli altri Super Poteri mondiali, primi fra tutti l’Europa e gli Stati Uniti.

Il *Soft Power* esercitato dalla Cina – ovvero la sua influenza culturale ed ideologica – si è invece principalmente concentrato sulla promozione della propria immagine in Paesi in via di sviluppo, come quelli dell’America de Sud e dell’Africa.

Per meglio comprendere le radici di tale cultura politica, tuttavia, è importante soffermarsi sul ruolo chiave della dottrina confuciana, anche definita ‘ruista’, dal termine usato per indicare i suoi discepoli. Il Confucianesimo e i suoi insegnamenti coprono un ampio spettro di valori etici, sociali, religiosi e culturali che mirano alla trasformazione individuale. La ‘Saggezza’ rappresenta qui l’ultimo passo di questo percorso e si traduce di riflesso anche nella dimensione familiare, comunitaria e nazionale. Vi sono teorie opposte sul livello di istituzionalizzazione del Ruismo, ma gli studiosi concordano nell’affermare che la dottrina è priva di un sistema di organizzazione interna definito. Per questo motivo, una forte struttura nazionale è vitale per la sopravvivenza del Confucianesimo che, negli anni di instabilità precedenti alla fondazione della Repubblica Popolare, è stata limitata alle realtà accademiche e familiari. Nonostante un generale allontanamento dai suoi insegnamenti, il Ruismo ha dato vita a diversi movimenti in favore della sua reintroduzione in più aspetti della vita quotidiana; il ‘Confucianesimo Politico’ di Jiang Qing, ad esempio, ha sempre sostenuto che la dottrina dovesse ricavare la propria legittimità direttamente dal popolo, dal divino e dalla Storia, rendendola così meno anacronistica.

Per Wu, tale ‘modernizzazione confuciana’ dovrebbe seguire tre approcci paralleli: l’interpretazione dei testi antichi in chiave contemporanea, l’eliminazione di quelle che Karl Marx definisce ‘sovrastrutture’, e la trasposizione cosmopolita degli insegnamenti. Questa interpretazione si aggiunge a una serie di dinamiche denominate ‘re-Sinizzazione’. Il termine diventò estremamente rilevante dopo gli eventi di Tiananmen Square, nel 1989, quando la Cina necessitava di un’iniezione di nazionalismo consistente. In questo contesto, molti termini confuciani vennero reintrodotti nel vocabolario ufficiale del PCC (un esempio è il concetto di ‘civilizzazione spirituale’). La re-Sinizzazione prese da subito le distanze da ogni ideologia Occidentale basata sulla nozione di ‘una-persona-un-voto’ vista come eccessivamente precaria, puntando invece su un sistema d’esaminazione pubblica meritocratico che si potrebbe associare all’interpretazione che Platone dà dell’organizzazione oligarchica. Un obiettivo di tale portata, secondo Zhang Weiwei, viene pienamente raggiunto attraverso l’uso di sondaggi d’opinione, screening, ed elezioni locali.

Nella Cina comunista, in aggiunta, l’idea di cittadinanza differisce notevolmente dalle sue interpretazioni occidentali; infatti, il termine non viene mai utilizzato nella tradizione confuciana. Al contrario, Nuyen sottolinea che il concetto di cittadinanza non è strettamente collegato ai principi liberali propri dei Paesi sviluppati, per la maggior parte democratici. Si potrebbe appunto sottolineare che la cittadinanza prescinde dal sistema capitalistico proiettato principalmente sulla

massimizzazione dei profitti. Gli stessi diritti individuali hanno da più di un secolo un ruolo importante nella vita dei cinesi, specialmente il diritto all'istruzione e alle pari opportunità. Indubbiamente, però, il comunismo cinese fa distinzioni funzionali tra i suoi cittadini una volta che questi definiscono il loro ruolo nella società e, come nota Faulks, l'idea del singolo non si può discostare da quella di comunità. La concezione cinese di comunitarismo si pone su una collettività 'network', attraverso la quale il singolo si muove su traiettorie emotive e razionali: ciò viene definito 'cittadinanza spessa' (*thick citizenship*) e prevede la coesistenza di doveri legali e morali.

Nella seguente porzione del lavoro, il focus si sposta sulla società cinese, i suoi valori e le sue divisioni. Qui, il modello di Converse per il tracciamento dei cambiamenti nel comportamento elettorale, risalente ai primi anni '60, viene riassunto nei suoi due presupposti principali: esiste una correlazione positiva tra il livello di esposizione ai messaggi politici e quello di consapevolezza dell'elettore, e una negativa tra una passiva accettazione di tali messaggi e la consapevolezza stessa. Successivamente, nello studio del fenomeno politico vennero incluse le variabili 'convinzioni', 'valori' e 'attributi culturali'. Il modello di *Issue Competition* implica che esista una sistematica lotta fra candidati concorrenti per stilare una lista di priorità basata sui loro singoli e fazionari interessi. Geddes e Zaller concludono che i votanti che si trovano nella fascia media di consapevolezza politica sono coloro che più facilmente oscillano da una preferenza al suo opposto, rispetto a chi invece è nelle fasce più estreme. Ciò avviene perché i cittadini più consapevoli selezionano le informazioni a cui vengono sottoposti e, quindi, radicalizzano le loro già esistenti convinzioni; contrariamente, i meno politicamente investiti difficilmente danno peso ad un qualsiasi messaggio di quel tipo.

La percezione democratica del popolo cinese risulta essere una tra le meno informate al mondo. Il Professor Cho illustra come tale risultato derivi da una scarsa esposizione a riforme di tipo democratico e da una storia recente di profonda e generale povertà. Per alcuni questo particolare aspetto porterebbe ad un futuro sistema federalistico cinese, oppure allo scoppio di una guerra civile, dal momento che l'influenza liberale inevitabilmente importata dall'estero creerebbe grande instabilità. Per altri, contrariamente, il futuro della Repubblica Popolare risiederebbe nella democrazia. Ma se certi studiosi ritengono che sarà il Partito stesso a virare gradualmente da una rotta autoritaria, altri ritengono che la società cinese sia invece abbastanza forte da provocare il cambiamento necessario. Fishkin et al. suggeriscono che la migliore via di mezzo tra i valori democratici di uguaglianza politica e un equo processo deliberativo si trovi nel compromesso tra un'opinione pubblica rappresentativa – ma poco informata – e un'opinione elitaria informata – ma non rappresentativa -.

Contestualmente, l'interpretazione che offre Habermas sul ruolo della sfera pubblica come la "terza parte" nello scontro tra società civile e stato viene criticata da Huang in quanto al contempo

“troppo specifica e troppo generale” per il contesto Cina. Huang propone come soluzione la nozione di ‘terzo dominio’, proprio della storia socio-politica nazionale dai tempi della dinastia Qing e, in particolare, delle classi agricole rurali. Il terzo dominio si istituzionalizzò e divenne vitale nella mediazione tra gli uffici giurisdizionali statali e il sistema di giustizia civile dopo la Rivoluzione Comunista.

Volgendo l’attenzione all’accennata divisione sociale tra aree urbane e rurali, la variabile ‘istruzione’ è determinante nel descrivere come l’istruito ceto medio condivide valori più democratici rispetto ad altre categorie popolari. Allo stesso tempo, uno studio condotto da Kennedy, Liu e Nagao nel 2018 ha rivelato che oltre il 70% dei cinesi appartenenti alla borghesia, residenti sia nelle aree urbane che in quelle rurali, si astengono dal voto nelle elezioni locali. La spiegazione per i ricercatori Chen e Zhong sarebbe che non presentarsi alle urne durante elezioni non competitive è un forte messaggio in favore della democrazia, specialmente in considerazione del fatto che il PCC ha da sempre ritenuto il voto come un dovere, e non un diritto. Al contrario, Key riporta che i cittadini con un livello di istruzione medio-alto tendono all’astensione dal voto dopo la prolungata esposizione ad un ambiente accademico piuttosto fizioso come quello esistente sotto l’autoritarismo cinese.

Dall’altro canto, un cospicuo numero di studiosi vede nell’incremento di popolarità delle elezioni locali, significativo solo dal 2000 in poi, un segnale positivo per il futuro della Cina democratica. Nelle porzioni rurali del Paese, tuttavia, i risultati di tali elezioni favoriscono quasi sistematicamente i candidati facenti parti del Partito Comunista, nonostante solo una piccolissima percentuale della popolazione abbia collegamenti diretti con il PCC. Nei casi in cui le candidature vengono lasciate “aperte”, infatti, Kennedy ha riscontrato che più del 70% dei cittadini eletti non fanno parte del Partito. Inoltre, la presa di coscienza degli elettori sul loro potere decisionale rinforza la società civile, partendo dai singoli villaggi e innescando il processo di democratizzazione “dal basso” precedentemente menzionata.

Nella loro controparte cittadina, le elezioni locali registrano un generale supporto per il governo da parte della classe media, in quanto più del 60% dei suoi componenti sono dipendenti del Partito. Contrariamente a quanto visto finora, quindi, secondo l’indagine di Chen e Lu i ceti inferiori presenterebbero preferenze democratiche. Per Fan e Yan, la classe d’origine e lo status sociale desiderato possono determinare l’orientamento antigovernativo del singolo: le élite propenderanno per il supporto del Partito che garantisce loro tutti i vantaggi di qui dispongono. È stato anche riscontrato che le classi medio-basse tendono a prendere parte in petizioni pubbliche per esprimere il proprio parere, piuttosto che in vere e proprie elezioni. L’opinione di Dong-Kyun tuttavia è che la classe operaia sia la categoria più legata ai valori tradizionali come conseguenza di una distribuzione iniqua delle risorse. Alla base di questa dinamica, la propensione che i cinesi hanno per la stabilità

politica; infatti, Dong-Kyun ipotizza che se, come sua tendenza generale, il PCC fosse più aperto al cambiamento, i ceti medio-bassi non ne supporterebbero le politiche altrettanto strenuamente.

Seppur apparentemente controintuitivi in un contesto autoritario, i Sondaggi Deliberativi, intesi come il pubblico dialogo tra componenti di una stessa comunità finalizzato ad influenzare le azioni politiche locali, sono un metodo sempre più usato in Cina. Secondo Sustain la legge di ‘polarizzazione del gruppo’ tende a radicalizzare le parti coinvolte sulle loro opinioni di partenza, sminuendo l’impatto democratico delle stesse, ma è simultaneamente vero che i Sondaggi Deliberativi richiedono un certo livello di trasparenza da parte delle istituzioni e degli enti governativi.

Nonostante le variabili da prendere in considerazione nell’analisi della società cinese siano svariate, l’ultima sezione del secondo capitolo si concentra su due in particolare: ‘genere’ ed ‘età’. I dati riportati da Zeng dimostrano come, dopo un’iniziale curva crescente di donne arruolate dal PCC, la loro percentuale abbia incontrato una fase di stallo e di lieve decrescita dalla metà degli anni ’70 in poi. Di conseguenza, una ridotta rappresentazione scoraggia molte donne a prendere parte alle selezioni che, in media e allo stesso livello d’istruzione, sembrano favorire ampiamente gli uomini. Queste osservazioni non si limitano alle fila del Partito, ma influenzano anche il resto dei settori lavorativi, ponendo l’accento su un sistema feudale basato su stereotipi obsoleti. Paradossalmente, le donne più istruite tendono a distaccarsi dalla vita politica, conscie dei molti atti violenti che la partecipazione femminile ha causato nella storia cinese più recente. Tutto ciò è reiterato da una propaganda comunista basata sulla ‘divisione del lavoro’ e, pertanto, dei ruoli. Wu sottolinea che le donne cinesi sono limitate da una ‘barriera invisibile’ (*glass ceiling*) che ha un effetto negativo anche sulla loro partecipazione e conoscenza politica. È comunque importante sottolineare il ruolo che la Federazione delle Donne – fondata nel 1949 – ha nel supporto di attività popolari locali gestite da donne o con un alto numero di impiegate; il fine della Federazione è infatti quello di promuovere un modello di ‘donna cinese forte’ e non solo femminile.

Kennedy (et al.) affermano che, sorprendentemente, il genere non è un fattore determinante nella formazione del comportamento politico individuale. Piuttosto, l’età ne influenza le dinamiche: i ricercatori hanno riportato che, in un campione di elezioni urbane e rurali, la maggior parte degli under-45 non si è presentata alle urne, mentre solo una piccola percentuale degli over-45 non lo ha fatto. La spiegazione fornita riguarda ancora una volta il livello d’istruzione dei soggetti che hanno preso parte allo studio: le generazioni più vecchie sono solitamente anche le meno istruite e, di conseguenza, eseguono il loro dovere nei confronti dello stato andando a votare.

Inglehart propone due teorie differenti su come persone di diverse età formino le proprie convinzioni politiche: l’‘ipotesi di socializzazione’, secondo la quale la situazione socioeconomica in cui il cittadino si trova nei primi anni della vita solidifica i suoi futuri valori di pari passo; e l’‘ipotesi

di scarsità' che invece prevede che, al momento della crescita, l'individuo cerchi un riscatto di quello che gli è stato negato durante l'infanzia. Le esperienze condivise sono un ulteriore componente da considerare, soprattutto in una nazione come la Cina che ha visto il susseguirsi di una dinastia imperiale, una rivoluzione comunista, una guerra civile e un periodo di grandi riforme economiche nell'arco di un solo secolo. In generale, con l'avvento dell'Era delle Riforme, iniziata con Deng Xiaoping, i tipici valori comunisti sono stati velocemente rimpiazzati da individualismo e materialismo, specialmente per le generazioni più giovani. Necessariamente, quindi, Zheng smentisce quanto riscontrato da Kennedy et al. sostenendo che siano proprio le ultime generazioni ad avere a cuore un'apertura verso una forma più democratica di governo che valorizzi i diritti individuali.

L'ultimo capitolo si focalizza proprio sull'Era delle Riforme e sul più recente percorso economico cinese. Lo stato versava già in condizioni economiche disastrose quando Mao Zedong salì al potere nel 1949, principalmente a causa della guerra civile appena terminata. La Rivoluzione Comunista concentrò il potere nelle mani di Pechino e intensificò gli sforzi del settore agricolo, relegando qualsiasi forma di capitalismo ad una dimensione anti-patriottica. Tali dinamiche, sommate agli inevitabili processi di globalizzazione che toccarono tutto il mondo, prepararono il terreno per un altro tipo di rivoluzione: le riforme liberali di Deng Xiaoping. Il Segretario Generale rese il modello di 'economia pianificata' cinese uno di 'economia di mercato', basato sul potere industriale più che sullo sforzo agricolo. Deng credeva fermamente che il concetto di Socialismo diverga totalmente da quello di povertà e che il livello di instabilità sociale raggiunto sotto Mao – causato da un'erronea distribuzione del potere d'espressione e decisionale – necessitasse un maggiore grado di libertà individuale. Questo periodo venne infatti definito 'di riforme e apertura' e fu caratterizzato da una graduale ma significativa capillarizzazione del potere, e dalla crescita esponenziale del numero di aziende e attività private. Anche all'interno del vocabolario ufficiale di Partito apparvero riferimenti al settore privato.

Agli inizi del XXI secolo, l'allora Presidente Jiang Zemin promosse l'introduzione nei ranghi del Partito di una serie di rappresentanti provenienti da diversi contesti sociali, continuando perciò l'apertura visionata da Deng. L'inclusione del settore privato nell'universo politico ha successivamente creato una 'rivoluzione orizzontale' delle organizzazioni e associazioni di massa, rendendole indispensabili nella mediazione tra stato e società. Parallelamente, si è registrato un incremento dei fenomeni di clientelismo e corruzione, guidati da interessi materiali – profitti - e immateriali – informazioni -. Il dibattito è acceso sul futuro della democrazia in Cina: per alcuni l'Era delle Riforme è un chiaro segno di democratizzazione, mentre per altri ciò non è sufficiente. Chen e Zhong, attraverso uno studio condotto nella capitale del Paese, hanno dedotto che le tendenze generali vergono intorno alla prima interpretazione e che, quindi, l'autoritarismo è destinato a scomparire. Per

farlo, prendono in considerazione la correlazione tra la soddisfazione socioeconomica e l'opinione su una forma di governo democratica, giungendo alle stesse conclusioni di Fan e Yan: maggiore è il livello di soddisfazione, minore sarà l'impulso positivo verso un cambiamento e, perciò, verso la democrazia. Tuttavia, la percezione economica e sociale differiscono notevolmente nell'immaginario collettivo e le riforme sembrano aver portato una sicurezza materiale maggiore rispetto a quella sociale.

Gli ostacoli per una democrazia cinese sembrano solo moltiplicarsi se si considera che una demonizzazione della borghesia capitalista è ancora in corso e che, secondo Donnelly, la difesa dei diritti umani e uno sviluppo economico di grande portata sono dimensioni inconciliabili, perlomeno nell'immediato. In linea generale, gli studiosi tendono a considerare i sostenitori delle riforme come pro-democrazia, dal momento che una responsabilizzazione delle istituzioni è implicitamente ad esse legata.

In chiusura dell'elaborato, un'indagine riassuntiva della 'terza rivoluzione cinese' viene proposta: l'ascesa al potere di Xi Jinping. Infatti se, inizialmente, l'attuale Presidente cinese ha dichiarato di volere seguire le orme dei riformisti venuti prima di lui, presto è divenuto chiaro che la sua idea di governo prevede piuttosto una nuova centralizzazione del potere e uno 'sviluppo del socialismo'. Xi prioritizza la promozione del 'Modello Cina' al di fuori dei confini nazionali partendo però dall'interno grazie ad un forte 'nazionalismo emotivo', originato dalla sua propensione a sottolineare i secoli di umiliazioni e sacrifici sofferti dal popolo cinese. Xi si è inoltre assicurato la lealtà dei principali ufficiali del PCC, attraverso giuramenti plebiscitari e campagne anti-corruzione per eliminare i suoi più diretti avversari politici. Ha anche rinforzato la rete di Cybersecurity nazionale, innalzando il *Great Firewall* e istituendo un 'Esercito di Internet' in grado di censurare ogni messaggio non conforme all'ideologia di Partito.

L'unicità del percorso economico cinese risiede, secondo Ang, in un intrinseco pragmatismo che chiama 'improvvisazione guidata'. In altre parole, mentre le linee guida generali vengono tracciate dal governo centrale, i suoi ufficiali possono "improvvisare" a livello locale. Tutto ciò rinforza la posizione del mercato interno e delle istituzioni governative a sua volta.

L'*Hard Power* della Cina di Xi si estende alle sue strategie militari – prima fra tutte la riconquista del sovrano cinese nel Mare Cinese del Sud – e infrastrutturali – La Belt and Road Initiative che dovrebbe coinvolgere 70 Paesi e sarebbe una dimostrazione di potere senza precedenti da parte della nazione -. Il grande pragmatismo dimostrato, secondo Wang, si traduce anche in una 'strategia delle vie di mezzo' costruita intorno al sistema di normative non vincolanti e alla legittimità che da esse deriva. Nonostante ciò, l'inasprimento di tali strategie appare essere il modo più efficace di esportare il modello cinese.

