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The U.S. versus China Models : An Evolutionary Perspective :

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# The U.S. versus China Models: An Evolutionary Perspective

■ Ming Wan

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## ► Abstract

While the United States and China are very different, it is still worthwhile to study the two countries as long as we adopt an appropriate, evolutionary framework. Democracies generally perform better than authoritarian regimes, but that larger tendency may not hold true in individual cases. Not all democracies have done well and not all authoritarian governments have failed judging by their performance of basic state functions. We need a more nuanced understanding of models of national political economy, the term model adopted for analytical convenience. Trump's presidential election has also raised fundamental questions about the United States. With a nationalistic and populist wave in the advanced democracies and beyond, comparative politics may contribute to studies of American politics.

The American model has been the most consistent and successful in the world since 1800 thanks to the strengths of the American system and largely favorable external environments. By contrast, China has adopted a series of drastically different models in the same period, stagnating and failing much of the time. The China model discussed here refers to Deng Xiaoping's model adopted at the end of the 1970s, which has evolved into a hybrid system of political authoritarianism, partial market economy, and filtered information flow. China has been rising rapidly since 1990, which cannot be separated from its model.

A competition between the models of the two largest economies is consequential for what kind of international order we may have. It is safer to bet on the American model prevailing eventually because it is still far more attractive than the China model and because of its much longer track record. At the same time, one should not rule out the Chinese system at a time of rising populism and nationalism in the advanced democracies. The American and Chinese systems are likely to compete hard and co-evolve with each other into the foreseeable future, potentially bringing out the best and the worst in the two nations.

## Introduction

To many, a comparison of the political systems of the United States and China may well feel forced. It does not take an Einstein to see that the United States and China are very different. Both the United States and China are states, but we do not just compare any states for no good reasons. We have to justify why we want to spend time and energy on something that may be obvious to all. It makes more sense to compare the United States to other democracies and China to other historical empires or other authoritarian regimes. In fact, scholars in American studies or China studies often focus on the two countries as singular entities unique and exceptional in some meaningful ways.

I agree that the United States and China are different and that it makes sense to focus on the variation of the countries that are otherwise similar. At the same time, I maintain that it is still worthwhile to study divergent countries such as the United States and China as long as we adopt an appropriate framework. It is logical and partly empirically proven that democracies perform better than authoritarian regimes<sup>1)</sup>. But that larger tendency may not hold true in individual cases. Not all democracies have done well and not all authoritarian governments have failed judging by their performance of basic state functions. Thus, we need a more nuanced understanding of models of national political economy.

Donald J. Trump won the 2016 presidential election. Shocking and worrisome for many though it was, this seismic political event has raised fundamental questions about the United States. All of a sudden, scholars who used to take things American for granted began to wonder if they actually knew as much as they had thought about the country. With a nationalistic and populist wave in the advanced democracies and beyond, it is far easier now to argue that comparative politics may have something valuable to say about American politics. In the American academy, the subfield of American politics has done well in recent decades and has largely set the tone for what kind of research is considered prestigious and rigorous. It is healthy in my mind to bring in perspectives gained from studying other countries.

I use the term model to refer to a simplified picture of political systems. In my 2014 *China Model* book, I examined the following indicators of national political econo-

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1) See for example Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

my system (state purpose, the state's role in economy, corporate governance, and innovation system), institutions, operational features, growth model, information management and foreign aid model<sup>2)</sup>. One may also use national capitalism for various capitalist national systems of political economy. This is obviously a descriptive model. One can observe how these different traits have evolved over time. I have not yet examined their interactions, but this crude framework does allow initial comparisons. The Chinese use different terms to describe their system, with the China model as only one of them. In fact, the top Chinese leaders virtually never use that term. The 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress concluded on October 24, 2017 used "socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era" as the party's official label for the Chinese political system. Chinese media used various terms such as "China plan," "China road" or "China wisdom," but not China model. The American model is used even less in the political discourse and academic analysis. I use the term model for analytical convenience in this paper.

My China model book elaborates on my thinking about the China model versus the American model using the indicators I have chosen as appropriate for studying national models, namely history, political economy order, institutions, operational features, growth model, information management, aid model and exportability<sup>3)</sup>. My view remains basically the same. But I now view the historical roots of the Chinese system as more important because more and more Chinese and non-Chinese use a historical analogy or historical analysis to view China's behavior<sup>4)</sup>. I agree to some extent with the constructivist claim that the way people think about the world partly constitutes the world.

In my China model book I was already moving toward an evolutionary approach, which I will adopt explicitly in this paper. It is hard enough to compare two static complex systems. How can we compare them in motion? I argue that we can understand complex systems only when they are in motion. Institutions exist because they serve purposes. Thus, we can only see whether the systems serve their original purposes.

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2) Ming Wan, *The China Model and Global Political Economy: Comparison, Impact, and Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 9.

3) Wan, *China Model*, p. 50.

4) For some recent works that use China's past to explain its present, see Howard W. French, *Everything under the Heavens: How the Past Helps Shape China's Push for Global Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017); Fei-Ling Wang, *The China Order: Centralia, World Empire, and the Nature of Chinese Power* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2017).

Equally important, political institutions are social constructs and how people view these institutions is essential. Both the United States and China have to adapt to the global waves of politics, economy and culture, which allows us to compare them in a dynamic context. And a study of the differences and similarities in political regimes between the world's two largest economies in a strategic rivalry also has practical significance. I will discuss this foreign policy aspect only briefly in the paper.

The American model has been the most consistent and successful in the world since 1800 despite periodic setbacks thanks to the strengths of the American system and largely favorable external environments, which the United States helped to create in the later years. By contrast, China has adopted a series of drastically different models in the same period, stagnating and failing much of the time. The China model I discuss here refers to Deng Xiaoping's model adopted at the end of the 1970s, which has evolved into a hybrid system of political authoritarianism, partial market economy, and filtered information flow. China has been rising rapidly since 1990, which cannot be separated from its model. The American model and the China model are not the only models in the world today, but they do belong to the two largest economies, thus consequential for what kind of international order we may have. It is safer to bet on the American model prevailing eventually because it is still far more attractive than the China model and because of its much longer track record. At the same time, one should not rule out the Chinese system at a time of rising populism and nationalism in the advanced democracies. I see the two systems competing hard and co-evolving with each other into the foreseeable future, potentially bringing out the best and the worst in the two nations.

This paper includes four sections. The first section discusses an evolutionary approach to the political systems in the world. The next two sections examine the political evolution of the United States and China respectively. The last section provides a broad discussion of the global trends and distributions of political institutions.

### **Theory of Evolution for Politics**

Political scientists have utilized theory of evolution but the approach remains on the margin of the discipline as shown in the surveys of the field, handbooks, textbooks and syllabi for required courses. I argue however that political science would make greater advance with an evolutionary approach. Political scientists often emulate phys-

ics, economics or psychology. However, evolutionary theory is better suited for studies of politics. The political world is a living system. Thus, political science should be part of life sciences. Political scientists study patterns in unique happenings. Biologists face similar challenges in the life systems. Evolutionary theory is good at identifying large patterns. Experiments on evolution can be difficult, but that is similar to political science. Evolutionary theory is all-encompassing, which has been a goal for generations of political scientists. Evolutionary theory is a proven science. Last but not the least, an evolutionary approach will open up new territories and new questions for political science research.

The basic ideas for theory of evolution should be well known<sup>5)</sup>. Thus, I will not offer a primer in this paper. There has been some political science or IR scholarship following an explicit evolutionary approach<sup>6)</sup>. We often encounter the evolutionary terminology or analogy in political science works. It is often the case that some scholars need an implicit evolutionary logic for their key arguments without acknowledging their intellectual debt. As a case in point, Kenneth Waltz needed a mechanism of selection for his claim that socialization and competition make states alike in an anarchical international system<sup>7)</sup>. But the term selection does not appear in the index of the book.

Adopting an evolutionary theory affects what explanation should be. It is a common practice for political scientists and IR scholars to establish a causal relationship by examining whether and how the variation in the dependent variable is related to the variation in the independent variable. Thus, we explain by establishing causal

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5) For readings for general audience, see Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Matt Ridley, *The Evolution of Everything* (New York: Harper, 2015).

6) George Modelski, "Evolutionary Paradigm in the Social Sciences," *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 321-42; Roger D. Masters, "Evolutionary Biology and Political Theory," *American Political Science Review*, vol. 84, no. 1 (March 1990), pp. 195-210; Roger D. Masters, *The Nature of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Bradley Thayer, *Darwin and International Relations: On the Evolutionary Origins of War and Ethnic Conflict* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004); William R. Thompson, ed., *Evolutionary Interpretations of World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

7) Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 76-77.

relationships<sup>8)</sup>. However, an evolutionary approach focuses on two related questions about change in political systems in time and space and the purposes for which political institutions serve. Purpose-based evolutionary explanation is often dismissed as explaining everything away. However, as John Maynard Smith argued, an evolutionary explanation should be understood in full rather than in a short-hand form. As an example, rather than “the heart beats in order to pump blood round the body,” we should use the full explanation as follows: “Those animals which, in the past, had hearts that were efficient pumps survived, because oxygen reached their tissues, whereas animals whose hearts were less efficient pumps died. Since offspring resemble their parents, this resulted in the fact that present-day animals have hearts that are efficient pumps<sup>9)</sup>.” Moreover, Maynard Smith pointed out that, functional explanations “make sense only in so far as” a theory of evolution is correct<sup>10)</sup>. Part of the reason for failure of functional explanations in international relations is that they are not explicitly based on theory of evolution.

Functional arguments have played an important role in the development of political science and international relations. Purposes and functions are also important for some major schools of international relations. Robert Gilpin views “the primary purposes of the economic activity of the nation” as the first indicator for national systems of political economy<sup>11)</sup>. Robert Keohane included a chapter on functional arguments for international organizations in his 1984 book *After Hegemony*<sup>12)</sup>.

Purposes are more central to constructivism. For Hedley Bull, international order is defined as “a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society<sup>13)</sup>.” John Ruggie also argues that “whatever its institutional manifestations, political authority represents a fusion of power with le-

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8) Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 75.

9) John Maynard Smith, “Explanation in Biology,” in Dudley Knowles, ed., *Explanation and its Limits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 66.

10) Maynard Smith, “Explanation in Biology,” p. 67.

11) Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 149.

12) Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Chapter 6.

13) Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 8.

gitimate social purpose<sup>14</sup>). ” I view constructivism as closest to evolutionary theory in that social and cultural evolution is central to how politics has evolved. Humans are indeed different from other animals in that we possess highly developed cognitive capability and act to shape the environment we live in. Social learning and social evolution has been crucial<sup>15</sup>). The only difference is that most constructivists reject the possibility of using scientific methods for studying politics. By contrast, theory of evolution is scientific.

In accordance with evolutionary reasoning, hypothesis testing for universal law-like statements is not the only scientific way of doing research. Richard Dawkins, a well-known biologist, has suggested that “it is *possible* for a theoretical book to be worth reading even if it does not advance testable hypotheses but seeks, instead, to change the way we see<sup>16</sup>). ” For constructivists like Alexander Wendt, it is acceptable to seek process-based constitutive causality<sup>17</sup>). Evolutionary approach does not seek invariant laws the way physics does and generates mainly contingent results.

We need to use evolution not just as an analogy or for casual use of its terms. For this paper, I will focus on three key evolutionary concepts, namely adaptation, selection and evolutionary constraint<sup>18</sup>). Adaptation has a specific meaning in evolutionary biology. Biologist Mary Jane West-Eberhard defines it as “a characteristic of an organism whose form is the result of selection in a particular functional context” and “the process of ‘adaptation’ as the evolutionary modification of a character under selection for efficient or advantageous (fitness-enhancing) functioning in a particular context or

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14) John G. Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” *International Organization*, vol. 36, no. 2 (Spring 1982), p. 382.

15) Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985); Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

16) Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Gene as the Unit of Selection* (Oxford: Freeman, 1982), p. 2.

17) Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 79. See also Richard Ned Lebow, “Constitutive Causality: Imagined Spaces and Political Practices,” *Millennium-Journal of International Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (December 2009), pp. 211–239.

18) Another fundamental evolutionary concept is mutation, which refers to errors in replication. This can happen when an institution is not replicated exactly during a generational change. But this paper will not use that concept.



set of contexts<sup>19)</sup>.” To prove adaptations, West-Eberhard argues that we need three kinds of empirical evidence. First, similar forms occur in similar environments across species, particularly unrelated species; different forms occur in related species due to different environments; different forms occur in different life stages due to different environments. Second, we may experimentally alter or eliminate a character to determine the effect on its efficiency. Third, we can compare naturally occurring variants in terms of their efficiency in a situation where they are hypothesized as adaptations<sup>20)</sup>.

Adaptation is closely connected to selection because adaptation is made for selection advantages. Selection refers to greater frequency or greater relative abundance of its kind. We need to be careful that something prevalent in the population may have been selected initially for functional purposes other than the one we see at first glance. Examples abound in the animal world.

The world has different types of political systems that compete with each other. Political systems are similar to species. One may ask whether we can use species for society and polity. We can. Noted sociologist Emile Durkheim stated to that effect in his 1895 book, following the reasoning as below:

“We have seen that societies are only different combinations of one and the same original society. Now the same element can combine only with others like it; and the compounds which result can, in their turn, combine only among themselves by following a limited number of combinations, especially when the compound elements are few, as in the case with social segments. The gamut of possible combinations is therefore finite, and consequently most of them will necessarily appear repeatedly. We must therefore conclude that social species exist. Although the possibility remains that certain of these combinations are produced only once, this does not prevent its being a species. We shall simply say in cases of this kind that the species includes only one individual<sup>21)</sup>.”

Some scholars who belong to the school of adaptationism believe that adaptation has resulted from only natural selection for most traits in most species<sup>22)</sup>. However,

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19) Mary Jane West-Eberhard, “Adaptation: Current Usages,” in David L. Hull and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Philosophy of Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 8. See also George C. Williams, *Adaptation and Natural Selection: A Critique of Some Current Evolutionary Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

20) West-Eberhard, “Adaptation: Current Usages,” pp. 8–9.

21) Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), pp. 86–87.

22) Elliott Sober, “Six Sayings about Adaptationism,” in David L. Hull and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Philosophy of Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 72.

other researchers such as Stephen Gould reject key elements of adaptationism. They advance instead arguments based on evolutionary or developmental constraints<sup>23)</sup>. Maynard Smith has provided a clear contrast between selection and developmental constraints. Selective adaptation results from “changes in its competitors, its predators, and its parasites.” By contrast, developmental constraints “limit the ways in which a population can respond to selection<sup>24)</sup>. ”

### America's Political Evolution

To understand the political evolution of the United States or any country for that matter, we need to go to its very origin. The United States is a young country but has inherited deep traditions, particularly from Great Britain. The United States won its independence from Great Britain in 1776. The Declaration of Independence was aspirational. The document contained the core political beliefs—liberty, individualism, democracy and the rule of law—that came to be called the “American Creed<sup>25)</sup>. ” Looking back, we could easily conclude that the American Independence had to happen. But it was not that obvious at the time and the significance of this pivotal event in world history only revealed itself fully much later. Great Britain had other European-majority settlements such as Canada and Australia. Canada in particular is in the same geographical location as the new United States. Canada did not become independent, as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire, until 1867 when Great Britain wanted a unified Canada to defend itself better against the United States. Australia became a dominion within the British Empire only in 1901. Both Canada and Australia remain in the British Commonwealth to this day.

A republican U. S. government seemed to have to happen. There has been a con-

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23) The concept of constraints is complex. See Ron Amundson, “Two Concepts of Constraint: Adaptationism and the Challenge from Developmental Biology,” in David L. Hull and Michael Ruse, eds., *The Philosophy of Biology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 93–116; Stevan J. Arnold, “Constraints on Phenotypic Evolution,” *The American Naturalist*, vol. 140, Supplement (November 1992), S85; Janis Antonovics and Peter H. van Tienderen, “Ontoecogenophyloconstraints? The Chaos of Constraint Terminology,” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution*, vol. 6, no. 5 (May 1991), pp. 166–68.

24) John Maynard Smith, *Evolutionary Genetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 288.

25) Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), pp. 13–14.

tinuous myth that George Washington turned down an offer to become king<sup>26)</sup>. The myth reflects what people want to see. But the myth also suggests an alternative path that is unimaginable. Great Britain, the mother country, had kings. But the American colonies just overthrew the king. Developmental constraints meant that it would be absurd to contemplate other alternatives such as a Muslim caliphate, a Chinese middle kingdom or a native American chiefdom. The Europeans-majority American colonies were different from non-Western regions where the European ideas and institutions came into a sharp conflict with the indigenous populations.

At the same time, within those broad developmental constraints, the newly born United States could evolve in its own path and did. Samuel Huntington examined three key features of political modernization, namely the rationalization of authority, the differentiation of structures and the expansion of political participation. He concluded that three patterns existed in the West, Continental, British and American<sup>27)</sup>. The United States inherited the Tudor political beliefs and institutions from 16<sup>th</sup> Century England, which included “the idea of the organic union of society and government, the harmony of authorities within government, the subordination of government to fundamental law, the intermingling of the legal and political realms, the balance of power between Crown and Parliament, the complementary representative roles of these two bodies, the vitality of local governmental authorities, and reliance on the militia for the defense of the realm<sup>28)</sup>.” These institutions and ideas were medieval in character. The British colonists took these institutions to the new world, which outlasted Great Britain itself. Britain followed the trend in Continental Europe for centralized state power in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Continental Europe had accomplished that modernization task by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. The centralized state emerged in Europe to serve the purpose of engineering change. Prior to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, fundamental law and diffusion of power was the norm in Europe. But as Huntington noted, “Fundamental law and the diffusion of authority were incompatible with political modernization,” which “requires authority for change<sup>29)</sup>.” A new concept of sovereignty gained currency, which meant

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26) Robert F. Haggard, “The Nicola Affair: Lewis Nicola, George Washington, and American Military Discontent during the Revolutionary War,” *Proceedings of The American Philosophical Society*, vol. 146, no. 2 (June 2002), pp. 139–69.

27) Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order and Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 93–139.

28) Huntington, *Political Order and Changing Societies*, p. 96.

absolute power over citizens. The process of centralization began in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century and was completed by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. As a symbol of that transition, assemblies of estates in Continental Europe ceased to exist by 1700. Using contemporary terminology, we may as well call this period a major authoritarian turn in European political history. Great Britain centralized state power by the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. By contrast, the United States largely kept the Tudor traditions, as symbolized by judicial review and diffusion of power.

Why did the United States evolve differently? Building on Huntington's discussion of political modernization, Francis Fukuyama, who was Huntington's student, cited the arguments by American scholars such as Louis Hartz and Martin Lipset. Hartz reasoned that the United States was different because it did not have an inherited feudal class structure that defined Europe and because North America had seemingly unlimited opportunities for European settlers. Lipset argued that the United States was born in a revolution against the British crown, resulting in liberty understood as distrust of government. Fukuyama himself suggested that the United States did not face a serious threat from any powerful neighbors and was so large that decentralization was always necessary<sup>30</sup>.

The United States did not get its institutional design right at the start. The Articles of Confederation proved inadequate for the new country. The Framers of the U. S. Constitution signed in 1787 and entered into force two years later made a clear adaptation. The Constitutional Convention was focused on giving the federal government greater authority. At the same time, the past choices for a republican or popular government and for giving small states equal power had a "constraint" on the basic orientation of the new Constitution. While one could imagine an authoritarian turn, it was unlikely given the path the new country had been on.

Within that favorable constraint, the focus of the Convention was on what kind of institutional design for the country. A few plans were proposed, particularly the Virginia Plan and the New Jersey Plan. The key points in the Virginia Plan came from James Madison. The plan dominated in the deliberation in the first month of the convention. If the Virginia Plan had been adopted, the United States would have gone

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29) Huntington, *Political Order and Changing Societies*, p. 101.

30) Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014), pp. 136–137.

down a different political path. The plan called for a fusion-of-power system rather than a separation-of-power system. Since the executive was to be chosen by the national legislature, that design would eventually make the United States a parliamentary democracy. The plan would also eliminate the coequality of the states since it proposed that the first branch of legislature be elected by the representatives from the states in proportion to the country's population and that the first branch elect members of the second branch. Representing the interests of the small states, the New Jersey Plan would augment the Articles of Confederation by ensuring coequality of the states. The Connecticut delegation, from another small state, proposed a single institutional design choice, which came to be called "the Great Compromise". According to the Great Compromise, the United States would adopt bicameralism. The members of the lower house would be elected by population in proportion to the U.S. population and the members of the senate would be elected equally among the states<sup>31)</sup>. Thus, the Constitution was written based on the recognized problems facing the country, political ideas and practical politics.

The U. S. Constitution contained some unique institutional features. It is rigid and difficult to change. It also has an archaic electoral system as the Electoral College, which came to be compounded by the most states' later choice of a winner-take-it-all system. Thus, this system is a violation of a more democratic majority principle. Moreover, the Constitution failed to anticipate political parties and interest groups, the bureaucracy and public policy<sup>32)</sup>.

The U. S. system was not built for efficient policy making, which was understandable because the Constitution was written before the Industrialization and the era in which the government had to serve more functions. But one may argue that what is most important is to set up the political system right before focusing on the nuts and bolts of administration. Indeed, over time the United States added more institutions that came to be emulated by many other countries.

But the U. S. Constitution could not solve the political tensions at the time and into the future, as shown by the American Civil War, which by definition meant a funda-

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31) Steven L. Taylor, Matthew S. Shugart, Arend Lijphart, and Bernard Grofman, *A Different Democracy: American Government in a Thirty-One-Country Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. 25-56.

32) Taylor et al., *A Different Democracy*, pp. 46-47.

mental breakdown of the political system. The historical memory of the war continues culturally and politically to this day. Was the war about slavery or state rights? If the South had won the Civil War, the historical trajectory of the United States would be drastically different.

The slavery and racism were the original sins of the United States<sup>33</sup>). While the 13 colonies attacked the British abuses, they violated the rights of black slaves and Native Americans. Ironically, the British-appointed governor of Virginia issued an emancipation proclamation in November 1775, which promised to set black slaves free if they joined the fight against the Patriots. That action served to rally the slave-owning white Southerners against Britain<sup>34</sup>). That was almost 88 years before President Lincoln's more famous emancipation proclamation. The British also enlisted the Native Americans in the war against the Patriots. That became a major grievance against the Crown listed in the Declaration of Independence<sup>35</sup>).

However, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States imagined the most inclusive political institutions in the world at the time. Moreover, as commentators often observe based on strong historical evidence, the American political institutions that were created by the American Creed have allowed the country to continue improving toward a "more perfect union."

We can also use the apparent contradictions in the American system as an analytical tool to understand the country's political development. Huntington argued in his 1981 book on American politics that the gap between political ideals and the political reality led to periodic creedal passion that sought institutional reforms to align political reality better to political ideals. He identified four such periods, the Revolutionary,

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33) The American model has at times been admired for reasons that the American majority would find embarrassed about. In a recent study, James Whitman has documented Hitler's Nazi Germany sought to emulate the American race model in the early 1930s. As Whitman noted, the most radical Nazi participants were the most ardent proponents of the American model in race laws. James Q. Whitman, *Hitler's American Model: The United States and the Making of Nazi Race Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), pp. 1–2.

34) Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017), pp. 95–96.

35) It charged that the British government had "excited domestic insurrections amongst us, and has endeavoured to bring on the inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages whose known rule of warfare, is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions."

Jacksonian, Progressive eras and the protest period in the 1960s–1970s<sup>36)</sup>. These periods of creedal passion occurred at about 60–year intervals<sup>37)</sup>.

The American political system has not changed fundamentally since its founding. But the institutions within that system have clearly evolved. The American federal government has become bigger and more powerful despite strong anti-government political culture in the country. Starting with Ted Roosevelt, the United States entered into an imperialist stage, which would affect the size of the U. S. government. The U. S. government also took on social welfare functions after the Second World War.

Students of American politics in a comparative perspective know that the United States was the earliest modern state that had wider political participation from the start. Fukuyama rightly pointed out the political development implications of that origin, related to the rise of political parties and patronage/clientelism. Once social welfare became a recognized state responsibility, it had a necessary acceleration mechanism built into the system. While the Americans have an anti-government political belief, they have also shown a strong willingness to accept government subsidies. Few people tackle the real danger of mounting costs of entitlement. From time to time, some commentators would point out the absence of a serious debate about this issue in American public sphere. As Robert Samuelson of the *Washington Post* recently argued yet again, “the era of small government...was over many decades ago.” The real challenge is “whether we’ll have effective big government or mismanaged big government.” His verdict is that we are seeing a mismanaged big government. The expense of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid is growing relative to other categories for state spending such as defense. According to the Congressional Budget Office, Social Security and Medicare spending will be about 40 percent of the federal budget. Paul N. Van de Water of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that federal spending will increase from 20.9 percent of GDP in 2016 to 23.5 percent in 2035. Interest for debt alone will be 2.4 percent of GDP in 2035. Both the Democrats and Republicans have contributed to the looming fiscal crisis<sup>38)</sup>.

Huntington’s characterization of a 60–year creedal passion appears to be right giv-

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36) Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 85–129.

37) Huntington, *American Politics*, p. 131.

38) Robert J. Samuelson, “The Deficit is Everybody’s Fault,” *The Washington Post*, September 11, 2017, A 15.



en what is going on in the country right now. The United States has become more and more polarized since the 1970s. Liberals focus on inequalities and want an expanding government to address these issues. By contrast, conservatives see individual liberty as paramount and oppose big government. The polarization is now reflected in scant overlap in main issues between the Republicans and Democrats. The public has also experienced an ideological polarization. Furthermore, the American citizens increasingly choose to live in the neighborhoods whose ideological orientation they identify with. Ideological polarization has affected the executive, legislative and even judicial branches<sup>39)</sup>.

Larger economic and social forces are driving the polarization in the United States. The U. S. has seen a long trend in increasing income and wealth inequity, popularized by Thomas Piketty's bestseller<sup>40)</sup>. For millions of Americans, the American dream seems to be out of reach<sup>41)</sup>. Now we also know better the extent of despair among disadvantaged white working class, defined as without college degrees and paid by the hour or by the job, who helped to put Donald Trump in the White House<sup>42)</sup>.

It is not just economic hardship that has driven white working class in formerly Democrat strongholds in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and elsewhere to the Trump camp. Many Trump supporters are also motivated by hostility toward immigration and fear of cultural displacement<sup>43)</sup>. The Public Religion Research Institute con-

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39) James E. Campbell, *Polarized: Making Sense of a Divided America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Steven E. Schier and Todd E. Eberly, *Polarized: The Rise of Ideology in American Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

40) Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty First Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). See also *Americas* (Washington, D. C. : APSA, 2016).

41) See for example, Robert D. Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

42) Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right* (New York: New Press, 2016); Wayne Allyn Root, *Angry White Male: How the Donald Trump Phenomenon is Changing America-and What We Can All Do to Save the Middle Class* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2016); Justin Gest, *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

43) Daniel Cox, Rachel Lienesch, and Robert P. Jones, "Beyond Economics: Fears of Cultural Displacement Pushed the White Working Class to Trump," Public Religion Research Institute, May 5, 2017, accessed May 11, 2017, available at <https://www.prrri.org/research/white-working-class-attitudes-economy-trade-immigration-election-donald-trump/>. See also Emma Green, "It Was Cultural Anxiety That Drove White, Working-Class Voters to Trump," *The Atlantic*



ducted a recent survey of over 100,000 Americans. The poll found a sharp demographic and social change. In 1976, about 81 percent of Americans identified themselves as white and Christian, with 55 percent of the Americans as white Protestants. By contrast, white Christians today account for less than half of the American population (43 percent) and only 30 percent as white Protestants. And they are aging<sup>44)</sup>.

The demographic change has triggered a profound identity debate. It is conventional wisdom among students of the United States that the country is uniquely defined by political ideals rather than ethnic affinity. Huntington argued in that 1981 book that the American national identity is associated with political ideals rather than ethnic or religious identities, unlike other nations<sup>45)</sup>. One may argue that many other countries have also had the gap between their ideal and the political reality. But Huntington noticed three distinctive characteristics of American political ideals, namely the *scope* of the agreement on these ideals, thus the American Creed, the *substance* of these ideals, which are liberal, individualistic, democratic, egalitarian and anti-authority; and the changing intensity of American belief in these political ideals<sup>46)</sup>. Some of the American political beliefs originated from Europe. But as Huntington noted, “in no other society...are all of these ideas so widely adhered to by so many people as they are in the United States<sup>47)</sup>.” However, Huntington’s view on this issue would change in later years. He came to identify the American national identity with the Anglo-Saxon political and protestant traditions<sup>48)</sup>. If one reads Huntington’s 1981 book carefully, one should not be completely surprised by Huntington’s later shift. In that book, he did see a major source of the American Creed from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Protestantism<sup>49)</sup>. But it was still a major shift when Huntington took a major source for the American Creed

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*Monthly*, May 9, 2017, accessed May 11, 2017, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/white-working-class-trump-cultural-anxiety/525771/>.

44) Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Value Atlas*, Public Religion Research Institute, September 6, 2017. Cited in Jennifer Rubin, “The Demographic Change Fueling the Angst of Trump’s Base,” *The Washington Post*, September 7, 2017.

45) Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 23–30.

46) Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 3–4.

47) Huntington, *American Politics*, p. 15.

48) Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1996); Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

49) Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 14–15.

as a basis for the American national identity.

An ideological and cultural polarization is particularly damaging given American's separation-of-power system. We observe increasing political and policy paralysis, which weakens support for democracy even in the United States.

Now the United States is going through a "revolutionary" change with Donald Trump's presidential election, which has been characterized as "breaking all the rules" or "defying the odds<sup>50)</sup>." But as most observers quickly recognized, the signs and trends were there and Hillary Clinton's campaign had made grave miscalculations. The Electoral College had produced presidential winners who lost the popular vote before. We have also seen populist outsiders winning the White House. The American electoral system worked as designed.

To the disbelief and anger of the so-called "establishment," the fundamental ideas about international order and domestic politics are being challenged. The experts are criticized and dismissed as out of touch or even outright dangerous. This reminds me of Chairman Mao's preference of "red" over "expert," which did so much damage to the country. More disconcertingly, Trump is part of a wave of ethnic nationalism in both the developed and developing world. Trump's election in November 2016 occurred in the middle of a European trend away from Center-Left to Right, measured by the losses of the Center-Left parties that had dominated in Europe for decades and the lowest total voter share in the continent<sup>51)</sup>.

We still do not know whether the Trump administration would fundamentally change the American political system and behavior. I personally believe that American democracy will rebound<sup>52)</sup>. The institutions still function as intended. But in the meantime, the Trump administration has squandered much of America's moral authority in the world. The China model will gain by default. But it will not be the only model

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50) Larry J. Sabato, Kyle Kondik and Geoffrey Skelley, eds., *Trumped: The 2016 Election that Broke all the Rules* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017); James W. Ceaser, Andrew E. Busch and John J. Pitney, Jr., *Defying the Odds: The 2016 Elections and American Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

51) James McAuley and Griff Witte, "A New Political Order in West," *The Washington Post*, November 25, 2016, A1.

52) For a similar assessment, see E. J. Dionne, Jr., Norman J. Ornstein and Thomas E. Mann, *One Nation after Trump: A Guide for the Perplexed, the Disillusioned, the Desperate, and the Not-Yet Departed* (New York: St. Martin's, 2017).

seeking to shine in a more chaotic international system.

### China's Political Evolution

The United States had the oldest democratic constitution in the world. At the same time, as a continuous ancient civilization, China has a long tradition in political thinking and institutions. Fukuyama has identified three key features of a liberal democracy, the state, rule of law and accountable government<sup>53)</sup>. In terms of modern state, Fukuyama argued that China was the first modern state, forming a centralized, bureaucratic empire by 221 BC. Fukuyama's verdict was not new. Some leading China specialists had already said so. John King Fairbank, for example, commented that China had a centralized empire dated to 221 BC, almost two millennia before France became the first modern state in Europe at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>54)</sup>. State centralization in China should be dated earlier to the Kingdom of Qi during the Warring State period. Guan Zhong who became Qi's chancellor in 685 BC introduced reforms to shift administration from hereditary aristocracy to professional bureaucracy and collect taxes directly from villages. Guan's reform measures made Qi the most powerful state and its ruler Duke Huan the hegemon in China. The Kingdom of Qin furthered state centralization, which laid the foundation for its subsequent victories to unify China. The blueprint for a unified empire was present based on the previous experience. But the first emperor established a blue print and expectations that would lead to reproduction of centralized empires for two millennia. Fukuyama attributed the reason to military competition in China at the time. War made the Chinese state just like war made the modern state in Europe.

The Chinese history was not stagnant as some early European thinkers made it to be. Indeed, China basically followed the same centralized empire model from 221 BC to 1911. But within that framework, the Chinese state evolved, sometimes drastically, due to internal and international security environmental change and cultural, economic and technological forces. As a continental country, the country saw massive human migration and cultural interaction with the outside world, particularly borrowing of

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53) Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), pp. 14-19.

54) John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 46.

Buddhism from India.

China has had a long tradition of state administration. Some other East Asian countries such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam have had similar experience. That stands the region apart from some other non-Western regions that have had a harder time adapting to the modern world. Crawford Young, a leading Africanist in the United States, contrasted Africa with East Asia. Most East Asian countries have had a distinct political entity and long institutional continuity. By contrast, “the colonial system created the African states in most instances; only a handful have a more distant ancestry, and even fewer have decisive institutional continuities with a precolonial past<sup>55)</sup>.” China and most other East Asian countries have had an established nation and state for longer than Europe and are arguably benefiting as well as paying prices for having too much state.

The Chinese imperial model came undone in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Opium War was the starting point of China’s modern history. The Chinese dynasty did not crumble after that war, which was not particularly damaging in physical terms by itself. But the war and its subsequent treaties started a long process of China having to face a new type of great powers. The Europeans had arrived in East Asia centuries earlier, but they became strong enough by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century to transform the Chinese world order into a Westphalian system. Like other non-Western nations, China also began a difficult process of adaptation. Facing similar pressure, the main East Asian countries of China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam responded differently. The internal conditions of these countries were indeed different, which partly explained their varying responses. Things could have evolved somewhat differently. But whatever did happen had a profound impact on future East Asian developments. Japan moved fast and effectively after the 1868 Meiji Restoration and came to colonize Korea and occupied parts of China.

Japan’s invasion of China starting in 1931 paved the way for the Chinese Communist Party to come to power. The war created power vacuums in large areas, which allowed the Chinese communist forces to penetrate and consolidate power. Once Japan surrendered in 1945, the Chinese Communist Party had gained enough strength to contend with the Chinese Nationalist Government.

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55) Crawford Young, *The African Colonial State in Comparative Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 9.

China's choice for communism in the late 1940s caused much anxiety in the United States. Why didn't China choose American liberal democracy? How did Soviet communism relate to Chinese society?<sup>56)</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has an official version that justifies its rule: the CCP was the only party that was willing and able to respond to people's just demands. But things could have happened differently. Despite that Chinese propaganda, one can make a case that China was more likely to become communist at that particular historical juncture. As John Fairbanks observed in his autobiography, communism was good for China although bad for the United States<sup>57)</sup>.

Despite initial economic success in the 1950s, China under Mao suffered a series of self-inflicted wounds due to frequent political campaigns and erroneous economic strategies. Mao's approach could not be predicted by the fact that China had a communist system. A different communist leader could have behaved somewhat differently, which would have a different impact on the country's future evolution.

By the late 1970s, the Mao model had failed. Deng Xiaoping's adaptation for reform and opening in 1978 began the political experiments that constituted the China model under discussion in this paper. Deng was a pivotal leader in China's contemporary political history. There were debates in China at the time about what was the problem with the country and what should be done about it. It was conceivable that a far more conservative approach advocated by Chen Yun could have been adopted, particularly if Chen outlived Deng. Deng chose to move on the economic front before any political reform and adopted a gradualist approach, which would be the opposite of Mikhail Gorbachev's choice of reform in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s<sup>58)</sup>. That different approach partly explained China's more sustained economic growth than Russia's<sup>59)</sup>.

The 1980s was the reform decade. The economic reform and opening to the outside world led to vibrant discussion for democracy among China's intellectuals and col-

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56) Benjamin I. Schwartz, *China and Other Matters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 3.

57) John King Fairbank, *Chinabound: A Fifty-Year Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 317.

58) Barry Naughton, *Growing out of the Plan: Chinese Economic Reform, 1978-1993* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

59) Minxin Pei, *From Reform to Revolution: The Demise of Communism in China and the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

lege students whose demand was supported by the average citizens who resented wide-spread government corruption. But instead of accommodating public demands, which would have led to healthier and more balanced economic growth, the Chinese government chose to crack down on the demonstrating students and urban residents in Beijing and some other cities. After the June 4 incident, Deng surprised observers by sticking to his economic reform approach while strengthening the communist party control. There were strong voices within the party and the government that Deng's earlier economic reform that deviated from socialism had caused the political turmoil. Deng's post-1989 strategy, supported by his successors, was to make state enterprises more efficient and more central to the Chinese economy, and to make the party and the state more rational<sup>60</sup>). Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao followed the Deng line and Deng's introduction of collective leadership, no more than two 5-year terms and retirement age. They both identified their successors at their second quinquennial party congress.

Xi Jinping who assumed the top leader position in 2012 behaved differently from Jiang and Hu from start. He consolidated power more quickly and pushed for a more assertive foreign policy. There was much speculation whether Xi would put himself in the same status as Mao and Deng by having his name in the party constitution. He achieved that objective. At the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress held on October 18-24, 2017, the party constitution was revised to include "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era." In fact, "Xi Jinping Thought" is higher than "Deng Xiaoping Theory." In the Chinese Communist Party ideological hierarchy, thought is higher than theory. The phrase "new era" suggests that Xi is now starting the third era of the People's Republic of China, after the Mao era and the Deng era. Breaking the practice of the past two decades, Xi did not have any heir apparent at the new 7-member politburo standing committee, clearly meant to give himself more permanent power whether he chooses to extend his term beyond the party convention of two terms.

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60) Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics: Entrepreneurship and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Dali Yang, *Remaking the Chinese Leviathan: Market Transition and the Politics of Governance in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); David Shambaugh, *China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

As things stand now, Xi's "new era" is not as dramatic a departure from the immediate past practices as the Mao era and the Deng era. For one thing, Xi Jinping Thought is much longer than Mao Zedong Thought and includes socialism with Chinese characteristics, which is essentially Deng Xiaoping Theory. Xi's thinking seems to be about balanced economic growth, innovation, and disciplined and "absolute" communist party leadership. Xi's speech at the party congress unveiled a two-stage development plan to make the country a global innovator by 2035 and "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful" by 2050, democratic not meaning Western democracy. Xi wants to move China toward the center of the global stage with confidence. He will apparently not introduce any Western-style democratic reform. These are his goals, which are logically a continuation of the Deng line, which produced a foundation for the country's rapid economic growth and created new challenges in the process that any new Chinese leaders had to face. Xi has reintroduced more personalized political leadership style but he is not Mao the revolutionary. Even though Chinese historical traditions were not discussed at the party congress, Xi has encouraged the Chinese tradition discourse since coming to power, a sure sign that Chinese political traditions rather than Western liberalism are prevailing.

Thus, what we see in China now has resulted from the past adaptations, a model of political authoritarianism, partial market capitalism/state capitalism, and filtered information flow. China has been growing rapidly, thanks mainly to reform and incentives in my assessment<sup>61)</sup>. In particular, even though the Chinese Communist Party monopolizes power and state enterprises dominate in strategic sectors, China has a decentralized economic decision-making structure. Thousands of counties have significant autonomy in shaping their economic development strategies and compete with each other for performance<sup>62)</sup>.

China has adopted a more decentralized economic administrative structure out of

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61) Ming Wan, "The China Model and the Great Recession: A Historical Comparison," in Dali L. Yang, ed., *The Great Recession and China's Political Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 223-42.

62) Chenggang Xu, "The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development," *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 49, no. 4 (December 2011), pp. 1076-1151; Jing Vivian Zhan, "Decentralizing China: Analysis of Central Strategies in China's Fiscal Reforms," *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 18, no. 60 (June 2009), pp. 445-62.

necessity. China is a very large country. With the diverse local conditions, China has no choice but to give local governments more autonomy. China has capable bureaucrats but not a sufficient central bureaucracy to run the whole country. China has also done so for political reasons, giving local officials autonomy to experiment and benefit from their efforts and thus building a constituency for reform<sup>63</sup>).

I have suggested a hybrid nature of the contemporary Chinese system in my China model book, which has incorporated non-Chinese institutions, practices and ideas. That is not an original observation. A good number of analysts have reached a similar conclusion. Based on my own assessment, China has learned the most from the United States, but it has learned from other countries as well. For example, China's aid model has been heavily influenced by Japan's aid model applied in China.

Some recent research has highlighted the hybrid nature of the Chinese system on the operational level. As Douglas Fuller has shown, China's success in the IT sector has largely resulted from a hybrid system of ethnic Chinese setting up foreign firms in China that are closely linked to foreign financial institutions that provide financial discipline<sup>64</sup>). Fuller's empirical research shows that a dichotomy between the market-focused analytical framework and the developmental state framework is inadequate to understand the success and limitation of China's IT industry. China still had underdeveloped market institutions and its state-supported firms perform poorly despite heavy investment from the government. And the Chinese government has allowed the internationalization of some of its core economic activities. At the same time, there are signs that China's economic nationalism has been rising in recent years, which may compromise its internationalization efforts.

We do not know whether this Chinese adaptation will continue to work for the country and whether that can be borrowed by other developing countries. But it has worked so far for the Chinese government and much of its population.

### **The United States versus China Politically in the Global Context**

When people think about the United States versus China, they typically think about democracy versus authoritarianism, which is of course correct. I have included Figure

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63) Susan Shirk, *The Political Logic of Economic Reform in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

64) Fuller, *Paper Tigers, Hidden Dragons*.



1 to contrast the United States and China in terms of political regimes. The Polity IV database used for this figure includes five categories based on a scale of  $-10$  to  $10$ . A perfect  $10$  means full democracy. Democracy has a score from  $6$  to  $9$ . Autocracy is from  $-10$  to  $-6$ . The Polity IV includes also open anocracy (from  $1$  to  $5$ ) and closed anocracy (from  $-5$  to  $0$ ). Anocracy is an unstable hybrid of democracy and autocracy<sup>65</sup>).

Figure 1 shows that the scores of political regimes for the United States and China have been sharply divergent since the China model emerged in the late 1970s. China scored a negative  $7$  from 1975 to 2015 while the United States received the highest positive ten in the same period. Figure 1 traces back to 1800. We should be careful when using large social science databases, which often obscure sharp changes not captured when coders necessarily use a limited number of indicators. Having said that, I will use the Polity database as the few available ones to discuss the politics of national models. From a longer historical lens, the United States and China have been sharply divergent politically.

#### Figure 1 The United States versus China

Source: Ming Wan, "The Political Economy of U.S.-China Relations and the Trump Administration," *Washington Journal of Modern China*, vol. 13 (August 2017), p. 61.

It is more meaningful to contrast the United States and China in a dynamic, global context, as shown in Figure 2. From a historical perspective, the United States has arguably been the most innovative and successful political system for the past two centuries. One may indeed conclude that history has selected democracy as the winner. The United States was the lone democracy in 1809 and was not particularly powerful. By 1870 the United States had become the world's largest economy. The United States has been the leader of the liberal democratic world since the end of World War Two. Figure 2 visualizes a dramatic increase in democracy absolutely and relatively.

#### Figure 2 Evolving global political regimes

Source: Wan, "Political Economy of U.S.-China Relations," p. 62.

By contrast, 19 of the 22 countries listed for 1800 were autocrats and the remain-

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65) Monty G. Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, "Polity<sup>TM</sup> IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2013," Center for Systemic Peace, accessed January 17, 2017, available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

ing three were anocracies. China belonged to the predominant political regime type in the world. And China was one of the most powerful countries in the world, at least on paper. However, the percentage of the autocrat political regime decreased over time, shrinking to only 21 out of 165 countries in 2015. China has been on the losing side judging by the trend lines in Figure 2. This was particularly the case after the Cold War ended and Eastern Europe transitioned to democracy. No wonder President Bill Clinton lectured to President Jiang Zemin at a joint press conference in the White House in October 1997 that China “is on the wrong side of history.” China was viewed as a vanguard in socialist reforms in the 1980s but came to be seen as a laggard in democratization in the 1990s that was bound to fail.

However, China remains authoritarian and has in fact worsened in human rights in the past few years. But unlike in the 1990s we see a minor reversal of democracy in recent years and a comeback of authoritarian regimes. Some Eastern European countries like Hungary and Poland are busy destroying their democratic institutions. Turkey is now essentially back to be an authoritarian country. Worse still, we see a wave of nationalist and populist emotions in the United States and Western Europe.

The challenge for the United States and democratic countries is that China has been rising. Figure 3 reveals China’s rise relative to the United States in a whole range of power measures, from a low point in 1990. In fact, China has surpassed the United States in GDP (PPP) and volumes of merchandize trade in the past few years. China is still growing several times faster than the United States and is also gaining on the United States in technology and innovation<sup>66</sup>).

Figure 3: China rising

Sources: Wan, “Political Economy of U. S. –China Relations,” p. 57.

Note: The data for FDI outflows for 2005 would give China an unusually high 80 percent that of the United States. I used the information from World Development Indicators online for that year. The percentages from the previous year and the following year are similar to those from the UNCTADSTAT.

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66) George S. Yip and Bruce McKern, *China’s Next Strategic Advantage: From Imitation to Innovation* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016); Douglas B. Fuller, *Paper Tigers, Hidden Dragons: Firms and the Political Economy of China’s Technological Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Duncan Clark, *Alibaba: The House that Jack Ma Built* (New York: Ecco, 2016).

I believe firmly in liberty and democracy based on my personal experience and studies of different political systems. But theory of evolution by Charles Darwin does not assume necessary progress from lower to higher forms. I suspect an important reason that some social scientists keep a distance from theory of evolution is the dark page of social Darwinism, which Nazi Germany carried to extreme but was also advocated and practiced to some extent in other developed countries including the United States. Thomas Leonard has recently shown how the Progressive thinkers justified and promoted racial and class discrimination and eugenics in the name of progress through science of social control from the late 1870s to the start of the First World War<sup>67)</sup>. Thus, even though liberal democracies are far more likely than authoritarian alternatives to do the right thing and serve their citizens, they still need to strive to do the right thing and perform.

The nation states in the world do compete, which is necessarily reflected in a competition of values and political systems. China is representative of authoritarianism. Even though we can debate over the intrinsic values of a particular system, the rise and fall of different national models partly coincide with the rise and fall of the nations that possess those models. The Japanese model was viewed as a challenge to the American model in the late 1980s but that perception changed with Japan's economic problems after the bubble burst in the early 1990s.

When I was writing my China model book, I knew that China had gained confidence in their system after the 2008 Great Recession. In fact, that was part of the reason I became interested in the topic. But China was still hesitant in pushing their model onto other countries. They have become less hesitant since then. The 19<sup>th</sup> party congress that ended on October 24, 2017 should set the tone for an even stronger self-promotion of slogans such as “the China road”, “the China experience” or “the China plan” as highly relevant for other developing countries.

I also thought that the China model had a limited appeal at that time. Now the China model has a greater appeal but is also inviting greater scrutiny and backlash. As a case in point, according to Afrobarometer, a polling organization, China ranks second as a development model (24 percent) for all Africa, trailing only the United States (30 percent) and ahead the formal colonial powers (13 percent) and South Africa (11

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67) Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

percent). China is also viewed as having somewhat or very positive influence in their country based on infrastructure, business investment and cost of products by 63 percent of respondents. China has a negative image for the quality of its products<sup>68)</sup>.

I have since realized that a country does not have to have a positive appeal for its institutional practices to be emulated. In fact, adversaries have as strong an incentive to emulate their rivals to compete. As a case in point, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi formed the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) directly under him based on a cabinet resolution on January 1, 2015 to replace the Planning Commission established in 1950. Aayog issued a 3-year action agenda in 2017. That action agenda cited the word “China” 53 times and the word “Chinese” ten times in the main text, mostly in the contexts of Chinese successful experience for India and a sharp contrast with India that has not yet fully realized its potential. By contrast, the plan mentioned the words “the United States,” “U. S.,” and “America” only 13 times, with only two times related to what India can learn from the United States, namely how much more efficient the United States judicial system is than the Indian one<sup>69)</sup>. It does make sense that India can emulate China in some areas since both are 1 billion-plus developing countries. But one can also argue that China has much to learn from India. If a similarly sized country that has even lower GDP per capita has enjoyed democracy for decades now, what is China’s excuse?

Both the Americans and Chinese have a strong sense of their country’s exceptionalism. But what does it mean? Are they justified in their self assessment? We know all nations take pride in themselves and consider themselves special in some ways.

The Americans take great pride in their exceptionalism. There are three meanings of exceptionalism in the American attitudes, namely being the first constitutional democracy, being excellent or being unique from other democracies<sup>70)</sup>. There is some truth in all three. The United States indeed had the oldest democratic constitution that served as a model for future democracies. The United States has also some uniqueness

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68) Afrobarometer, October 24, 2016, accessed July 22, available at <http://afrobarometer.org/press/world-development-information-day-chinas-growing-presence-africa-wins-positive-popular-reviews>.

69) National Institution for Transforming India, “India: Three Year Action Agenda, 2017-18 to 2019-2020,” 2017, accessed on October 26, 2017, available at [http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/coop/India\\_ActionAgenda.pdf](http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/coop/India_ActionAgenda.pdf).

70) Taylor et al., *A Different Democracy*, pp. 2-5.

from other democracies. Taylor et al have conducted a systematic comparative analysis between the United States and thirty other democracies, focusing on constitution, federalism, division of power, election and electoral systems, political parties and interest groups, legislation, executive branch and judicial system. They conclude that the United States is indeed unique in the mix of institutions compared to the other 30 democracies under study. But for mainstream political leaders, much of the policy community and public opinion, the United States is exceptional as indispensable for peace, prosperity and good for the world.

The Chinese think their country is exceptional because it has had one of the longest continuous history in the world. With the country's dramatic rise, the Chinese government and public have gained confidence and believe that their country is uniquely qualified to be a world leader although they have not so far been interested in seeking to change other nations.

Graham Allison has recently argued that a military conflict between the United States and China is "more likely than not" due to the structural logic of the Thucydides's Trap. Thucydides viewed the hegemonic war between Sparta and Athens 2,400 years ago as resulting from the following fact: "It was the rise of Athens, and the fear that this inspired in Sparta, that made war inevitable." In addition to that structural logic, Allison added some other reasons, the civilizational differences being one of them<sup>71</sup>). Allison does not think that a U.S.-China hegemonic war is inevitable. Aaron Friedberg views such a scenario as far more likely. He explicitly contrasts the American and Chinese models.

"For Americans the success of a mainland regime that blends authoritarian rule with market-driven economics is a puzzle and an affront. Such a combination is not supposed to be possible, at least in the long run...China's continued growth under authoritarian rule could complicate and slow America's long-standing efforts to promote the spread of liberal political institutions around the world...As China emerges onto the world stage, it is becoming a source of inspiration and material support for embattled authoritarians in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, as well as Asia<sup>72</sup>)."

Like virtually everyone else in the mainstream policy community and media, Friedberg arguably did not foresee the election of Donald Trump who has taken an

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71) Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), pp. 40-47.

72) Aaron L. Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), p. 44.

“America first” slogan and has not promoted liberal political institutions around the world so far in his presidency. At his inaugural speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 19, 2017, Trump said explicitly that the United States will not seek to impose its political system on other countries but emphasized that he would put American interest in prosperity and security first. He mentioned the word sovereignty 21 times in his speech. But one may argue that Trump represents a drastic departure from the postwar elite consensus in the United States and the so-called “deep state” will keep that agenda alive. Moreover, the U.S. policy will revert to that pro-active internationalist agenda after Trump’s departure. On the other hand, there is a possibility that Trump represents a long-term trend in the United States because of his support base. Political institutions do evolve, not necessarily for the better from a dissenting perspective. Whatever happens in the United States and China, once a rivalry emerges, which is the case now, it is inevitable that both sides will attribute that rivalry partially to the differences in their political values and practices. And it is inevitable that their respective performances will be associated with their political regimes.

Figure 1 Political Regime of the United States and China, 1800-2015

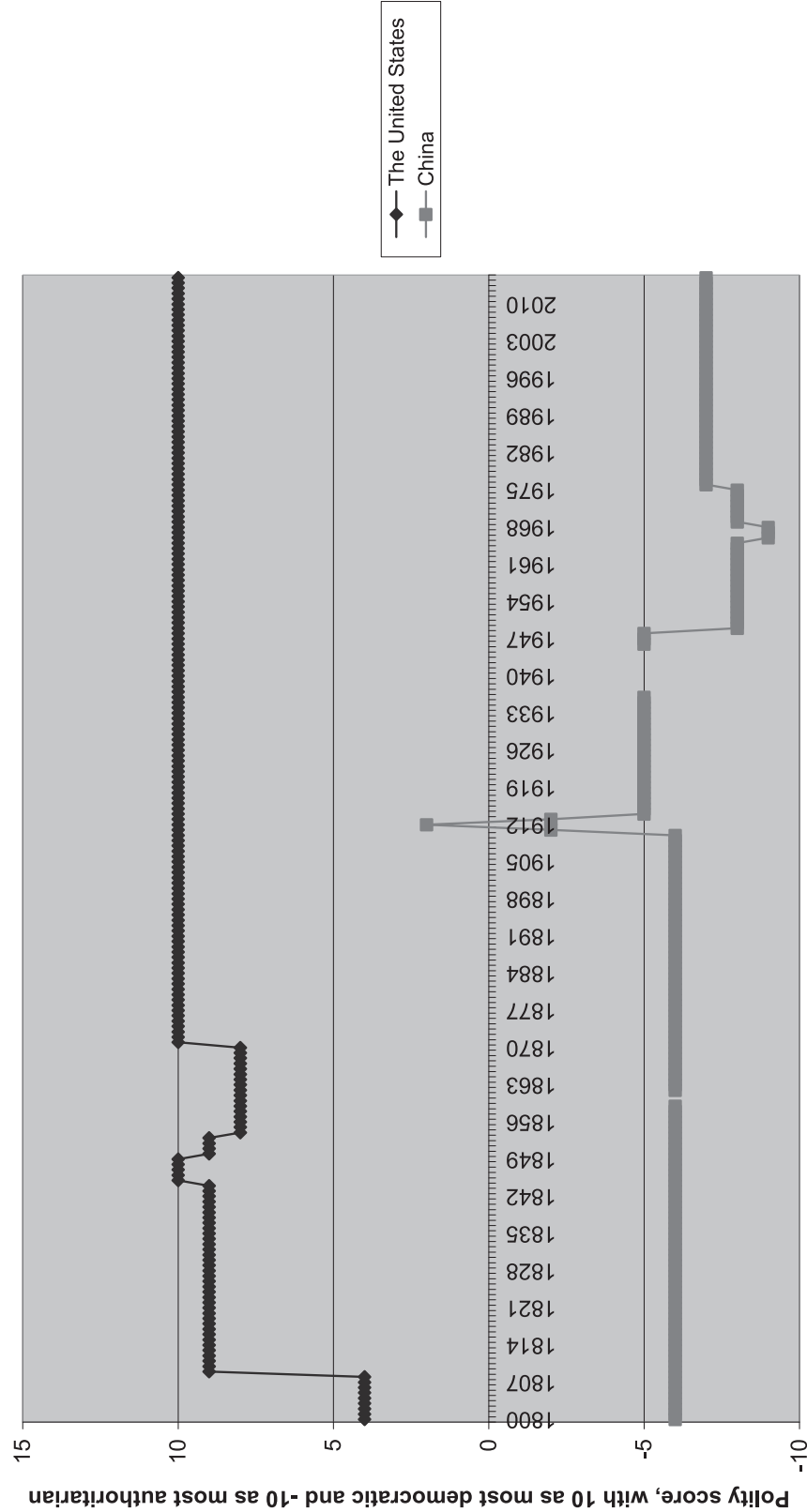


Figure 2 Political Regimes in the World, 1800-2015

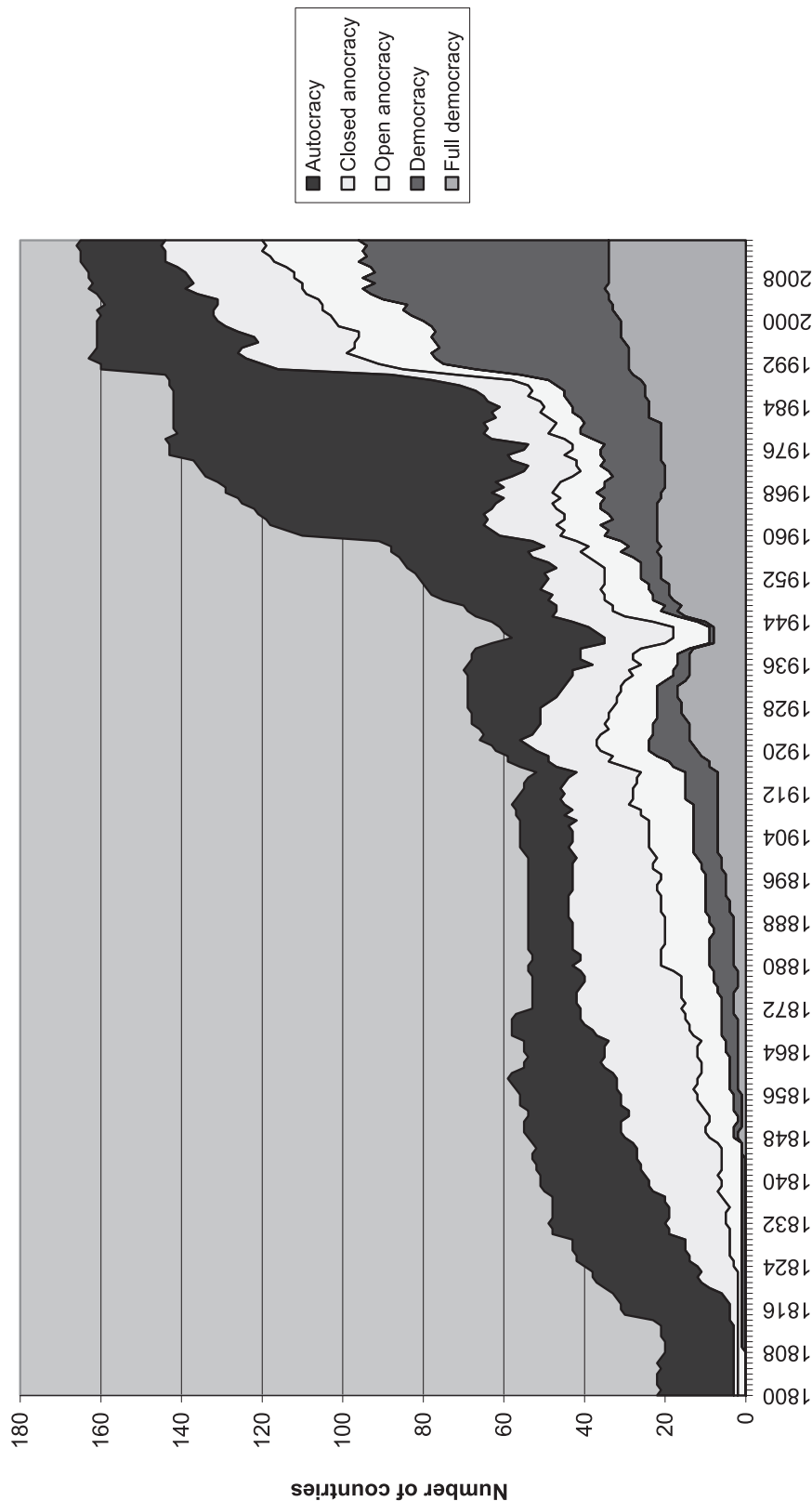




Figure 3 China Rising, 1990 to 2016, USA=100%

