

CHAPTER 9

Populist Authoritarianism

A Preliminary Theoretical Discussion

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE PA MODEL

Following the political culture literature, this book emphasizes the importance of political socialization and its impact on people's political attitudes, values, and behavior. In the early years of the Communist rule, through the Mass Line-inspired political mobilization, collectivization, and provision of social services, China developed a political culture that can be described as populist authoritarianism. Such a political culture consists of several interrelated elements, including the wide acceptance of the Mass Line ideology, dense social capital and group solidarity, high political trust and regime support, strong national identity, direct public political involvement, particularly at the local level, a high level of government responsiveness, and the underdevelopment of intermediate institutions and procedures which are characteristic of a civil society. Together, these elements form the key components of the theoretical framework of Populist Authoritarianism, or the PA model, which is summarized herein from the findings in the previous chapters.

The Continuity of the Mass Line Ideology

Mass Line serves as the ideological foundation of the PA model. Since the 1940s when Mao Zedong first articulated the Mass Line, it became a widely accepted guiding principle of governance by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). As discussed in chapter 1, the Mass Line became an effective instrument for political mobilization in rural China. The CCP relied on peasant support to defeat the Nationalist Party and eventually seized political

power and founded the Communist regime in 1949. From 1949 to the late 1970s, the CCP continued to use mass political campaigns to mobilize political support and promote social and economic change.

Many people in and outside of China believed that such mass campaigns led to disastrous consequences due to the over-concentration of political power in the hands of Mao and his followers and their obsession with ideological purity. While the post-Mao leaders in the CCP showed some willingness to avoid the cult of personality and emphasized group leadership and adopted limited intra-party democracy, there was enough evidence that their populist orientation continued to dominate the CCP's governing style,¹ particularly in its effort to gain popular support through public campaigns (see chapter 1).

One example was the public campaign against prostitution in the early 2010s. Tens of thousands of police were dispatched in different cities, and many prostitutes and their customers were arrested on the spot. Their photos were widely publicized by the police, and some of them were chained and forced to walk in the streets as a way of public humiliation.²

Another example of public political campaign was anti-corruption. After the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the CCP was determined to clear up corruption among government officials and decided to launch a nationwide campaign under the leadership of the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI). Such a campaign once again relied on mass movement. The CCDI encouraged the public to directly report the wrongdoings of government officials and then punished these officials publicly. On the CCDI's official website, 34 officials were exposed and dismissed within the first 15 days of July 2014, and there were 500 cases of dismissal of government officials from February 8, 2013, to July 15, 2014, averaging almost one dismissal every day.³ Such mass campaigns remind people of the same techniques used during the Cultural Revolution in order to remove the unpopular Party and government officials through public humiliation. This tendency of continued mass movement and even the mob mentality in the post-Mao era were described in detail in chapter 6.

There is no clear sign that the Mass Line will be replaced by institutional measures in problem solving. Even though the CCP was talking about building institutional procedures such as the rule of law, such effort has easily given way to the direct interaction between the state and society every time there was an urgent problem.

The Mass Line mentality is not an invention by the CCP; it is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese political culture emerged in the dynastic history. The rulers served the Law of the Universe (*tian xingdao*) which meant the provision of public goods. The masses granted their loyalty and

support only when the rulers fulfilled their responsibilities. As happened many times in Chinese history, the masses did not hesitate to overthrow the rulers when the latter failed to deliver. Such a direct relationship between the ruler and the ruled can be traced back to many dynasties and is still deeply rooted in the minds of the masses even though China is moving into a modern and industrial society.⁴

Social Capital and Interpersonal Trust

In addition to Mass Line as the ideological foundation, the social origin of the PA model is rooted in the continuous supply of strong interpersonal trust and rich social capital. As shown in chapter 4, China consistently ranked at the top among the countries and regions where data were available. The number of Chinese survey respondents who answered "most people can be trusted" ranged from 50% to 60%, while many other countries and regions were at the level of 30%, including industrial democracies such as the United States. When the meaning of interpersonal trust was dissected into traditional kinship trust, communal trust, and civic trust, communal trust stood out as the most significant contribution to China's high level of interpersonal trust. The existence of communal trust and its strong impact in interpersonal trust further provided the necessary social capital and more effectively facilitated regime support, national identity, political interest, political efficacy, and volunteerism than kinship trust and civic trust.

The origin of communal trust can be traced back to the Mass Line-based political mobilization and the primitive accumulation of social capital in the early days of the CCP's governing experiences, as elaborated in chapter 1. The rural and urban communities that were formed during the People's Commune Movement and around the urban work units in the 1950s generated a sense of community solidarity that continued to exist during China's economic marketization. While communal trust may decline as China further industrializes, it is likely to maintain its high level as long as the CCP stays on its course of the Mass Line.

The findings about high interpersonal trust in autocratic China question the relationship between democracy and social capital. It is possible that social capital is not necessarily a product of liberal democratic political culture. Historically, interpersonal trust as an important reflection of social capital also grew in other non-democratic societies. In a refreshing counterview of the traditional civic culture literature, Berman (1997) conducts a historical study of the collapse of the Weimer Republic and the rise of Nazi Germany. She contradicts the theory of civic culture and

democracy advocated by what she calls the "neo-Tocquevillean" theorists such as Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993) and Fukuyama (2000) and argues that social capital and citizen political activism emerged in the Weimar Republic as a reaction to the weakness of the Weimar political institutions. The National Socialist Party mobilized the social energy, network, and skills associated with German social capital and successfully established the Nazi regime. For Berman, civic culture and social capital led Germany to abandon democracy and adopt totalitarianism.

Both Berman's study of Germany and the findings about China in chapter 4 of this book suggest that social capital can be utilized for regime consolidation by democratic as well as autocratic governments.

Political Contention and Participation

As a result of the Mass Line style of political mobilization and the rich community-based social capital, the PA model further encourages political contention and high levels of mass political participation. Frequent mass political mobilization and public campaigns under the Mass Line ideology resulted in constant public involvement in local and national politics and increased direct public political exposure and awareness. Community-based social capital and interpersonal trust strengthened the sense of group solidarity among the members of communities that facilitated group action and open contention and confrontation against political authorities.

The findings in chapter 6 show that group protests were widespread in the contentious political cultural environment; the leaders of such protests were often social and political elites who experienced more political socialization in the Populist Authoritarian culture; collective protests were more likely to take place in the provinces with histories of factional fighting among the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

The same tendency of contentious politics was also found in chapter 7 in the 2012 China Labor Dynamics Survey. In that survey, about 90% of the employees had at least one dispute in the past two years, and over 80% of the disputants took action to solve their problems through either individual or group negotiation, reflecting a high level of political activism and participation.

As mentioned previously, in addition to the Mass Line mentality, such political activism is partially a result of interpersonal trust, which formulates the strong personal ties that are necessary for high-risk collective action. For example, the participants of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s in the United States relied on such strong personal ties formulated in their church communities and successfully fought against

racial discrimination (Gladwell 2010). In China, interpersonal trust that originated in local community networks helped the protest organizers to launch collective action against local authorities, and it also encouraged local residents to take the risk to participate in such activities.

Weak Institutions

As a consequence of direct mass political participation, another feature of the PA model is that it produces relatively weak political institutions, including the underdevelopment of the rule of law, intermediate social organizations, and the electoral system. This is a result of the CCP's obsession with the PA model that requires direct connection between the state and society in which both sides can reach each other quickly without the filtering of the often protracted institutional processes.

As discussed in the case studies in chapter 6, Chinese protestors frequently ignored institutional procedures and demanded intervention from the highest levels such as the provincial governments or even from Beijing. Similarly in chapter 7, in solving labor disputes, Chinese employees often resorted to direct negotiations with their employers, almost completely bypassing the intermediate institutions such as the court, trade unions, the media, the legislature, and the functional departments in the government.

The underdevelopment of the intermediate institutions is both a cause and a result of the direct mass political participation. The weakness of institutions provides the justification for the public to ignore them and seek solutions directly from the authorities. The interference from above in the process of problem solving further weakens the role of the intermediate institutions and their procedures, and sometimes makes them irrelevant. One such example is the trade unions, which were almost completely excluded from the process of labor dispute resolution (see chapter 7).

On the surface, the slow development of democratic institutions seems to contradict the recent development of intra-party democracy that some scholars have noticed (Zheng 2010, 2014a, 2014b). Inside the CCP, elections are more competitive, leadership transition is more predictable, decision-making is more transparent, and there are more reliable mechanisms for checks and balances between party organizations.

While such new trends serve to consolidate the power and adaptability of the Party, so far there is no sign that the Party elites intend to loosen their grip of political monopoly and spread intra-Party democracy to Chinese society as a whole. In contrast, as shown in this book, there is ample evidence that the relationship between the state and society continues

to rely on the Mass Line, and civil institutions remain weak and underdeveloped. Chinese leaders are more interested in seeking solutions in Chinese classics, rather than in building a Western-style liberal democracy (Buckley 2014). Even within the CCP, intra-Party democracy is by no means entirely consistent with the Western concept of the rule of law. One example is the anti-corruption campaign in the mid-2010s. Accused party officials were often “presumed guilty,” humiliated publicly, and dismissed without due legal procedures (Jacobs and Buckley 2014).

The PA model does not exclude the study of political institutions. It serves as a reminder that institutions in China may not carry the exact features of the Weberian rational bureaucracy and that Chinese politics will have to be understood in both formal and informal contexts. Some scholars have already incorporated informal elements in the study of formal institutions in China. For example, Lily Tsai demonstrated the importance of kinship ties and informal folk religious organizations in village governance and public goods provision in rural China (Tsai 2007a, 2007b). Similarly, Shih, Adolph, and Liu (2012) reminded their readers that informal factional ties played a more significant role in party officials’ career advancement than formal performance measures. One topic for future research is how the CCP’s effort at institution building is shaped by its populist authoritarian style of governance.

The Hyper-Responsive Government

The Mass Line ideology, the contentious style of mass politics, and the high level of public political activism and participation in the PA model require a highly responsive government for it to maintain political power and stability. While the Populist Authoritarian state uses force without hesitation when its very survival is threatened, it also spends a lot of time and energy maintaining political power by responding to public demand. Consequently, people in a PA society are more likely to believe that their government responds to their needs than those in a democratic society. For example, in chapter 5, 77% of the Chinese survey respondents believed that their government were responsive to their demand, while only 36% of the respondents thought so in democratic Taiwan. Assuming that the survey samples were representative and the respondents were telling the truth, this was a huge gap.

But why do autocratic regimes respond to public demand more than democratic regimes? The answer partially lies in the institutional design of democracy, particularly in the electoral system. Democratic elections set the rules for different political interests to compete freely and to accept

victories and losses. They provide the ultimate legitimacy for the winners as long as they receive majority votes. Therefore, majority rule is the cornerstone of democratic regime legitimacy.

One problem—or advantage, depending on how one views it—with majority rule in democratic societies is the lack of the need to satisfy everyone. Politicians only work to get elected regardless of the winning margin. In the case of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian was elected in 2000 with only 39% of the votes, and the winning margin was only 0.028%. While it is true that the losing voters can wait until the next election (Przeworski 1991), such institutional arrangement can create a large number of disgruntled voters who show a weak support of the incumbent government.

The second problem of representative democracy is that it may make elected politicians less likely to respond to public opinion between elections. Once elected, their jobs are guaranteed until the next election. As a result, the public may become apathetic toward such a system (Dalton 1999).

In contrast, the single-party institutional design requires a PA regime to be more alert to public opinion in order to survive politically. In a formal model, Lorentzen (2013) shows that authoritarian regimes are compelled to allow and even encourage limited expression of discontent in order to target its response to public demand and to avoid potential political instability. Although they don't have to compete in elections, their legitimacy lies in the claim that they represent the interest of the majority. Lacking free elections, which provide a simple but effective yardstick for legitimacy, a PA regime can feel insecure even when it sees a single protester on the street. Such institutional deficiency explains why the PA state tends to be hyper-responsive at times.

Some people may question the appropriateness of comparing government responsiveness in democracies and autocracies. For them, democratic citizens have higher expectations of their rights, and they make stronger demands with their governments that routinely respond to public requests. Consequently, they can become easily dissatisfied and underestimate their governments' responsiveness. The authoritarian citizens, on the other hand, live in a political system where government responsiveness is supposedly not required. They can be very happy and overestimate government responsiveness when their government does very little to satisfy their requests. In other words, perceived government responsiveness does not mean actual responsiveness.

Although this book examines Chinese citizens' perceived government responsiveness, some readers may argue that such perception can be manipulated by the officially controlled media; and perceived responsiveness is not the same as actual responsiveness. Yet there are reasons to believe

that a PA regime does need to respond to public opinion in order to keep its legitimacy. It is not very difficult to find evidence of the PA state in China being sensitive to public opinion. In addition to censoring certain opinions and using force when necessary, it probably spends more time and resources in responding to public demands by policy adjustment. For example, the ethnic unrests in Tibet and Xinjiang not only resulted in Internet censorship and political control, they also brought huge amounts of economic aid to these regions. Similarly, the agricultural tax was abolished in 2006 in order to reduce public discontent and promote regime legitimacy in rural China (Whyte 2010). Some scholars even complain that the Chinese government is sometimes overly responsive to public nationalism in its foreign policy making (Shirk 2011).

Even if it is true that perceived government responsiveness is based on different realities in democracies and autocracies, perception itself is important because it is related to political trust and regime support. Ultimately, regime survival depends as much on the real action of the government as on people's *perceived* benefits of their government's action. In short, it makes sense to compare democracies and autocracies as long as government responsiveness explains political trust in both types of political systems.

Strong Political Support

The final component of the PA model is strong political support. This is a natural consequence of the Mass Line ideology, strong community solidarity, widespread public involvement and political participation, and a paradigmatically responsive government.

Evidence of strong political support was found in chapters 2, 3, and 5. When political support was measured in different ways, including confidence in the key political institutions, national identity, satisfaction with government performance, support for one's own political system, or support for incumbent leaders, Chinese respondents consistently demonstrated one of the highest levels among the countries and regions where survey data were available. Chapter 8 further confirms that even taking into consideration a few percentage points of political desirability effect, the overall level of political support in China is still significantly higher than in many liberal democracies. Among the alternative explanations, such as political mobilization, economic development, Confucian cultural tradition, and internal efficacy explored in chapter 5, government responsiveness stood out as the most important reason for regime support.

In recent years, while the CCP suppressed any external challenge to its political monopoly, it took a number of measures to maintain political stability within the PA framework. It promoted within-system participation and expression of different opinions, encouraged the emergence of politically energized social groups such as migrant workers, co-opted private entrepreneurs, rural residents, certain ethnic minorities, and folk religious followers,⁵ and tolerated ideological diversity within the Communist Party itself, while incorporating these new social forces into the framework of democratic centralism which is one of the key components of Mass Line (Salmenkari 2010). Lacking competitive elections, the CCP feels compelled to secure public trust by responding to public demand. The ability to maintain this Populist Authoritarian political culture is one reason for the CCP's sustainability.

Compared to liberal democracy, however, China's PA model is inherently unstable because it provides little institutional guarantee for personnel and policy changes and for conflict resolution. Regime legitimacy and political trust based on the government's hyper-responsiveness cannot be easily sustained. Satisfying everyone's demands is simply too costly and too exhausting. Without the institutional buffers such as elections and legal procedures, the public mood can swing violently and cause political earthquakes that can directly threaten the survival of the political system. Therefore, autocratic political trust, no matter how strong it may seem, is very costly to sustain. In liberal democracies that enjoy institutional stability, citizens can be distrustful of the incumbent government, but they can count on expressing their dissatisfaction in future elections and resolve their conflict in the legal system. Consequently, some people may argue that democratic distrust is healthy and authoritarian trust is unhealthy.

Some people may further argue that political trust may not be as important in liberal democracies as in authoritarian societies because democracies function through well-established institutions and do not rely on a particular party or group of leaders to sustain themselves. But if political trust is defined by the measures developed in chapter 5, namely, trust in the key institutions, trust in political leaders, national identity, and trust in the political system itself, then it seems that any government, authoritarian or not, can benefit from promoting these ideas. The question is at what cost and to what extent. With well-functioning political institutions, perhaps liberal democracies can afford to acquire less political trust and a larger number of politically unhappy citizens than authoritarian regimes that rely on political trust more heavily for their survival.

In sum, the PA model includes at least six key elements: (1) the Mass Line ideology, (2) rich social capital, (3) high degrees of public political activism and contention, (4) weak political institutions, (5) a highly

responsive government, and (6) strong regime support. The preceding discussion showed the interrelationship between these elements. Future research may further examine their causal connections in a formal model.

THE PA MODEL AND CIVIC CULTURE

Scholars have shown a relationship between political culture and regime stability, but mostly in established democracies. For example, in the civic culture literature, the smooth functioning of democratic regimes depends on how well developed civic culture is. In their classic study, Almond and Verba (1963) define civic culture as the individual citizens' satisfaction with and support for their country's political institutions, national identity, involvement in political activities, a sense of political efficacy, social trust, and social tolerance (also see Kavanagh 1989; Conradt 1989; Sani 1989; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Eberly 2000; Himmelfarb 2000; Fukuyama 2000; Sabetti 2007; Wnuk-Lipinski 2007).

Yet in the post-World War II era, the relationship between civic culture and democracy has experienced significant change (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Torcal and Montero 2006). While public support for the democratic system *per se* continues to be strong in Western democratic societies (Dalton 1999; Norris 2011), certain elements of the civic culture have declined, such as government support (Abramowitz 1989; Dalton 1999), political participation (Kavanagh 1989), and interpersonal trust (Putnam 1995; Newton 1999).

Instead, political culture has shifted in post-industrial democracies from survival to self-expressive values—or emancipative orientations (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel and Inglehart 2007; Inglehart 2007). These post-materialist emancipative values include individual freedom, civic action, life satisfaction, social tolerance, and interpersonal trust. Noticeably missing from the list are political support and national identity. Perhaps the most important difference between civic culture and the emancipative orientations is the shift from the group to the individual. The primary goal of the post-industrial politics is to benefit the individual, and the country as a whole becomes secondary.

While Western industrial democracies have shifted toward the emancipative values, empirical evidence shows that some elements of the classic civic culture can be found in an autocratic society like China, such as political support, national identity, social capital, and political involvement. These elements of the classic civic culture are likely the results of the regime's "primitive accumulation" of social and political capital in the early years, as well as the Mass Line doctrine.

THE PA MODEL AND THE BA STATE

Existing studies of authoritarian politics explain authoritarian regime resiliency by emphasizing the top-down control by political elites and bureaucratic institutions. Such studies are often described as focusing on bureaucratic authoritarianism, or the BA state. For example, in South America from the 1960s to the 1980s, the bureaucratic authoritarian states such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay successfully resisted democratization not by relying on individual dictators but through bureaucratic military control by technocrats, while brutally suppressing the labor movements and other political parties (O'Donnell 1988; Dickovick and Eastwood 2013).

The BA state finds its resemblance in China through many studies by China scholars, such as Oksenberg and Liberthal's book (1988) on the flattened, protracted, and fragmented bureaucratic rule in China, Liberthal's comprehensive study on the Chinese bureaucratic authoritarian political system (2004), Landry's in-depth research on career advancement in Chinese local bureaucracies (2008), and Manion's works on dealing with bureaucratic corruption (2004) and the bureaucratic retirement system (1993).

In his comprehensive study of 138 countries with authoritarian political experiences from 1946 to 2008, Svobik (2012) seems to think that China has solved the two key problems that make many authoritarian regimes rely on dictatorship and repression: elite power sharing and mass political control. He shows that power sharing has been institutionalized in China by term limit and collective leadership, thereby avoiding the dictatorship and cult of personality under Mao (also see Zheng 2010). Svobik is cautious, however, about future regime stability in China, as he points to the importance of power balance among the top ruling elites as a condition for successful power sharing and political stability.

For the second problem—mass political control, Svobik (2012) thinks that the CCP has effectively implemented the incentive structure that ties its members' political loyalty to their career development and material benefits. This mechanism is effective in producing the rank-and-file political activists (party members) who support the regime.

While the studies just discussed provide highly sophisticated and insightful discussion on authoritarian political sustainability in China and elsewhere in the world, they are studies about political elites and they mostly leave the masses out of the picture. One problem in China (and elsewhere) is that political elites only constitute a very small number. For example, the Communist Party members in China only comprise about

8% of the population. In Svoboda's study (2012), his reason to leave the more than 90% of the masses out of the discussion is that most authoritarian regime changes (68%) are the results of elite power struggles, and only 11% of such changes in his data set were caused by popular uprisings (figure 1.1, p. 5).

Authoritarian regimes may not fall due to popular uprisings, but the fear of such action often is a constraint to their rule, particularly when the masses are protesting in China almost on a daily basis. It is obvious that the authoritarian regime in China is using other means to keep political support in addition to recruiting the party loyalists.

In fact, top political elites often try to use the masses to achieve their political goals in their power struggle. In this sense, elites and the masses are often closely connected. Elite power struggle does not take place in isolation. It is sometimes more directly connected to public opinion precisely because of the absence of democratic institutions such as elections, independent social organizations, and the rule of law. As discussed earlier, the authoritarian leaders in China often attempted to connect directly to the masses in order to weaken their political opponents at the top, such as Mao's appeal to the Red Guards to overthrow his political opponents during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s, Zhao Ziyang's attempt in Tiananmen Square, though failed, to connect to the student protestors in order to counterbalance the factional struggle within the CCP's Political Bureau in 1989, and Xi Jinping's effort at mobilizing mass political support by launching nationwide anti-corruption campaigns.

In sum, the PA model shares with bureaucratic authoritarianism the importance of the state, but it differs from the BA state in that mass mobilization, rather than demobilization, plays a decisive role in the political dynamic that propels policy making and regime sustainability.

THE PA MODEL AND EXISTING STUDIES OF MASS POLITICS

While the literature on bureaucratic authoritarianism rightly emphasizes the importance of the top, existing studies on mass politics provide detailed and rich information about the bottom of Chinese society. As discussed in the previous chapters, O'Brien and Li's (2005a) study on the "rightful resistance" tells the story of how the masses are able to successfully resist local governments' unpopular decisions and policies by quoting more general policy guidelines from higher level governments (also see Thireau and Hua 2007).

One question that needs to be further addressed from the aforementioned studies is whether the state and its political elites passively react to the pressure from below or proactively anticipate such bottom-up political energy in their design of the political system. The PA model shows that such a system of bypassing local authorities and reaching up to higher level governments may not be a random and passive act, and it is rooted in the idea of the Mass Line. While this book is mostly about individual citizens' attitudes and behavior, and not about government policy and organizations, there is enough evidence in the existing studies to show that scapegoating is a frequently used tactic by higher level authorities to blame those below and maintain mass political support at the center.

These studies include Manion's work on the central government's effort at exposing local officials' corruption in order to shift public attention from the top; Landry's book (2008) on promoting more capable cadres to higher level governments while leaving the less qualified officials at the local level; Lorentzen's (2013) research on implementing higher level policy initiatives locally in order to test public opinion and screen out unfeasible projects and unpopular officials; Perry's (2001) finding that localized protests are most likely tolerated; and others who also find that the PA state in China often relies on mass protests to maintain and consolidate its power (Saich 2007; Stockmann and Gallagher 2011; and Kennedy 2012). All these findings suggest that the PA state is not a passive reactor but an active participant in the process of mass politics.

Another group of existing studies on mass politics is the traditional political culture literature (Shi 2001; Shi and Lu 2010; Lu and Shi 2015; Shi 2015). This literature focuses on Confucian values and the kinship tradition in explaining mass support of the elite and the elite's effort at serving the masses. In this view, it is the paternalistic relationship between the state and the masses that explains the sustainability of the regime. In other words, it is the Confucian harmony that holds the state and society together.

While such a view makes a significant contribution to the comparative understanding of often misunderstood concepts such as democracy (Shi and Lu 2010; Lu and Shi 2015; Shi 2015) and the non-confrontational aspect of the state-society relationship, the PA model can contribute to the often confrontational style of the Chinese political culture. Further, while recognizing the role of Confucian paternalistic values, the PA model emphasizes the more recent political experience in the CCP's rule and its impact in regime sustainability. In short, the PA model and the paternalistic theory together form a more complete explanation of both the harmonious and contentious elements of Chinese political culture.

THE PA MODEL AND THE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

In comparative political studies, authoritarian regimes are typically seen as political systems in which political elites attempt to control and manipulate the masses (Svolik 2012). Such an approach assumes that in these authoritarian societies, there are minimum degrees of social and political rights, individual freedom, interpersonal trust, citizen political participation, regime responsiveness, and political trust of the regime.⁴ Early studies showed that these traits were the exclusive products of civic culture and liberal democratic institutions (Almond and Verba 1963).

Comparative political studies have made many important advances since the early studies of civic culture and democracy. One such advance is the availability of large-scale cross-country public opinion survey data, such as the World Values Surveys, the World Barometer Surveys, and the International Social Surveys Programme (ISSP). The empirical evidence from these surveys provides only weak or no support for the relationship between democracy on one hand, and individual freedom, interpersonal trust, political participation, government responsiveness, and regime support and legitimacy on the other hand. In contrast, some of the authoritarian countries demonstrated the strongest regime support in these surveys (Norris 2011). These findings suggest that traditional understanding of authoritarianism needs to be further refined, and democracy alone cannot explain the existence of these concepts that are key phenomena in comparative political studies.

Based on the findings from more than 20 Chinese and cross-national public opinion surveys, the PA model developed in this book makes three contributions to comparative political research. First, it points out the universal nature of politics and governance by demonstrating that similar political outcomes can be generated by different governments, regardless of whether they are democratic or nondemocratic, rooted in different cultures, and operate in formal or informal institutions. The findings in this book caution the exclusive reliance on democratic institutions as the sole source of the political phenomena mentioned earlier and show that other types of political systems and political cultures can also produce similar results. In other words, liberal democracy may not be a very useful variable in explaining why people participate in politics, why they identify with their country, why the government responds to public demand, and why people trust their political system and each other.

Second, the cross-system nature of the preceding political phenomena calls for the expansion of these concepts. For example, political support does not only include supporting democracy but also any government.

Political participation means not only elections but also protest, informal group negotiations, and petitions. This conceptual enrichment is particularly necessary in comparative political studies. Of course, there is always the danger of *concept stretching*—a process whereby the same concept carries different meanings in different societies (Peters 1998). Such danger should not stop researchers from contextually defining abstract concepts in comparative political studies. Overly rigid definition leads to what can be called *concept freezing* that limits cross-country and cross-system comparisons. As long as the concrete definitions are consistent with the abstract concept, such comparative studies can often generate interesting findings, while avoiding concept stretching. For example, even if voting and protesting are different forms, they can be studied under the same label of political participation that is defined as bottom-up action aimed at influencing political outcomes.

Third, the PA model did not grow idiosyncratically in today's China. It can be applied to studying other authoritarian societies with similar characteristics. One group of such political systems to which the PA model is relevant is the totalist regimes (Tsou 1986) with strong populist orientations, such as China under Mao, Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh, and North Korea today. The other category of countries to which the PA model can be applied is the post-revolutionary societies such as Castro's Cuba, post-revolutionary Iran, Vietnam after Ho Chi Minh, and of course, China after Mao. Finally, the PA model is also applicable to some electoral democracies with a strong populist orientation, such as Argentina under Perón, Venezuela under Chávez, Russia under Putin, and the populist governments under Thaksin and Yingluck in Thailand. In addition to the populist orientation, these societies also share with varying degrees the traits of the PA model such as strong regime support (Norris 2011), responsive governments, social capital and interpersonal trust, strong public involvement and political participation, direct relationship between the state and society, the relative weakness of political institutions, and inherent political instability.

In conclusion, the PA model can serve to enrich comparative studies by broadening the key political concepts while avoiding concept stretching, by going beyond the traditional distinction of democracy versus non-democracy while emphasizing the universal experience of governance, and by refreshing the traditional definition of authoritarian regimes through the distinction between elite authoritarianism and populist authoritarianism.