Political Reform in China in the 1990s: Implications for the Future

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The most important change in the world in the late 1980s was the disintegration of Soviet and Eastern European state power and the termination of the Cold War. It is a miracle that despite the "Disturbance 1989," China has managed to achieve rapid and sustainable economic growth, and has basically maintained political and social stability. Such a miracle has attracted much attention, and has elicited varied interpretations. No matter from what perspective one interprets this phenomenon or what beliefs one subscribes to, it is an irrefutable fact that profound and irreversible changes have taken place in China.

How can these great changes be explained? How should Chinese reform be evaluated? To understand Chinese reform as strictly economic and not political, or to accept the view that there is a complete absence of democracy in Chinese political reform, does nothing to convincingly elucidate the great social changes that have taken place over the past decade, nor does it conform to the facts. These changes are reflected not only in economic growth, and ameliorated quality of life, but, more significantly, in the profound transformation of social structure and in the development of popular conceptions of private ownership and civil rights. To cite Michael Toros, "It is usually impossible for one country to achieve political or social developments without relative changes in its social, political and economic "institutions"" (Toros, 1992). However, such far-reaching changes, especially changes in the political field, are not as obvious as the economic ones. As Andrew Walder put it, this is "the quiet revolution from within" (Hsu, 2001).

The aim of this article is to introduce the basic practices and elements of Chinese political reform initiated in the 1990s, and show the qualitative distinctions from the reforms of the 1980s. Because the reforms of the past decade necessarily developed out of earlier reforms, and to better help readers understand the trends in the political reforms of the 1990s, the first part of this article briefly reviews Chinese reform in the 1980s. The second part documents the basic content of the political reforms of the 1990s, identifying and broadly analyzing three basic features therein. The third part examines future prospects for political reform in China.

A Brief Review of Chinese Reform in the 1980s

The reforms first initiated at the end of 1978 in China have continued to develop for more than two decades. To analyze the performance of political reform in China in the 1990s, a brief review must be made of the reforms of the previous decade.

In the late 1970s when China proposed the goals of the "Four Modernizations" (i.e. comprehensive modernization of industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense), a historic process of social transition—from agricultural society to industrialized society—began. The reasons for China’s poverty and underdevelopment during the first three decades after the establishment of the state lie in the

Abstract: Chinese political reform in the 1980s was concentrated largely on reversing many of the affects of the Cultural Revolution, such as the “personality cult” and the attitude of “what I say goes,” and improving efficiency through streamlining administration and delegating power to the lower levels. The reforms of that decade demonstrate a certain passivity and vacillation. In comparison, the political reforms enacted in the 1990s tended to be theoretically conscious, entailing a progressive advancing political reform, which promoted change at many levels, concerning relationship between micro and macro, central and local, and state and society. Autonomy, internationality, and progressiveness were the key characteristics of Chinese political reform in the 1990s. In the near future, political reform in China will begin storming age-old fortifications, and only through uninterrupted institutional innovation can China effectively avoid a cataclysm from an "explosion of participation."
ideological commitment of the Chinese Communist Party to the idea of class struggle. The state placed very little emphasis during this period on economic development (Resolution on Historic Issues of the Party after Establishment of the State, 1981). The reform policies adopted in the late 1970s, aimed at "reinvigorating the economy," stemmed from a desire to rectify the widespread poverty and from a recognition of the importance of economic development. In other words, the reforms in their initial conception were focused on the national economic system, and their primary objective was the restructuring of the highly concentrated socialist planning economy and "Danwei/unit management" system.

However, this did not go as smoothly as people expected. Of the many obstacles encountered, the greatest were the constrictions of a timeworn ideology and socialist economy. This entailed a highly concentrated planning economy based on public ownership, and a centralized political system: "No separation between the Party and the government work, no separation between the Party/government and the enterprise affairs, no separation between the Party and government work and business units work and no separation between the Party/government work and the mass work. The highly centralized power system is carried out in economic, political, cultural and social sectors. Under such a system, the systems of economy, science and technology, and other sectors are politically, nationally and administratively institutionalized to a big margin, or say, they have become the attachment to the Party and the State with very limited independence and autonomy of their own" (Wang, 2000). This was because the highly centralized planning economic system and the old ideology were intertwined with the unified and highly concentrated political system. So, to reinvigorate the economy required overcoming the limitations of the outdated ideology and centralized regime. At the same time, a nationwide critical rethinking movement was launched to clear up the confusion caused by the Cultural Revolution. The focal point in rethinking the Cultural Revolution was the question of whether political authority was a "God" or a "Person." This rethinking also led to a national discussion as to whether "practice is the only standard to check the truth." This discussion raised strong criticisms of the previous practice/view of "political leader as god," propelling political authority to descend from the "temple" to the "earth." Moreover, it directly promoted the ideological emancipation of the people, and accelerated an ideological transformation. Good examples are seen in the theoretical ideas of "white cat and black cat" popular in the initial stages of the reform and of the "criterion of judgment based on whether it will be favorable for the development of the productivity of the socialist society, whether it will be favorable for strengthening of the comprehensive national power of a socialist country, and whether it will be favorable for improvement of the people's living standard" (Deng, 1992). In a certain sense, this far-reaching ideological emancipation movement created an atmosphere adequate for the initial education and propagation of values of democracy and human rights, and laid an ideological foundation and set forth the theoretical prerequisites for the promotion of political reform.

Under the dual pressure of economic reform and the movement for ideological emancipation, the reform of the traditional centralized political system had to be added to the agenda. Actually, China was facing the same issue that all of the developing countries faced during the course of political modernization, "how to transfer the legitimacy from individuals to the state power" (Almond, 1987). The reform of the political system carried out from the early to mid 1980s was primarily manifested in the following two respects.

Firstly, negative dynamics in the political life of the Party and the State, caused by the "cult of the individual" and the attitude of "what I say goes," which had appeared during the Cultural Revolution, were rectified through structural changes. Among these were the establishment of a provision on retirement and term limits for leaders at various levels (Deng, 1993), the transformation of the Chairman Responsibility System into the Secretariat of the Central Party Committee and the General Secretary Responsibility System (Resolution on Establishment of Central Secretariat), the reestablishment of the Discipline Inspection Commission of the Central Party Committee, the enlargement of the powers of the National People's Congress, the restoration of the Procuratorate and Court, dissolved during the "Cultural Revolution," the prohibition of the Party and its administrative organs from handling legal cases (Constitution of the People's Republic of China, 1982), and the restoration of the Lawyer's System, then suspended for 23 years. The above measures were taken to reform the malfunctioning political system, formed during the Cultural Revolution and characterized by highly centralized individual power. However, these reforms did not succeed in substantially breaking the old patterns of the traditional political system. As a matter of fact, it was a disguised restoration of the pre-Cultural Revolution system, rather than true political reform.

Secondly, in order to meet the requirements of "reinvigorating the economy," political reforms focusing on improving government efficiency,
streamlining administration and delegating power to the lower levels were enacted. For instance, in rural areas, reform was carried out on the existing People's Commune Structure: the administration township government was established to separate governmental administration from commune management (Notice on Implementation of Separation of Commune Management from Government Administration and Establishment of Township Government, 1983). In cities, government functions were separated from those of business, and companies could now carry out independent business operations, independent management, and had full responsibility for their own profits or losses and development. An administrative power division was created between the central and local sectors, and the greater decision-making power was granted to the local sector. In order to create a clear distinction between Party and government, policies were adopted to separate the functions of the two. Obviously, historical factors effect reform implementation—speeding up, slowing down or stopping the process—at any given moment. And Chinese political reform found itself stalled after the political disturbances of the summer of 1989.

There was no theoretical preparation for the reform of the political system, which was not taken as a process independent from the economic reforms, with its own unique connotations and value orientation. In other words, there was a lack of rational thinking regarding the goals and values of political reform, such as democracy and legislation, and as a result, the political reforms of 1980s were characterized by a passiveness and wavering. Passiveness here implies that the political reforms lacked an intrinsic dynamic power, necessitating further development in order to satisfy the requirements of the economic reforms and public opinion. Wavering means that these reforms were practiced as uncertain experimentation, fueled by a social psychology that sought stability and feared disturbance. Therefore, the reforms of the 1980s vacillated back and forth, and their effects were not as evident as those of the economic reforms. Although many people’s expectations were not met, the reforms were carried out under extremely complicated circumstances and still managed to break through many old barriers. After all, the political reforms of the 1990s were based on those of the previous decade, and any of the more recent political developments are unthinkable without the reforms of the 1980s. If political reform in the 1980s is to be summarized in a single sentence, it would be: propelled by the strength of economic development, political reforms played an active role in breaking down the cumbersome restrictions of the old political system, and silently sowed the seeds of democracy.

Main Content and Special Features of Chinese Political Reform of The 1990s

By the early 1990s, China was enacting structural reforms to the socialist market economy (Jiang, 1992). With the intensification of market reform, it was becoming clear that the previous political structure was inconsistent with a market economy, and this tension was causing increasing conflict between different powers within the political structure. “Even a small development of the economic structural reform can show the necessity of the reform of the political structure. The achievement of the reform of the economic structure cannot be maintained without the reform of the political structure” (Deng, 1993). Impelled by the development of the market economy, China started a new cycle of the multi-level and omnidirectional political reform. The political reform of the 1990s has mainly focused on the following four major aspects.

Firstly, at the local level, rural areas have gained unprecedented levels of autonomy and democracy through the elections of villagers’ committees. The implementation of democratic institutionalization in China initiated from this fundamental construction. In 1987, the National People’s Congress promulgated the Organic Law on Villagers’ Committees, which stipulates that the director, deputy director and members of villagers’ committees shall be regularly (four years per term) and directly elected by the villagers. The law also stipulates that the villages shall function autonomously through democratic elections, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision. So far, four direct elections have taken place in China. Some problems have arisen in these rural elections that have yet to be worked out, such as bribery, threats of violence, the influence of family and patriarchal clan. However, more than ten years of democratic practice has begun to bring about changes to the basic political life in China’s vast rural areas, and has promoted broad political progress. For instance, village autonomy has gradually reduced state political control throughout rural China. Villagers can now manage their own affairs according to law, altering the previous relationship of administrative subordination. Their autonomy and direct elections have effectively managed to cultivate a democratic spirit among villagers, fostering a consciousness of political participation and civil rights. And due to regular elections, terms of office and term limits, the villagers’ committees function with a legitimacy predicated on villagers’ “consent.” As such, the village leaders take a greater responsibility for
villagers, as opposed to previously when village leaders were responsible only to overhead authorities. Democratic practices in the rural areas have produced a tremendous influence on the democratic process in China as a whole. In recent years, in cities such as Beijing and An'shan, the direct election of leaders to community administrative committees has been enacted at the community level. For example, an open democratic election for a community management director was implemented in the Shihle Community of An'shan City, and Mrs. Zhangyuan, an undergraduate from Liaoning University, aged only 27, won the election. In Dapeng Town, Shenzhen City and Buyun Township, Sichuan Province, there have been direct elections for town government.

Secondly, at the national level, there have been several significant reforms. The first of these has been carried out in numerous manners to reinforce the functions of the National People's Congress. For the purpose of introducing increased competition and greater motivation in the elections, the differential voting system has been instituted at different levels, most notably in the election of deputies to the People's Congress. In an effort to restrict the powers of government, the procedure for nominating candidates for government leadership has been reformed: Deputies of the People's Congress are allowed to independently nominate candidates for the government leaders, and differential voting may be adopted in the election of government leaders. As the supervisory rights of the People's Congress and their ability to limit the government have increased, the authority of the constitution has also been reinforced, and all organizations, including the Communist Party, must perform their duties within constitutional parameters. This has not only reinforced the function of the People's Congress, but also strengthened its autonomy. These reforms have played an important role in breaking down the highly concentrated power system, and represent a departure from the earlier political situation, wherein the Party, not the government, controlled administrative affairs. For instance, Party-nominated candidates in several provinces and cities lost their bids for deputy to the People's Congress to candidates independently nominated by congressional deputies.

Another element of national reform is seen in the great efforts to improve the judicial system. For instance, the procedures for adversary proceedings were improved, a system for investigating misjudged cases was established, a functional separation was created between case investigation and judgment, the system for the withdrawal and challenge of judicial officers was set up, the chief judge selection and appointment system was implemented, a rehearsal system was instituted in order to promote a sense of procedural openness, and court judges must now wear a uniform and use a gavel. These reforms have played a very important role in promoting judicial authority, guaranteeing judicial independence, and ensuring a sense of fairness and justice.

Administrative reform has been initiated to solve the problems of inflated government organizations, oversized staffing, the mixing of governmental functions and business management, and overwhelming bureaucracy, and to establish a new type administrative system corresponding to the construction of a market economy and democratic politics. For instance, the transformation of governmental functions has led to the implementation of the civil service system, characterized by classified management, open selection, and competitive employment. A new cycle of institutional reform was carried out in 1998, expanding on those reforms enacted in 1993, resulting in the reduction of the number of state council subordinate organizations from 40 to 29 and the number of government personnel by 50%, from 32,000 to 16,000 people (The State Council, 1998). This institutional reform is the most significant one, and is now extending deeply into the county and township levels. It is estimated that four million government employees will have left their offices by the time this institutional reform is completed.

Further national-oriented reform is evident in the series of regulations instituted to monitor the use of public power and restrict corruption. Corruption has been a significant and frequent problem throughout the transformation of Chinese society from a planned economic system to a market economy. However, corruption persists in various forms, through the enforcement of public power for private interests, and the continual spread of corruption indicates a lack of a definite, open and compulsory system within the institutional construction for supervising and restricting public power.

However, great strides have been made in combating corruption over the course of the past decade. A series of systems to supervise the procedures of employing and dismissing cadres was set up. These include a system for public recruitment and public examinations, an inspection to examine cadres during their terms, a system for switching cadres and examining them when they are leaving office, etc. At the same time, some initiatives were taken to improve daily management and supervision, such as the systems for leading cadres' talks, an anti-corruption system, a system of answering questions about public service staff, and an external supervision system to monitor corruption and the enforcement of the law. In August 1993, the civil service system was initiated, and Party organizations, the National
Congress, the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (C.P.P.C.C.) and social organizations were then bound by its regulations. The expansion of democracy is at the heart of these policies, instituting and governing examinations, recruitments, rotations, resignation and the dismissal of public employees. As stated earlier, more than 3600 persons have been dismissed from government organizations at various levels, since the implementation of the civil service system. From October 1997 to September 2002, there were 861,197 cases registered by the disciplinary inspection institutions across the country, 846,150 persons disciplined within the Party or administratively, resulting in 137,711 dismissals from the Party. There were 37,790 persons who were both dismissed from the Party and criminally charged. Among those C.P.C. cadres disciplined, there were 28,996 from the county level, 2,422 from the departmental level, and 98 from the provincial level (The Central Discipline Inspecting Commission of the Chinese Communist Party, 2002).

Governmental behaviors, especially public administrative activities, were standardized and supervised. A series of rules concerning cadres’ honesty and self-regulation has been initiated since 1989. These include the Measures Concerning Party Disciplines to Deal With Cadres Over County Level Violations of the “Five Stipulations” of Anti-corruption and Self-controlling in the Party or Governmental Organizations, Views Concerning the Implementation and Handling of the “Four Stipulations” of Cadres in the State-owned Enterprises to be Honest Against Corruption and Self-controlling, Stipulations Concerning the Income Declaration of Cadres over the County Level in the Party and Governmental Organizations, Stipulation that Public Employees in the Party and Governmental Organizations Should Register Their Presents Received in Domestic Contacts, Stipulations Concerning the Reporting of Important Personal Affairs by Leading Cadres, and so on. At the same time, China’s legal construction developed three elements to legalize the supervision and restriction of cadres. Firstly, laws such as the Administrative Review System, Administrative Inspection Law and Administration Penalty Law were implemented, forming a unified administrative procedural law, a perfect legal inspection for the administrative enforcement of law and a relief system. Secondly, in the field of juridical inspection, the Administrative Litigation Law was formulated, which developed China’s litigation system. And thirdly, the State Compensation Law was formulated to protect the rights of citizens, legal persons or organizations in gaining compensation for losses. These laws are of great significance, not only in the standardization of the public administration sector’s legal enforcement and the protection of individual rights, but also in formulating an effective restriction system.

The third major focus of Chinese reform in the 1990s was the relationship between national and local governments, resulting in a more rational division of power. Although great progress had been made in many respects, the question of centralization remains problematic. “Centralization creates stiffness, while decentralization creates confusion,” sums up many of the administrative problems in the restructuring of government power, and the perpetual back and forth cycle between centralization and decentralization. In order to counteract this phenomenon and meet the demands of the market economy, the idea was introduced in the 1990s of dividing powers of office between the central government and the local government. This systemic reform has been carried out in the tax distribution system, and the range of authority on financial revenues and expenditures has been re-divided between the central and local governments. Central and local governments have both established their own independent inspection and collection systems to handle tax revenue affairs. This new financial system has substituted the previous financial management system, in which lower-level government has the burden of contracting to higher-level government, by conforming to the economic structures of a modern society.

The final category of Chinese reform of the 1990s has been that attempting to rationalize the relationship between the state and society. The early stages of reform, the larger political ideals at work were not popularly evident. So, the reforms were seen only as a move away from highly centralized governance, as a re-distribution of the powers between different governmental organizations. No major regulation was made regarding the relationship between the state and society. Although the reform instilled local governments with a new vitality, it had not yet touched the major concerns dealing with the operations of the public sector (i.e. the political domination of the economy) and the state domination of society. The only change in transferring the powers of the central government to the local was the subject of political governing, but not the governing itself. Such practices did not produce the estimated effect, and instead, new problems occurred (e.g., the arising of the local protectionism). The high nationalization of society can certainly improve the organic mobilization capacities, and accelerate high economic growth within a short period under some circumstances. However, it cannot substantially solve the problems of dynamic power and coordination for economic and social developments, and it cannot
create a modern society full of energy, vigor and innovation.

In 1990s, regulations dealing with the relationship between the state and society were revamped so as to solve the fundamental problems in the Chinese social sectors (i.e. the strong domination of the state over society). These reforms have been manifested primarily in the following ways: (1) Making the new market the basis for the allocation of social resources, thus enabling the social and economic sectors to gradually rid themselves of the direct control of state administrative powers, and to enjoy a certain level of autonomy. (2) Through revising the constitution, the legal position of private economy and property was established. According to the latest China Wealth Report, state enterprises and enterprises with shares held by the state account for 31% of capital, and individual and private enterprises account for 38%. However, in comparing capital ownership and structure, the state owned estates only account for 26%, and the domestic individual inhabitants account for 57% of the total capital. This data demonstrates how significant the changes to utilization and ownership of the capital have been (Fan, 2003). (3) The establishment of the social security and social relief system, enabling socialization of urban public welfare. (4) The reform of the state and social organic structure, and the changes to the previous tendency toward administration of social organizations. Enterprises and other social organizations will be gradually separated from the state administrative organizations, and they will no longer exist as an administrative unit of the state. Instead, they will become independent corporations with a well-defined legal position. These social intermediate organizations, independent from public organizations, may play an important part in protecting civil rights. For example, there are about 12,000 lawyers' inns, together with 120,000 lawyers, whose role is to protect the rights of citizens and provide legal aid. On August 18, 2002, Chinese Commerce reported that the police had arrested a couple living in Wanzhushan, Yan'an, Shaanxi Province, confiscated their VCD player and detained them for watching pornographic discs at home. This report led to an extensive societal dispute. A lawyer from Beijing claimed that "it's against legal procedure to get in citizens' home without wearing police uniform, and showing credentials," "it's citizens' liberty to do what law does not prohibit," and "it's one of citizens' privacy rights to watch pornographic discs at home." He asked the police department to apologize to the couple in public, compensate them, and to punish the policemen who violated the law. The police conceded to these demands. (5) The enactment of the Organic Law of Villagers' Committee and the Organic Law of Urban Household Committee, enabling the realization of local autonomy. (6) The reform of the state control patterns on society. Compulsory administrative instructions and planning will no longer dominate, and instead, legal and economic measures have been adopted to regulate and control the operation of the society. The above reforms have accelerated the structural social changes, increased social mobility, promoted autonomy and internal coordinating capacities, and greatly enhanced social productivity.

The reforms of the 1990s have altered the face of China, and are distinct from those of the 1980s. Although the reforms of the 1990s were predicated on those of the 1980s, they established a unique set of values and ideas (i.e. democracy, legal administration, and civil rights). Political reform is now understood as imbued with these concepts, rather than as a necessary coincident with economic reform. For instance, at the 15th National Congress of the Party held in 1997, the mission to govern the country according to a strong legal code was established as the basic strategy for the state administration. This process will "gradually achieve the institutionalization and legalization of the socialist democracy, and such a system and law cannot alter due to substitution of any leader, and cannot twist due to the changes of the attention and opinions of any leader" (Jiang, 1997). This, of course marks a major conceptual shift for the Communist Party regarding administration. Political reform itself is now the strategic mission, which marks a change from the passivity of the earlier reforms, and enables the reform process not just to break down the old system, but also to establish a new one. The 16th National Congress of the Party has entailed a peaceful and normal alternation of the Central Committee leadership for the first time in the 50-year history of the Chinese Communist Party.

Another key distinction for the reforms of the 1990s has been the adoption of an internationalist and humanist standard, breaking away from a purely Chinese understanding of civilization. The new reform guidelines imply that "we must start in consideration of the national conditions of our own country, sum up our own practical experience, and learn from the helpful achievements of the political civilization of human beings" (Jiang, 2002). For instance, foreign electoral experiences were examined in the establishment of the direct election system for the Villagers’ Committee. In order to standardize administrative actions and create a legal mechanism for the supervision and restriction of administrative power, we have formulated the administrative litigation law, state compensation law, law of supervision over administration and law of administrative review. These laws offer an institutional arrangement that provides an
administrative remedy for citizens, corporations and other organizations. We have revised the criminal laws and criminal proceedings code, and established the doctrines of crime mala prohibita, matching the punishment to the crime, and the presumption of innocence. These doctrines were imported based on the successful experiences in the establishment of legal systems abroad.

The 1990s reforms have a progressive quality that distinguishes them from earlier reforms. In a huge country like China, the pursuance of radical political reform can easily lead to social instability. As American scholar Huntington said, "the state of modernization produces stability while the process of modernization may cause social instability" (1989). In order to guarantee sustainable social development in China, the more than 10-year practice of political reform in China was enacted in a stable and progressive way. For "integrating the dynamic power of reform and development process with degree of public acceptance" (Jiang, 2002), great attention should be paid to the feasibility of reform policy selection and the order of the development process. The progressive development strategy emphasizes that political reform should be implemented in a sequence from easy to difficult, from experiment to popularization, and from partial to whole.

Future Prospects of Political Reform in China

The political reforms of the past two decades, and especially those of the 1990s, have played an unparalleled role in improving human rights and in the promotion of economic development and social progress in China. However, the political reform mission is not yet complete, and China still has long way to go to achieve true democracy and legal administration. Future political reform in China will have to anticipate many uncertain factors. Political reform must involve the re-distribution of powers and the re-adjustment of the relationship of interests. What's more, competition and conflict between different forces and interest groups cannot be avoided. In fact, the political reform process is inherently a process of competition between different political forces. So, nobody can design a perfect, faultless and feasible reform plan, and it is unrealistic to require the actual process absolutely adhere to the envisioned process. Therefore, I would like to forward some ideas on future political reform, based on a knowledge of the real situation in China.

Through more than 20 years of reform, great changes have occurred in the social structure, forming different interest groups and a diversification of values. Since joining the WTO, the rules of international economy and economic globalization have also had an incredible effect on China. The ordinary citizen's awareness of autonomy, rights and participation has obviously been reinforced, and the requirements for punishing corruption have grown stronger. The leaders of the new generation must continue these reforms if they want to perform well and maintain political legality in the future. The continuation of political reform has become a common assumption at all levels.

In the coming five years or so, reform will enter a new stage, and challenge certain fortified positions. As mentioned above, reform has so far entailed a gradual process. Based on necessity to maintain stability, reform policy has been largely directed at those entities that will not cause social disturbance. In certain fields, reform has been strictly nominal and the scope of implementation limited. On the other hand, we should see that "through the accumulative effect produced in the progressive reform, the political system in China is now gradually getting rid of the features of the previous personalized, non-institutionalized and unstable system" (Xu, 2000). On the other hand, facing the real situation in China, where after years of social change, there is a public demand for mass participation. A new political system based on "public competition" has not yet been formed. The social transformations in China present a danger of a "participation explosion." In recent years, the conversion of the "leaders' pattern" and "pattern of administration," and the allowance of the owners of private companies to join the Chinese Communist Party, signify a reply to such danger. This means that "China has not yet stepped into the 'post reform' times, and instead, it is riding a tiger and finds it hard to get off, and it has to continuously seek for the way out for 'passing the barrier for reform'" (Ji, 2002).

Finally, there is the question of promoting political reform in China. Facing this potential "participation explosion," how can we ensure safety, and turn the "participation crisis" into a dynamic power of the reform? I believe that this can be done only through institutional innovation. That is to say, we must construct a diversified system of expressing the popular will and peaceful settlement, provide proper procedures for public selection and a platform for institutionalization, improve the capacity of the political system to absorb various forces and factors and resolve conflicts of interest and social contradictions. This institutional innovation can be implemented in the following three ways: (1) We must promote democracy within the Party. We need to establish a democratic mechanism for consultation, public discussion, mutual surveillance, stable cooperation, peaceful competition, and decision-
making within the Party. (2) In order to strengthen its powers and promote democratic practices, we need further reforms of the National People's Congress. We must improve the procedures and methods for deputy nominations, reduce the scale of the Congress's conferences at all levels, extend the duration of the conference, and make congressional deputies a specialized position. (3) We must extend the successful experiences in direct elections in the villagers' committee to urban communities, and later we shall implement democratic procedures at the township level. Of these three future reform paths, the realization of democracy within the Party will be difficult, expanding democracy in the National People’s Congress is the key point to political reform, and the promotion of basic democracy will be the foundation of political reform.

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