

CONFERENCE WITHIN THE CONFERENCE (CWC) AT SPSA 2017

COMPARATIVE AUTHORITARIANISM OF STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS

In 2013, *The Economist* said that year was the “biggest year for democracy ever,” and in the wake of the Arab Spring of 2011, the world seemed to finally be advancing toward that democratic utopia that Francis Fukuyama predicted in *The End of History and the Last Man*. But between then and now, something has changed. Now the original stability of the liberalized Arab regimes seems to be slipping, and *The Economist*’s front page touts an article called “What’s Gone Wrong with Democracy.”

Although most of the human being have historically and geographically lived under authoritarian rule, majority of the studies in political science have focused on politics in democratic countries. This conference-within-the-conference tries to fill this hole in political science. Why have some authoritarian regimes been resilient (like China so far)? What makes authoritarian governments stay in power? Interestingly, many authoritarian regimes have faced social unrest, and they have been democratized in some cases while they have survived in other cases. What explanations would account for this variation?

To answer this question, the papers in the panels draw empirical evidence from politics in China, the Middle East, and other authoritarian countries. Panel 1 focuses on how authoritarian rulers institutionalize governance for survival of the regime, Panel 2 highlights how rulers manage political communication and information to maintain the authoritarian regime, and Panel 3 explores the implications of economic globalization on authoritarian politics.

PANEL 1: INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Chair/Discussant: Hiroki Takeuchi (Southern Methodist University: htakeuch@smu.edu)

The Politics of Courts in Authoritarianism: Explaining the Expansion of Judicial Power in Post-Mubarak Egypt

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The uprising of January 2011 in Egypt removed Mubarak from power but did not dismantle his authoritarian regime. Instead, mass protests, the original utility of diverse anti-Mubarak opposition groups, and subsequent democratic elections ended with the military coup of July 3, 2013. Since then, state institutions have preserved the overall power structure that had been challenged by the young revolutionaries and the Muslim Brotherhood between 2011 and 2013. While research has paid much attention to the role of the military and the police in arresting the post-Mubarak transition from authoritarianism, the interventions of the judiciary have been less known. In fact, the judiciary actively obstructed populist demands for change and participatory transformation before the coup in 2013. In doing so, the courts acted as a source of support for the remaining authoritarian regime and an instrument to undermine prospects for a successful transition. Thus, the judiciary was central to the governance repertoire deployed by the state to

blunt popular pressures and save its institutional interests. This paper analyses the complicity of the judiciary by addressing two key questions. What motivated both the “revolutionary” and “counter-revolutionary” forces to advance their claims through the judiciary during the short-lived process of political transition? And, generally, what are the consequences of allowing an unreformed judiciary to be the bastion of the “rule of law” in societies undergoing post-authoritarian transitions?

Dictatorial Survival and Breakdown

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This paper looks at the dynamics of authoritarian breakdown. In it, we show how the relationship between the dictator and his inner circle interacts with formal institutions originally created for other purposes to make different dictatorships vulnerable to different kinds of challenge. This interaction explains why some dictatorships are more susceptible to economic crisis than others and why some have more difficulty surviving elite power struggles. The paper highlights the relationship between past institutional choices and regime survival. We also show how different expected post-exit fates affect the responses of both dictators and their closest allies to popular opposition. In the final section, we bring these various strands together to explain, first, why some kinds of dictatorship are more resilient in the face of challenges than others and, second, why some kinds of dictatorship tend to permit fair, contested elections when faced with widespread opposition and thus to exit peacefully, while others cling to power until forcibly removed.

How Does the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Utilize People’s Congresses? Its Changing Relationship with Society

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The main purpose of this paper is to expose political functions of the delegates to the local people’s congresses in China. It focuses on the local people’s congress delegates selected from the circles of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

Previous research argues that in authoritarian regimes democratic institutions carry out three political functions. The first one is the power sharing function to prevent alienation of the elites. The second is the engagement function aimed at suppressing the opposition. The third political function is that of information gathering to enhance government effectiveness. Earlier research on the delegates of the Chinese local people’s congresses focuses on this function of information gathering and reveals the delegates’ functions as agents, remonstrators, or representatives.

Using the data from the Jiangsu Province Yangzhou City People’s Congress from 1998 to 2015, this paper examines how the information gathering function of the local people’s congresses has

changed over the last decade or so. In particular, analyzing the contents of the bills submitted to the people's congress by the delegates selected from the PLA circles, this research depicts how the PLA has gradually started expressing its demands through the people's congresses over the last decade.

At the end of the 1990s, the PLA never submitted bills to the local people's congresses. In regards to this reason, an individual familiar with the local people's congresses responded that "even if the PLA had any demands it did not submit bills since it was able to solve these issues within its own system." However, in the recent years, the PLA has been submitting its requests to the people's congresses in the form of bills. This paper explores the political meaning of the change in the relationship between the local people's congresses and the PLA.

China's Trade Union Reform in the 1980s: The Impact of Poland's Democratization Movement

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How has the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) worked to form a national solidarity through providing workers' welfare? This research is a part of the attempt to trace the party's struggle and failures in terms of "welfare and solidarity."

In the 1980s, Chinese workers who had lost an "iron rice bowl" under economic reform carried out demonstrations and strikes demanding jobs and better pay. This chaotic situation in the cities, compared with democratization movements developing in Poland and other Eastern European countries in this period, was recognized as a crisis of the regime by the CCP leaders.

The CCP leadership, aiming to curb the impact of turmoil in Eastern Europe, tried to enhance the functions of existing trade unions (*gonghui*) as a buffer for workers' frustration. It was a countermeasure to prevent Chinese version of "Solidarność" from being formed, and at the same time was an attempt to segment workers' interests by building labor-management consultation mechanism around the local-level *gonghui* which were firmly controlled by the CCP organizations at the correspondent administrative level. However, *gonghui*, which had lost the position as an organizer of labor insurance since 1965, could get little respect not only from workers but also from the local-level party and administration. Finding the party and administration tactically trying to weaken the roles of congress of workers and staff, abolish the basic-level *gonghui*, replace *gonghui* cadres arbitrarily, or misuse *gonghui* assets, a part of *gonghui* cadres began to insist on the necessity to make *gonghui* personnel and financial management be separated from the party and to enhance the vertical leading system inside *gonghui* organization. It was the time when we could expect the search by *gonghui* leaders for making *gonghui* become a workers' interest group since the 1950s would form a strong stream again. Zhu Houze (standing vice-chairman of All-China Federation of Trade Unions, ACFTU), who had wanted further political diversification, expressed the support for students' movement for democratization. Some research fellows of China Institution of Industrial Relations and ACFTU Research Center of Industrial Relations joined demonstration march with the flag of ACFTU in their hands.

Their resolve was finally destroyed by the notice which was issued soon after the Tiananmen Incident. It declared the party's decision to strengthen its grip on *gonghui* and other people's organizations. At the same time, the party accelerated the efforts to rebuild a social insurance system. In 1993, it approved organizing Workers' Mutual Insurance Association. It was one of the measures the CCP took to consolidate frustrated *gonghui* cadres and to rally workers around *gonghui*.

PANEL 2: COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION, AND AUTHORITARIAN RULE

Chair/Discussant: Erica Frantz (Michigan State University: ericaemilyfrantz@yahoo.com)

Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in Authoritarian China

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Focusing on the hydropower projects on two of the major rivers flowing through Yunnan Province as a case study, the paper attempts to examine the role of media in China, and to investigate relations among China's domestic public opinion, nationalism, and China's cooperative behavior. This study finds that the resurgent nationalism does not necessarily lead to a nationalist policy. Especially in the realm of non-traditional security, with domestic public opinion widely divided, the Chinese government may move to a more cooperative approach, partly in an effort to mute the criticism from other countries.

Of Rents and Rumors: Government Competence and Media Freedom in Authoritarian Countries

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Media freedom is costly for governments in authoritarian countries because it makes corruption more difficult to conceal, thus antagonizing citizens, and it enables disgruntled citizens to coordinate and challenge the government. But a free media can also bring benefit to governments in such countries, for example, by informing citizens whether their poor social and economic situations are due to low government competence or exogenous factors for which the government is not responsible, thus reducing the probability that citizens "mistakenly" rebel against a competent government. This paper analyzes these trade-offs and shows that some intermediately competent types of governments will allow more media freedom than others. Empirical analysis supports the theory.

Critical Journalists and the State in China: Grasping Transformation on the Boundary

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This paper draws contrasts and similarities between the periods of the Hu-Wen era and the Xi era through the prism of journalist-state relations. Specifically, this study focuses on the interactions between China's outspoken journalists and the state, thereby exploring the terrain of politics on the boundary of permissible under the new leadership. I find that whilst the space for critical journalism on the whole has shrunk in the past few years, the relationship between journalists and the state are still characterized by improvised collaboration that has persisted over the past several decades. Specifically, the policy of media supervision is invoked only in the context of propaganda and spaces for investigations are inadvertently opened by the state but only in so far as they serve higher political journalists. Journalists and social commentators who manage to survive in the new era, are ever more inventive in their strategies for adjusting to state-sanctioned improvisation while largely succumbing to rotating within the orbit of the party, and thereby implicitly self-censoring and collaborating with the regime.

Why Oil Rich Dictators Do Not Invest in Information and Communication Technologies

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A variety of factors affect how dictators behave, how they invest (or do not) the country's resources and the policies they pursue. In recent years, scholars have questioned whether dictators invest in information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure because of the economic benefits a networked society may offer, or if they limit access to ICTs for fear that they facilitate anti-government mobilization. Citizens rely on their governments to invest in building ICT infrastructure so they may gain access to information and other benefits of new communication technologies. Since internet access offers citizens educational, entertainment, and informative benefits, understanding which factors influence non-democratic leaders to invest or not in ICTs merits further studies.

Past studies have shown that dictators with longer time horizons for their political tenure pursue policies and investments that produce long-term benefits for the population. Citizens who live in dictatorships governed by dictators with longer time horizons may benefit from greater economic growth, better use of foreign aid and stronger public health, according to previous studies. Factors that influence dictators' perception of their time horizon include institutional designs that offer credible power-sharing to other elites, such as legislatures, political parties and succession rules, as well as prior levels of economic development, integration in international trade and industrialized economies. On the other hand, dictators who face civil conflict or depend on volatile commodities, more likely fear an earlier departure and, therefore, invest less in public goods and more likely skim from the public coffers. Among commodities, those that rely on manual labor for production or extraction, tend to encourage dictators who depend on their rents to consider popular interests to a greater degree than dictators who benefit from rents from less-labor intensive commodities, such as oil. Thus, dictators, who have short time horizons due to volatile revenues and who need not appease the masses to derive resource rents, should invest

substantially in infrastructure that citizens demand but only yield long-term benefits to the leader.

Using a cross-national, time-series database of authoritarian regimes from 1995–2015, I first examine whether commodity-dependent regimes have lower levels of ICT diffusion than countries with more diverse economies. I then test whether oil-rich countries have lower levels of internet access than countries dependent on other volatile commodities, but that require manual labor, which should push authoritarian leaders to concern themselves more with citizens' interests.

PANEL 3: THE MARKET AND THE STATE IN AUTHORITARIANISM

Chair/Discussant: Yao-Yuan Yeh (University of St. Thomas: yehy@stthom.edu)

Industrial Transfer and the Remaking of China's Competitive Advantage

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China's recent economic slowdown has triggered fear and even panic among global investors. In particular, observers are worried that manufacturing—the engine of China's hyper-growth over the past decades—has hit the doldrums. This paper affirms that low-end, labor-intensive export manufacturers on the coast are indeed hit by rising costs and tougher local state regulations. However, it goes further to stress that some coastal manufacturers have begun relocating into and investing in the inland provinces of China to take advantage of lower costs and policy concessions. This phenomenon of industrial transfer, which began in the 2000s, plays a critical role in sparking economic growth in the interior regions, in economic restructuring on the coast, and in the remaking of China's national competitive advantage. State efforts at actualizing these goals, however, remain fraught with challenges.

Development and Everyday Politics in China: A Big Data Approach

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It is not hyperbole to state that China has undergone one of the most significant economic, social, and political transitions in human history. In a single generation, hundreds of millions of Chinese have entered the middle class, the country's GDP has grown enormously, huge amounts of land and resources have transferred into private hands, and countless other realities have been irreversibly changed. As many scholars have noted, however, relatively little has changed in terms of China's political realities. Indeed, many argue that the state has ramped up its efforts at authoritarian control and that political opportunities have actually decreased. Close-to-the-ground fieldwork, however, has consistently demonstrated that, below the top levels of the state, Chinese society has transformed too dramatically for there not have been meaningful change in the way that average Chinese relate to and interact with their state. Yet, identifying how these fit

into the larger pattern of development in the People's Republic of China has proven exceptionally difficult for two primary reasons. First, China is an enormous and diverse nation where development has taken place. Shanghai now easily competes with the developed world in many respects, whereas subsistence farming continues to be a reality in some of the poorer areas. Second, while statistics on economic development are relatively easy to obtain, there is a profound lack of large-scale data that casts light on local political realities. Statistics on protests or other types of political participation are difficult or impossible to obtain, especially on the broad chronological and geographic scales that would be necessary to provide comparison. This paper, therefore, turns to a novel data source to pursue a big data approach to try to understand the different political issues that have flowed and ebbed as development has spread across China.

This paper uses data from legal advice websites, which allow individuals to publically post law-related questions which then may, or may not, be answered by lawyers. These websites have become a vitally important, but wholly unstudied, resource for average Chinese in private matters, such as contract disputes and divorces, but also in socially sensitive matters, such as employment and pensions, and in their relationship with the local state, one-child policy, and state land requisition. Many factors make the data on these websites a particularly valuable tool for analysis. First, its scale is massive, well over 50 million legal questions have been posted across a handful of legal websites. Second, time-frame, at least a decade, helps us capture change over time. Third, most questions are posted with specific time and location metadata which allow us to identify where and when these issues arise with much greater specificity than most other types of data. Fourth, a wealth of non-politically sensitive questions allow us to control for other factors, such as online access and the perceived effectiveness of the legal system, that might affect variation in patterns of posting. By scraping this massive quantity of data and subjecting it to various forms of statistical and textual analysis, we are able to investigate.

Combining this data with basic information on economic conditions allows us to track how a large number of political issues map onto development and how this varies across time and space. For example: Do disputes over state land requisition increase up to a certain point of development and then begin to decrease, or are patterns more closely associated with the urban, peri-urban, or rural nature of different areas? Do complaints against the police increase or decrease along with development and are they more common in minority-dominated regions? How different are the approaches that poor rural and urban middle-class Chinese towards China's repressive birth control policy? In short, this paper will provide an expansive and novel look at the relationship between development and everyday politics in the PRC.

Links between Business Entities and State Institutions in China through the Economic Reform Era to the Xi Jinping Administration

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The main purpose of this paper is to explore the links between business entities and central and local government institutions in China. The paper holds that such links emerge once a manager is recruited to a state institution and thus examines career backgrounds of the top officials in

economic policy-making institutions and top leaders of provincial governments since the beginning of economic reform until early 2016. The central argument of this paper is that only a very limited number of companies from traditional industries are connected to the central and local government institutions. This is the result of a particular model of governance adopted by the CCP regime, which recruited the best-performing managers from the largest state-owned enterprises in traditional industries to compensate for the government's loss of expertise in economic affairs as a result of the separation of business from the state. This explains the emergence and strength of the so-called "vested interests" in China and puts into question the dominant argument on the CCP regime's ability to adapt (regime resilience argument). Instead, the paper suggests that economic development in China is path-dependent and only very strong political will might change it. It examines to what extent the current Xi Jinping administration has been able to break this path and evaluates how effective the anti-corruption campaign has been in eliminating strong links between state institutions and the limited number of traditional industries.

Free Trade Agreements and Domestic Politics of an Authoritarian Regime

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Structural reforms undermine the vested interests of the collusive rent-seeking mechanism. Thus, the reformists who want to advance structural reforms often face backlash from the conservatives who enjoy the benefits of vested interests. The free trade agreements may impose on the governments a yes-or-no answer regarding the politically sensitive issues that would undermine the vested interests. Therefore, the governments may have a strong incentive to use the FTAs as external pressure to advance structural reforms as a way to achieve sustainable economic growth. In this way, international rule-making on trade will empower the reformists and hence make the nation's behavior more cooperative. This paper suggests that this same mechanism may occur even in an authoritarian regime.