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**Populism With Agoraphobia:
Hu Jintao and the Risk Culture of Democratization in the PRC**

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By now there is much speculation as to the future path of political reform in China, as a result of the completed succession of Hu Jintao (and Wen Jiabao) to the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Two factors stand out: One is Hu Jintao's determination to move policy in a more populist direction, with a greater concern for social welfare and public opinion, and the other is an equal determination to maintain the leadership of the Party. This is a policy the author sometimes jokingly refers to as "populism with agoraphobia."

Whenever the subject of reform comes up, the question arises as to whether the glass (of change) is half-full or half empty. This is inevitable, given that reform explicitly acknowledges and projects continuity from the past into the future. This is a sterile debate. The real issue is what the constraints are on change and how are these formed. Only by examining these constraints is it possible to assess the relative quantum of change and whether that quantum is of sufficient mass to merit assessment as qualitative, or transformative change. Here the main factors are structural and institutional. Agency is important, but it is important also to assess not just the personality and individual characteristics of the leader, but the factors that shaped the leader's selection. This is especially important in the case of a leader like Hu Jintao, who emerged, not out of a crisis or out of a prolonged political struggle but through institutionalized channels of selection, promotion and appointment. He is the product of the Party institution, and he owes his career to it.

This alone would suggest innate conservatism, but it is possible to object that Mikhail Gorbachev, anything but a conservative reformer, also achieved power by climbing the rungs of the *apparatus*. Here is where a more nuanced and expanded analysis is required. We require an understanding of the selection and recruitment process of the institution, the prudential rules of promotion, the external environment faced by the institution and the institutional resources required by the leader to maintain his authority within the structure of power.

It goes without saying that the author agrees that the legitimacy of the CPC is fragile, that it needs to be renewed constantly, and especially now that it cannot depend on the charismatic appeal of social transformation and a mass base imbued by ideological

commitment. It is in Hu's own words a 'zhizhengdang' a party in power, dedicated first and foremost to maintaining itself in power and consisting principally of officeholders in responsible political posts.

The Party faces a particular crisis due to the decline of its traditional mass base in the urban working class employed in state-owned enterprises. The Party looks to recruiting members of new socio-economic elites but given the enormously skewed distribution of income in Chinese society today, those elites are demonstrably poorly legitimated within Chinese society. In short, the Party risks becoming 'divorced from the people' the worst possible danger to its continued legitimacy and authority. Moreover the Party recognizes that it is in 'mortal danger' from the scourge of corruption and seeks new means to control power conversion and rent-seeking behavior by its leading cadres. This is not only required to maintain the Party's mass legitimacy but just as importantly, as a means to contain the principal-agent problems associated with administrative corruption. Simply put, a rent-seeking official is not only unaccountable to the public but equally unresponsive to the central leadership. So why not make officials more accountable to the public. Wouldn't this solve both problems at once? Why not indeed!

The first answer is that this is precisely what Hu Jintao claims he is trying to do, to make Party officials more responsive and accountable. This is precisely what he means by improving the governing capacity of the Party. (Actually a better translation would be improved governance). We should look closely at the series of speeches and changes that Hu has initiated with respect to political reform. Here we find a fairly consistent pattern:

1. A concern with legitimacy and addressing genuine public demands
2. A concern with efficiency and accountability in government
3. A concern for public participation

Missing from this list is recognition and acknowledgement of democracy itself as a value, and subjecting the Party itself to democratic accountability.

Of course, Hu claims that the Party is already democratic. That is, first, that the leading role of the Party is already settled by history through its historic role in leading the people towards revolution.¹ Second, that the party already subjects its policies to debate and discussion through the representative institutions of the People's congress system and the united front bodies of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. Please note however that it is the *policies* of the Party that are open for discussion and debate, not the position of the Party. Hu takes it for granted that the CPC has an agenda setting role. Indeed, that is its *raison d'être*. The means to that end is its domination of the personnel system and its unchallenged monopoly in the selection and allocation of qualified personnel to administrative and political offices.

¹ For example the decision on improving the governmental ability of the Communist Party passed at the Fourth Plenum of the 16th Central Committee terms the achievement of governing party status by our party as "the choice of history, the choice of the people" using the inverted comma between the two phrases which in Chinese punctuation denotes equivalence. See "Zhonggong Zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang dang de zhizheng nengli jue ding" http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2004-09/26/content_2024232.htm Accessed September 26, 2004.

With regard to the latter, Hu has proposed making the process both more “scientific” and more “democratic”.² Democracy in this sense has a peculiar meaning in the communist lexicon, where leaders speak of a “democratic style” as though democracy were a fashion item or form of tasty cuisine. Democratic style means open to discussion and debate, it does not mean open to majoritarian decisionmaking by the open public. The decision of the Fourth Plenum speaks of “rule *for* the people; *relying* on the people; *supporting* and *guaranteeing* the people as masters in their own home; ***persisting and improving the people’s democratic dictatorship***; persisting and improving democratic centralism; bringing along people’s democracy through inner-Party democracy to strengthen the most expansive patriotic united front.”³ What this means in practice is that qualifications for offices are to be posted, files of qualified candidates are to be circulated and discussed, and appointments are to be made after discussion by the appropriate Party committee. Again, there is no suggestion that party executives (Party secretaries) are to give up their prerogative to select eligible candidates. This means in practice a kind of senatorial ‘advise and consent’ role, within the Party Committee system. Presumably, this would eliminate the worst abuses of appointing obviously incompetent or unqualified persons to important posts simply on the basis of their personal relationship to the Party secretary. It does not however, do anything to open up selection criteria to qualified outsiders and (in a manner reminiscent of senate hearings) discourages or inhibits controversial appointments.

With regard to important local political executive positions, Hu has proposed making use of public opinion surveys and the like. Again, this is intended to ensure that leaders are at least acceptable. However, recent practice has shown a clear desire to discourage and prohibit open campaigning by individuals for public office, with voters, whether in public electoral districts or in closed indirect elections given no more than the official biographical sketch distributed by the electoral commission.

Adam Przeworski has defined electoral democracy as a system of ‘institutionalized uncertainty’. Hu’s program is striking in its systematic effort to eliminate or contain uncertainty. In every case the Party hierarchy controls the outcome, even where multiple candidates are allowed. The emphasis is on science and efficiency much more than accountability and legitimacy. In many respects ‘scientific selection’ has an ancient pedigree in China, corresponding to the Confucian concern for education as the prerequisite for moral qualification institutionalized through the Imperial civil service examination system. No-doubt there is more than a passing concern here for ‘rule by virtue’ and the proper *suzhi* or (moral, professional and academic) ‘quality’ of leading personnel.

² The decision has as point five “it is necessary to persist in scientific governance, democratic governance, governance in accordance with the law” *ibid*. Note that scientific governance takes precedence over democratic governance in the form it is enumerated.

³ *Ibid*. Again “the people” as defined in the “people’s democratic dictatorship” is quite exclusive and specific in meaning see, Mao Zedong “The peoples Democratic Dictatorship”. The “people” is a relative term, defined in relation to “the enemy” who must be deprived of *any* political rights. Also The reference to the United Front is also instructive because the united front must always be led by the Communist Party. In other words all references to democracy must be read in exclusive terms with agency residing exclusively in Party hands. This does not contradict, however the prospect that under the condition of Party leadership the Party will not attempt to be more inclusive in its policies and its recruitment.

However, the immediate background to the constraints in these reforms may be found in the system that produced Hu Jintao. While he was of questionable class background,⁴ presumably through sheer academic brilliance, as well as unquestioned political loyalty, he entered China's most prestigious university Qinghua. There he obviously impressed the leadership with his academic and political zeal to be named a political monitor.⁵ Hu Jintao excelled at playing by the rules and always sought to please his superiors. He must have come away with a belief that those who show ability and assiduously play by the rules will be rewarded. When confronted by the chaos of the Cultural Revolution he refused to take sides, and did not become a political entrepreneur in a period of turmoil. Obviously, he remained loyal to established authority even as their authority crumbled. Moreover, even though he might have expected an assignment to a metropolitan institutions by virtue of his elite education and high political standing he accepted his assignment to remote Gansu without complaint, nor did he plot an early return to central China. He continued to keep his nose clean and perform for his superiors. After his recall to Beijing again he accepted what many would regard as difficult and inconvenient posts – Guizhou and then Tibet. There can be little doubt that he must believe that loyalty and talent will achieve its just reward. It seems he demands no less.

The CPC is a classic example of oligarchy. It confines the right to rule among its own membership and monopolizes recruitment into its ranks. The best way of modeling the dynamics of the Party's relationship to society is through the analysis of oligopolistic competition. Party leaders, are always subject to a degree of competition. That is why they may be removed in an unscheduled fashion. At the same time, we also have numerous examples of the Party being challenged from the outside, beginning in the Hundred Flowers, the Cultural Revolution, Democracy Wall and Tiananmen. In each case some internal division lowered the barriers to external participation. So, the first point that must be made is that Party leaders normally hold on to the Party's monopoly of political participation except under conditions where they feel that external pressure may increase their power *within* the Party. It goes without saying that a leader who has consolidated his internal power has no incentive to elicit external participation. In the current set-up of the Party there is an intermediate situation which may warrant a limited opening. That is the effort to control principal-agent problems, an effort that is most acute at the periphery of Party power. Hence, some openness at the township and county level may serve the interests of maintaining a degree of centralized control. In particular, the Party's information problem is acute the farther one gets from the center. Therefore, greater openness means greater transparency and opens up channels of information from the periphery to the center. However, The Party cannot afford a formalized distinction between the center and locality because that would increase the

⁴ Ma Ling confirms that Hu Jintao was descended from a family of tea merchants, that originated in Jixi , Anhui, but which established its business headquarters in Taizhou, Jiangsu, where Hu Jintao was born and grew up. The business largely failed during the Japanese invasion, but Ma does not deny that Hu father continued to engage in business, and that the family was comfortably well-off. Hu's father was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution. Ma points out that Hu was a) a brilliant student b) a political activist c) exceptionally affable.

⁵ See Cheng Li, *China's Leaders* pp 116-117. Ma points out that Hu was not only Class monitor he was also monitor of the Dance Troup and the artistic propaganda team.

legitimation problem. If local leaders are elected on an inductive basis and central leaders are appointed on a deductive basis this highlights the distance between elites and masses. Hence the way in which the Party deals with these problems is to obfuscate the distinction by emphasizing a plurality of leadership selection methods, with various forms of election seen as equivalent means and forms applied on a pragmatic basis.

An ongoing anxiety about the Party's legitimacy⁶ stimulates proposals for reform. However, without a systemic crisis of legitimacy there is no pressure to open up the political system to external competitors and therefore no pressure for democratic change via a negotiated 'pact'. Such a pact presupposes a legitimated opposition. In China none exists and none is allowed to exist.

This brings us to the question of "incremental" democratization. It is difficult to imagine what this would look like. The issue is clear cut and there is a clear dichotomy between a situation where an organized and institutionalized elite selects its own members and successors and one where successors can challenge the entrenched elites and potentially win.

The following tables are intended to clarify the circumstances where political elites are likely to welcome or tolerate a political opening. Where legitimacy is weak and mobilization is high, elites are likely to confront determined opposition. Where legitimacy is high and mobilization is also high, is a situation of populism where opposition is rarely tolerated. Only when legitimacy is weak and mobilization is low do entrenched political elites have an incentive to seek out opposition figures. Although they may be forced to deal with them when mobilization is high and legitimacy is low).

In the second table, entrenched political elites are able to handle opposition when state capacity is high. Under those circumstances even a high level of mobilization may be channeled peacefully. The final table deals with the structural determinants of the mass mobilization. Where the state's capacity to offer inducements is high, and its capacity to coerce is also high, then the potential for widespread social mobilization is very low. When the state's coercive capacity is high but its ability to offer inducements is low, then also it is very unlikely to tolerate widespread mobilization. In circumstances where the state capacity to coerce is low and its ability to induce is low state elites are rendered essentially passive. The only circumstances where they may be encouraged to allow a degree of mobilized opposition is when the ability to induce is high and the capacity to coerce is low.

The orientation of the current Chinese Communist leadership is to simultaneously reinforce the state's coercive capacity and its economic capacity. Its transparent aim is to pre-empt opposition if at all possible. To the extent it is successful it leaves no political space for any political opposition to develop. If it is unsuccessful, then it loses control of the political agenda, and there can be no coherent talk of political reform from above.

⁶ See the warning that the "life and death of the party" could hang in the balance once again put out at the Fourth Plenum of the 16th Central Committee Sept 2004. Joe McDonald, "China's Communists Call for Better Gov't" Associated Press. 09/26/04 13:02 EDT

Thus a better way of understanding the current path of political reform which emphasizes strengthening institutions and channeling everything through legalized channels (such as the new regulations on letters and visits) is the preemption of civil society not its encouragement. The more successful the regime, the longer genuine political reform will be put off. Only when the regime loses control of one of the two factors: economic inducements or coercive capacity, will the regime seek to actively engage and negotiate with whatever organized elements of civil society that may be found.

Table I

| | | |
|------------|--------------|-----|
| | Mobilization | |
| | High | low |
| Legitimacy | High | |
| | low | |

Table II

| | | |
|--------------|----------------|-----|
| | State Capacity | |
| | HIGH | LOW |
| MOBILIZATION | High | |
| | Low | |

Table III

Coercive Capacity

High low

Inducement
Capacity

| | |
|------|--|
| High | |
| low | |

Risk culture and Hu Jintao

Cheng Li has presented us with a view of the Fourth generation which is at once benign and reassuring. Yet fully two years after Hu Yaobang’s accession to the summit of the CCP and the PRC and even after he has essentially completed his consolidation of power both inside the PLA and at the provincial level there is no sign of a democratic opening, and in fact, increasing signs of repression.

I intend to analyze Hu Jintao’s leadership within a dynamic framework of personality and organization. The Key analytic factors here are:

1. The closed system of CCP politics
2. The personal biography of Hu Jintao
3. The process of his advancement
4. The mechanism of his succession
5. The changing organizational environment of the CCP

The CCP is a self-selecting organization with a closed membership that has an intense consciousness of in-group and out-group membership.

The organization began as an organization of professional revolutionaries within an extremely hostile environment. In this environment discipline equaled survival. Strong internal discipline was also linked with a need to remain alert to trends within the wider societies that provided opportunities for expansion and wider social influence. As a governing Party, the CCP was torn between its role as an organizer of public power through state institutions and its traditions as an organizer and mobilizer of social action. Hu Jintao’s political formation occurred during the height of this tension and his political survival and advancement has been tied to his ability to manage the risks faced in this environment.

His entire lifetime has been experienced within a frame where the CCP held a monopoly of power institutionally and ideologically. The outstanding characteristic of Hu Jintao's political career is that he has succeeded always within the framework of a hierarchy, ingratiating himself to his superiors and avoiding conflict with his colleagues. His has been a career marked by sponsorship from powerful patrons. He has never achieved advancement in an open contest in competition with a rival political candidate.

Second, Hu Jintao's personal biography holds a number of very special features. His father was a merchant. Prima Facie he should have belonged to the "five black" categories that would have denied him entry into the communist Party or opportunities for higher education. Instead, Hu was able to accomplish both. Only two factors can possibly explain this. 1. His father must have been classified as a member of the national bourgeoisie, such that he was classified as a patriot and progressive. Second, Hu Jintao must himself have worked very hard to become identified with the revolution.⁷ In any case, Hu Jintao's class background would have made him politically vulnerable at least until the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978. To survive, Hu Jintao not only had to be extremely loyal to the Party line, he also had to be an outstanding student. To get into Tsinghua University in 1959 from a provincial town with a negative class background Hu would have had to be an exceptional student who was seen as exceptionally loyal and politically conscientious.⁸ Even then he must have done something during the Four Cleanups campaign that made him eligible to join the CCP and become a Political Monitor in 1964.

He would have been a target of political attacks during the cultural revolution and his assignment to Gansu in 1968 might have come as a relief. What is most interesting however was that as early as 1969 he became active again in the Party organization. According to Ma Ling, given Hu's close connection to the power structure of Jiang Nanxiang, who was the main target of the radical attacks at Tsinghua, Hu simply sat out the cultural revolution and spent his time catching up on his reading... One source has Hu putting up a big character poster with other members of the Hydraulic Engineering Department in defence of Tsinghua's Party leadership,⁹ but ultimately he simply stood aside. What appears true is that he stayed out of the vicious factional struggles during the "Hundred Days' War" and so avoided association with any of the rival red-guard factions.

Ironically, although his position as political monitor undoubtedly placed him on the inside track for political advancement prior to the Cultural Revolution, Hu's career

⁷ Ma Ling notes that Hu Jintao's exceptional grades in elementary and lower middle school allowed him to enter one of Jiangsu's best secondary schools in his hometown of Taizhou, and that while in school he proved himself a very eager participant in labor education classes, such that he joined the CYL at the age of 15 in the twelfth grade. Ma Ling, Li Lu Hu Jintao: ta cong nali lai jiang xiang hechu qu [Hu Jintao: Where does he come from where will he head in the future?] (Hong Kong: Ming Bao books, 2002) pp. 20-21

⁸ The percentage of students at Tsinghua who were of worker-peasant background increased from 12.8% in 1952 to 36 percent in 1959, see Cheng Li, *China's Leaders, the New Generation* (Lanham, Mass.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) p. 103. For Hu's exceptional academic abilities and political activism see *ibid.* pp. 116-117.

⁹ Ian Seckington, "Who's Hu?" *The China Review* No. 21 (Spring 2002)
http://www.gbcc.org.uk/iss21_2.htm

nevertheless received a boost from being sent down to Gansu in 1968. As he had always done, Hu cheerfully participated in labor at the Liujiaxia hydroelectric project. While there, he spent much of his spare time as an activist doing song-and-dance propaganda work. He was transferred to a smaller station at Babanxia, where he was more likely to be noticed. Eventually in January 1970, his propaganda skills, activism and clean political record landed him a job as a secretary. As one of his biographers noted, though his move from the technical team at the power station to the political position as secretary only required him to move up one floor in a two story building, this move had much greater significance. This was the second time that Hu had transferred from the technical to the political track. It meant that even in the heady days when politics was everything, he had earned political trust. He had finally managed to erase any doubts arising from his questionable class background.¹⁰ His move subsequently placed him in a position at the Gansu Construction Commission in the provincial capital in 1974. A year later he became deputy head. He was sent as part of the relief team to the site of the Tangshan earthquake in 1976.¹¹ In 1980 he came to the attention of Song Ping the Provincial Party Secretary. Also a Tsinghua graduate Song was of the influential the December 9 generation, whose wife Chen Shunyao had been deputy Party Secretary of Tsinghua when Hu was there.

When asked why Mr Hu had stood out from other young officials, the veteran cadre replied: "He had a good education. He made no mistakes [in his personal life]. He had a good relationship with his superiors and subordinates. He was respectful to people. And he was young."¹²

In 1980 Hu was promoted deputy director of the Gansu Capital Construction Corporation. In 1981 Song Ping was appointed deputy head of the State Planning Commission and evidently gave advice that led to Hu's inclusion of the first ever young cadres class at the Central Party School.¹³ He became head of the Gansu Young Communist League, and from there was sent to the Central Party School, usually a signal of candidacy for advancement. Song Ping became the Party Secretary who headed the Organization Department at that time, and he was in a position to influence advancement of cadres, and would have been in charge of assigning cadres to the Central Party School. Deng Xiaoping was at that time sponsoring an intensive program to promote younger cadres, both to replace the aging veterans and to fill the gap with Cadres who were more reliable than those who had achieved rapid advancement by pursuing radical factional politics during the Cultural Revolution. Hu Yaobang was placed in charge of this process through the leadership of the Communist Youth League. In 1982, Hu Jintao was elected the youngest (alternate) member of the CCP Central Committee. Not the first time that Hu Jintao served as the youngest in his class. Apparently while at the Central Party School Hu Yaobang made the acquaintance of Hu Deping, Hu Yaobang's son.¹⁴ Hu Jintao became

¹⁰ Su Li *Zhongong wangzhu Hu Jintao* (Hong Kong: Xiafeier guoji chuban gongsi, 2002) p. 75.

¹¹ Cheng Li p. 117

¹² <http://changshagroup.com/lotuslogs/arc20021110.htm> (text originated from the South China Morning Post) (accessed April 12, 2005.)

¹³ Seckington op. cit.

¹⁴ changsha group op. Cit.

the number two in the CYL following its 11th Congress. Some evidence of Hu Jintao's connections with Hu Yaobang is the fact that he accompanied the elder Hu on a tour of Hubei and Guangdong shortly before he became the CYL head in May 1984.¹⁵

Hu Jintao's affability and his ability to get along with his elders is his most powerful political skill.¹⁶ He is obedient and respectful to a fault and never objected to being sent to hardship posts such as those of Party Secretary in Guizhou, and subsequently, Tibet. The fact that he was allowed to spend most of his tenure in Tibet in Beijing, is evidence of the political capital he garnered.¹⁷ Other sources claim that Hu earned the nickname of "sunzi" or "grandson" for his obsequious respect for his elders. According to Zong Hairen, , Song Ping as Party Secretary who headed the Organization Department, was able to make the case for Hu Jintao as heir presumptive to the position of General Secretary in the lead-up to the 14th Party Congress in 1992. Precisely because Hu had never refused an assignment from the Party .¹⁸ Hu deference, and debt to Song Ping suggest that he will make no radical move to rehabilitate or overturn the verdicts on the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations and repression. His mentor, Song Ping was elevated to the Standing Committee of the Politburo at the Fourth Plenum of the 13th CC which met June 23-24 1989 precisely to settle the political scores of the Tiananmen affair.

Hu's entire career shows evidence of deference to his patrons.

Hu has not exercised much real authority. What he has done, however—and it is a remarkable achievement in light of the troubled history of the People's Republic—is to survive. For ten years he offended no one: he did not grab prematurely for power; he deferred not only to those above him but to those below; and he allowed no distance to open between himself and Jiang Zemin. When arrangements for the 2002 power succession began to be seriously discussed in 2000, Hu was still there, and nothing has happened to change that position.¹⁹

The final piece is his acquiescence to Jiang Zemin's effort to upstage him at the very Party congress where he became leader. Hu made no protest even when Jiang denied him a public forum to make a speech on the occasion of his elevation to General Secretaryship, an unprecedented slight.

The dynamics of Hu succession are such that Hu was picked initially by Deng Xiaoping as Jiang Zemin's ultimate successor. Therefore, in order to assure himself of his

¹⁵ Seckington, op. cit.

¹⁶ Ma Ling states that his interviewees all record that Hu's outstanding characteristic is the ability to get along. Ma Ling p. 24.

¹⁷ One source says Hu Deping was influential in getting him medical treatment for altitude sickness in Beijing. Ibid

¹⁸ See Andrew Nathan, Bruce Gilley "China's New Leaders: the Path to Power" *The New York Review of Books* Vol49 no. 14 (September 26, 2002) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/15673> (accessed April 12, 2005)

¹⁹ Nathan and Gilley op. cit.

succession he had to behave deferentially both to Deng and to Jiang. Without any other source of legitimation other than the Party hierarchy itself, the legitimation of his succession rests on the legitimacy of the Party hierarchy and its rules. The hierarchy offers his only claim to leadership status. It should therefore not be surprising not only that Hu has shown deference to his elders, but to the idea of the Party hierarchy itself.

Moreover, social-psychological studies of social change reinforce the idea that change is associated with the work of dissenting minorities.²⁰ Hu has never been in the dissenting minority. The closest he has come is in refusing to bandwagon on the denunciation of his erstwhile patron and namesake Hu Yaobang in 1987, while Hu Jintao was Party Secretary in Guizhou.²¹ Hu's entire career, including the period of the Cultural Revolution demonstrates not a single instance of dissent or opposition to the prevailing Party line or organization. Indeed, we may infer from his experience during the Cultural Revolution that as one of those initially designated for advancement before the Cultural Revolution who had achieved this status by dint of academic achievement and unstinting work on behalf of the Party hierarchy, he would be disapproving, even disdainful, of Johnny-come-lately oppositionists and dissidents whose "qualifications" were inferior to his own. Furthermore, his biographers insist on Hu's solidarity and comradeship with his classmates from Tsinghua. A further sign of self-conscious conformity.

Social psychologists refer to two sources of conformity in social organizations.²² One is cognitive the other is normative. Social change is said to occur when determined dissent shakes the cognitive basis of solidarity by forcing organization members to evaluate the "truths" shared by the organization. Hu has always situated himself with the mainstream, always in the position of defending organizational truths against challengers.

Hu Jintao's agenda for political reform lays stress upon maintaining the Party's leading role and subordinating democracy to stability:

We must actively and continually press forward with political reform and build political civilization with great force. In order to build a prosperous society, pioneer new vistas for socialism with Chinese characteristics we must develop socialist democracy, fully stimulate and expand the activism of the popular masses, its initiative and innovative spirit to strengthen the life force of the Party and state, consolidate and develop democratic unity, a lively and vigorous, peaceful and harmonious political terrain (jumian). We must persist with Party leadership and allowing the people to be masters of their homes and ruling the country in accord with the law in unison with the practice of political reform and socialist political construction, uniting this with the practice of constructing socialist modernization by developing inner-Party democracy to lead the development of popular democracy, to achieve the institutionalization, normativization, and proceduralization of socialist democratic politics.

²⁰ Robin Martin and Miles Hewstone, "Social Influence, Processes of Control and Change: Conformity, Obedience to Authority and Innovation," In Michael Hogg and Joel Cooper, *The Sage Handbook of Social Psychology* (London: Sage, 2003) pp 347-366,

²¹ Seckington, op. cit.

²² Deutsch and Gerard, cited in Robin Martin and Miles Hewstone, "Social Influence, Processes of Control and Change: Conformity, Obedience to Authority and Innovation," In Michael Hogg and Joel Cooper, *The Sage Handbook of Social Psychology* (London: Sage, 2003) pp. 348-349.

We must proceed from national conditions, and incrementally perfect democratic institutions, with the emphasis on the people's congress system, the system of multiparty political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party, the system of regional minority autonomy, and grass-roots local democracy in order to expand procedural citizen political participation and promote scientific and democratic policy-making to guarantee the people democratic elections in accordance with the law, democratic policy-making, and democratic supervision.²³

Note here that throughout this speech on democracy and democratic rights, the leadership of the Party is in the subject position and the people is in the object position. It is the Party which grants the people the rights and opportunities of political participation that must be conditioned by the law, economic development as well as stability and harmony. Democracy must be encouraged to the extent that it is not disruptive.

Hu Jintao has laid out an agenda that genuinely aims to cope with the challenges facing contemporary China. There is a sincere effort to deal with the social question, deal with social pressure and redress inequities. However the tools through which Hu aims to do this are entirely Leninist in nature. Therefore, to deal with China's pressing problems u aims first to strengthen the Party's vanguard role.²⁴ This is not surprising given that his career has been made on the basis of playing the activist within the framework of hierarchically mandated tasks. However even his supporters acknowledge that the effort to preserve a vanguard role in present day China risks turning into formalism into a program of "engineering symbols" and a waste of public funds on symbolic tourism.²⁵

Hu Jintao has placed himself in the classic trap of the authoritarian dilemma. He recognizes that the CCP has become identified with elites and recognizes that the gap with the grass roots is he fundamental source of uncertainty confronting Party rule. He wishes to reconcile Party rule with the interests of society and serve society as the basis of Party rule.

We must further reform and perfect the leadership and governance methods of the Party persist in the principle that the Party oversees the whole picture (zonglan quanju) and coordinates the various directions, realizing governance in accord with the law in order to better implement the leadership of the Party over the state and society. We must further deepen the reform of the system of public administration, improve administrative efficiency, promote the realization of fairness and justice for the entire society to better serve the people.²⁶

²³ See Hu Jintao, speech at the conference commemorating the 110th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong (December 26, 2003) <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1024/2267174.html> (Accessed April 12, 2005)

²⁴ See Hu Jintao ,,

²⁵ RMRB Commentator' Article, "Zai tan baochi dangyuan xiandingxing guanjian zai qude shixiao" [Once more on how the key to maintaining the advanced nature of the Party member depends on obtaining real results] RMRB P. 2 April 14, 2005
<http://xf.people.com.cn/GB/42471/3319752.html>

²⁶ Hu Jintao Speech commemorating Mao Zedong op. cit.

Note that in this connection efficiency is equal in concern to accountability, and the major priority is the quality of leadership not the right to rule itself. In this equation therefore opposition and controversy are disruptive and themselves a source of governance uncertainty to be minimized. Hence the authoritarian dilemma. To preserve its mandate to rule the party or the party in power must serve society. In order to serve society the Party must improve its capacity to lead. To preserve its capacity to lead it must remove obstacles to its governance and opposition is one such obstacle. Furthermore, while the Party seeks to preempt challenges by channeling popular participation through recognized institutions and procedures, such participation must not obstruct its capacity to govern. Moreover, so long as the Party is able to pre-empt opposition by pragmatic and proactive problem-solving, then the need and substance of popular participation is itself pre-emptive. Therefore, for the party to be successful, it must pre-empt opposition. If the party is successful, then there is no need for opposition. Thus in paying lip-service to the need for democracy, democracy itself is obviated.

The literature of social psychology suggests that “only enduring and radical contextual changes .. modify personality”²⁷ Hu has set out to preserve a sociopolitical structure that minimizes challenges from within and without. He has made clear that “multiparty cooperation” leaves no room for an opposition party.²⁸ His entire career has been tied to strict conformity to the organization in opposition to dissenters.²⁹ Hu’s commitment to inner Party loyalty further insulates him against change emerging from outside the Party organization, given the tendency noted in social psychology for to accentuate in-group identification in situation of conflict or competition with out-group members.³⁰

Conclusion

To sum up: real political reform would entail opening up a legitimate space for an opposition, an opposition that could become the catalyst for organizational change. While such an opposition could conceivably emerge from inside the Party, the hierarchic structure of the Leninist Party with the well established culture of Party discipline militates against this. Hu Jintao’s own history as well as the policy pronouncements associated with his first term in office demonstrate determined opposition to opening up a political space for opposition outside the Party. Hu is looking for ways that will allow for “participation” without contestation; consultation without competition or disharmony.

Even within the area of grassroots democracy which many have seen as the best hope for gradual democratic political reform, new documents point to an

²⁷ Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, “Intergroup Behavior and Social Identity,” *The Sage Handbook of Social Psychology* op. cit p. 409.

²⁸ See “Hu Jintao zhuchi zhengzhiju huiyi yanjiu zhengxie zhidu: Bu zhaochao bieguo,” Hu Jintao presides over Politburo Meeting to study the Political Consultative system: We will not copy other countries] <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1024/314268.html> (Accessed January 24, 2005)

²⁹ It is symptomatic that one of the steps in his career ladder was the declaration of Martial Law in Tibet in March 1989 in response to demonstrations in Lhasa.

³⁰ Hogg op. cit p. 411.

effort to eliminate potential conflict between elected village heads and Party secretaries by combining those positions, along with the elimination of the Political consultative conference at the local level.

None of this means that change is not possible. Rather it means that is unlikely to be initiated by Hu, and that it is likely to be resisted as long as possible if initiated from the outside.³¹ However, given Hu's demonstrable preference for procedural and non-confrontational resolution of inter-personal conflict, it is possible that he will adjust to challenges in the interests of preserving social harmony. Nevertheless, it would also appear that he is possibly among the last to tolerate or introduce a competitive framework for the resolution of political differences.

That is why he has disappointed reformers in Hong Kong who hoped he would introduce direct elections for Hong Kong's Chief Executive as well as fully democratic elections to Hong Kong's Legislative Council in 2007. The main reason he resists is less out of concern about the results of Hong Kong democracy in Hong Kong itself, but more out of fear of its spillover effects in the mainland should it succeed. Hu is not ready, and possibly, never will be.

Because Hu's career has succeeded mainly when mobilizational phases of the regime were at an ebb, and hierarchies were fairly strong, his first instinct is to strengthen the hierarchic structures of the regime. Nevertheless, his career as a lieutenant in mobilization campaigns orients him towards social action so long as it is channeled through recognizable hierarchic structures. He is not a revolutionary, and has neither the experience nor the inclination to build new hierarchies through mobilizational campaigns. Unlike Jiang Zemin, a technocrat who was parachuted into political leadership and had little experience of dealing with grass roots politics, Hu does. But he does it always in the service of the organization. Democratic politics demands leaders who are skilled in the arts of political mobilization, but who are willing to engage in competition with determined opponents for popular support. Hu has never developed such skills.

³¹ This conclusion has now been echoed by s disappointed reformers within China see, Philip Pan, "Hu Tightens Party's Grip On Power: Chinese Leader Seen As Limiting Freedoms" Washington Post Foreign Service ,Sunday, April 24, 2005; Page A01