

Democracy Vs. Rule of Law Debate: Empirical Findings

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Issues at the Center of Scholarly Debates

The growing disconnect between China's market-oriented economy with its authoritarian political institution has given rise to intense discussion and debate about political reform. Four major paradigms has been offered

Four Paradigms

- China will collapse (Gordon Chang)
- China will democratize (Bruce Gilley)
 1. Opposition are too weak to launch bottom revolution.
 2. Top down transformation is possible
- Resilient of Authoritarianism (Andy Nathan): CCP has the ability to sustain popular support through a combination of economic growth, skillful repression and propaganda, and foreign policy successes that gratify a nationalist public.
- China will gradually decay (Pei Mingxin): Intuitional barrier prevents China from necessary transition. Bureaucrats become predators.

Similarity and Differences

- Current regime cannot sustain (probably not including Andy)
- The next issue is, naturally, what kind of regime does China need or more likely to get?
 - Liberal democracy
 - Consultative rule of law regime
- Much of the debates presented in the book are centered on the possibility to establish rule of law in China without democracy

Missing Link in the Debate

- Attitudes of ordinary people are mysteriously missing from the picture.
- What do people in China want? Do they want democracy?
- How much do they want?
- Does political culture has any influence here? If yes, what kind of influence does culture have?

Figure 1. Whether Democracy is Suitable for the Society in which Respondents Reside

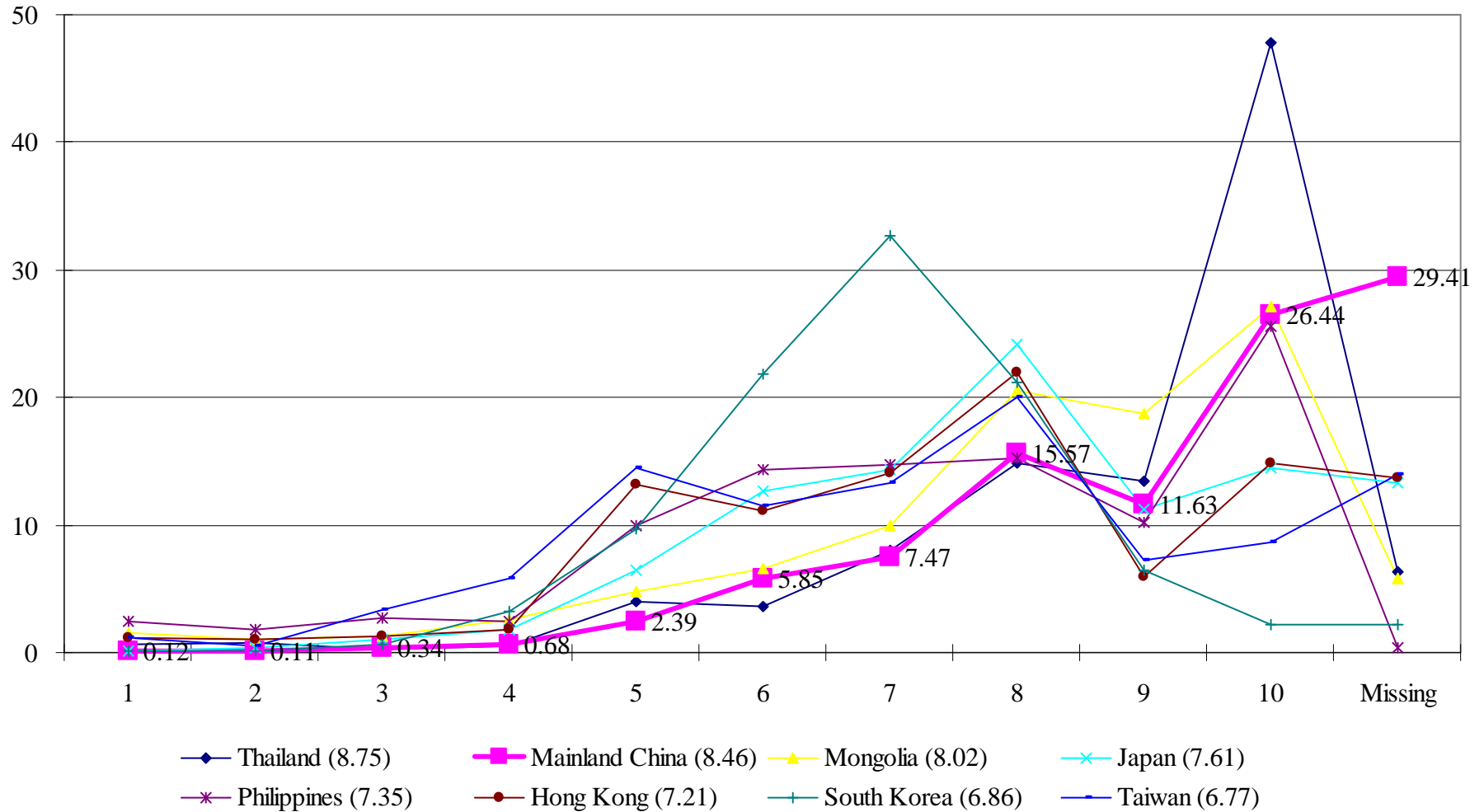
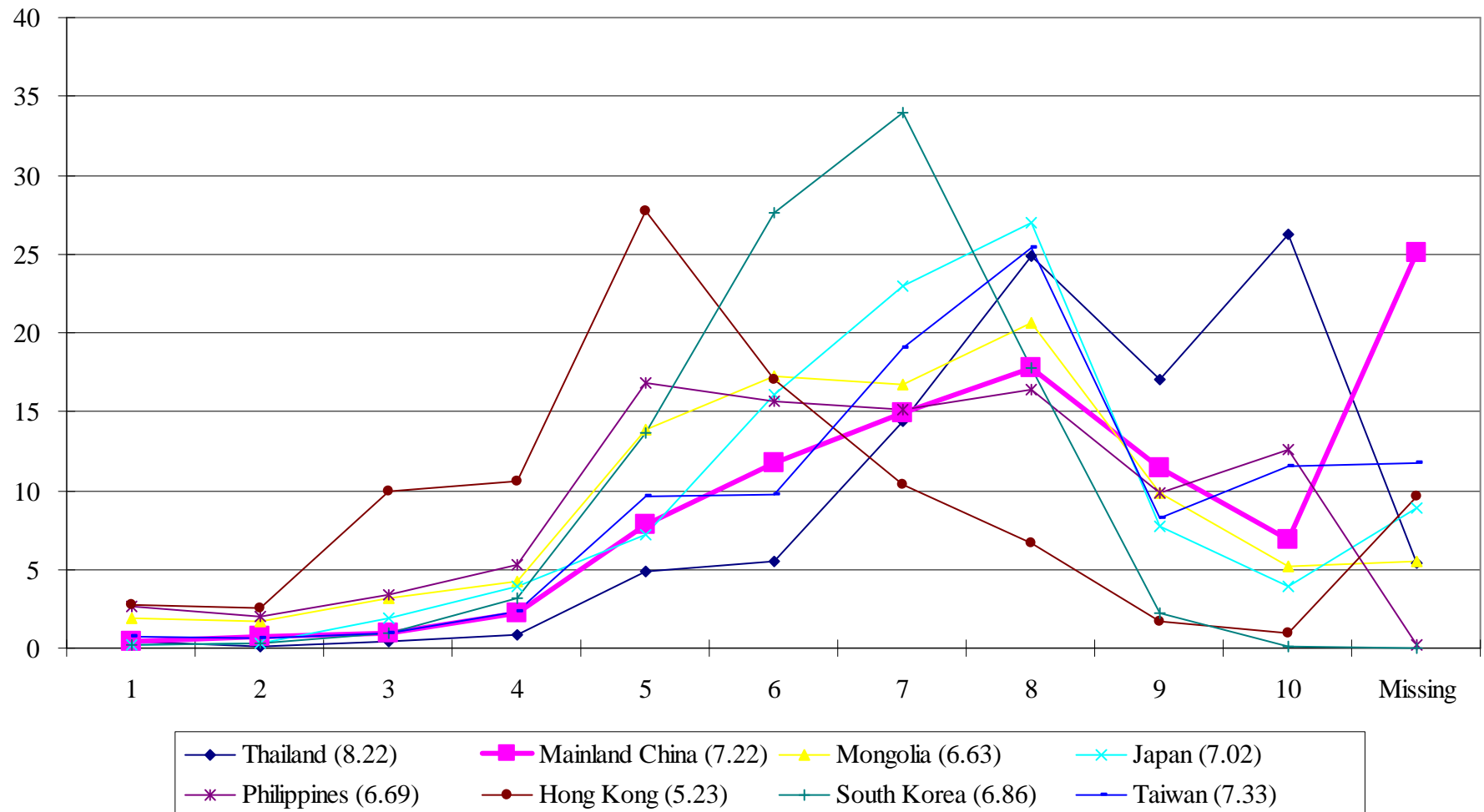


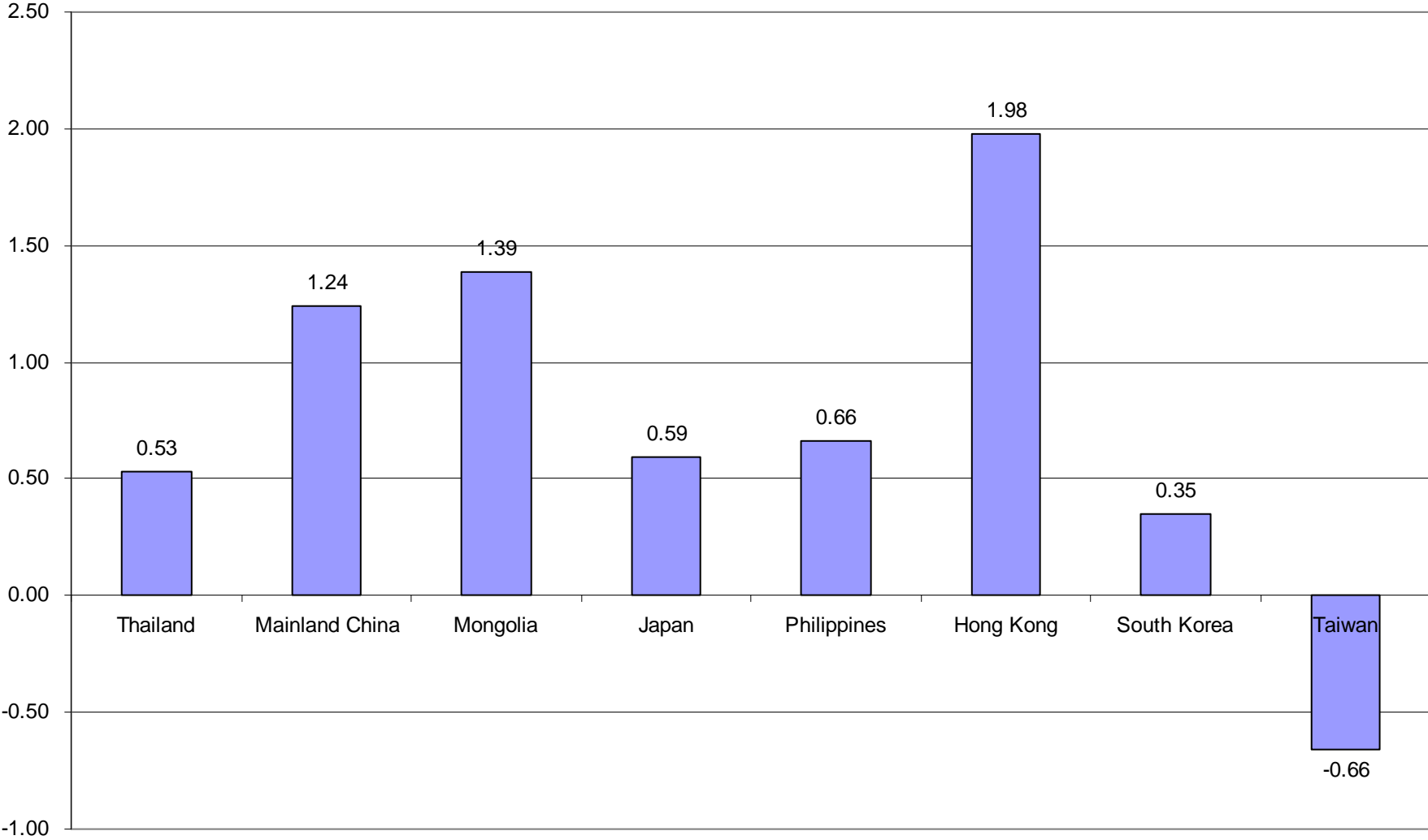
Figure 2. Levels of Democracy in Different Societies as Perceived by Their People



Empirical Findings

- People in China do want democracy
- A more puzzling finding is that the perceived level of democracy in China is extremely high!
- In the past, scholars just ask the first question. We conceptualize the issue in a somewhat different way. We believe democracy has both supply and demand side. What is important for the political development in China is the ratio between supply and demand.

Figure 3. Gaps between Democratic Supply and Demands



Unexpected Findings

- The gap between democratic desirability and democratic supply in mainland China is no larger than other countries and regions in East Asia despite China is the least democratic one.
- In Taiwan, we found the relationship is reversed. Taiwan is the only political entities in Asian where people think democratic supply exceed democratic demands

Possible Interpretations for the Puzzles

- Political Fear
- Political Indoctrination
- People understand democracy differently

Political Fear

- To test this hypothesis, we asked people to evaluate civil liberty and political rights in China.
- We ask fear directly and correlate the answer to their understanding of democracy
- We exam correlation between fear and DK and NA.
- No empirical evidence to support this claim

Table 1. Perception of Performance of the Current Government As Compared to that of 1979

	Better	No Change	Worse	B-W
Civil Liberty				
Freedom of Expression	85.0 (2,174)	12.1 (310)	2.9 (73)	82.1
Freedom of Residence	82.5 (2,118)	14 (358)	3.6 (91)	78.9
Freedom of Religion	75.7 (1,569)	20.4 (422)	3.9 (80)	71.8
Freedom of Association	74.2 (1,435)	21 (406)	4.8 (93)	69.4
Political Rights				
Personal Political Rights	69.3 (1,664)	24 (576)	6.7 (162)	62.6
Independence of the Legal System	61.8 (988)	21.1 (337)	17.1 (273)	44.7
Equal Treatment by the Government	60.5 (1,489)	23.3 (574)	16.2 (398)	44.3
Influence on Government Policy	39.0 (766)	47.1 (926)	13.8 (272)	25.2
Economic Performance				
Economic Development	96.6 (2,804)	1.6 (47)	1.8 (52)	86.3
Inequality	21.2 (600)	4.1 (115)	74.7 (2,109)	-53.5
Corruption	12.4 (319)	4.4 (113)	83.2 (2,138)	-70.8
Social Order				
Public Security	45.3 (1,293)	6.1 (175)	48.5 (1383)	-3.2

Source: 2002 Mainland China Survey

Note: Entries are Percentage. Entries in parentheses are Ns. Missing values are excluded.

Different Understanding?

- We asked open-ended question, what is democracy?
- We code the answer into 3 major categories, freedom, parental care (benevolent dictatorship, and procedure democracy)

Table 2. Meaning of Democracy for Respondents in China and Taiwan

To you, what does democracy mean?	Mainland China	
	Percent	N
Freedom		
Freedom and/or Equality	22.9	739
Parental Care		
Soliciting People's Opinions when Making Decisions	17.1	544
Joint Decision Making	16.9	538
Government for the People	7.2	229
Procedures, Obligations, or Rights		
Listen to People's Opinions when Making Decisions	13.5	429
Elections and Participation in the Decision Making Process	11.6	371
Rights	6.3	200
Don't Know	42.1	1340

Finding in Mainland China

- 1/4 people understand democracy as freedom
- Large number of people understand democracy in terms of parental care
- Only 10 percent people perceiving democracy as election, check and balance and multi-party competition
- The answer is compatible to both the culture and regime indoctrination argument – the culture itself is shaped by the authoritarian institution.
- To test the last argument, we bring Taiwan in. We found despite the institutional difference, only small number of people in Taiwan understand democracy as election, party competition, etc. Regime indoctrination cannot explain the previous finding.

Table 3. Meaning of Democracy for Respondents in China and Taiwan

To you, what does democracy mean?	Mainland China		Taiwan	
	Percent	N	Percent	N
Freedom				
Freedom and/or Equality	22.9	739	48.6	687
Parental Care				
Soliciting People's Opinions when Making Decisions	17.1	544	5.7	81
Joint Decision Making	16.9	538	6.8	96
Government for the People	7.2	229	7.8	111
Procedures, Obligations, or Rights				
Listen to People's Opinions when Making Decisions	13.5	429	13.4	190
Elections and Participation in the Decision Making Process	11.6	371	10.4	147
Rights	6.3	200	4	56
Don't Know	42.1	1340	17	241

Source: 2002 Asian Barometer Study

Note: Total exceeds 100 percent due to multiple answers being allowed for each respondent

Conclusion

- There are substantial compatibility between Pan Wei's argument and public opinion in China
- The message from the survey, I would argue, rather than as demonstrating China cannot democratize, suggest that there are rooms for regime to maneuver to hold on power
- Consultative rule of law regime may be the best choice for the regime.