



# The Historical Background, Challenges and Future Prospects of Democratic Administration in China

Zhaoyi Chen<sup>1\*</sup>, Sity Daud<sup>2</sup>, Abdul Muein Abadi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia; p116949@siswa.ukm.edu.my (Z.C.); sitydaud@ukm.edu.my (S.D.); muein@ukm.edu.my (A.M.A.)

**Abstract.** The growth of Chinese democracy has a profound historical background and has gone through the tortuous process. Beginning in the last century, under the common role of internal and external factors, the government has introduced a series of democratic measures. This article aims to briefly explain the measures proposed by the Chinese government's democratic administrative reforms, while discussing the potential of the democratic administration. China's local democratic administration is still in some institutional and cultural challenges, in order to overcome these difficulties, China has adopted a series of measures, strengthened the publicity and education of law, enhanced the public's political consciousness and participation, and strengthened the supervision mechanism. The Chinese government has been promoting grass-roots democratic reforms and testing different mechanisms and policies. Economic growth, education level, and the rise of social media have created favorable conditions for wider democratic participation. On this basis, this article will offer a useful insight of the future of Chinese democracy.

**Keywords:** China, Democratic Administration, Difficulties, Potential, Practice Innovation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of democratic administration has a long history in the West. As the earliest scholar who put forward the theory of democratic administration, Max Weber pointed out two rules that administration must follow. It is based on the premise that all people have the same qualifications to lead common affairs in principle; It reduces the scope of command powers to decrease to the lowest degree. (Weber, 1978) With the development of administration theory in the US, Ostrom gradually introduced the concept of democracy into the field of public administration. At the same time, scholars such as Fredrickson and Stillman continued to improve the concept of democratic administration, making it a mainstream theory. (Stillman, 1976)

Although the schools of administration are different, scholars all advocate some common values, oppose the political/administrative dichotomy, and advocate injecting democratic values that originally existed in the political field into the administrative field; emphasizing the direct participation of citizens in the administrative process; emphasizing the cultivation of civic spirit and its role in management.<sup>1</sup> Influenced by Western political science, China has continuously promoted the construction of democratic administration in the practice of administrative reform this year. During the administration of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, democracy in the administrative field was regarded as an indispensable direction of government reform. They see this as the key to avoiding corruption and maintain long-term Party rule. Since Xi Jinping came to power, he has continued to insist on administrative democratization and proposed a series of measures to promote administrative democracy.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1. Brief History of China's Democratic Transformation

**Table 1:** The Evolution of Administration in China.

Year	Historical period	Feature
Before 1911	Administration in China during the feudal period	The monarchy is the main political and administrative system
1911-1949	Administration before the founding of New China	The war is constant, and it is difficult to conduct democratic reform attempts
1949-1966	Administration in the early days of the founding of New China	Strengthen the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s leadership and socialist public ownership.
1966-1976	The chaos during the Cultural Revolution period	Social turmoil, constant political movement, and democracy have been destroyed
1978-2012	Administration after reform and opening up	Explore the democratic administrative road with China characteristics and make administrative reforms.
2012-now	Administration of Xi Jinping's era	Increase political control, strengthen anti-corruption measures, and promote political reform

Before 1911, China was in the feudal era, at that time, the monarchy was the feature of China. Ancient Chinese politics was the integration of imperial power and bureaucratic politics. The emperor was the highest authority. Local officials on behalf of the emperor to conduct local management. All the appointments and removal of officials depend on the emperor. At that time, China had no democracy, Confucianism were promoted and followed by the

<sup>1</sup> A more detailed discussion of this content can be found in Ostrom(2008), Osborne and Platrik(1997), Denhardt(2000).

<sup>2</sup> China's leaders put forward the "whole process of people's democracy" at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), aiming at pushing democracy construction to a new height, and at the same time put forward various measures for democracy construction, such as promoting administrative supervision and rule of law.

emperor. Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, Western democratic ideas have been continuously introduced into China. The Revolution of 1911 overthrew the feudal rule of the China and established the Republic of China, marking the emergence of Chinese democratic ideas. However, subsequent political turmoil and war limited the growth of democratic systems. The KMT Civil War led to the establishment of the PRC, and the CPC achieved victory. The CPC established a party system, which limited political diversification and democracy. During the Cultural Revolution, Chinese society suffered serious political turmoil and human rights violations, and the principles of democracy were suppressed. Since the 1980s, new policies promoted China's economic reform and modernization process, and it had also promoted the discussion of social opening up and democratic reform. China begun to implement some local elections and villagers' autonomy experiments, although the scope of these is limited. In 2000s, China's civil society began to rise, including no-governmental organizations, independent media and rights protection movements. They tried to strive for more freedom of speech and participation in all aspects of politics. Since the 1900s, China's Internet and social media platforms enabled the public to express their voices, criticize government policies and join in social discussions. However, the government also adopted extensive review and blockade measures to restrict citizen's comments on the Internet. China has implemented a series of policies to strengthen the control of the party, including strengthening the supervision of the media, the Internet, and civil society to ensure the absolute dominance of the CPC. In general, China's democratic process is a complex history, full of challenges and contradictions. Despite some progress and reforms, China still has strict restrictions on the political system, and the one-party system still dominates. The Chinese government's policies and attitudes have changed in different periods, but the CCP's control has always been the core issue.(Zhou, 2001) In the future, China's democratic development trend will still be uncertain.

Since 1980s, the democratization process of the Chinese government has been relatively limited, mainly focusing on local scope and institutional level. In the early 1980s, China began to implement villagers' autonomy projects, allowing rural residents to participate in decision-making at the grassroots level.(Lu et al., 2019) Villagers can elect members of the committee to manage some economic affairs. The goal of this system is to strengthen grass-roots democracy, although the party's control is still relatively large. China's local elections also provide some democratic opportunities. Municipal and township governments can elect representatives, who can attend local policy formulation and supervision.<sup>3</sup> However, these elections are usually supervised and controlled by the authority. Most representatives are party members, and election candidates usually need party approval.

Since 2012, China emphasized the leadership of the Party in national political life and strengthened the party's centralized leadership. The government has implemented the review and control of Internet and social media.(Mattingly, 2019)This has led to more stringent restrictions on freedom of speech. The government supervises the content of the Internet, blocks sensitive information. Besides,the government launched a large-scale anti-corruption movement to clean up corrupt elements through disciplinary review within the party. Although this campaign has been supported by the public, it is also criticized by some western countries. (Tsang & Cheung, 2022) China has strengthened the control of the local government, and enhanced centralization by consolidating power and cutting the autonomy of local areas. This may weaken the political diversity and policy flexibility of the local government. China also has strengthened control of academic, media and cultural fields, and requires them to follow the party's ideology.

## 1.2. Factors for Democratic Transformation

The transformation of administrative to democracy is a long -term process, with complicated internal and external factors. Internal factors are mainly political stability, the security needs of political party leaders, the transformation of leaders' cognition, and so on. From the outside, the continuous deepening of economic globalization, the development of informatization, international pressure, and the growth of mass needs are all factor that cannot be ignored. Affected by these factors, China began to take many democratic measures in the 1980s.

**Table 2:** Factors of Chinese Democratic Reform.

	Promotion Factors
Internal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pursuit of Social Stability</li> <li>2. Change of Government Cognitive Level</li> <li>3. Legitimacy Requirement</li> <li>4. Corruption Problems</li> </ol>
External	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Globalization</li> <li>2. International Trade</li> <li>3. International Image Requirement</li> <li>4. Increasing Public Needs</li> <li>5. Development of Technology</li> <li>6. Economy Development Requirement</li> </ol>

## 3.1. Internal Factors

China's transformation to democracy has a complex reason for active and passive, internal and external. From

<sup>3</sup> China's Constitution and related organic laws(*Zu Zhi Fa*) stipulate the details of grassroots democratic elections.

the perspective of internal elements, first of all, the government's pursuit of stability is greater than everything. Therefore, they encourage a certain degree of democracy to solve social problems. This can solve the dissatisfaction of some people and satisfy their interests. (Wang,2015) Second, the government's cognitive level is constantly improving. With the internationalization of China in recent years, China has also learned more advanced management methods. The drawing of these Western experience has made China recognize the lack of management of its own management and provides space for reform. Obviously, at the local government level, many places such as Zhejiang Province have introduced many new policies in accordance with modern Internet technology, which has changed the management model to meet the requirements of the masses.<sup>4</sup> Third, this is also the inherent requirements of legitimacy. China needs to meet their basic demands through the public participation in the administrative process, which can vent their dissatisfaction. Regardless of the success of democratic reform, the masses' support for the government will continue to rise. Fourth, due to the corruption problems in China in the past two years, party members and the masses have weakened the confidence of the government. (Wedeman,2017) Therefore, China encourages the participation of social groups in major matters. This can make the policy more open and curb the spread of corruption.

### 3.2. External Factors

Analysis from external reasons, democratization is inseparable from trade. First of all, China's external exports and trade volume increased year by year. In this context, more partners need to be attracted, so a more advanced management model meets the market requirements. (Guthrie,2012) The premise of cooperating with other countries is to have a certain degree of democratization and openness. This is due to the globalization trend that deepened in this century. Secondly, the governance of modern society is more complicated, and the original management method is difficult to keep up with the trend of the times. In particular, a large number of new social groups have emerged in China, and the complexity of trade and leases has continued to deepen, and China needs to adopt new ways of thinking. Third, the demand for the Chinese public has been different.<sup>5</sup> With the opening of the people's international perspective and the increase of the happiness index, the masses of the new era put forward higher requirements for living standards. And the Chinese people are even more sensitive to defending their rights. This puts forward a request for ruling levels. Finally, with the outbreak of science and technology, its achievements have continued to integrate into government practice. Online supervision, information disclosure, and government consultation directly or indirectly improved the government's democratization level.(Holliday and Yep,2005)

## 4. CHINESE GOVERNMENTS' PRACTICAL INNOVATION

Some local governments encourage the public to attend policy formulation or project management, and collect common people's opinions through public hearing, consulting meeting and online platforms. The degree of participation is different in various regions and time, but the government usually maintains the control of final decisions.

**Table 3:** Main Areas and Contents of Administrative Reform of Chinese Government.

Areas	Contents
Information Disclosure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Content</li> <li>2. Scope</li> <li>3. Forms and Channels</li> <li>4. Supervision Measures</li> <li>5. Legalization</li> </ol>
Decision-making Mechanism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Administrative Decentralization</li> <li>2. Research Mechanism</li> <li>3. Public Opinion Collection</li> <li>4. Expert Consultation</li> <li>5. Supervision Measures</li> </ol>
Administrative Legalization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Public Participation</li> <li>2. Communication between Government and Citizens</li> <li>3. Legal Supervision</li> <li>4. Limit of Administrative Power</li> </ol>
NGOs Involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Number</li> <li>2. Kind</li> <li>3. Functiuon</li> <li>4. Oversight</li> </ol>
Public Opinions Collection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Legislation</li> <li>2. Platforms and Measures</li> </ol>

<sup>4</sup> Zhejiang taps internet to enhance govt services.

Retrieved from:[https://www.wuzhenwic.org/2019-10/22/c\\_554558.htm](https://www.wuzhenwic.org/2019-10/22/c_554558.htm)

<sup>5</sup> In the report of the 19th National Congress of communist party, the leaders of China revised the expression of basic social contradictions in China, emphasizing the changes of people's needs.

#### 4.1. Reform in Information Disclosure

First, the Chinese government is always broadening the range and content of information disclosed about government affairs. The disclosure's content covers every facet both before and after the policy is put into effect. Open government affairs are currently practiced by administrative organs in China at the levels of provinces, cities, counties, and townships; public institutions run by civil servants; and public institutions having some administrative management or approval functions. (Li, Xue and Qin, 2022) With respect to the disclosure content, it is necessary that all issues pertaining to the exercise of administrative authority be managed in compliance with national legislation. Common disclosure matters include personnel appointment, major government projects, financial budgets, organizational composition, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the Chinese government is always coming up with new ways to disclose official issues through new forms and channels. (Yang, Wu and Xiao, 2022). Government information dissemination is being done in a methodical manner now. Such as government press conferences, free official bulletins sponsored by governments, government approval halls or service windows, government department hotlines, government PR columns on public matters, and invitations to pertinent government gatherings. For instance, China has lately promoted the fengqiao experience, which calls for the creation of a contradiction solution center at the local level to address issues facing the general populace. (Cai, 2022)

Third, the government is still pushing for the affairs disclosure system to be innovative. Information disclosure legislation as well as a legal framework for government information disclosure have been developed in China. The extent and mode of information dissemination are outlined in these regulations. In certain locations, the government uses an online opinion gathering tool in addition to offering services over the Internet. This enhances the public's ability to obtain information. (Stockmann and Luo, 2017) China has also set up avenues for collecting social criticisms and accepting public oversight. They publicly choose senior officials, and the establishment of the official inspection and pre-appointment notification systems has further guaranteed the public's right to know about and control staff employment. Furthermore, the Chinese government has implemented policies aimed at enhancing public oversight of projects in which it has invested, particularly public benefit development projects that are of great public interest. In addition, public service organizations and several public utilities—including transportation, power, and water supply—are working to put the open affairs system into place.

#### 4.2. Innovation of the Decision-Making Mechanism

In order to satisfy public opinion, the Chinese government keeps pushing for the democratization of administrative decision. First, the central government continues to support administrative decentralization while defining the administrative authority of departments and governments at all levels in a way that is coherent and supported by science. (Fang, Fang and Yu, 2022). By using this approach, local governments at the county and municipal levels now have greater freedom to steer the local economy and can more quickly and effectively address grassroots concerns. Second, the framework for research and inquiry for significant political initiatives has been built and enhanced by Chinese governments at all levels. Things that haven't been thoroughly investigated shouldn't be brought before the government. Each year at the start, local governments choose the main subjects for research. Many of these subjects will be included in government decisions or immediately turned into policy after they are finished.

Third, the government creates avenues for citizens to voice their opinions and sets up a system of public hearings and publicity for important issues. (Ergenc, 2014) In order to ensure that the interests of all members of society can be freely expressed and that official choices more accurately reflect the interests of the people, the government places a strong focus on creating and enhancing the various classes' mechanisms for expressing their interests. (Zhao et al., 2022) Governments at all levels have vigorously advocated for the system of open government affairs, democratic symposiums and hearings, and a thorough listening to suggestions and opinions from both inside and outside the Party in order to advance the democratization of decision. Through media announcements, issues of public importance are brought up for public discussion in an effort to garner support.

Fourth, the government creates and enhances a framework for significant issue consultation and fully embrace the function of a think tank. (Li, Tsai and Song, 2023) A crucial component of the democratic system is the consultation process. The government devised a framework for expert consultation on important topics, and then it formed a series of expert groups or consulting institutions in succession. Fifth, the government should make clear who is responsible for what decisions, provide a reliable mechanism for looking into policy-making errors, and hold policy-makers accountable to the public. (Liu, Liu and Liang, 2022) As a result, the primary standard for evaluating the democracy of the policy-making process is whether the obligation can be fulfilled. Local governments create administrative supervision regulations, define supervision techniques and procedures, and routinely monitor and provide input on the implementation of decisions made by governments at their respective levels.

#### 4.3. Efforts In Administrative Legalization

Legalization and proceduralization are two tools used in the realm of government administration to control and limit government action. (Wang, 2022) The legalization and proceduralization of public administration occur

<sup>6</sup> China has formulated special regulations on the administration of government information disclosure, and defined the contents that should be disclosed in legal form. Retrieved from: [http://www.beihai.gov.cn/xxgk/bm/bhscszmgjc/tpxw\\_54/t16668051.shtml](http://www.beihai.gov.cn/xxgk/bm/bhscszmgjc/tpxw_54/t16668051.shtml)

simultaneously with the process of fortifying administrative democracy. First, local governments enhance public engagement in the legislative process and enhance the quality of the legislative process itself. (Deng, He and Li, 2022). Legislative recommendations and opinions from grassroots units and administrative counterparts must be taken into consideration when requesting comments on legislative drafts, legislative research, and other related tasks. China establishes and enhances the system of legislative hearings and legislative consultative meetings concurrently. (Ergenc, 2014) China's rule of law has improved a lot than the previous decades. It is rarely found to be judicial corruption. The proportion principle is met in the process of case trials. The judicial procedures rarely have trial errors.

Second, in the process of administrative law enforcement, local governments improve communication between the public and the government. Administrative organs are required to execute their authority in compliance with the law, adhere to explicit legal protocols, and guarantee that all parties have the right to a state, a defense, and fair hearings. Simultaneously, it ought to maintain openness and promptly provide the public with pertinent information. In order to guarantee that the actions of the administrative organs are lawful and compliant, the rule of law must also be put into practice. This involves making sure the administrative organs follow the law in carrying out their responsibilities and refrain from abusing their authority. The administrative organs should treat all parties equally and refrain from discriminating against them based on any criteria, including social position, background, or belief, when implementing the legislation.

Third, local governments reinforce the limits on the government's administrative power and enhance its legal oversight. (Li et al., 2022). Governments and departments at all levels have handled reconsideration cases in accordance with the law since the "Administrative Reconsideration Law" was promulgated and put into effect. They have also corrected and supervised unlawful or improper administrative acts of law enforcement agencies and successfully protected the legitimate rights and interests of administrative counterparts. Administrative law enforcement's monitoring system in China has been progressively enhanced. The administrative execution process also includes a hearing procedure and it must adhere to the fairness and transparency rules, which mandate that the hearing be conducted in an open setting.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, local administrations support the reform of governmental operations. The legal definition of administrative functions is provided by the government. The local government progressively mends the connection with businesses and the market by putting the "Administrative Licensing Law" into practice. (Ross, 2004) Local governments use a combination of marketization and administration to encourage the building of infrastructure, while also progressively enhancing the public service system and providing more funding for health, education, and other social projects. The government has also developed a number of additional social security programs, including medical, unemployment, and work-related accident insurance, in order to adequately safeguard the weaker segments of society.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.4. Non-Governmental Organizations' Participation

Chinese NGOs have become much more powerful in recent years. The administration of social public affairs has improved with the growth of NGOs. (Wu and Nie, 2022). NGOs in China have grown to be a very powerful influence at this point. People have begun expressing their own interests on this platform. The number of NGOs in China has increased, and the fields involved have become more diversified. (Chen, 2006) The administration of social public affairs is a collaborative effort including several NGOs, businesses, and the broader public. NGOs have progressively developed into a vital conduit for the public to communicate with party committees, governments at all levels, and the general public. (Hsu and Hasmath, 2014) They also serve as a platform for the public to voice their opinions, defend their own rights and interests, and take part in political and economic development. NGOs often maintain tight relationships with the government and have access to individuals at the grassroots level. As a result, NGOs promptly compile and transmit to the government the aspirations, requests, and critiques of the populace. They can enhance the efficiency and justice of government administration while fostering positive interactions between the government and the vast majority of the populace. A wide range of industries are covered by NGO operations, including poverty alleviation, cultural education, health, and environmental protection. All facets of society are better served by this variety. China is attempting to enhance the legal landscape in addition to fortifying NGO oversight. Promulgated in 2017, the "Overseas Non-Government Organization Law of the People's Republic of China" regulated the operations of foreign NGOs and mandated their registration and acceptance of monitoring.<sup>9</sup> Significant progress has been made in social services by certain NGOs. NGOs, for instance, have actively taken part in and been crucial in providing medical care, disaster relief, and poverty help. China's NGOs have collaborated with foreign NGOs and international organizations. This supports China NGO's professional growth by introducing resources and expertise from outside. Several NGOs in China leverage technology and social media platforms to enhance their public outreach, engagement, and communication.

#### 4.5. Public Opinion Poll

The Chinese government mandates public hearing and opinion-gathering procedures in the process of creating and updating regulations. In order to ensure that policies are more in line with actual demands, these processes

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/administrative-reconsideration-law-chinese-and-english-text>

<sup>8</sup> Social Insurance in China. Retrieved from: <https://www.china-briefing.com/doing-business-guide/china/human-resources-and-payroll/social-insurance>

<sup>9</sup> Peace Out NGOs. retrieved from: <https://hir.harvard.edu/peace-out-ngos/>

often mandate that government departments gather a wide range of opinions and recommendations from the public before drafting any legislation. Additionally, the government has set up a few online venues for social media and the Internet to gather opinions.(Jia,2019) These platforms give the general public a way to submit ideas and proposals online so that more people may get involved in the process of developing policies. Furthermore, the government often issues requests for comments for public scrutiny during the regulation-making process. The public is given the chance to comprehend and engage in the regulation-making process through the use of this technique.<sup>10</sup>

In China, a few specialized organizations are in charge of organizing and gathering public opinion. In order for party organizations at all levels and government officials to better understand the opinions and demands of the people in a more thorough and detailed manner, as well as to concentrate the wisdom of the people, the launch of the opinion collection activities has facilitated the transformation of the party's governance mode and given people from all walks of life a means of fully expressing their wishes to the party and the government. Each year, the government receives thousands of pieces of information representing the collective desires and specific requests of the populace through opinion gathering methods including public phone calls, in-person interviews, and electronic mail. The content of policies is decided by the government following examination and confirmation. (Ouyang et al., 2022) A special hearing or seminar on a significant subject could be held, inviting experts and public representatives to attend in order to get more detailed feedback. Questionnaires will be used by several government departments to gather public opinions in a methodical manner. This aids the government in getting a more thorough understanding of the public's opinions on particular problems. For example, the Chinese government has included material from public opinion surveys into the cadre assessment framework. (Liu, 2011) Aspects like civic moral education, talent team building, cultural building, administrative level in accordance with the law, grassroots democratic political building, anti-corruption conditions may be included in the cadre assessment indicators. Questionnaires for a public opinion poll will also be distributed by the government, with the aim of assessing the level of satisfaction with household income, transportation, education, healthcare, environmental protection, social security, and other related topics.

## 5. MAIN CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM

China is a nation with a single party. The army and the administration are completely under the authority of the CPC. This one-party system hinders the growth of multi-party systems, which results in a lack of oversight and competition in the political system and exacerbates the corruption issue inside the party. By monitoring, filtering, and reexamining media and Internet information, the Chinese government imposes restrictions on the right to free expression. This has limited the opportunity for political discourse and engagement and prevented residents from openly discussing political topics.

### 5.1. The Electoral Process

China began to implement villagers' autonomy projects in the 1980s, allowing villagers to elect the village committee members. This system encourages a certain degree of grass-roots democracy. (Zheng and Gu, 2023) Committees are institutions elected by villagers to manage village-level affairs. Members of it usually serve as the village director and director of the committee. Villagers can become members of the committees. These elections are usually held regularly, and villagers have the right to choose people who think they are most suitable for managing village affairs. The villagers' committees are responsible for formulating village-level programs, maintaining infrastructure and resources of the village, and resolving disputes between villagers. China's urban area has a community resident committee to manage community affairs. These committees are usually elected by residents, but the government often restricts the qualifications of candidates. Chinese cities usually have community residents committees, which aims at managing community affairs. (Zhou, 2023) Members of it usually include community residents. Community resident committees are responsible for formulating community plans and managing community affairs. It should formulate policies and plans that consistent with residents. However, the scope of elections is usually limited, and the government often allows elections only within a certain range, and does not allow multi-party systems. Candidates need to be approved by the government and are supervised by them during the campaign. The government usually stipulates the restrictions on their qualifications to exclude those who are not suitable. (Martinez et al., 2022)

In addition to the grassroots elections, in the county-level or municipal elections, candidates must also have party permission and are under the party's supervision. This prevents genuine competition and variety from occurring, turning the election into a symbolic rather than a truly democratic process for making decisions. To limit the number of people who can run for office, the government has established a number of requirements. These prerequisites might be based on social standing, political beliefs, or party histories. It may be necessary for candidates to clear official screening and receive government clearance before running. To protect the government's interests, election workers typically oversee election processes, take part in election activities, and tamper with election outcomes. This contributes to the election's unfairness and lack of independence. Voters and candidates find it challenging to get information since the government controls propaganda and the media. Candidates may be examined and vetted by the government to make sure their information complies with party

<sup>10</sup> Provisional regulations on major administrative decision-making procedures. retrieved from: <https://flk.npc.gov.cn/detail2.html?ZmY4MDgwODE2ZjNjYmIzYzAxNmY0MTQ1MTM5NDFmODE>

policy. This restricts the public's capacity to learn about politics. Election-related information is typically difficult for the general public to grasp, the election process typically lacks independent oversight, and the election outcomes are not sufficiently transparent. This makes it harder to guarantee election fairness and leaves election procedures open to interference.

### 5.2. The Degree of Legalization of the Government

China's judicial system lacks true independence and is subject to government intervention and control. This makes it challenging for the court to uphold individuals' rights, particularly in situations involving political issues. (Minzner, 2011) Government officials may misuse their authority and break rules and regulations in some areas and situations, and the legal system may not always be able to properly put an end to this behavior. Certain local government representatives might not be aware of or able to follow laws and regulations. Legal aid organizations and local courts are typically few in local areas.<sup>11</sup> Due to a lack of judges and attorneys, there is a protracted trial process, little access to legal assistance, and challenges for members of the public seeking legal representation. Complex cases—like land disputes and tensions between the government and the populace—have become more prevalent in some locations. This increases the difficulty of implementing rule of law and necessitates the use of more institutions and legal resources to settle conflicts.

China's understanding of the rule of law varies depending on the area and socioeconomic class, as does legal education. It may be more challenging to alter the rule of law condition in certain isolated and rural places where residents are less familiar with legal principles and the rule of law. Unfair rules and regulations may result from government-business ties, particularly at the local level. There are instances where local business owners and government representatives have intimate ties, which might result in the improper application of the law. (Chen, 2003) The government has made some strides in promoting and educating the people about the rule of law, but more effort is still needed to raise public awareness and knowledge of the rule of law in order to support legislative reform.

### 5.3. Serious Corruption Issues

The Chinese government has a wide range of corruption issues, which not only undermines the government's legitimacy but also makes it challenging for the government to effectively address social issues. Because of the party's concentration of power and the absence of efficient oversight and check-and-balance mechanisms, corruption is an issue in one-party systems. The government uses harsh tactics to quell civil society activities, the rights protection movement, and disagreements. This has made it more difficult for citizens to enjoy their freedoms and rights and given rise to the issue of human rights violations. The public's faith in the government has decreased due to corruption, which has eroded the government's integrity and transparency. (Dong and Torgler, 2013)

The public may start to question the government's democratic system as a result, claiming that the government is more interested in serving private interests than the general good. Corruption may result in the unequal distribution of resources, which benefits the powerful and resourceful while harming the weaker segments of society. This erodes the basis of democratic ideas and widens the gap of social classes. Government inefficiency is typically caused by corruption because policies may be influenced by private interests rather than the general good. The government finds it challenging to satisfy the requirements of the people and deliver public services as a result. (Carothers, 2022). It could make it harder for the government to put democratic values like accountability, openness, and public involvement into practice. It may also jeopardize election integrity, erode democratic institutions' credibility, and erode public confidence in their ability to work together.

### 5.4. The Restricted Public Participation

Even though the Chinese government makes an effort to involve the public in some aspects of policy creation, the party still has the final say over policy decisions. Decision-making has become opaque as a result, and public trust has decreased. People in China find it challenging to exercise their rights to free speech, assembly, and political involvement because of severe political and social constraints on public participation. (Tian and Chuang, 2022). Tough control and regulatory measures by the government, such as information control, rights protection measures, and review processes, severely restricted civic society and political variety and restricted the public's ability to engage in political and social activities. Through examination, blocking, and monitoring of Internet information, the Chinese government has restricted freedom of expression and the press. (Dong, 2012) Because of this, it is harder for the general population to get accurate and varied information, which muffles societal criticism and objections. The Chinese government has placed limitations on the expression of political opinions and the execution of official policies. To restrict the rights of public assembly and demonstration, the Chinese government has implemented a number of stability preservation measures. (Rojek, 1989)

## 6. POTENTIAL AND PROSPECTS IN DEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION

Since 1980s, China's democratic government has achieved some strides and has promising future development. Despite the fact that China currently has a one-party system, the government has made progress in advancing political reform, enhancing transparency, and fortifying the law system. To preserve social stability and ensure a

<sup>11</sup> How to develop public legal services under the trend of rural hollowing out. retrieved from [http://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/fzgz/fzgzggflfwx/fzgzggflfw/202109/t20210929\\_438611.html](http://www.moj.gov.cn/pub/sfbgw/fzgz/fzgzggflfwx/fzgzggflfw/202109/t20210929_438611.html)

brighter future for China's democratic administration, it is anticipated that China will continue to investigate political system reform while upholding national characteristics, enhancing citizen participation, encouraging political diversity, and constructing the law system.

### **6.1. Informaionization and Digitalization**

The Chinese government is pushing for digitization, bolstering the transparency of government operations, and opening up government data. This type of information sharing enhances the legitimacy and legality of government policy-making while also assisting the public in understanding policy execution, resource allocation, and government decision-making processes.(Hassid,2015) The Chinese people now has additional ways to get involved in the creation of government policies and decisions thanks to the Internet and social media. Policies may be influenced by public comments and opinions, which leads to more democratic engagement. The Chinese government is actively enhancing government administration and policy formation via the use of big data and artificial intelligence technologies. (Shi et al.,2017). This enhances both the transparency of policy formation and the scientific and efficaciousness of policies. The Chinese government backs the establishment of technology businesses and innovation parks, as well as the growth of the knowledge economy and innovation. As a result, the knowledge economy has expanded and China's standing in the international arena of research and technology has improved. The public's political awareness has increased due to the digitization of the economy and the widespread use of the Internet, which facilitates the dissemination of information.

### **6.2. Economic Mobility and Political Awareness**

The advancement of China's democratic government can benefit from economic prosperity. In the near term, it might not result in significant changes to the political system right away, but it might foster the growth of democracy more broadly and produce a number of advantageous circumstances. The middle class in China has grown as a result of the country's economic expansion, and members of this class are typically more interested in politics and public affairs. (Goodman and Chen,2013;Chen and Lu,2011)The involvement and demands of the middle class might bolster government management and encourage greater accountability and transparency on the part of the government. Social and environmental issues have progressively surfaced with economic expansion. More demands from the people for labor rights, food safety, environmental preservation, and other concerns might encourage the government to take action.(Wang,2008)

Education advancement typically follows economic progress. It increases a citizen's likelihood of understanding democratic principles, getting involved in politics, engaging in decision processes, and making demands. China is attempting to transition from a manufacturing-based economy to one that is knowledge-oriented and innovation-driven. (Zhao and Guo,2021) This may lead the government to prioritize innovation, intellectual property, and the entrance of talent, all of which call for increased levels of legality and openness on the part of the government. Future opportunities for higher education may increase as China's technological capabilities develop, allowing more people to reach higher education levels. This will raise the proportion of highly educated people in the population and raise the standard of thought throughout society. With more people having access to information and being involved in social affairs, the digitization and informatization of society will likely be further aided by the rapid advancement of technology. This will encourage civic engagement and democratic governance. Education may place greater emphasis on developing intercultural communication skills and a global perspective as a result of the globalization trend. This will support China's democratic administrative reform to progressively bring it into compliance with international standards and help cultivate more inclusive and multi-thinking talents.

### **6.3. China's Grass-Roots Democratic Reform**

The Chinese government supports enhancing public services at the local level. Enhanced public-government relations are fostered by more intimate and efficient services, which bring local governments closer to the people. China's grassroots government reform includes dissemination of information by the government. More policy information, decision-making, and resource allocation are shared by the government, which aids in improving public understanding of government operations and policies.(Zhou,2017) The public gets additional possibilities to engage in the government's decision and policy formation process through grassroots elections and policy consultations.(Perry and Goldman,2009) The public's feeling of civic duty and political engagement is enhanced by this. The government supports the creation of many levels of accountability and anti-corruption systems. This contributes to the public's increased faith in the government and strengthens its integrity. Concurrently, a public opinion feedback system has been developed, and the government has increased its receptiveness to public input and has begun implementing their recommendations and opinions.<sup>12</sup> This aids in improving public needs meeting by the government.

Firstly, grassroots democracy reform can improve the efficiency of government and pique citizens' interest in getting involved in social issues. Residents can directly participate in the decision-making process and encourage the creation of policies that are more in line with their actual needs through grassroots elections and self-government. Such direct involvement enhances the executive capability of the government and helps to build a more responsible and effective administration. Secondly, government accountability and openness are successfully promoted by grassroots democracy reform. The public can more easily obtain government information, and the

---

<sup>12</sup> In recent years, many county governments in China regularly announce the adoption of the opinions of the masses online.



government's decision-making process is made more transparent through public information, village meetings, and elections. The resolution of social conflicts and disagreements can be facilitated by the construction of a robust democratic system at the grassroots level. It is possible to lessen social discontent and the frequency of social conflicts by holding fair elections and using legal decision-making procedures. Thirdly, a democratic culture can be fostered by grassroots democracy. Democratic values and a sense of identity can be fostered in citizens through involvement in local elections and self-governance. The development of such a culture will support broader administrative system reform as well as the acceptance of democracy in society at large.

#### 6.4. The Government's Positive Attitude

In recent years, the Chinese government has put forward the concept of "whole-process people's democracy", which shows the Chinese government attaches great importance to democracy.<sup>13</sup> Under the initiative of this concept, Chinese citizens are more active in participating in administration than ten years ago, and the Chinese government has made remarkable progress in information openness and transparency. Election democracy and governance democracy are the two facets of people's democracy as a whole. In order to ensure the broadest possible participation of the people in all fields and aspects of national and social governance, the China's democracy process emphasizes not only the people's participation in the election process but also the participation in the daily social governance process following the election. In order to rule the state and society, it places a strong emphasis on collaboration between the people and the government. Furthermore, the concept of "whole-process people's democracy" highlights the role that democracy plays not only in the legislative process but also in the judicial and law enforcement systems. Through precise public opinion identification methods and legislation, the ruling party and the government must effectively respond to the constantly changing interests of the people in real life. The Chinese government works hard to guarantee that every decision made by law enforcement and every court case is perceived by the public as fair and just.

### 7. CONCLUSION

On the whole, the prospect of democratic administrative reform in China is optimistic. Although western countries have criticized the human rights situation in China, we can't deny the government's efforts in administrative reform. China's definition of democracy is different from that of the West, and China pays more attention to the substantial improvement of people's living standards. What needs to be considered is that China's attitude towards democratic administration has always been positive. In recent years, China leaders have repeatedly emphasized the institutional guarantee of developing democracy and the new concept of "people-centered" (*Yi RenMin Wei ZhongXin*). At least at the central level, China is strongly supporting the construction of democratic system, so there should be more and more local government innovations in the future. The Chinese government might keep putting an emphasis on the rule of law and enhancing the legal system, but it might also fortify the system of local governance and give citizens more influence over local issues. The government will continue to support digital governance, which may entail optimizing decision-making and service delivery through the use of big data, cloud computing, and AI. In order to encourage a more transparent and democratic governance system, China might also work with other governments to enhance international experience exchange, learn from other nations' successful experiences, and collaborate with them.

### REFERENCES

- Chen, Z. (2003). Capital markets and legal development: The China case. *China Economic Review*, 14(4), 451-72. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2003.09.016>
- Chen, J. (2006). The NGO community in China. Expanding linkages with transnational civil society and their democratic implications. *China Perspectives*, 2006(68), 29-40. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.3083>
- Chen, J., & Lu, C. (2011). Democratization and the middle class in China: The middle class's attitudes toward democracy. *Political Research Quarterly*, 64(3), 705-719. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912909359162>
- Carothers, C. (2022). Taking authoritarian anti-corruption reform seriously. *Perspectives on Politics*, 20(1), 69-85. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592720001371>
- Cai, M. (2022, April). Analysis framework of grassroots social governance from the perspective of "Fengqiao Experience". In 2022 7th International Conference on Social Sciences and Economic Development (ICSSSED 2022) (pp. 455-458). Atlantis Press.
- Denhardt, R. B., & Denhardt, J. V. (2000). The new public service: Serving rather than steering. *Public administration review*, 60(6), 549-559. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-3352.00117>
- Dong, F. (2012). Controlling the internet in China: The real story. *Convergence*, 18(4), 403-425. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856512439500>
- Dong, B., & Torgler, B. (2013). Causes of corruption: Evidence from China. *China Economic Review*, 26, 152-169. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2012.09.005>
- Ergenc, C. (2014). Political efficacy through deliberative participation in urban China: A case study on public hearings. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19, 191-213. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-014-9289-z>
- Fang, T., Fang, D., & Yu, B. (2022). Carbon emission efficiency of thermal power generation in China: Empirical evidence from the micro-perspective of power plants. *Energy Policy*, 165, 1-12. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.112955>
- Guthrie, D. (2012). *China and globalization: The social, economic, and political transformation of Chinese society*. Routledge.
- Goodman, D. S., & Chen, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Middle class China: Identity and behaviour*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Holliday, I., & Yep, R. (2005). E-government in China. *Public Administration and Development*, 25(3), 239-249. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.361>
- Hsu, J. Y., & Hasmath, R. (2014). The local corporatist state and NGO relations in China. *Journal of contemporary China*, 23(87), 516-534. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.843929>

<sup>13</sup> Full Text: China: Democracy That Works.  
retrieved from :[http://www.news.cn/english/2021-12/04/c\\_1310351231.htm](http://www.news.cn/english/2021-12/04/c_1310351231.htm)

- Hassid, J. (2015). Chinese government responsiveness to internet opinion: Promising but dangerous. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 44(2), 39-68. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2308813>
- He, W., Li, W., & Deng, P. (2022). Legal Governance in the Smart Cities of China: Functions, Problems, and Solutions. *Sustainability*, 14(15), 9738. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14159738>
- Jia, L. (2019). What public and whose opinion? A study of Chinese online public opinion analysis. *Communication and the Public*, 4(1), 21-34. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047319829584>
- Liu Z. (2011). Local government leading cadres' political performance evaluation of the masses participation: status quo, dilemma and countermeasures. *Journal of Shihezi University: Philosophy and Social Science Edition*, 25 (6), 39-45. <http://www.cqvip.com/qk/86713x/201106/41010246.html>
- Lu, Y., Zhang, Y., Cao, X., Wang, C., Wang, Y., Zhang, M., ... & Zhang, Z. (2019). Forty years of reform and opening up: China's progress toward a sustainable path. *Science advances*, 5(8), eaau9413. doi: 10.1126/sciadv.aau9413
- Li, G., Xue, Q., & Qin, J. (2022). Environmental information disclosure and green technology innovation: Empirical evidence from China. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 176, 121453. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121453>
- Liu, J., Liu, M., & Liang, W. (2022). The dynamic COVID-zero strategy in China. *China CDC Weekly*, 4(4), 74. doi: 10.46234/ccdcw2022.015
- Minzner, C. F. (2011). China's turn against law. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 59(4), 935-984. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5131/AJCL.2011.0006>
- Mattingly, D. C. (2019). *The art of political control in China*. Cambridge University Press.
- Martinez-Bravo, M., Padró I Miquel, G., Qian, N., & Yao, Y. (2022). The rise and fall of local elections in China. *American Economic Review*, 112(9), 2921-2958. doi: 10.1257/aer.20181249
- Nie, L., & Wu, J. (2022). Strategic responses of NGOs to the new party-building campaign in China. *China Information*, 36(1), 46-67. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X21995705>
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge University Press.
- Osborne, D., & Plastrik, P. (1997). *Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Ouyang, Z., Chen, S., Lai, Y., & Yang, X. (2022). The correlations among COVID-19, the effect of public opinion, and the systemic risks of China's financial industries. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and Its Applications*, 600, 127518. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.physa.2022.127518>
- Ross, L. (2004). Rethinking Government Approvals: The New Administrative Licensing Law. *China Law & Practice*, 5, 30-32.
- Perry, E. J., & Goldman, M. (Eds.). (2009). *Grassroots political reform in contemporary China* (Vol. 14). Harvard University Press.
- Rojek, D. G. (1989). Social control in the People's Republic of China. *Criminal Justice Review*, 14(2), 141-153. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/073401688901400204>
- Stillman, R. J. (1976). Professor Ostrom's New Paradigm for American Public Administration-Adequate or Antique?. *Midwest Review of Public Administration*, 10(4), 179-192. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/027507407601000401>
- Stockmann, D., & Luo, T. (2017). Which social media facilitate online public opinion in China?. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 64(3-4), 189-202. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1289818>
- Shi, Y., Shan, Z., Li, J., & Fang, Y. (2017). How China deals with big data. *Annals of Data Science*, 4, 433-440. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40745-017-0129-9>
- Shi, B., Li, N., Gao, Q., & Li, G. (2022). Market incentives, carbon quota allocation and carbon emission reduction: evidence from China's carbon trading pilot policy. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 319, 115650. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.115650>
- Tian, F., & Chuang, J. (2022). Depoliticizing China's grassroots NGOs: State and civil society as an institutional field of power. *The China Quarterly*, 250, 509-530. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741022000157>
- Tsai, W. H., Li, G., & Song, W. (2023). Agent politics of Chinese think tanks and cultural industry governance in China's "new era". *Critical Asian Studies*, 55(1), 20-39. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/14672715.2022.2147853>
- Tsang, S., & Cheung, O. (2022). Has Xi Jinping made China's political system more resilient and enduring?. *Third World Quarterly*, 43(1), 225-243. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.2000857>
- WANG, X. (2008). Divergent identities, convergent interests: the rising middle-income stratum in China and its civic awareness. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 17(54), 53-69. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560701693070>
- Wang, J. (2015). Managing social stability: The perspective of a local government in China. *Journal of East Asian Studies*, 15(1), 1-25. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S159824080000415X>
- Wedeman, A. (2017). The intensification of corruption in China. In *Critical Readings on the Communist Party of China* (4 Vols. Set) (pp. 1242-1272). Brill.
- Wu, Y., Xiao, H., & Yang, F. (2022). Government information disclosure and citizen coproduction during COVID-19 in China. *Governance*, 35(4), 1005-1027. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12645>
- Wang, S. (2022). *Law as an Instrument: Sources of Chinese Law for Authoritarian Legality*. Cambridge University Press.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. University of California Press.
- Zhou, M. (2001). The politics of bilingual education in the People's Republic of China since 1949. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 25(1-2), 147-171. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2001.10162788>
- Zhou, K. (2017). *China's long march to freedom: grassroots modernization*. Routledge.
- Zhao, J., & Guo, J. (2021). The restructuring of China's higher education: An experience for market economy and knowledge economy. In *Marxism, Neoliberalism, and Intelligent Capitalism* (pp. 93-107). Routledge.
- Zheng, B., & Gu, Y. (2023). Instrumental voting under authoritarianism: evidence from Chinese village elections. *Chinese Sociological Review*, 55(2), 127-153. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/21620555.2021.1968819>
- Zhou, L. (2023). Mediation and grassroots policing in China: Conflict resolution or social control?. *China Information*, 37(2), 165-184. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X221121716>
- Zhao, L., Zhang, L., Sun, J., & He, P. (2022). Can public participation constraints promote green technological innovation of Chinese enterprises? The moderating role of government environmental regulatory enforcement. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 174, 121198. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121198>

We would like to acknowledge the funding from the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia grant of TAP K006263 for the publication of this article.