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Tang, Wenfang, *Populist Authoritarianism. Chinese Political Culture and Regime Sustainability*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, xiii + 220pp., £18.99 p/b.

Wenfang Tang's *Populist Authoritarianism* is an important and illuminating read both for students of China and for students of authoritarianism more generally. Based on extensive national and cross-national survey data, the book elaborates an eponymous theory of political culture based on the Chinese case, consisting consists of six elements: Mass Line ideology; high levels of social capital and interpersonal trust; high levels of public involvement in local politics through protest and contention; weak formal institutions, such as courts, trade unions, the media and relevant government departments; a strongly engaged government that promptly responds to public protest; and high levels of public support for the leadership. Together, these elements constitute the populist authoritarian (PA) model, which, the author argues in the final chapter, can be applied in comparative research both to 'totalist' regimes and to electoral democracies with strong populist orientations (p. 166).

Perhaps the most important of the six elements for understanding Chinese political culture is the Mass Line ideology, articulated in 1943 by Mao Zedong, which refers to 'a close and direct relationship between the Party and the masses, or between political power and society' (p. 6). Thanks to this relationship, citizens are not only empowered to engage regularly and directly with local officials, but these officials are obliged to respond to complaints and resolve disputes or poorly formulated policy in a timely fashion. It is the legacy of Mass Line ideology, Tang argues (p. 127), which continues to render formal mediating institutions, such as judicial courts, weak and under-utilised, since dissatisfied citizens are more likely to take matters into their own hands and approach officials directly. As he points out, this contradicts common assumptions held by modernisation theorists, which hold that processes of marketisation will cement practices and institutions associated with the rule of law.

For students of China, Tang's PA model sheds light on two apparent paradoxes in the Chinese political system: first, high levels of interpersonal trust, but the absence of democracy; second, the high levels of protest, but the concomitant high levels of support for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government. Chapter Five, co-authored with Joseph Yingnan Zhou and Ray Ou Yang, is of particular relevance here. It compares levels of trust in government in China and Taiwan, and finds that Chinese citizens have far greater trust in the CCP than the Taiwanese do in their democratically elected representatives. Crucial is the perception among Chinese citizens that their government is effective in responding to public demand (p. 99), unlike in Taiwan, where government officials were perceived to be unresponsive and ineffective, a fact that Tang attributes in part to the constraints of the electoral cycle. However, Tang is careful not to paint too rosy a picture of the Chinese political system. Due to the lack of elections as a source of legitimacy, the government must either act responsively or face loss of public trust and support. Consequently, Tang states that the Chinese system is 'highly unstable due to the lack of institutional guarantee' (p. 2).

For students of authoritarianism, the book's main contribution lies in its challenge to the dominant understandings of state-society relations under conditions of authoritarianism. First, it questions the widely-held assumption that citizens living in authoritarian regimes are apathetic, politically alienated and victims of state power; on the contrary, Chinese citizens are presented as

being active and engaged in political processes. Similarly, in contrast to the common view that authoritarian governments are uninterested in the needs and views of their populations, Tang portrays the Chinese state as highly responsive, almost 'paranoid' (p. 2), and 'an active participant in the process of mass politics' (p. 164). This leads Tang to the conclusion that, 'liberal democracy may not be a very useful variable in explaining why people participate in politics, why they identify with their country, why the government responds to public demand, and why people trust their political system and each other' (p. 165). Indeed, his book provides ample evidence that such phenomena are readily observable in at least one one-party state.

While *Populist Authoritarianism* offers a clear and convincing conceptualisation of the Chinese political system and the reasons for its longevity in the face of the domestic upheavals associated with integration into the global market economy, this reviewer is doubtful as to the wider applicability of the model to some of the other national cases mentioned in the conclusion. Tang suggests that the 'PA model' can be applied to 'electoral democracies with a strong populist orientation', such as Russia under Putin. In direct contrast to Tang's model, plenty of research has shown that post-Communist Russia suffers from very low levels of interpersonal trust (indeed, Tang even cites this work on p. 59). Further, that the Russian government is highly responsive to local protest is also questionable. Nevertheless, whether the PA model can conceptualise political culture in other non-democratic East Asian societies with Maoist legacies would constitute a fruitful avenue for further research.