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Four Chinas – Which Model for the Future?

Abstract

The "four Chinas" (the People's Republic, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore), representing different types of political regimes, provide a fascinating contrast with regard to their respective performance in the context of the renewed global conflict between liberal democracies and autocracies. This paper first examines briefly their common historical and cultural backgrounds and then turns to their specific characteristics in terms of major criteria of liberal democracy and quality, their governance scores, and socio-economic performance at the macro-level. This is supplemented by a more detailed analysis of "Asian" cultural features, recent developments and support for democracy at the micro-level. In a final part, the reactions to the dramatic COVID-19 pandemic are documented showing once more specific regime characteristics. All this is based on publicly available "Varieties of Democracy" (V-Dem), World Bank, UNDP, "World Values Surveys" (WVS) and similar data. The conclusions point to the crucial position of Taiwan in this respect.

1. Introduction:

The end of the Cold War has not led to "the end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) and a universal victory of liberal democracy and market-oriented economies. Instead, a new "system competition" between liberal democracies and assertive authoritarian regimes has emerged in international politics. This concerns foremost the USA on the one hand and the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the other, but also, to a lesser extent, the European Union and Russia as international players. In this context, a closer look at the "four Chinas" representing different prevalent system models may shed some light on the respective strengths and weaknesses of these regimes and their future role in international politics. The "Chinas" here are understood as having some common cultural and historical roots, but also some continuing links under increasingly difficult circumstances. In this sense, Singapore with a population of more than 75% of Chinese descent and having served as a model for a while for the PRC (Ortmann and Thompson 2020) is included here as well.

In a very broad sense, the four Chinas represent the major political system types in the present world: "closed autocracy" (PRC), "electoral autocracy" (Singapore), "electoral democracy" (Hong Kong, as a very special case), and "liberal democracy" (Taiwan). In the terminology of Luehrmann et al. (2018:63), these types are characterized by the following criteria (see Table 1):

Table 1. Regime classification.

Closed Autocracy	**Electoral Autocracy**	**Electoral Democracy**	**Liberal Democracy**
No *de-facto* multiparty, or free and fair elections, or Dahl's institutional prerequisites not minimally fulfilled		*De-facto multiparty, free and fair elections, and* Dahl's institutional prerequisites minimally fulfilled	
No multiparty elections for the chief executive or the legislature	*De-jure* multiparty elections for the chief executive and the legislature	The rule of law, or liberal principles not satisfied	The rule of law, and liberal principles satisfied

Under "closed autocracies" different sub-types such as still existing absolutist monarchies as in Saudi Arabia, theocratic regimes as in Iran, military dictatorships, and single-party totalitarian states as in North Korea can be subsumed. Similarly, "electoral autocracies" comprise a broader range of "hybrid" authoritarian states with some façade democratic features but lacking free and fair elections, similar to the post-communist states in Central Asia (see also Schedler 2006). "Electoral democracies" correspond to Robert Dahl's (1971) definition of "polyarchy" with high levels of popular political participation and allowing for open and pluralist multi-party contestation. "Liberal democracies", finally, come closer to the democratic ideal by additionally granting basic human and social rights which are enforced by the rule of law and an independent judiciary. For the sake of convenience and simplicity we use this terminology here.

In the following, we will specify in how far the four Chinas correspond to this typology and in which way they foreshadow the present and future international system competition. This reflects a (relatively) "most (or very) similar conditions – different outcomes" (MSDO) design (Przeworski/Teune 1970; Berg-Schlosser/De Meur 2009). In this way, the more specific features of each type and their respective strengths and weaknesses become apparent. We will first discuss some of the historical and cultural commonalities of these cases and then turn to specific assessments of their system characteristics and performance in some crucial areas such as socio-economic development, "good governance", and the overall functional and normative qualities of these regimes. For this purpose, we employ the latest "Varieties of Democracy" (V-Dem) data (Coppedge et al. 2022) and similar most recent U.N. and World Bank sources on the macro-level. This will be supplemented by a discussion of "Confucian" political culture and assessments of popular perceptions of regime support and evaluations on the micro-level with the help of available "World Values Surveys" (WVS) data. With the outbreak of the current COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019/early 2020, the ongoing system competition has received a new dramatic twist, which we address in a special section towards the end. Based on these data and findings, we arrive at some conclusions about the future viability and attractiveness (or not) of the "Four Chinas" models and the implications for international politics. These are particularly relevant in the renewed global conflict between liberal democracies and

authoritarian regimes, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the increased tensions in the Taiwan Straits.

2. Historical Background

For our present purposes, the period under consideration here begins with the end of WWII and the outcome of the civil war in China in 1949. The revolutionary Communist forces led by Mao Zedong had succeeded and Chiang Kai-shek, leader of the ruling Kuomintang party (KMT), was forced to retreat with his forces and many of his followers to the adjacent island of Taiwan.

2.1.China:

On the mainland, Mao founded the People's Republic of China, a Marxist-Leninist Communist regime "with Chinese characteristics" and a state-controlled economy. Land reforms, the proclaimed "Great Leap Forward ", and the ensuing "Cultural Revolution" targeting the intellectual elites led to economic failures, mass starvation and harsh repression in the 1950s and '60s. After Mao's death in 1976 and purges of the "Gang of Four" including Mao's wife Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978 and initiated major economic reforms. This led to the creation of a mixed economy with significant market-oriented elements and an opening up towards the world markets.

Politically, a new constitution was adopted in 1982 granting some autonomy to the 22 provinces under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The regime became "milder" in certain ways, but massive student protests in 1989, which – encouraged by Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union - demanded greater democratic rights, were put down with brutal force on Tiananmen Square in front of the "Forbidden City" in Beijing in July 1989. Subsequently the leading role of the CCP was reasserted, with the Central Committee with about 150 to 200 members and its Polit Bureau with about 20 members as the leading decision-making bodies. As head of the party serves the Secretary General who usually also becomes China's President and Chair of the Central Military Commission, thereby combining the three most important political offices in the country. The maximum of two five-year terms for President was removed in the constitutional reform of 2018. President Xi Jinping now serves in all three positions without any term limits. Next in line as head of government is the Premier who chairs the State Council and the respective ministries.

The "National People's Congress" with about 3,000 members is the official parliament. The latter, however, is convened only once a year and has to be considered as a "rubberstamp" body. At the top of the judiciary, the "Supreme People's Court" is headed by the Chief Justice. It is

also subject to the instructions by the party and the executive. The provinces are administered by Governors appointed by the central government. Below this level there is a multitude of prefectures, counties, townships and villages. At the local level there are regular, often competitive multi-candidate elections, originally initiated by Deng's reforms in the late 1970s.

Apart from these formal structures, the actual functioning of the various institutions is a different matter. In recent years, there has been a wide range of publications trying to grapple with this question (for more comprehensive reviews see, e.g., Templeman 2017, Ringen 2018). Some portray the regime as a modern version of Confucian traditions, emphasizing its "meritocratic" and mostly efficient and benevolent nature (e. g. Bell 2015). Like the "Singapore model", it purportedly combines economic efficiency, rule of law and personal integrity of its leaders. Apparently, this also has been proclaimed by parts of the Chinese elite in the wake of Deng's reforms (Ortmann and Thompson 2016, see also section 2.4 below). Other observers are more critical and point to the rampant corruption at many levels and the rent-seeking behaviour of many incumbents (e. g. Pei 2016). This seems to be especially prevalent at the regional and local levels where Deng's decentralizing reforms created greater autonomy with only few checks on the accountability of local administrators and party officials. Competitive elections at the village level are apparently insufficient for curtailing corruption and malfeasance (O'Brien and Zhao 2014). The official authority to deal with this problem lies with the "Discipline Inspection Commissions" (DICs) at the various levels, but even these are often used by higher ranks just to forestall the rise of potential political rivals and adversaries "from below". Other possible checks such as independent media or effective civil society organizations are also non-existent or severely curtailed. This has led not only to waste and inefficiency, but also to expressions of local and regional discontent

Nevertheless, economically China's model since Deng's reforms has been successful with very high growth, industrialization, urbanization and literacy rates. It also has created a new more affluent middle class (see also Table 5 below). This has fostered a more general acceptance and de facto legitimacy of the regime as long as it is able to keep the "authoritarian bargain" of improving living conditions for large parts of the population under strict control by the ruling party. At the same time, the regime applies severe forms of crackdown - including torture and killings - on actual or perceived opposition by political dissidents as well as ethnic and religious minorities such as the Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province or Buddhists in Tibet (Yang 2018).

Today, the PRC is not only the most populous country on earth (about 1.4 billion inhabitants), but also the third largest economy after the U.S. and the EU in terms of nominal GDP. In terms

of "purchasing power parities", China is even ahead; per capita GDP, however, is of course still much lower. On the downside are high levels of pollution and ecological degradation as well as a strongly increasing social inequality. Under Xi, China increasingly attempts to extend its international influence and assert its strength vis-à-vis its neighbours, most notably Taiwan across the straits of the East China Sea. Military expenditure has also risen enormously, and China has become a formidable military power. The "Road and Belt Initiative" has been created as the modern "silk road" to forge new ties with sympathetic regimes around the world providing credit and technical support for many infrastructure projects. At the same time, the creation of "Confucius Institutes" in many countries and at many universities is supposed to serve as a "soft power" to enhance its influence (Benner et al. 2018).

The most recent step to cement President Xi's position and historical stature was the third "Historical Resolution" passed by the Central Committee of the PRC in November 2021 (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-59229935). This puts him at a par with the first historical resolution passed on behalf of Mao Zedong consolidating his leadership in 1945 and the second endorsing Deng Xiaoping's reforms in 1981. Some of Deng's decentralizing measures are apparently also taken back. Together with the removal of presidential term limits in 2018, this increases the focus on Xi and the accompanying increasing personality cult. Such a concentration of power can, however, lead to a "system overload" as in Soviet times and severe succession problems. We cannot go into many details here, but the comparisons in section 3 below will provide a more balanced picture of the overall regime performance.

2.2.Taiwan

When Chiang Kai-shek arrived on the island in December1949 he brought with him about two million emigrants from the mainland, among them the government of the official "Republic of China" (ROC), soldiers from the defeated army and "nationalist" business and intellectual elites. The main island and some smaller surrounding ones originally had been settled by groups of Polynesian descent, followed later in the 16th and 17th centuries by Han Chinese immigrants from the mainland. At the time of their arrival, these groups amounted to about six million. Today's population is about 23 million.

Formally, Chiang Kai-shek's government claimed to represent the ROC, originally founded on the mainland in 1912 at the end of over 2000 years of Imperial rule. The regime was recognized as such by many countries on the Western side of the Cold War and occupied the seat of China in the Security Council of the U.N. Only with the change of the U.S. China policy under

President Nixon in the wake of the Vietnam War in 1971 did the PRC take this seat. International recognition of the ROC and formal diplomatic relations meanwhile has dwindled to 14 smaller countries, but many others maintain liaison offices and consulates. To impose his rule, Chiang Kai-shek declared a state of martial law. In the beginning, this created a period of "White Terror" and the elimination of many actual or suspected KMT opponents. The KMT maintained its single-party authoritarian rule until 1986 when the first opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was allowed to be founded. Martial law was finally lifted in 1987.

After widespread popular protests led by students from all major universities (the "Wild Lilly movement") in 1990, elections to the Legislative Yuan (parliament) were held for the first time in 1991, followed by the first competitive presidential elections in 1996. The KMT still could maintain its lead until 2000, when the DPP presidential candidate Chen Shui-bian was elected and then re-elected in 2004 for an official second term. Chen attempted to normalize the international status of the country giving up the formal claim to represent all of China, but a referendum failed to achieve the necessary quorum. After some corruption scandals triggered widespread protests (the "Red Shirt Movement"), the KMT was returned to power in 2008 gaining majorities both in the legislative and presidential elections, with Ma Ying-jeou becoming the first female president. In this period, trade relations with the mainland improved and direct mutual travel became possible. The official "Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement" (CSSTA) initiated by President Ma in her second term in 2014 ran, however, into strong opposition once more from large groups of young protesters fearing a threat to Taiwan's only recently achieved more fully independent and democratic status. The "Sunflower Movement", as it became known, succeeded and in the 2016 legislative and presidential elections the DPP was returned to power under President Tsai Ing-wen. (Hsu Szu-chien and Ketty W. Chen 2017). This was seen by Beijing as a threat to its unification hopes and the CPC launched a massive cyber smear campaign against her. This, however, backfired mobilizing strong support for President Tsai and she was re-elected in the 2020 elections by a landslide (Hartnett and Su 2021).

In this way, Taiwan has become what can be termed by all present standards a consolidated "liberal democracy". In the meantime, initially with American support, Taiwan also had become one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It became known, together with Hong Kong, Singapore and South Korea, as one of the "Asian Tigers". Today, Taiwan belongs to the technologically most advanced countries in the world (see also section 3.1. below).

The international status of the island still remains disputed. The PRC considers Taiwan to be just one of its provinces with its declared "One China" policy. The majority of islanders today, however, insist on a separate identity and international sovereignty founded on basic human rights and democratic legitimacy in the tradition of Sun Yat-sen, the first provisional president of the Republic of China and the first leader of Kuomintang. As such, he is still revered as the "Father of the Nation" in the ROC and as "Forerunner of the Revolution" in the PRC. His political philosophy emphasized the "Three Principles of the People" (Tridemism), consisting of Minzú (independence from foreign domination), Minquán (rights of the people, democracy), and Minsheng (people's livelihood and welfare) (Sun Yat-sen 1974). A Sun Yat-sen Memorial has also been established in Singapore indicating the historical and cultural links. Especially the democratic aspect is the main raison d'être for Taiwan's present independent status that, however, remains threatened by President Xi's aggressive stance and a possible "Crimean solution" à la Putin (Chu and Chang 2018). At present, only the continuing military presence of the U. S. and its allies in the broader region can guarantee this status (Ringen 2018)

2.3 *Hong Kong*

The island of Hong Kong in the delta of the Pearl River became a British colony after the end of the first Opium War in 1842. The territory was later extended to include the adjacent peninsula of Kowloon. A 99-year lease agreement with Britain in 1898 further added some "new territories" on the mainland. When the lease expired in 1997, Hong Kong came under the authority of the PRC as a Special Administrative Region (SAR). In a joint Sino-British declaration negotiated with Deng Xiao-ping in 1984, China guaranteed to maintain the independent economic and political status for another 50 years after the transfer (i. e. until 2047) under the formula "one country – two systems".

Under British rule, Hong Kong became a major port and, after WWII, an important financial and industrial center as the first of the Asian "tigers". When the end of the lease approached, governmental and administrative reforms were introduced by the outgoing colonial administration to safeguard the rule of law and the autonomous status. The existing Legislative Council became fully elective for the first time in 1995. Nevertheless, about half a million people to whom British citizenship had been extended emigrated at the time of the transfer fearing increased domination by the PRC.

Hong Kong is formally governed under the "Basic Law" agreed upon in the Joint Declaration. The Chief Executive replaced the Governor and appoints the Executive Council (cabinet) and

principal officials. The Chief Executive is appointed by the Chinese State Council after nomination by the local Election Committee of business and community leaders. The Legislative Council has 70 members, half of whom are directly elected in geographical constituencies; 30 more in "functional constituencies" representing business and other special interest groups; the remaining five come from members of Hong Kong' s 18 District Councils. The SAR has maintained a separate jurisdiction based on the traditions of British common law (Young and Cullen 2010).

The special status of SAR has a number of advantages for the PRC. Hong Kong is a major hub for international trade and financial relations. The port is the most important container terminal for the industrial southern China region. International capital transfers are freely possible. The Hong Kong Dollar (HKD) is convertible and linked by a currency board to the U.S. dollar within a small range of exchange rates. Many international banks and companies keep their headquarters or offices and highly qualified staff in the SAR.

The standard of living is among the highest in the world. This prosperity has, however, also its downsides with extremely high housing costs due to its limited territory. Socio-economic inequality is also favoured by a tax system with very low company and income taxes and no taxes on capital returns. The Gini index of 0.47 is very high and even considerably higher than in Singapore (0.36) or the U.S. (0.39) (World Bank 2020, see also section 3.1 below).

Social inequality and increasing political pressure from the PRC under Xi since 2012 have led to several waves of protest, especially in the younger generation. Attempts by Beijing to implement a pre-screening of candidates for the Chief Executive triggered massive protests by the "Umbrella Movement" in 2014 (Bland 2017). These were followed by even greater protests of over a million people in 2019 directed against a proposed *Extradition Amendment Bill*, which would allow the extradition of fugitives to mainland China. In spite of this pressure, a strong civil society has emerged comprised of many strata and groups favouring democratic and emancipatory values (see also section 3.2 below). The recent protests have also been supported by large parts of the middle classes (Ma 2018).

In the course of time, the citizens of Hong Kong have developed a distinct identity, which is reinforced by the repressive measures introduced by the PRC and finds its expression in hostile reactions towards the mainland and its representatives. A survey in 2019 by the Hong Kong University Public Opinion Programme (now closed under political pressure) showed that 53 % of the adult population identified themselves as "Hongkongers", only 11% as "Chinese". 71%

declared “not to feel proud of becoming a national citizen of China” (https://www.hkupop.hku.hk/). On the mainland, this has led to reciprocal reactions, the formula “One Country – Two Nationalisms” seems more apt today.

In March 2021, a new electoral law was passed by the National People’s Congress of the PRC that all candidates for the Chief Executive, the Legislative Council and the Election Committee will be pre-selected to ensure that “only patriots should govern Hong Kong”. This, at the latest, has now turned Hong Kong from an “electoral democracy” into a very special “electoral autocracy”.

2.4 Singapore

In 1819, Sir Stamford Raffles, as representative of the British colonial administration, arrived on Singapore island that is situated at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula near the straits of Malacca. The island possessed a natural deep harbour and fresh water supplies, but was scarcely populated. He realized the potential of the port as an important trading post on a major shipping route. For this purpose, he concluded a treaty with the Sultan of Johor, the nominal ruler. In 1824 the entire island became a permanent possession of the British East India Company. In the following decades, merchant houses were set up mainly by European trading firms, but also from other parts of the world. The population greatly increased including many immigrants from mainland China who fled the hardships of the Opium Wars and served as labourers in the port. In 1867 Singapore formally became a Crown Colony. During WWII Singapore was occupied by Japanese forces, but with the defeat of Japan in 1945 the status of a British Crown Colony was re-established. In 1947 a civil administration was established with separate Executive and Legislative Councils.

Increasing political turmoil in the course of de-colonization led to an agreement with the elected Chief Minister to grant full internal self-government in the State of Singapore Act in 1958. The first elections to the Legislative Assembly in 1959 were won by the People’s Action Party (PAP) under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew who became the first Prime Minister. He favoured a merger with Malaya to benefit the economy by creating a common market. In 1963 an agreement was signed to establish the Federation of Malaysia. Ethnic tensions and race riots between the Malay and Chinese parts of the population, however, led to a separation again in 1965 and the independent Republic of Singapore was created.

The new state to some extent followed the Westminster model with a parliamentary system and a Prime Minister as head of the executive. The President has largely ceremonial roles. The

unicameral parliament is elected by a "first past the post" majoritarian system. Voting is compulsory for all citizens above the age of 21. In addition to directly elected M.P.s in single-member constituencies (SMCs), some *Group Representation Constituencies* (GRCs) of between three and six members were created, of which at least one must represent a minority ethnic group of Malay, Indian or similar descent. Up to nine nominated M.P.s (NMPs) can also be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Select Committee. Furthermore, up to six Non-Constituency Members (NCMPs) can be appointed from opposition parties. Both NMPs and NCMPs have only limited voting rights.

Since independence the PAP has held the vast majority of seats in all elections, sometimes without any opposition candidate gaining a seat. In the course of time elections have become somewhat more competitive. In the latest (2020) election, 10 candidates from the biggest opposition party (the "Workers Party", WP) were elected or nominated. The PAP with a vote share of 61.2 % gained 83 seats. The second largest opposition party, the "Singapore Democratic Party" (SDP) with 10.2% of the votes was given two NCMP seats. The WP, for the first time, also was able to win several GRCs. There also was a record number of women candidates with 28 of them succeeding.

This complicated pattern of representation has been created (with some modifications in the course of time) to reflect the multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of society on the one hand, but also the continuing dominance of the PAP on the other. Similarly, the executive has always been dominated by the PAP. Lee Kuan Yew as first Prime Minister- served from 1965 to 1990 (and then continued as "Senior Minister" and "Mentor"). He was succeeded by his deputy Goh Chok Tong, serving until 2004. Goh was in turn succeeded by Lee Hsien Loong, eldest son of Lee Kuan Yew, the current Prime Minister. After an amendment to the constitution in 2017, the President was directly elected for the first time under a system ensuring the representation of minority ethnic groups. Under this rule, Halimah Yacob from the Malay community was elected unopposed. She also became the first female President.

The judiciary is formally independent, but the judges are appointed by the President and, especially, the members of the Supreme Court are believed to be close to the ruling party. The legal and judicial regime in Singapore is quite harsh including the possibility of caning for relatively minor offences. The death penalty by hanging is enforced for serious crimes such as premeditated murder, but also for drug trafficking. Nevertheless, the judiciary has a reputation of being mostly fair and impartial and is ranked quite high on rule of law and control of

corruption indices (see also section 3.1 below). In terms of crime control, Singapore is one of the safest countries in Asia and worldwide.

The country now has a population of about 5.7 million inhabitants, mostly with Chinese (about 75%), Malay (13%) and Indian (9%) backgrounds, Linguistically, however, these communities are internally diverse. English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil are the official languages. Religious affiliations reflect these ethnic patterns. A large majority of Chinese profess some attachment to Confucianism, Buddhism or Daoism; the Malay and some Indians are Muslims; there is also now a sizeable Christian community and a sizeable number of persons without religious affiliation. In addition, there is a large group of foreign workers of about 1.3 million mainly from Malaysia, India, China and the Philippines, most of whom have low-paid jobs in industry, the construction sector or households.

The economic performance of Singapore has been spectacular over the last decades. From a poor "Third World" place, it has become a First World country. It is now a major trade and financial hub and also a major tourist destination. State-owned enterprises also play a substantial role. The port is the second busiest in the world in terms of cargo tonnage. Today Singapore is ranked near the top of Human Development indices (see below). But it is not only the high rate of GDP growth, but also the provision of welfare measures like public housing schemes for large parts of the population, and excellent health and education systems, which have contributed to Singapore's rather unique ratings.

All of this reflects the thinking, and is largely due to the active political involvement of the founding father of the country, Lee Kuan Yew. As hardly any other person, he has shaped his country and continues to do so to some extent even after his death in 2015 at the age of 91. In a way he combined both Chinese (Confucian meritocratic) and British backgrounds and values. From the Chinese side he inherited a strong family orientation and a paternalistic leadership style aiming at consensual forms of conflict resolution. As a lawyer trained in Britain at the London School of Economics and the University of Cambridge, he upheld values of public and personal integrity and the rule of law. In practical politics, having seen and experienced communist uprisings in China and Singapore in the 1940s and '50s he was staunchly anti-communist, but also anti-communalist fearing ethnic and racial conflicts in his multi-ethnic home country (Quah 2001). He was not an ideologue, however, and actually despised both Western and communist ideologies preferring a hands-on pragmatism for resolving many concrete problems (Lee Kuan Yew 2013; Plate 2013).

This success, however, has also its downsides. Some observers doubt whether the "model" of highly personal authoritarian rule combined with an open capitalist economy is sustainable in the long run after the death of the founding father. Some "temptations" among parts of the present leadership seem to have crept in to look after their own well-being. There have also been allegations of money-laundering. Social inequality in terms of the Gini index (45.9) is quite high. Likewise, the living conditions for the foreign work force are very poor. Increasing levels of general prosperity and higher levels of education have also led to increasing demands for less state control and more participation in the younger generation.

3. Macro-level analyses

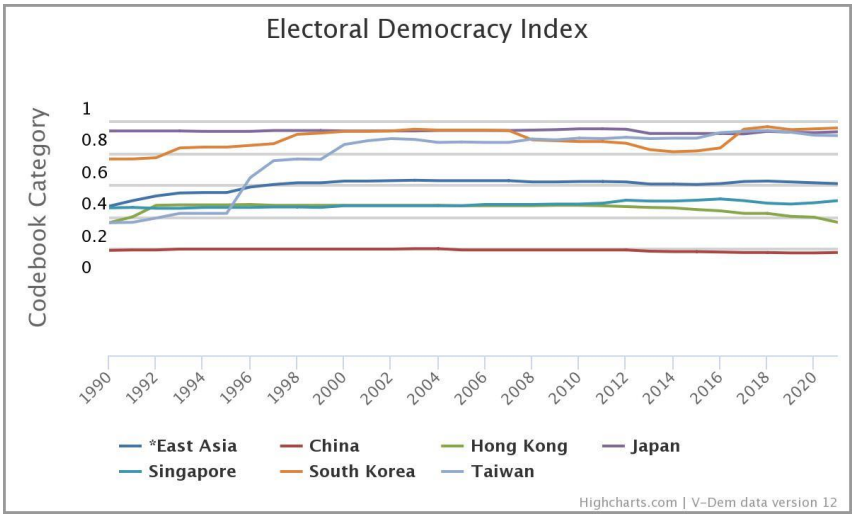
In this section the major regime characteristics of the four cases are discussed in greater detail. These are their democratic components and "qualities" (or not) since the latest major "wave" of democratization in 1990. This is followed by assessments of their "governance" performance and overall socio-economic developments.

3.1 *Components of liberal democracy*

We first briefly present the major elements of liberal democracy in the East Asian regional context. This is done, as mentioned above, with the help of the most recent V-Dem data and graphic illustrations (https://www.v-dem.net/en). V-Dem is the most comprehensive and valid data set; it is based on a broad range of *expert judgements* both from inside and outside the respective countries. In contrast to other data bases and indices of democracy such as Freedom House (https://freedomhouse.org/) or Polity (https://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html) all procedures and assessments are entirely transparent (for critical reviews of the earlier indices see, e.g., Munck/Verkuilen 2002; Berg-Schlosser 2007). The indices can also be disaggregated to their specific components and different levels of analysis (national, sub-national, local).

The development of "electoral democracies" ("polyarchies" in Robert Dahl's terms) over the last three decades is shown in Figure 1:

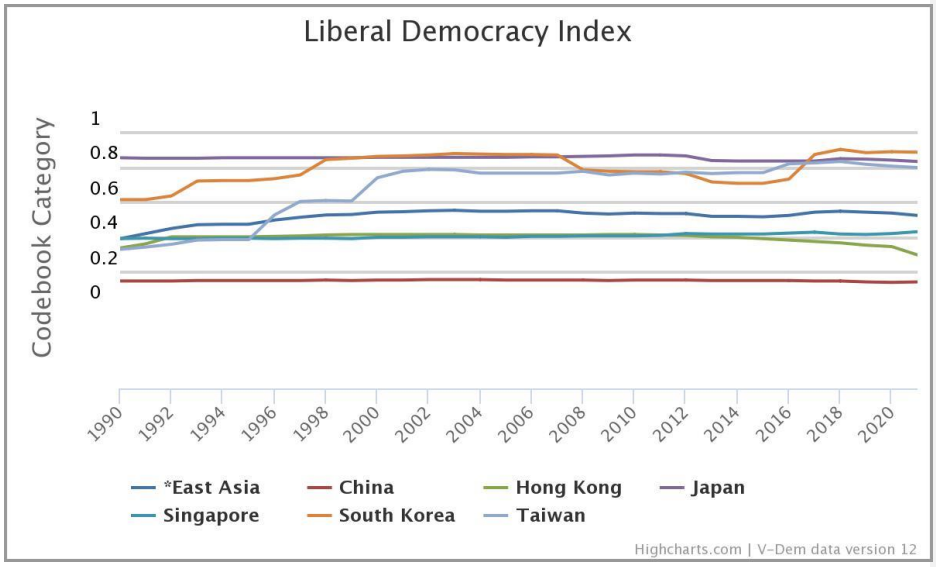
Figure 1: Electoral democracy index East Asia



As can be seen, Japan (which has been added here for comparative purposes) constantly is at the top and China at the bottom of this index. The regional average increased somewhat. Taiwan considerably improved, Singapore remained stable at a higher level than the PRC, and Hong Kong declined recently.

The electoral democracy index consists of five components: freedom of association, freedom of expression and alternative sources of information, clean election index, percent of population with suffrage, and elected officials. For the more demanding "liberal democracy" index three more components are added: rule of law; judicial constraints on executive, and legislative constraints on executive (Coppedge et al. (2020), V-Dem Codebook, p.45). The development of liberal democracy is presented in Figure 2:

Figure 2: Liberal Democracy Index East Asia



Here, the contrasts are even sharper showing, in particular, some more differentiation recently at the upper end.

These developments can be specified more closely according to the eight components of this index and the total index numbers for the "four Chinas". These are listed in Table 2:

Table 2 about here

It becomes apparent, that things have not changed very much on most of these dimensions in the PRC. Especially alternative sources of information and judicial restraints on the executive have decreased further. By contrast, Hong Kong shows considerable declines for all components. Freedom of information and association have suffered considerably, the rule of law is in danger, elections are no longer free and fair. In Singapore the media, freedom of association and, most importantly, elections remain restricted; the rule of law has been maintained. Among our cases, Taiwan is the shining example of a successful transition to democracy and can now be considered to be largely consolidated with a strong rule of law component.

3.2 *Elements of democratic quality*

In addition to these more differentiated definitional elements of a "liberal democracy", concerns about the overall "quality" of democracy and the well-functioning and performance of democratic systems have become more pronounced in recent years (see, e.g., Diamond and Morlino 2005). Such criteria include basic democratic values such as liberty and equality, broad-based participation and party competition, horizontal (inter-institutional) and vertical (elected incumbents – society) accountability, and (also) the rule of law (Morlino et al.2017, chapter 6). The precise values are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 about here

Here, too, the values for China have remained mostly stable at comparatively low levels. In particular, both horizontal and vertical accountability have negative values. Similarly civil liberties and the rule of law are very low. Hong Kong shows a recent decline of civil liberties, horizontal and vertical accountability, but remains at higher levels than the PRC. This corresponds to the developments reported in section 2.2 above. The values for Singapore remained stable at a considerably higher level than in the PRC, with some recent improvements of horizontal and vertical accountability and, in particular, recent party competition. Taiwan, once more, is the showcase with significant improvements on all dimensions over the last three decades.

3.3 *Governance indicators*

As elsewhere, the state of democracy is also related to their actual governmental processes and performance. The World Bank "*good governance*" data are the only ones covering this aspect more fully. They have been compiled since 1996 from a large variety of sources. These data comprise indices of "government effectiveness" (i. e. the quality of the bureaucracy and public services), "regulatory burden" (i. e. market-unfriendly policies like price and trade controls), "graft" (i. e. the exercise of public power for private gain) including various forms of corruption, nepotism or clientelism, and "political stability" or its opposite, the extent of social unrest and violence. Graft is coded here as "control of corruption" or the lack of it. All indicators have a range of -2.5 to + 2.5 (https://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/) (see Table 4).

Table 4 about here.

For China, the values are negative for the entire period on almost all dimensions. The indicator for voice and accountability is especially low; government effectiveness has improved a bit over the last decade. By contrast, Hong Kong shows high values for control of corruption,

government effectiveness, regulatory quality and the rule of law. Only voice and accountability and, in particular, political stability (reflecting the massive street demonstrations) have declined in recent years. Singapore has even higher figures, except for the negative score on voice and accountability. The values for Taiwan indicate considerable improvements over time. The figure for voice and accountability is the only higher one among our cases.

Taken altogether, the various measures of the components and the quality of democracy and governance justify our broad classification of the PRC as a harsh "closed autocracy", the continuing status of Singapore as an "electoral autocracy" with a strong rule of law component, the decline of Hong Kong from a "guarded" electoral democracy to a very special electoral autocracy, and, finally, the successful transition to and consolidation of liberal democracy in Taiwan. As competitors, these different regime types also have to be seen with regard to their performance on a number of most important current material dimensions such as socio-economic development, ecological sustainability and policies coping with climate change, and, as the most recent phenomenon, the handling of the Covid 19 pandemic.

3.4 *Socio-economic performance*

In empirical democratic theory a strong causal relationship between the level of socio-economic development and the emergence and sustainability of democracy in modern times has been emphasized by many authors: the famous "Lipset hypothesis" (Lipset 1959; see also Przeworski et al. 2000; Acemoglu/Robinson 2006). Among the four cases considered here, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan belong to the group of East Asian "tigers" which had very rapid rates of economic growth in the 1970s and '80s. They also managed to cope with the "dotcom" financial crisis in East Asia in the late 1990s and early 2000s relatively well. Of these only Taiwan, however, followed the expected pattern: strong economic development followed by successful democratization (as also in South Korea for example). Hong Kong remained a special case of limited democracy, first under British and now under PRC tutelage. Singapore developed its own model of successful socio-economic development under continuing authoritarian auspices. Mainland China also is a special case and a latecomer in many ways. In spite of significant recent economic advances, however, it does not show any sign of authoritarian "softening" (see also the brief accounts in section 2 above).

Here, we assess the relative socio-economic performance of these regimes with the help of the "Human Development Index" (HDI) compiled annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1990. This is a composite measure combining levels of Gross

National Income (GNI) per capita measured in "purchasing power parities" (PPP) with regard to the value of the U.S. dollar, levels of education, and average life expectancy at birth (reflecting also the health and nutritional situation in a country). This is a more meaningful index than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita alone, which is still the most frequently cited indicator. The respective values for our cases and their (relative) "ranks" are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 about here

It can be seen that the figure for the overall HDI initially was highest in Taiwan, closely followed by Hong Kong and Singapore, the PRC lagging far behind. This is also reflected by the values of the separate indicators. By now, the three "tigers" have continued their advance on all dimensions with Hong Kong ranking fourth worldwide in 2019 (the latest data available). The PRC has caught up considerably with the highest growth rate among the four cases over the last three decades, not only in terms of GNI per capita, but also as far as level of education and life expectancy are concerned. Nevertheless, the PRC is only ranked 85th worldwide so far. Such figures have to be taken with a grain of salt, of course, the absolute values and changes of the indicators are more meaningful than mere ranks which may reflect very slight differences. Thus, the gap between the PRC and the three other cases remains quite large.

Successful performance in these domains can considerably contribute to the long-time support of any regime ("specific support" in Easton's (1965) terms). But material conditions like higher incomes, better education and growing middle classes alone do not determine political developments where democracy remains elusive. Moreover, Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) have pointed out that the rule of law and the protection of private property are essential for fostering long-term economic prosperity. In their most recent book "The Narrow Corridor" (2019) they emphasize that successful polities need to uphold a balance of power among a strong state and a strong civil society. This implies that an all-powerful state will not be able to generate long-term legitimacy among citizens and civil society elites. The perceptions of citizens concerning their own life situation as well as the overall support and legitimacy of the regime are equally important. To these we now turn.

4. Micro-level perceptions

4.1. Historical cultural background

As mentioned in the introduction, the "four Chinas" here are understood to share some common historical and cultural features in a very broad sense. These include traditional beliefs and

teachings such as influences of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism and some syncretistic versions thereof. Each of these traditions has its own history of influential teachers such as Kong Fuzi (Confucius 551 – 479 BCE), Lao Tzu, who is the attributed author of Tao Te Ching dated to the late 4th century BCE, and Buddha, born as Siddhartha Gautama in Northern India in the 4th or 5th century BCE. *Confucianism*, which today is still widely shared in East Asia, emphasizes the importance of the family and social harmony. In its worldly concerns, it focuses on the cultivation of individual virtue in a morally organized world. It contributes to the achievement motivation in every-day life and served as the basis for the meritocratic promotion system in Imperial China. Some authors attribute the more recent success of the "East Asian tigers" to this cultural influence. At the same time, Confucianism may have contributed to more obedient orientations towards political authorities, which, however, were expected to live up to such moral principles themselves.

In a similar way, *Daoism* proclaims such moral virtues. Dao (or Tao, literally" way") can be seen as "the flow of the universe" (Cane 2002). It propagates a "holistic" worldview emphasizing the unity of yin and yang in all its worldly and other-worldly manifestations and their cyclical developments over time. In contrast to imperial Confucianism, it rejected an emphasis on hierarchical social orders. *Buddhism*, which spread to Tibet, Mongolia and China probably since the 2nd century C.E. along the Silk Road, is the third major cultural/religious influence shaping current perceptions and behaviour in East Asia. The central notion refers to "karma", the cycle of life, death and rebirth of all living beings, which only ends when "nirvana", the fulfilment of the last stage of virtuous living and final "liberation" has been achieved.

In actual practice, there are many variations and syncretistic forms of these religious influences. We cannot go into any details here. In modern times, especially the compatibility or not of such "Asian values" with contemporary liberal democracies has been disputed. In particular, it was the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad, who proclaimed that Asian values are different from "Western" ones, justifying his authoritarian regime in this way. He was strongly contradicted by others, most prominently Amartya Sen (1999) who insisted on the universality of liberal democratic values in today's world. As mentioned above, for the cases considered here, the teachings of Sun Yat-sen have been particularly influential. His guiding principles are, indeed, compatible with modern liberal democracy building on several strands of Confucianism and similar influences (He 2016, see also Berg-Schlosser 2020).

4.2. Data base and major indices

Against this background, we now turn to the most recent empirical findings in this respect. As mentioned above, we will use the "World Values Surveys" (WVS) data base for this purpose including the latest (7^{th}) "wave". Here, we rely on the seven waves of the International Values Surveys (IVS) data file providing longitudinal data on value orientations of citizens since the early 1980s. The IVS combines the data of the World Values Survey (WVS) and the European Values Study (EVS). The surveys are representative of the adult population (18+ years) in each participating country. For purposes of an intra-regional East Asian comparison, we have included data from two liberal democracies here: Japan, as a longer established one since the aftermath of World War II, and South Korea as a more recent democracy marked by the election of Kim Dae-jung in 1997, a former opposition leader.

WVS were initiated by Ronald Inglehart in the early 1980s building on his theory of *post-materialism* (Inglehart 1977). By now, these surveys have covered 113 countries worldwide, albeit not for all waves. Over the years, Inglehart and Welzel (2005; see also Welzel 2013 and Inglehart 2018) have developed a comprehensive theory of *human development* associated with the global rise of *emancipative values*. Based on assumptions of *cultural* modernization theory (as opposed to the socio-economic modernization theory of the Lipset type), Inglehart and Welzel claim that value change is a crucial factor driving democratization. The rise of emancipative value orientations in the post-industrial democracies proceeded by generational displacement of older cohorts with predominantly traditional values by younger ones in which support for emancipative values was more widespread. Welzel (2013) constructed two indices of value orientations, the *Index of Emancipative Values* (EVI) and the index of '*Secular-Rational Values vs. Traditional Values*' (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 51). The theory of human development considers both groups of value orientations as being conducive to democratization and the stability of democracy in a country.

In his 2018 book, Inglehart emphasized that personal happiness and life satisfaction increase as societies become economically more secure, more democratic, and more tolerant (2018: 153). He argued that liberal democracy increases feelings of well-being among their citizens even beyond the increase produced by the higher standards of living in modern societies (2018: Chapter 8). Although personal well-being is not as closely related to liberal democracy as are emancipative values, its relevance derives from its immediate impact on the perceived prospects for leading a good life which is an important precondition of an optimistic outlook on society and politics. While life satisfaction and satisfaction with the financial situation of the

respondents' household are the most obvious indicators of personal well-being, generalized interpersonal trust is included as well (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 256). It influences the opportunities for the formation of a personal social network that transcends people's primary social environment (family, friends) and ties them to their wider social and political community. Those who distrust other people by expressing doubts about their good intentions will tend to limit their contacts to their own in-group and are less likely to engage in collective action to achieve a common goal. Robert Putnam (1993) has emphasized that such inclusive social networks constitute an important *social capital* for political communities.

Welzel's *Index of Emancipative Values* (EVI) includes four sub-indices:

- *The 'Defiance'* index combines low respect for traditional authorities, low national pride and a disregard for parents' demands.
- The '*Disbelief*' or *Secularism* index combines low importance assigned to religion, a self-identification as non-believer and irregular attendance of religious services.
- The *'Scepticism'* index combines low confidence in the military, the police and the judicial system.
- The '*Relativism'* index, finally, combines the evaluation of 'Cheating on taxes,' 'Avoiding fares on public transportation' and of 'Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties' as acceptable behaviors.

Instead of the *Defiance* index, we decided to include several items dealing specifically with family values that have frequently been considered as central by the Asian values thesis. This index is coded in the opposite direction. Instead of Welzel's *Scepticism* index we kept the directionality of the original items and measure mean confidence in the three traditional state security institutions which are central for a state's ability to ensure its monopoly on the use of force. The inspection of the correlation matrix confirmed that their intercorrelations are reasonably high which confirmed their scalability (Cronbach's α=.71).

We decided against a straightforward replication of Welzel's *Relativism* index because the distribution of the three items is extremely skewed. Nearly half of all respondents evaluated all three behaviors as 'never justifiable'. Welzel dichotomized the items and interpreted all deviations from outright rejection as indicating a relativist value orientation. Thereby, he artificially increased the prevalence of relativism. Since the three items show a sufficiently high scalability (Cronbach's α = .71), an alternative *Relativism* index was calculated which is based on the mean scores of the original ten-point scale.

The *Emancipative Values Index (EVI)* is the centerpiece of Welzel's theory. It is also made up by four sub-dimensions: The importance ascribed on individual autonomy (*'Autonomy'*), support for gender equality (*'Equality'*), tolerance of different lifestyles (*'Choice'*) and support for an increase in the political participation rights for ordinary people (*'Voice'*). Welzel posits that the demand for freedom of choice and for gender equality are universal values. He assumes that high scores on these value orientations imply that people have a proper understanding of the practical implications of democracy. Therefore, a discrepancy between people's emancipative values and political reality is considered as the most important driver of a global trend of democratization.

If the Asian values thesis is correct, emancipative value orientations should be less widespread in East Asian countries, regardless of their level of socioeconomic development. At the same time, they should be negatively related to the emphasis on family values and confidence in state authorities. that are ostensibly responsible for the lack of support for democracy.

4.3, Traditional vs. Secular Value Orientations and Interpersonal Trust

We start out with traditional value orientations because the Asian Values thesis has primarily focused on the emphasis placed on family ties. All survey waves in which the countries participated, are combined in Table 6

Table 6: Importance of family ties and family values (percentages)

	Important in life: family[1]	*Trust in family*[2]	*Goal in life: Make my parents proud*[3]	*Respect and love for parents*[4]	
Country	*% Very important*	*Mean*	*Mean*	*% Always respect*	*% Respect if earned*
China	75.2%	.96	.61	83.0%	17.0%
Taiwan	88.0%	.94	.67	93.1%	6.9%
Hong Kong	73.3%	.92	.60		
Singapore	92.5%	.92	.72	92.9%	7.1%
Japan	89.9%	.90	.56	73.9%	26.1%
South Korea	90.9%	.94	.64	92.5%	7.5%

Source: IVS 1981-2022, weighted data

1 **Question: "For each of the following, indicate how important it is your life." 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0 to 4. Included in waves 2 to 7.**
2 Question: "I'd like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups." 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0 to 1. Included in waves 5 to 7.
3 Question: "One of my main goals in life has been to make my parents proud." 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0 to 1. Included in waves 3 to 7.
4 **Question: "**With which of these two statements do you tend to agree?
A. Regardless of what the qualities and faults of one's parents are, one must always love and respect them
B. One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behavior and attitudes". Included in waves 1 to 4 only.

The data show that the importance ascribed to the family, trust in family members and to make parents proud is equally high in all countries included in our analysis. Unconditional deference to parents' authority also is a traditional value. In modern societies it tends to give way to a less hierarchical understanding of intra-familial relations and to accord children more autonomy. It is very high in five of the East Asian countries, Japan as the socio-economically most developed one has some lower values in this respect.

Next, we look at more secular orientations. The first column of Table 7 provides the scores for confidence in state security institutions. Welzel interpreted the inverse confidence scores as indicating political *Scepticism* which he considered as an indicator of non-traditional orientations. These institutions have an ambivalent character, however. In democracies, they ensure the internal and external security of the country and are unpopular only among people who consider them as unnecessary. In autocracies they are frequently employed as instruments of political repression to discourage the open expression of opposition to the existing political regime. Therefore, they are at the same time feared and loathed among dissidents.

Table 7: Confidence in state security institutions, relativism and secular value orientation (mean scores, range 0-1)

Country	*Confidence in state security institutions*[1]	*Relativism*[2]	*Secular orientation*[3]
China	.71	.07	.84
Taiwan	.52	.10	.55
Hong Kong	.61	.12	.72
Singapore	.68	.12	.40
Japan	.59	.06	.70

South Korea	.56	.12	.57

Source: IVS 1981-2022, weighted data

1 Confidence in the military, police and the judicial system of the country: Mean score on a 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0-1. Included in waves 1 to 7.
2 Evaluation of the justifiability of 'Cheating on taxes', 'Avoiding a fare on public transportation' and 'Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties'. Mean score on a 10-point scale, rescaled to range 0- 1. Included in waves 1 to 7.
3 Mean of several questions or items that deal with orientation towards religion: Importance of religion in life (4-point scale), whether respondents considered themselves as religious person (3-point scale), and frequency of church attendance (8-point scale), rescaled into range 0-1, with higher value indicating more secular orientation. Included in waves 1 to 7.

The Scepticism scores are moderately high, ranging from a low of .53 in Taiwan, to .71 in China. These national means do not indicate any East Asian peculiarity. The same is true for the *Relativism* index, -

The results for *Secularism* reveal a highly differentiated pattern. As we showed in our global analysis (Hoffmann-Lange and Berg-Schlosser 2022), citizens in predominantly Muslim and Catholics countries tend to be more religious, while countries without a predominant religion tend to have higher shares of people without religious affiliation and a more secular orientation. The East Asian countries are a special case since ancestor worship and Confucianism, the religious practices which traditionally used to be most widespread in this region, differ from other religions by not having an over-arching organizational structure. Therefore, the number of people without organizational ties to a religion is much higher which is evident in Table 8.

Table 8: Religious affiliation by country (row percentages)

Country	*No religious affiliation*	*Christian*	*Muslim*	*Buddhist*	*Other religious affiliation*
China	88.9%	2.8%	1.8%	6.2%	0.4%
Taiwan[1]	23.7%	5.7%	0.0%	20.7%	49.9%
Hong Kong	71.2%	16.5%	0.2%	10.4%	1.5%
Singapore	20.6%	19.4%	15.2%	28.2%	11.3%

Japan	55.7%	2.9%	0.0%	38.2%	3.2%
South Korea	40.8%	33.7%	0.1%	22.8%	2.5%

Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 1 to 7, weighted data

1 The residual category includes 24.3% practicing traditional religion, 15.5% of Taoist faith

The share of respondents who indicated to have no religious affiliation varies considerably across the six East Asian countries. Their share is very high in China and Hong Kong. While more than half of the Japanese respondents are without religious affiliation as well, a sizeable minority indicated they were Buddhists. South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore show a high degree of religious diversity instead. While it is certainly true that Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism have historically played an important role and have left their cultural imprint, this has been weakening in recent decades. Respondents without religious affiliation have the highest scores on the secularism index, while secularism is much lower among those indicating membership in a religious community.

As mentioned above, *Interpersonal trust* is an important societal resource and a basis for *social capital*. As Welzel puts it: "Generalized trust derives from trust in close others and the extends to unspecified others to eventually include even remote others" (Welzel 2013: 199). Welzel operationalized *generalized trust* by asking for three different types of interpersonal trust. *Close trust* is trust in family members and primary groups. *Unspecific trust* is the conviction that people are generally trustworthy. *Remote trust*, finally, involves trust in strangers and people with a different cultural or religious background. Welzel combined the questions for the three levels into his *Index of generalized trust* by assigning different weights for the three types of trust. Even though generalized trust is not explicitly political, it does have political implications. It encourages people to form or join politically active groups or parties, even in authoritarian systems and under conditions of political repression.

Table 9: Generalized trust (mean scores)

Country	*Trust in close people*[1]	*Trust in unspecific people*[2]	*Trust in remote people*[3]	*Welzel Index of generalized trust*[4]
China	.76	.63	.30	.49

Taiwan	.76	.41	.43	.48
Hong Kong	.73	.44	.43	.49
Singapore	.75	.40	.44	.48
Japan	.70	.41	.31	.39
South Korea	.73	.41	.36	.44

Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 5 to 7, weighted data

1 Mean score for trust in family, neighbors, people I know personally; 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0-1. Included in waves 5 to 7. Calculated if all three had valid scores.
2 Mean score for "Most people can be trusted" vs. "Need to be very careful" (dummy variable, 0 and 1) and "Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair?", 10-point scale, rescaled to range 0-1. Second question not included in wave 7
3 Mean score for trust in "People you meet for the first time", "People of another religion" and "People of another nationality", 4-point scale, rescaled to range 0-1, Included in waves 5 to 7. Calculated if all three had valid scores.
4 Mean of all three indices: The first item was weighted with 1, the second with 2 and the third with 3 (see Welzel 2013, Online Appendix, p. 62-63)

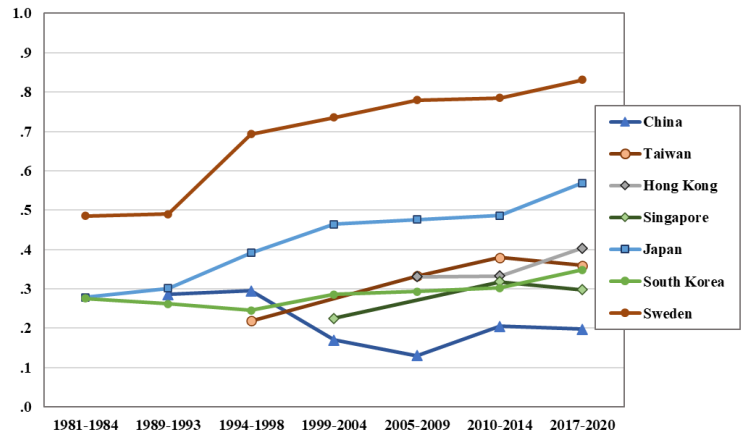
Table 9 shows that *close trust* is very high in all six countries, while *unspecific trust* and especially *remote trust* achieve considerably lower scores. In China we find that both close trust and unspecific trust are quite high. At the same time, it has the lowest score for remote trust. This may be due to the country's vast territory, large population and the political restrictions on personal contacts with foreigners. Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore show relatively high levels of remote trust, instead. This is not really surprising either because these are small countries whose economic welfare strongly depends on thriving international trade relations and encourages an openness of their citizens for interactions with other countries and cultures.

4.4.Emancipative Value Orientations: Support for a Free Choice of Lifestyle and for Gender Equality

Tolerance of different lifestyles (*choice*) and equality of women are two core indices of emancipative values. Since the theory of value change posits that such values have considerably increased over the past forty years, Figures 3 and 4 show trend curves for both value

orientations. They confirm previous results for the development of these values (Hoffmann-Lange and Berg-Schlosser 2022). To provide some cross-regional comparison, Sweden has been added here as a kind of "benchmark" case. While choice values have continuously increased in Japan from .28 to .57, this has not been the case in the other countries. In China, tolerance of different lifestyles has even decreased over time, from .29 to .20 This indicates that a traditional disapproval of homosexuality, abortion and divorce is still widespread. While all three behaviors are no longer criminalized, especially homosexuality is only tolerated, but at the same time politically stigmatized in China and Singapore.

Figure 3: Support for free choice of lifestyle

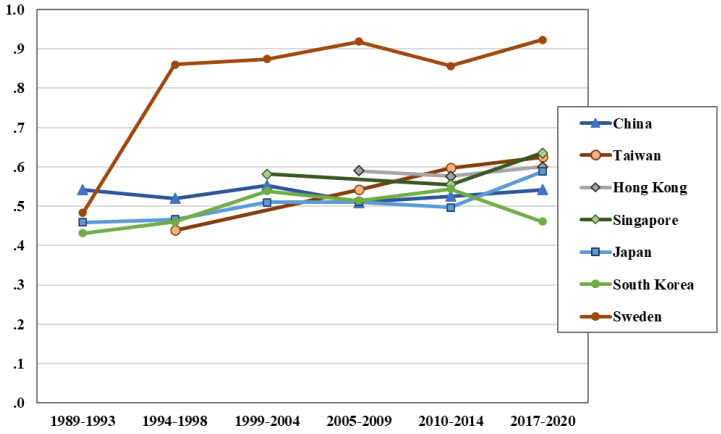


Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 1-7, weighted data

Index: Mean acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce; 10-point scale; rescaled to range 0-1.

Equality of women is legally guaranteed in all countries (World Bank 2019). Public support for gender equality trails these legal advances, however. In the most recent survey wave, it ranged between .46 in South Korea and .64 in Singapore.

Figure 4: Support for gender equality



Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 1-7, weighted data

Index: Mean support for equal access of women to university education (3-point scale), jobs and political offices (4-point scale); rescaled to range 0-1.

Overall, these data do not justify the optimism of value change theory regarding a steady global rise of emancipative values. The theory predicts a strong cohort effect based on the assumption that value change proceeds slowly and increases from older cohorts that grew up under more adverse economic conditions to younger cohorts growing up under better auspices and also being more highly educated. The results in Table 10 that are based on all seven survey waves suggest different cohort effects in the different countries. The effect is fairly strong in Taiwan and Japan, with an increase of above .30. In China, the oldest cohort is the most tolerant, while later cohorts have slightly lower values.

Table 10: Support for free choice of lifestyle[1] by birth cohort and country

Country	*Before 1936*	*1936-1945*	*1946-1955*	*1956-1965*	*1966-1975*	*1976-1985*	*After 1985*	*Difference[2]*
China	.28	.22	.21	.20	.19	.19	.23	-.05
Taiwan	.15	.19	.26	.29	.36	.42	.47	.32
Hong Kong	.23	.23	.29	.36	.39	.42	.47	.24
Singapore	.23	.21	.22	.22	.28	.32	.42	.19
Japan	.28	.34	.43	.48	.54	.59	.61	.33
South Korea	.15	.19	.25	.27	.33	.38	.42	.27

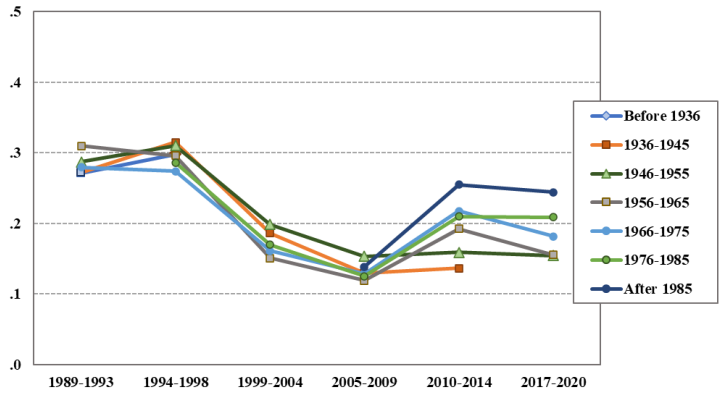
Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 1-7, weighted data

1 Mean acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce; 10-point scale; rescaled to range 0-1.
2 Difference between oldest and youngest cohort.

Since figures following cohorts over several survey waves can only be shown for a few countries, the following analysis is limited to the cases of China and Taiwan. A comparison of Figures 5 and 6 reveals that the cohort effect is strongest in Taiwan where the trend lines for the seven cohorts are clearly distinguishable. This development conforms closest to Inglehart's original theory of value change and cultural modernization. China shows an inverse period effect. After a slight increase from survey wave two to wave three, the line goes sharply down and has rebounded only moderately between waves 5 and 7. This development suggests that Chinese respondents do not have stable personal convictions regarding these matters. At the same time, the line-up for the cohorts is as theoretically expected.

Kommentiert [D1]:

Figure 5: China: Support for free choice of lifestyle by birth cohort and survey wave



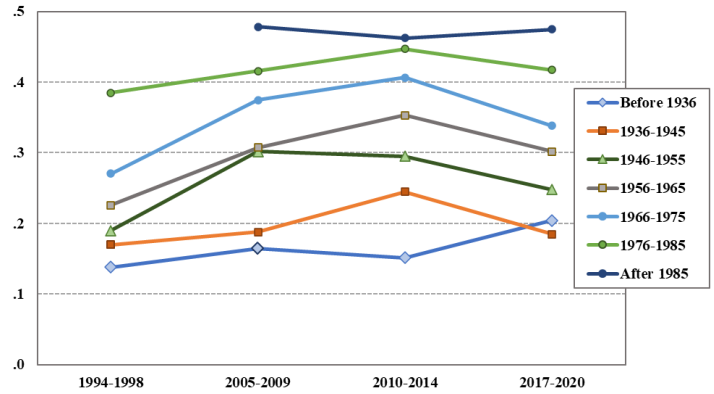
Source: Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 1-7, weighted data

Mean acceptance of homosexuality, abortion, and divorce; 10-point scale, rescaled to range 0-1.

The different pattern for Taiwan suggests that strong cohort effects can be expected primarily in times of rapid socio-political change. The swift development of Taiwan's political system from an authoritarian regime to a liberal democracy, which was accompanied by an equally strong economic growth, resembles the development of the western European countries after

World War II, which Inglehart used as prime examples for demonstrating the validity of his theory of value change driven by differences between successive cohorts.

Figure 6: Taiwan: Support for Free Choice of Lifestyle by Birth Cohort and Survey Wave



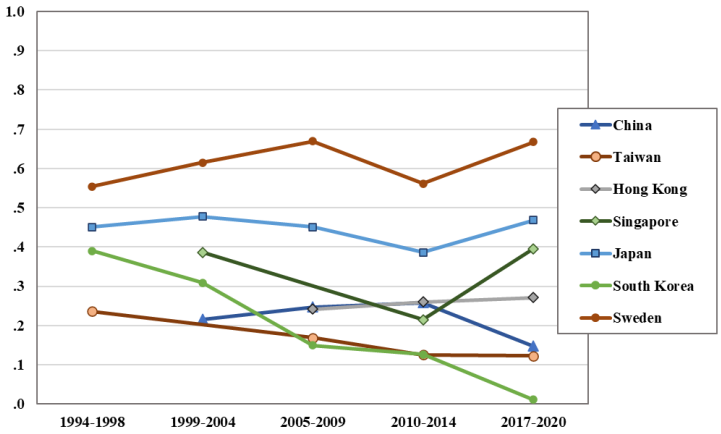
Unfortunately, the IVS surveys include only one family value that can be expected to conflict with an emancipative value orientation. This is the belief that parents deserve unconditional respect and it was only included in the first four waves of the surveys. The two orientations are indeed negatively correlated. The correlation coefficient is a fairly high r=-.341.

4.5. How much support is there for democracy?

Finally, we wanted to know how much support democracy can muster among the publics in the six countries. The general ideal of democracy enjoys high and stable support, even in the PRC where it is qualified by "Chinese characteristics". The picture changes, however, once we consider steadfast *support for democracy*. Our index *Support for democracy* is based on independent ratings of democracy and of two non-democratic regime types: rule by an autocratic leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections or a military regime. The index was constructed by subtracting the higher score for either of the authoritarian regime types from the score assigned to democracy. Unlike the other indicators, this index has a range from -1 to +1. Positive scores imply that respondents expressed a preference for democracy. This is a demanding index in the sense that it requires respondents to explicitly reject non-democratic alternatives. Similar measures have been suggested and used by several other authors (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 253, Diamond 2008: 31-34).

Figure 7 shows the trend in support for democracy. Sweden once more has been added here with scores ranging between .55 and .67. Japan, also a longer established democracy, has the highest scores (.39 to .48) among the East Asian cases. The other countries show some variation, but no substantial increase over time. Singapore's scores decreased from .39 in survey wave 4 to only .22 in wave 6, before they increased again to .40 in the most recent wave. Hong Kong's, and China's scores are even lower, they fluctuated over time and reached .27, and .15 in wave 7. Taiwan's curve points downward, too, with a steady decline from .24 to .12. South Korea, finally started out with relatively high scores close to .40 in the third wave (1994 to 1998) and experienced dramatic declines thereafter to scores barely above zero. This indicates that the more recent democracies of South Korea and Taiwan do *not* show an increase in public support for democracy. Instead, they have fallen back rather than catching up. In fact, the scores of Singapore, an electoral autocracy, have meanwhile surpassed them. In the case of South Korea this may be due to a series of political scandals involving among others President Park Geun-hye serving from 2012 to 2017 until she was impeached and convicted for charges of corruption. In any case, the WVS surveys do not capture the most recent developments where in the case of Taiwan the increasingly aggressive stance from mainland China under President Xi apparently has led to stronger support for the regime and President Tsai who was re-elected by a landslide in 2020 (see also section 2.2. above).

Figure 7: Support for Democracy by Country and Wave



Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 3-7, weighted data

The differences between the countries become even more instructive if we look at the results in Table 11 based on the results of the most recent survey wave. The index of support for

democracy is here trichotomized to distinguish respondents with a preference for an authoritarian regime, a preference for democracy and indifferent respondents who provided nearly identical ratings for both. It shows similar patterns for Chinese and Taiwanese respondents. About two fifth of them indicate a preference for democracy. In case of the former that must probably be qualified by an understanding of "democracy with Chines characteristics" In four countries, this share was above 50 percent. South Korea is a negative outlier. More than 25% of the respondents indicated a preference for an authoritarian regime, while two fifth of the respondents did not reveal a clear-cut preference.

Table 11: Regime preference

Country	Preference authoritarian regime	Indifference	Preference democracy
China	16.2%	44.7%	39.0%
Taiwan	19.9%	41.7%	38.4%
Hong Kong	11.9%	28.8%	59.2%
Japan	5.2%	20.6%	74.2%
South Korea	28.2%	43.8%	28.0%

Source: IVS 1981-2022, wave 7), weighted data

A final analysis tried to determine *factors explaining* support for democracy. For this multiple regression analysis we included the same independent variables as before, plus support for free choice of lifestyle and two additional variables. The first of these additional variables is an *intrinsic understanding of democracy* based on the extent to which respondents associated democracy with free elections, equal rights for women, and the protection of civil rights. The *importance attributed to living in a democracy* was included as well. The results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Multiple least squares regression analysis: determinants of support for democracy

	b	*Std. error*	*β*
Constant	-.351***	.018	
Liberal Democracies	-.048***	.006	-.058
GDP p.c. high	.094***	.007	.095
Support for free choice of lifestyle	.320***	.009	.234

Goal in life: Make my parents proud	-.157***	.010	-.089
Confidence in repressive state institutions	.128***	.012	.062
Secular orientation	-.028***	.008	-.021
Intrinsic understanding of democracy	.346***	.013	.164
Importance of living in a democracy	.287***	.013	.136

Source: IVS 1981-2022, waves 5-7, weighted data

Pairwise deletion of missing values; Multiple correlation coefficient: .406 ; Corrected r^2: .165

Std. error of estimate: .381; Significance level: *** <.001

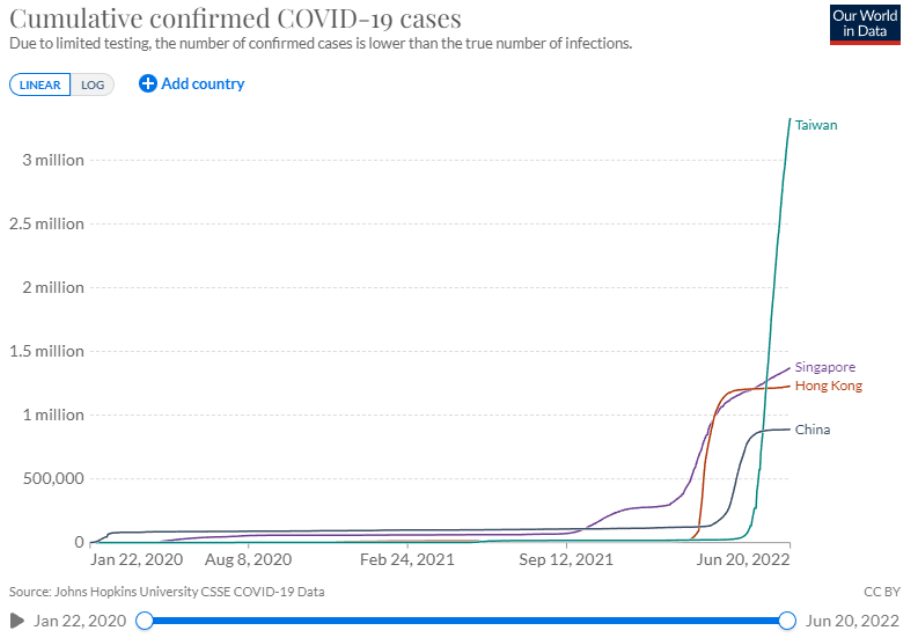
Altogether, the explanatory power of these variables is relatively low. They explain only 17% of the total variance. Moreover, most of the attitudinal predictors included in the traditional-secular and emancipatory values indices only achieved b-values below 0.10. Therefore, it can be concluded that their influence is primarily indirect. While they increase support for a free choice of lifestyle, they do not directly influence support for democracy. The choice index shows a stronger influence, although its b coefficient is not particularly high either. This implies that the effect of this emancipative value orientation on support for democracy is lower than the theory of value change predicts and confirms the persistence of country-specific cultural traditions. Finally, an intrinsic understanding of democracy and the importance assigned to living in a democracy achieve the highest coefficients.

In sum, this is in line with our broader findings which show that the more recent democracies worldwide generally enjoy lower public support than the longer-established ones (Hoffmann-Lange and Berg-Schlosser 2022). This is not really surprising because a "congruence" between political structures and political culture necessarily takes time (Eckstein 1988). In many instances democratization has occurred "from above" (as in West Germany or Japan after WWII) or because of other external circumstances as in Eastern Europe after 1990 and the demise of the Soviet Union with its worldwide repercussions. Among the cases here, this is confirmed by Japan's stronger position in this regard. In the case of Germany, this has been demonstrated long ago (Baker, Dalton, Hildebrand 1981). By contrast, the long-term democratizing effects "from below" as propagated by Welzel have been shown to be quite weak in the cases considered here.

5. A dramatic test of regime performance: COVID-19

In December 2019 an unknown infectious lung disease was detected in the City of Wuhan in Hubei Province in China. It quickly spread and was transmitted by travellers to neighbouring countries and Europe in the first months of 2020. The World Health Organisation (WHO) in February 2020 coined the term COVID-19 for this infection caused by the new Corona virus SARS-CoV-2. In March 2020 it was officially declared a pandemic by WHO. In the meantime, it has become a worldwide pandemic of an unprecedented scale and has infected more than 500 million persons and caused more than 6 million deaths in all parts of the world (figures for May 2022). For the "four Chinas" discussed here, this natural experiment was a litmus test for specific features of their regimes and presents important evidence for the ongoing global democracy vs. autocracy system competition, recently further exacerbated by Russia's war in Ukraine and the subsequent worldwide reactions and consequences.

In our four cases the situation developed as shown in Figure 8:



As can be seen, the pandemic was contained relatively successfully (compared e. g. to Europe or the U.S.) in the four cases until late 2021 in Singapore and early 2022 in the other cases. Hong Kong and, especially Taiwan, showed the most dramatic increases recently.

A similar picture is shown by the cumulative number of deaths (see Figure 9 :

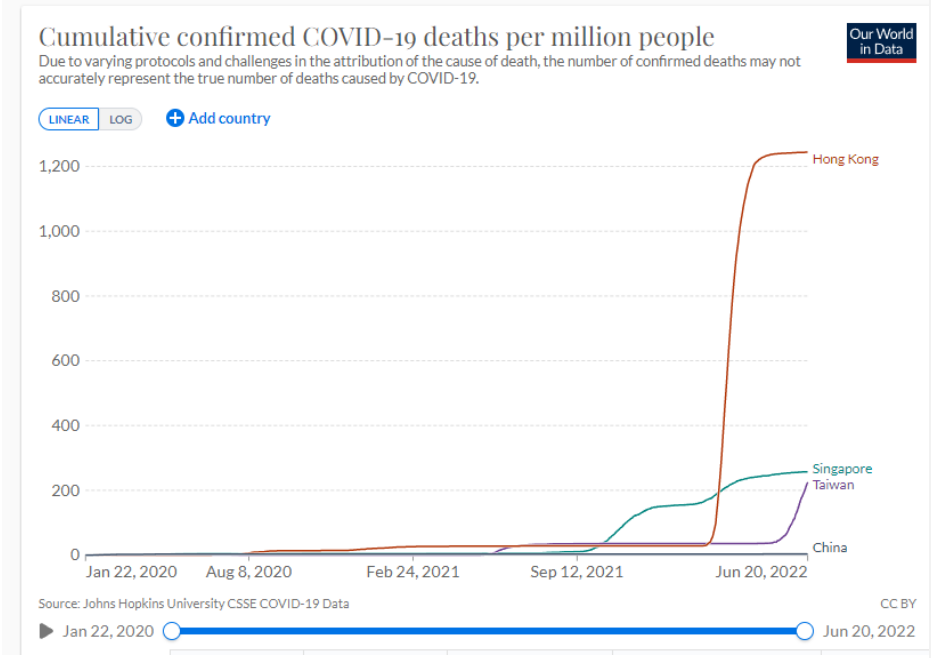


Table 13: Coronavirus data

Country	confirmed	deaths	Case fatality	Deaths/100K Pop	% fully vaccinated
China	2.114.127	14.621	3.2%	10.5	89.05%
Hong Kong	1.228.584	9.393	0.8%	1.234	85.3%
Singapore	1.367.761	1.403	2.3%	246	85.35%
Taiwan	3.330.695	5.365	0.8%	229	80.54

Sources: https://coronavirus.jhu.edu › data (accessed June 20, 2022)

https://epidemic-stats.com/coronavirus

All such figures, however, have to be taken with a big grain of salt since the testing and reporting of cases and the precise diagnoses of deaths vary greatly from country to country and are by themselves an indicator of regime openness and transparency. In the following, we look at this situation in some greater detail taking into account the reactions and measures taken in each case.

In the **PRC** an immediate top-down "Zero-COVID" strategy was followed. The City of Wuhan and other major cities in Hubei Province were subjected to a complete lockdown which lasted

almost 3 months. All schools, non-essential companies, public transport, airports and major highways were closed. Only one person from each household was permitted to go outside for provisions once every two days. Other provinces and major cities soon followed. A strict health monitoring system tracking each infection was imposed. The comparative impact of such measures is monitored and documented in a COVID-19 dataset combining the "CoronaNet COVID-19 Government Response Event Dataset" and the "Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker", compiled among other organisations by Oxford University and the Technical University of Munich (Cheng, C. et al.) The business and schooling restrictions for our four cases are depicted in the following graphs:

Figure 10: Business restrictions:

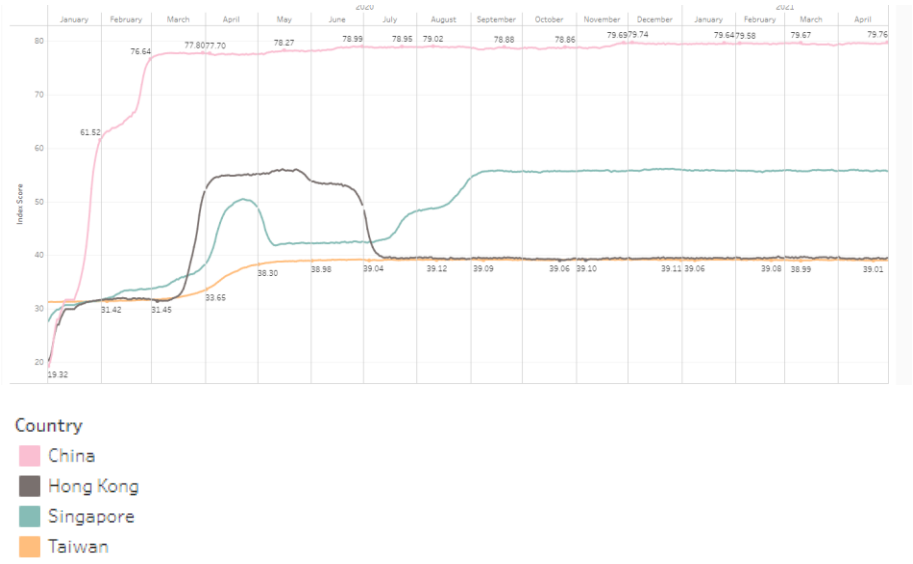
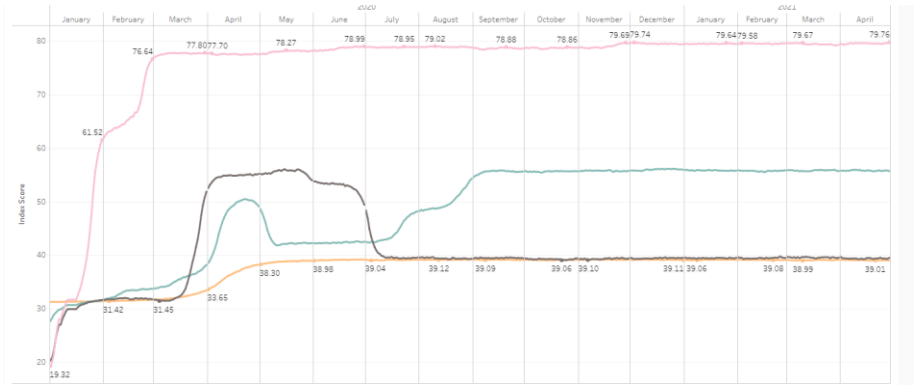


Figure 11: School restrictions:



The PRC thus clearly had the strictest measures in these respects in the observed period, followed by Singapore. Hong Kong and Taiwan remained more lenient. Other measures such as mask policies and social distancing on the whole were more generally accepted reflecting some cultural traditions in these regards.

In early 2022 **Hong Kong,** which was not as much secluded from the outside world as mainland China, was severely hit by the wave of the more recent COVID Omikron variant. The number of confirmed cases and related deaths increased dramatically (see Figure above). Hospital capacities and other health resources quickly reached their limits and strict measures were imposed (see also : https://www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html). Given the many existing links between Hong Kong and the mainland, the spread of this wave could not be prevented. At the end of March 2022, the City of **Shanghai** including the major harbour were subjected to a complete lockdown for almost two months. In May 2022 the capital of **Beijing** was affected as well. The number of cases and deaths spread almost countrywide. The Chinese lockdowns have severely hampered domestic and international supply chains and industrial production. Unemployment has risen and many temporary workers are left without any compensating welfare measures. For the first time in many years, open street protests could be obser4ved. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that in spite of high vaccination rates the locally produced vaccines such as Sinovac are much less effective than their Western counterparts (Biontech, Moderna etc.). It seems that the COVID genie has escaped from the bottle and can no longer be contained by the Zero-COVID policy.

Comparatively speaking, **Singapore** has taken a middle road in coping with the pandemic. Confirmed cases and COVID-related deaths per million people were higher than in China and,

until recently, in Taiwan, but less than in Hong Kong. The imposed restrictions were also less severe (see figures above). The situation was helped by the fact that Singapore has a well-developed health system and, as a tropical country, a longer experience with serious virus infections such as the SARS-CoV-1 pandemic in 2002/2003. Concerning the Omicron variant, the government has issued a new list of measures which, however, are less restrictive than in China (see also https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/resetting-our-measures-to-live-with-the-omicron-v).

Taiwan for most of the period also followed a Zero-COVID policy. In contrast to the PRC, however, this was not done in a simply repressive top-down manner, but also involved local governments, private enterprises and citizens, which were jointly engaged in the National Epidemic Prevention Team (NEPT, Hsie et al 2021). In addition, various innovative digital tools were introduced to distribute real-time health information, track individuals subjected to home quarantine and facilitate international border controls for inbound passengers before arrival. Social acceptance thus remained high and trust and cooperation with the government continued (Lee 2021). To be situated on an island, as in Singapore, also was a facilitating factor. In March 2022, in spite of the Omicron variant, the government announced a new strategy as a possible conscious "exit" from the pandemic. This explains the sudden rise of confirmed cases in Figure 8. Travel restrictions and contact tracing were relaxed, mild cases are isolated at home, and close contacts need only be quarantined for three days instead of ten. In this way, a return to a more normal life should be achieved. The number of COVID-related deaths has increased as well (Figure 9). The situation remains under observation and Premier Su Tseng-chang said that the virus "would not be allowed to spread unchecked" (https://time.com/6174132/taiwan-COVID-strategy/). It is too early to judge the final result of this strategy, but it shows the prudent approach the government has taken all along, in stark contrast to the dramatic repression in the PRC.

6. Conclusions

As we have shown, the "four Chinas" present a most interesting and highly topical comparison for the "*system competition*" in today's world. By and large, the strong performance on many dimensions at the macro-level (quality of democracy, good governance, socio-economic development and, dramatically, coping with the COVID pandemic) demonstrated the strength of Taiwan's democracy. By contrast, Hong Kong today under the PRC's overwhelming dominance no longer can be considered to be an "electoral democracy" and has ceased to be a "model" in any way. Singapore has maintained its hybrid status of electoral autocracy with a

satisfactory governance and economic performance. Some "softening" of the authoritarian aspects could be observed. The PRC, in spite of strong economic but weaker governance scores, has become even more repressive recently. The "Zero-COVID" policy has further aggravated the situation. Under Xi's highly personalized and centralized leadership now without time limits this model has become less attractive elsewhere and possibly, in the longer run, even in China itself (Brown 2022).

On the micro-level, a broader influence of East Asian historical traditions and values could be observed. These do not, however, stand in the way of a more successful democratization as demonstrated in Taiwan. Rather, some (slow) assimilation seems to take place as in other parts of the world. As mentioned before, the teachings of Sun Yat-sen already pointed in this direction. Aspects of gender equality and "choice" are gaining importance. However, the way to a more profound liberal democratic culture, even in cases like South Korea and Taiwan, still seems to be a long one.

All this is happening in an increasingly tense *international context*. The annexation of the Crimea peninsula in 2014 and, since 2/24 2022, the military attack of Ukraine by Putin's Russia have led to a new worldwide confrontation. Some observers regard this as a new "Cold (and potentially hot) War" between liberal democracies with the United States and the European Union as major players on the one hand and authoritarian regimes led by Putin's Russia and Xi's China on the other. Graham Allison (2015), for example, compares the situation to the conflict in ancient Greece between Sparta and Athens and speaks of a "Thucydides trap" leading almost inevitably to war between a long dominant and a new rising power. Among others, Steve Chan (2020) is very critical of this concept as it relates to present Sino-American relations. Nevertheless, the current situation in the Taiwan Straits and Xi's increasing aggressiveness highlight this conflict. Xi's "One China" policy under the leadership of the Communist Party (and his own) is not compatible with an independent and democratic Taiwan. Some knowledgeable observers raise a "Red Alert" in this situation (Görlach 2022). Others take a more differentiated view and point to mutual interdependencies and risks among "trading states" in today's highly globalized world as already emphasized by Richard Rosecrance (1986).

In any case, the PRC's and Taiwan's contrasting "models" stand for this renewed global conflict in the 21st century: a rule-based global order of peaceful coexistence or a vision of power based on military strength, coercion, and suppression of civil liberties. "That is why Taiwan is truly

the ultimate interface between the People's Republic and the outside world" (Brown 2022, p.214). The coming months and years will decide.

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