**Today’s China vs. Today’s India**

**Prompt: Pretend that you have control over which country you would like to have been born in—China or India. Based on the article, make an argument for why you would rather have been born in China in 2000. Then, make the same argument for India. ½ page answer.**

“China’s Challenge to Democracy”

*The democratic cause is on the defensive today, and China’s pragmatic authoritarianism now offers a serious rival model, based on economic progress and national dignity*

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In his 1992 book “The End of History and the Last Man,” Francis Fukuyama famously declared the triumph of liberal democracy as the model of governance toward which all of humankind was heading. It was a victory on two fronts. The Western democracies held the clear advantage over their ideological rivals [Communism] in material [economic] terms, thanks to their proven ability to deliver general **prosperity** [wealth] and a rising standard of living for most citizens. At the same time, to live in a modern democracy was to be given certain guarantees that you would be **respected as a person**. Everyone got to have a say, so democracy delivered **personal** **dignity** as well.

Results plus respect is a formidable political mix. For Mr. Fukuyama, that is what made democracy unassailable [unbeatable]: Only it could meet the basic human need for material comfort and the basic human desire for what he called “recognition” [while Communism failed to do either]…

Yet today, barely two decades into the 21st century, the contest has been renewed. It is no longer a clash of ideologies, as during the Cold War. Western democracy is now confronted by a form of authoritarianism that is far more pragmatic [realistic and flexible] than its communist predecessors. A new generation of autocrats [dictators], most notably in China, have sought to learn the lessons of the 20th century just like everyone else. They too are in the business of trying to offer results plus respect. It is the familiar package, only now it comes in a nondemocratic form.

Since the 1980s, the Chinese regime has had remarkable success in raising the material condition of its population. Over that period, nondemocratic China has made strikingly greater progress in **reducing poverty** and **increasing life expectancy** than democratic **India**: People in China live on average nearly a decade longer than their Indian counterparts and per capita GDP is four times higher. The poverty rate [people earning less than $2/day] in China is now well below 10% [close to 5%] and still falling fast, whereas in India it remains at around 20%. The benefits of rapid economic growth have been made tangible [real] for many hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens, and the regime understands that its survival depends on the economic success story continuing.

But China’s rise has been underpinned by more than just improved living standards. There has been a simultaneous drive for greater dignity for the Chinese people. This is not, however, the dignity of the individual citizen as we’ve come to know it in the West. It is **collective national dignity**, and it comes in the form of demanding greater respect for China itself: Make China great again! The self-assertion of the nation, not the individual, is what completes the other half of the pragmatic [logical, unemotional] authoritarian package.

Chinese citizens do not have the same opportunities for democratic self-expression as do citizens in the West or India [the world’s largest democracy]. Personal political dignity is hard to come by in a society that stifles [crushes] **freedom of speech** and allows for the arbitrary [random] exercise of power. **Nationalism** is offered as some compensation, but this only works for individuals who are Han Chinese, the majority national [ethnic] group. It does not help in **Tibet** or among **Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang**. [persecuted ethnic/religious minority groups]

On the material side of the equation, China’s pragmatic authoritarians have certain advantages. They can target and manage the benefits of breakneck growth to ensure that they are relatively widely shared. Like other developed economies, China is experiencing rising **inequality** between the very richest and the rest. But the rest are never far from their rulers’ minds. The Chinese middle class is continuing to expand at a dramatic pace. In the West, by contrast, it is the middle class, whose wages and standard of living have been squeezed in recent decades, who feel like they are being left behind.

The material benefits of democracy are much more haphazardly [randomly, without planning] distributed. At any given moment, plenty of people feel excluded from them, and the constant changing of course in democratic politics—“We zig and we zag,” as Barack Obama said after Donald Trump’s victory—is a reflection of these persistent frustrations. Democracies, because they give everyone a say, are bound to be fickle [constantly changing its mind]. Pragmatic authoritarianism has shown itself more capable of planning for the long-term.

This is revealed not only by the massive recent Chinese investment in infrastructure projects—in transport, in industrial production, in new cities that spring up seemingly from nowhere—but also by the growing concern of China’s rulers with environmental sustainability. China is now the world’s leading greenhouse gas emitter, but it is also at the forefront of attempts to tackle the issue. Only in China would it be possible to **double solar capacity in a single year, as happened in 2016.**

Western visitors often come back from China astonished by the pace of change and the lack of obstacles in its path. Things appear to get done almost overnight. That is what happens when you don’t have to worry about the democratic dignity of anyone who might stand in the way.

Beijing’s reliance on the continuation of rapid economic growth comes with significant risks. The great long-term strength of modern democracies is precisely their ability to change course when things go wrong. They are **flexible.** The danger of the pragmatic authoritarian alternative is that when the immediate benefits start to dry up, it may be difficult to find another basis for **political legitimacy** [justification for ruling]. Pragmatism may not be enough. Nor, in the end, will national self-assertion [nationalism], if it increases the dangers of geopolitical instability [road to another war].

**The central political contests of the 20th century were between rival and bitterly opposed worldviews [Democracy vs. Communism]. In the 21st century, the contest is between competing versions of the same fundamental underlying goals. Both sides promise economic growth and widespread prosperity—tangible results in terms of material well-being. But they differ on the question of dignity: The West [and India] offers it to individual citizens, while China offers it more diffusely [widely], to the nation as a whole**…

No one has the monopoly on respect plus results any more.

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