Introduction

The intellectual journey that led to this book can be traced back to my graduate school years at Columbia University. My interest in culture was generated by a puzzle in the field of political science: Why have scholars of Asian politics failed to make major theoretical contributions to political science in the way that their counterparts studying European, Latin American, and African politics have done over the past half century? Why haven't students of Asian politics developed general theories that can be applied to the study of political behavior and processes in other parts of the world?

Over several decades of studying Chinese politics I gradually realized that the answers to these questions lie in the existence of distinct cultural traditions across regions. Culture moderates and even directly shapes political attitudes, behavior, and the dynamics of political systems. Truly general theories cannot be established without systematically theorizing and appropriately modeling the impacts of culture. Without a general theory of culture, scholars of comparative politics are left with isolated research fields that are compartmentalized by geographic and linguistic barriers with few overarching links to political behavior overall. Since the behavioral revolution, scholars of political science have tended to assume that people in different societies are all instrumentally rational, that is, that their choices are guided by similar norms, which emphasize utility-maximization, usually centered on actors' material interests. When political scientists find that similar social-structural and institutional variables in societies with different cultural environments play different roles, they tend to attribute this to differences in access to information. For example, when they find that people in China trust their government more than

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people in other societies, they are inclined to attribute the difference primarily to regime media control. In this way, the impacts of culture have mostly been ignored.

But what if rationality – understood here as the process of deciding what goals to aim for and what means to use to achieve them – is culturally embedded, or, as I call it here, normative? That is, what if individuals' interest calculations are based on socially shared ideas about acceptable and expected behavior rather than on a universal, materialist concept of utility? I argue that norms shape people's interpretations of outside stimuli, define goals to pursue in their responses to the outside world, and guide them to choose appropriate means to pursue those goals. Culture, therefore, has an independent effect on people's political attitudes and behavior. Rationality is norm-infused rather than norm-free. One theoretical contribution that scholars of Asian politics can make to the general theory of political science is to theorize how culturally defined normative rationality can – by itself, or in interaction with social structures and institutions – shape people's choices in politics. The range of unique cultural heritages present in Asia, along with the diversity of distinct political institutions, and varying levels of economic development, provide researchers with an excellent variety of cases with which to develop and test theory about the impact of culture on politics.

This study seeks to discover whether and how cultural norms shape people's approaches and responses to politics. In such an investigation, the most difficult challenge is to rule out *endogeneity* – that is, to show that culture is an independent cause of certain behaviors and not the effect of structural or institutional factors that are the real causes of those behaviors. To control for the impacts of social structure and political institutions on behavior, social scientists cannot rely solely on cross-sectional data collected from one country at one time, as this would not provide the necessary variation to sort out the endogeneity issue. To establish the independent impact of culture from those of social structure and institutions, scholars of political culture need data from societies with different social structures and political institutions and also data across time. This study uses three waves of data from two Asian societies with different social structures and political institutions – mainland China and Taiwan – to explore the independent effects of culture on political behavior.

In the early 1990s, Professors Hu Fu and Chu Yun-han from the National Taiwan University visited Columbia University. We shared an interest in political culture, and we sought the help of Professors Hsin-chi Kuan and S. K. Lau of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 1993 our

three research teams conducted our first comparative study of political culture – the 1993 Survey of Political Culture and Political Participation in Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong – with the support of the Henry Luce Foundation. After the three surveys were done and we began analyzing the data, I painfully realized that the data did not allow me to test thoroughly my ideas about the role of culture. Although data from societies with different social-structural resources and political institutions allowed me to control for structural and institutional variables in order to examine the impacts of culture, my findings were limited to a single point of time in two rapidly changing societies: a Taiwan just undergoing democratic transition and a mainland China in the midst of economic reform. To systematically test the theory that culture did not change in direct response to changes in social structures or political institutions, I needed to wait for more time to elapse and then gather additional data.

After the 1993 survey, our three research teams were joined by teams from Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Mongolia to constitute the East Asian Barometer (EAB), which conducted its first wave of surveys from 2001 to 2003. Because the EAB's mainland China survey was conducted in 2002, I refer to it as the 2002 China Survey. Fortunately, I was able to persuade my colleagues in the project to include in our core questionnaire the key items necessary to test my cultural theory. The Taiwan survey for this same period is referred to here as the 2002 Taiwan Survey.

By 2005 the EAB had been joined by research teams from another five countries (Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore), and the name of the project was changed to the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS).[1] We conducted surveys in all thirteen societies during the period 2005–2008 and called them the "second wave surveys," or Asian Barometer Survey II. The mainland China survey in this set was fielded in 2008, and I refer to it as the 2008 China Survey.

With the involvement of more country teams, negotiations over items to be included in the common questionnaire became tougher. I was able to persuade my colleagues to include only a limited number of questionnaire items on cultural norms, fewer than those included in the 1993 and 2002 surveys. I therefore use the 2008 data here only to examine whether structural and institutional changes in China altered culture over

[1] The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) project Web site can be found at: http://www.asianbarometer.org.

the fifteen years under study. I do not use the 2008 data in my analyses of
political trust, participation, and understanding of democracy.

an overview of the book

The book is divided into two parts. In the first, I bring the original mean-
ing of culture – the distinctive normative rationality of a given society –
back to the center of cultural studies. To understand how normative
rationality influences the choices of individuals, researchers must focus
on norms. While mainland China and Taiwan are the loci of the puzzles
that I use to explore the role of culture and the source of the data that I
employ to test my analysis, the scope of the argument is intended to reach
beyond any particular region, to address the role and influence of culture
in political behavior in general.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief review of the intellectual origins of cul-
tural studies, showing that early studies of culture focused on the mean-
ings that lie behind social actions. When Almond and Verba borrowed
the concept of culture for use in political science, they understood it as
simply another kind of resource (Almond and Verba 1963). For them,
the impacts of cultural variables were similar to the impacts of sociolog-
ical resources: they can either increase the benefits or reduce the costs
associated with various participatory activities. Normative utility, which
had occupied a central position in traditional cultural studies, became a
secondary consideration.

To return cultural studies to its roots, I define culture as a kind of men-
tal software that sets up standards of appropriate behavior for a group or
category of people, thereby distinguishing that group from other groups
or categories. Culture constitutes socially shared guidance for accepted
and expected patterns of conduct. As such, it shapes the definitions of
normative rationality employed by political actors. This definition reas-
serts and refines the idea of culture as a pattern of social meaning in
three ways. First, it makes a clear distinction between values and norms
on one hand and attitudes and beliefs on the other. I argue that students
of political culture should concentrate on values and norms in order to
avoid treating culture as a proxy of structures and institutions. Second,
I argue that the nation-state is not always the proper unit of analysis
for the study of how culture affects individual action. Because culture
exerts influence through both individual psychology and social pressure,
the cultural environment at the community level can be expected to have
a more important influence on an individual than the larger cultural

environment in the country as a whole. (This is not to suggest that countries can never be used as units of analysis in cultural study. The proper unit of analysis depends on the particular dependent variable one wishes to explain.) Third, while recent cultural theory often sees cultural change as a response to social-structural and institutional changes in a society, I argue that struggles within cultures can play a critical role in bringing about cultural change in a society.

Chapter 2 begins to illustrate the argument by a comparison of the roots of traditional Chinese and modern Western liberal cultures. I stylize their differences as alternative solutions to the core problem of collective action: how to foster cooperation among people to achieve collective goals and thus make social life possible. Eastern and Western philosophers offered different visions of how humans escape from a pre-societal state or state of nature; the cultural norms they chose to sustain their solutions are also fundamentally different. Among the various cultural norms developed from those solutions, two of them – which I label orientation toward authority (OTA) and definition of self-interest (DSI) – have perhaps the most important impact on a person's orientation toward political life and therefore on political processes in different societies. The analyses in this book concentrate on these two cultural norms. Chapter 2 goes on to describe the mechanisms by which these cultural norms influence political attitudes and behavior.

Still in Part I, the theoretical discussion is followed by an empirical examination of culture in China and Taiwan. Using data collected from these two societies at different times, I test whether culture is a causal force that operates independently of social structure and political institutions. The first question is whether structural and institutional changes drive cultural changes. If they do, there would be little need to study culture. I show that rapid, modernizing social change in mainland China and far-reaching, democratizing political change in Taiwan did not bring about significant cultural shifts in these societies, confirming that culture changes independently from social structure and institutions.

I then use culture as an independent variable to explain certain puzzles of political life in China and Taiwan. Why does the authoritarian Chinese government enjoy a high level of political trust from people who claim that they have a strong desire for democracy? Why do people in Taiwan perceive their regime to offer a greater degree of democracy than they want? I show that people holding traditional cultural norms are more likely to trust their government, less likely to confront the regime,

and more likely to define the meaning of democracy as government by guardianship. An analysis of causal relationships in mainland China and Taiwan shows that the structural and institutional differences between the two societies do not diminish the impact of culture. Culture has an independent effect on political attitudes and political behavior.

Chapter 3 begins by specifying how the cultural norms in this study are measured. I then use confirmatory factor analysis to test whether the observable variables used in the surveys tap into actual clusters of values and norms and whether these norms have the features specified by my theory of culture. Finally, I compare the configurations of cultural norms in China and Taiwan. I find that the common culture they started out with has retained its basic structure in each society, despite their separation for many years and the dramatic changes each has undergone.

Chapter 4 is designed to examine the endogeneity problem discussed above: that is, whether culture is merely a product of social structure and political institutions. I explore whether social and institutional changes in China and Taiwan between 1993 and 2002 led to cultural shifts in these societies. If cultural norms changed in response to social and institutional changes, then culture is merely an intervening variable with no independent effects. I show that structural and institutional changes in these two societies actually reinforced people's commitment to traditional cultural norms rather than converting them to new norms as suggested by other theories. The finding confirms that culture is independent from structure and institutions.

Part II takes culture as an independent variable and tests its impacts on political attitudes and behavior. Chapter 5 examines the effects of culture on political trust. Scholars of political trust have generally held that people's attitudes toward government are shaped primarily by government performance as well as by people's ability to understand the government's impact on their lives. Empirical research on political trust has concentrated on these two factors and on variables related to them, such as education and access to media. The theory advanced in this book challenges the assumption that all people use the same standards to evaluate government performance. I argue that different cultural norms lead people to hold different expectations of government, which creates a diversity of standards for evaluating government performance. The same governmental behavior may lead people with different cultural orientations to respond in different ways. For this reason, normative rationality can have a significant impact on political trust.

The empirical test of culture's impact on political trust confirms that both individual-level norms and the normative environment in which the individual lives play a role in the way in which cultural norms influence political trust. The impact of the social environment on political trust is complex. It is not linearly associated with the percentage of people holding dominant cultural norms in a community; instead, a smaller group of deviating norm holders may be able to provide the crucial social support that makes it difficult for dominant norm holders to socially isolate deviating norm holders. Unless researchers in comparative politics understand how political actors' preferences are defined by culture, their analyses will suffer from the "omitted variable problem," and they will misunderstand the formation of political attitudes and behaviors of the populations they study.

Chapter 6 explores the impact of culture on people's participatory behavior. I argue that people's decisions to participate in politics can be divided into three stages:

1. Facing outside stimuli, actors need to assign responsibility;
2. If they hold their government responsible for a problem, they need to decide whether to engage in political acts to address the problem; and
3. If the answer is positive, they need to choose a particular political act.

I show that cultural norms have a statistically significant impact on each stage of the decision-making process, and that the impacts of culture are more important than those of social structure and political institutions. The impacts of culture on participation, however, are complicated. While one dimension of traditional culture – what I call an "allocentric" (or community-minded) definition of self-interest – encourages people to be more politically passive, another dimension of traditional culture – a "hierarchical" orientation toward authority – encourages people to be more politically active. Although the hierarchical orientation encourages people to get involved in various political acts, including unconventional political acts like strikes and demonstrations, the goals legitimated by the norm are different from those authorized by what I call a reciprocal orientation toward authority, in which the governed understand authority as operating by grace of their consent. Rather than authorizing people to oppose their government, a hierarchical orientation toward authority encourages people to remonstrate. Thus, similar political acts under-

taken by people holding different cultural norms may have dissimilar implications for the citizen and therefore also for the regime.

Chapter 7 tests the way in which cultural norms affect people's understanding of democracy. After the Third Wave of democratization, which started in Southern Europe in the 1970s and extended through Latin America, East Asia, and Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet space in the 1990s, democracy seems to have become a universally preferred value (see, for example, Chu, Diamond, Nathan, and Shin 2008). In China and Taiwan, the Asian Barometer Survey confirmed that the majority of people desire democracy. Yet a majority of respondents in authoritarian China reported that they already enjoyed a high level of democracy, and respondents in Taiwan claimed that the system was more democratic than they wanted it to be. Both of these surprising responses suggest that the democracy people in these two societies claimed that they wanted may have been different from the mainstream Western conception of democracy.

Although there is no democratic tradition in China, there is an ancient doctrine of "people as the basis" (*minben*) that remains influential. While minben and democracy are identical in their expectation that the goal of government is to benefit the people, they differ in (1) the means used to achieve this goal; (2) the standards for evaluating governmental legitimacy; and (3) the rights and responsibilities assigned to people vis-à-vis government. Precisely because the goal of good government is understood in the same way in both democratic and minben thinking, people with traditional cultural views may understand the meaning of democracy in terms of the minben tradition.

I test structural, institutional, and cultural explanations for differences in understanding of democracy. I show that more modern cultural norms incline people to define democracy as a set of procedural arrangements to constrain political power, whereas traditional cultural norms make people more likely to understand democracy as government by benevolent guardians. The finding is true in both authoritarian China and democratic Taiwan. A government's legitimacy, according to minben doctrine, may be judged on its policy outcomes; accordingly, citizens in a society where people are deprived of the right to elect public officials or are denied certain civil liberties in the name of collective interest may not necessarily downgrade their assessment of democratic development in their societies. This finding confirms that the authoritarian regime in China is sustained by a different kind of legitimacy than that of democratic regimes.

In the Conclusion, I argue that these insights into the role of culture throw light on the evolution of the political regimes in China and Taiwan. In China, the prevalence of traditional cultural norms of hierarchical orientation to authority and allocentric definition of self-interest undergird the legitimacy of a regime that styles itself as a guardian of the people and bases its claim to authority on its ability to provide for the people's welfare. Traditions of deference to authority provide the authoritarian mainland regime with considerable leeway to exercise authority in the absence of procedures to guarantee citizens' rights or influence. In Taiwan, the persistence of traditional norms, despite the modernization of social structures and the democratization of political institutions, creates friction between the regime's open and sometimes turbulently democratic political practices and the normative expectations of its citizens, which are influenced by traditional cultural norms. As a result, despite its authenticity as a democracy, the political system in Taiwan is a disappointment to some of its citizens.