



Global Ethics Corner: China on the Rise: Is China's Political Model Superior?

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Video

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Audio

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Transcript

Move over democracy, there's a new game in town.

After 20 years on top, democracy may have met its match in the rise of China's one-party system.

It wasn't always this way. Despite concerns about China's increasing economic and military might, Western nations have long been convinced of the superiority of their own political system.

But with today's economic malaise and political stalemate, a growing number of skeptics question the Western political model's supremacy. They warn that Americans and Europeans are too enamored with democracy's advantages to see its drawbacks.

Just look at the endless array of referendums, political paralyzes, and economic catastrophes across Europe and the United States. The need to appeal to public opinion and campaign donors has forced politicians to place short-term interests before long-term concerns.

Critics contrast these drawbacks with the so-called "China model." They say China's one-party state offers political leaders both efficiency and flexibility. The lack of checks and balances means China's authorities can make difficult decisions unilaterally, allowing them to implement unpopular but much needed reform. And since they don't have to worry about re-election, they are free to make long-term plans.

Critics of the "China model" counter with concerns about legitimacy and sustainability. They warn that China's large bureaucracy lacks public accountability. In the long term, this could breed corruption and bad governance. The abundance of human rights abuses, combined with the growth of China's middle class, will feed popular demand for greater political participation. Ultimately, they say, the system's inability to meet such demands will threaten China's stability, just as it did in the Soviet Union.

As the China Model gains supporters, where do you stand? Is there anything the West can learn from China's one-party system?

By *Marlene Spoerri*

For more information see

Eric X. Li, "Why China's Political Model is Superior," *The New York Times*, February 16, 2012

Patrice Hill, "China mocks U.S. political model," *The Washington Times*, November 9, 2011

Eric X. Li, "China's political system is more flexible than US democracy," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 17, 2011

Zhang Weiwei, *The China Wave: Rise of a Civilizational State*

Francis Fukuyama, "US democracy has little to teach China," *Financial Times*, January 17, 2011 (registration required)

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