Maintaining Popular Support for the Chinese Communist Party: The Influence of Education and the State-Controlled Media

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Literature on public opinion in China suggests that public support for the Chinese Communist party (CCP) is quite high. No matter how survey questions regarding regime support are phrased, the results are the same. The obvious question arises: how does an authoritarian regime, such as the PRC, garner the support of the vast majority of its citizens? I argue that the exposure-acceptance model best explains the high level of public support in China. This model suggests that educated citizens, who are politically aware, display high levels of political support within an authoritarian regime, but citizens at the highest levels of education are more resistant to political messages and tend to have lower levels of support. However, in a developing country such as China there are unequal educational opportunities for rural and urban citizens. This has a significant influence on how education affects regime support. Despite lower levels of support among the most educated citizens, the CCP still manages to maintain a high level of popular support through strict control over the media and education system.

The literature on public opinion in China suggests that public support for the Chinese Communist party (CCP) is quite high (Chen, 2004; Chen and Shi, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 1997; Li, 2004; Shi, 2001; Tang, 2005; Wang, 2005). All surveys examining public opinion toward the CCP conducted since the early 1990s show that over 70 per cent of respondents support the central government and the party. No matter how the survey questions are phrased, the results are the same. The obvious question arises: how does an authoritarian regime, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), garner the support of the vast majority of its citizens?

Public support for authoritarian regimes is not unique to the PRC. For example, according to Freedom House (2002), a well respected non-profit organization devoted to monitoring and measuring democracy around the world, Vietnam is ranked lowest in political rights and civil liberties. But data from the sample of 60 democratic and non-democratic countries show that the Vietnamese Communist party is among the regimes with the highest level of public support (see Figure 1). In their 1989 article, 'Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes', Barbara Geddes and John Zaller (1989) use survey data from Brazil at the height of the military regime under General Emílio Garrastazú Médici (1969–1974) and find that support for the regime was quite high among the politically aware and educated population. Geddes and Zaller (1989) employ an exposure-acceptance

Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents Satisfied with the National Leadership[a]
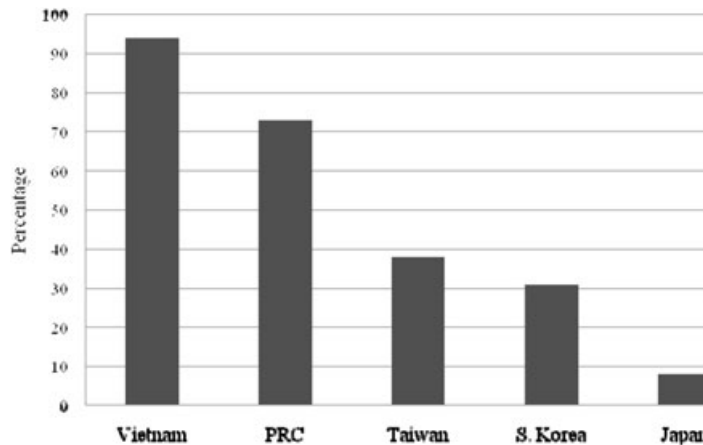
[a]*The World Values Survey question is: 'How satisfied are you with the way people now in national office are handling the country's affairs? Would you say you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?' The measure 'satisfied' for Figure 1 is the combination of very satisfied and fairly satisfied.*

Source: World Values Survey (2000).

model of political persuasion (McGuire, 1968) whereby the level of public support is based on two factors, exposure to political news and level of education. The model suggests that educated citizens, who are politically aware (i.e. have political knowledge and frequently read or watch political news), display high levels of political support within an authoritarian regime, but citizens at the highest levels of education are more resistant to political messages and tend to have lower levels of support. Although Geddes and Zaller (1989) examine only one case, they assert the model can be applied to any authoritarian regime. The PRC is an excellent test case to examine whether the exposure-acceptance model can be applied to other non-democracies.

In China, it is important to recognize the size of the rural population and 'rural and urban gap' in educational opportunities that may influence an analysis of support for the authoritarian regime. While over 65 per cent of the Brazilian population was urban in 1973, when Geddes and Zaller conducted their survey, over 65 per cent of the Chinese population was rural in 2000. An important question is therefore whether the pattern of support differs between rural and urban respondents in China. As this article will demonstrate, while there is no rural or urban difference in the pattern of regime support, there is a significant difference in the way education influences support among rural and urban respondents. This is due to the continual uneven educational opportunities and experiences between rural and urban citizens. Therefore, if education is an

important component of regime support, then rural and urban educational differences need to be taken into account.

In this article I use the China national sample from the 2000 World Values Survey (WVS) to test the exposure-acceptance model. I divide the national data into urban and rural sub-samples and compare results. A rural sub-sample of eighteen villages from a 2004 survey is also used in the comparison.[1] Results from the rural sample support Geddes and Zaller's (1989) model, and imply a fundamental linkage between education and support for the Chinese Communist party. The data suggest that education and media exposure have a significant influence on regime support in rural China. The key contribution of this model is the non-linear relationship between education and regime support. Respondents who have completed compulsory education (junior high school) and frequently read (or watch) political news display the highest level of regime support, while those who continued to study beyond compulsory education show lower levels of support. The implication is that, in the post-Mao Zedong (after 1976) era, the CCP has been successful in indoctrinating citizens in the values of the regime through the education system and control over the media.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section I present the current state of the field regarding regime support in the PRC. Three main explanations are considered and a fourth alternative explanation – the exposure-acceptance model – is introduced. In the second section I test the exposure-acceptance model using the urban and rural sub-samples from the WVS and a smaller rural sample from a 2004 village survey. I also point out the strengths and limitations of the model. In the concluding section I will discuss the implications of the model and future research.

Public Support in the PRC

While dissatisfaction with national leadership is part of the normal democratic process (Dalton, 1999), support for authoritarian regimes is puzzling for many political scientists. In a sample of five Asian countries, a clear pattern of satisfaction with the national leadership and level of democracy emerges. In Figure 1, the countries are ranked in the order from least to most democratic starting with Vietnam, PRC, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan. At the non-democratic extreme, Vietnam shows that 94 per cent of the sample are 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' with the national leadership while at the other end of the spectrum democratic Japan displays only 8 per cent 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied'. In addition, the PRC, Taiwan and South Korea share a similar cultural background regarding Confucian values and deference to authority, but despite these cultural similarities the PRC sample displays a significantly higher level of satisfaction with the national leadership. Although the level of dissatisfaction in Taiwan and South Korea may be part of the normal democratic process, it is still unclear why public support is so high in the PRC.

China scholars have identified three main explanations for regime support in the PRC: (1) citizen fear in reporting their actual feelings toward the regime; (2) media exposure to party propaganda; and (3) cultural predisposition toward authoritarian control. First is the fear factor. The data used to generalize citizen attitudes in rural and urban China are derived from survey research. The enumerators and the respondents are citizens of the People's Republic of China where public dissatisfaction with the national leadership is not tolerated in the state-controlled media. Although many reports of public demonstrations against local government abuses occurred throughout the 1990s, in general the vast majority of citizens do not publicly announce their dissatisfaction with the regime. Moreover, the interview process can be an odd and stressful social experience. John Muller (1973) and Zaller (1992) describe the interview process well. A stranger comes to the door and asks the respondent a series of questions, and this well-dressed educated individual carefully records each response he or she provides. Not wanting to be perceived as uninformed the respondent may give answers that are 'truthful' on subjects he or she knows nothing about. Muller and Zaller reveal an interaction between the enumerator and the respondent in the American setting where there is little concern over what the enumerator will do with the information. In an authoritarian regime, however, fear or uncertainty is added to this stressful survey experience because the respondent is unsure what the interviewer will do with the carefully recorded information. It is quite possible that respondents are playing it safe, and reporting strong support for the regime when a question arises. However, Tianjian Shi (2001), Jie Chen and Shi (2001) and Chen (2004) used a combination of questions on political fear and regime support within a questionnaire that examined patterns of fear and regime support.[2] They suggest that, in the China case, there is a weak correlation between political fear and respondent attitude toward the central government. In addition, Lianjiang Li (2004) found that despite respondent support for the regime, many individuals in his sample were not afraid to challenge local authorities or point out the failure of the central leadership fully to implement policies. Thus, political fear is unlikely to have a significant influence on individual responses to questions regarding regime support in the PRC.

The second explanation is exposure to party propaganda. Thomas Bernstein and Xiaobo Lü (2000) and Li (2004) find that the state-controlled media is associated with greater citizen support for the regime. Using data from 1994, Chen and Shi (2001) also find that the state-run media in the PRC has an effect on citizen support of the regime. However, they suggest that prolonged exposure to state-controlled media has diminishing returns. The saturation of party propaganda generates distrust and reduced support for the regime. They also find that education has a strong linear negative effect on respondent support. According to Chen and Shi, the negative relationship between education and political support highlights 'the failure of the authorities in socializing people through education (Chen and Shi, 2001, p. 105)'. They conclude that the high frequency of media exposure to party propaganda has the most significant independent negative effect

on regime support. In his 1999 survey of six cities, Wenfang Tang (2005) confirms the Chen and Shi (2001) media exposure model.

The third explanation is a cultural predisposition toward authority (Pye, 1978; Shi, 2001; Tu, 2000). Lucian Pye (1978; 1988) suggests that in the case of Chinese political culture, the omnipotence of authority has been passed from generation to generation, and has cultivated a submissive mentality in the people. Although Pye presents a sophisticated argument, his main point is that, in contemporary China, a cultural predisposition toward the acceptance of authority exists. Shi (2001) examines the relationship between culture and regime support in the PRC and Taiwan. He finds that culture, measured as a series of six questions on relations between parents and children and the individual and the state, has a significant influence on citizen support for the central government. In addition, Shi suggests that education has no independent influence on people's attitude toward the regime.

The media exposure and cultural explanations provide important insights into the sources of political support for the CCP, but an alternative exposure–acceptance model may be more appropriate for the China case. While Chen and Shi (2001) and Chen (2004) find a linear negative influence of education on public support for the CCP and Shi (2001) reports a limited educational effect, the exposure–acceptance model assumes a *curvilinear relationship* between education and regime support. Educated citizens are more likely to read daily news and have greater exposure to political messages than those individuals with less education. It is the completion of compulsory education in which regime values are reinforced every year that generates greater acceptance of political messages from the state-controlled media. Thus education should be associated with a greater level of regime support. However, at the same time, citizens with higher levels of education are likely to be more critical of the media. According to William McGuire (1968), the characteristics that increase the likelihood of exposure, such as education, are the same characteristics that reduce the likelihood of acceptance. Because the exposure–acceptance model predicts reduced levels of regime support at the low and high levels of education, education and regime support should have an inverse-U or ∩-shaped relationship.

The Exposure–Acceptance Model: Measures

In 'Sources of Popular Support for Authoritarian Regimes', Geddes and Zaller (1989) adopt McGuire's model to test the level of popular support for the military regime in Brazil in 1973. They find that, in the general population, the largest numbers of supporters are among those who have completed compulsory education and are frequently exposed to the government-controlled media. However, regime support decreases at the highest levels of education. This is because well-educated citizens are able to examine *alternative sources* of information and critically examine the political messages from the state media.

Media exposure and level of education are also directly related to level of political awareness. That is, well-informed educated citizens are aware of specific policies, leaders' names and political events. In addition, while education is an important measure of message acceptance, individual predispositions toward authority and interest in politics also have an influence on regime support. Although Geddes and Zaller (1989) only examined Brazil, they suggest that their model can be applied to other non-democracies to explain the source of regime support.

While China provides an excellent opportunity to test the exposure–acceptance model, the model (as it is used by McGuire and Geddes and Zaller) assumes a uniform meaning for higher education within a given country. Yet many China scholars have pointed out that the education system favors urban residents and development of rural education has been a significant issue for the Chinese central government since the 1970s (Lai and Lo, 2006; Murphy, 2004; Pepper, 1996; Tsui, 1997; Wang, 2003). The unequal educational opportunities may also influence citizen attitudes toward the central party-government leadership. Therefore, it is important to take into account the different meanings of higher education for rural and urban residents.

Regime Support

The dependent variable is regime support and the measure has two general definitions. The key distinction is the difference between 'diffuse' and 'specific' support (Easton, 1965). Diffuse support is related to government institutions and regime, while specific support is directed at individuals such as incumbents or candidates (Dalton, 1999). Diffuse support is a deep-rooted set of attitudes toward the operation of the political system and these beliefs tend to be resistant to change (Easton, 1965). It is frequently interpreted as measuring the legitimacy of political institutions. On the other hand, specific support is related to evaluation of political elites in their performance and actions, and is susceptible to change. The China case poses an interesting challenge to this interpretation of support. Chen (2004) makes a clear distinction between diffuse and specific support in his analysis of political support in urban China. His index of specific support measures citizen evaluation of policy performance such as controlling inflation and providing welfare services. However, Russell Dalton (1999) argues that regime support is related to institutional expectations, performance judgements (policy) and trust in institutions, while specific support (authorities) is associated with candidate evaluation and party support.[3]

Thus, in China, almost all survey questions regarding the national leadership are diffuse in nature because researchers generally cannot ask respondents their opinions about specific leaders. In recent surveys there are questions about the Chinese Communist party, but few questions about Jiang Zemin or Hu Jintao.[4] Chen and Shi (2001) argue that the distinction in China between government and party and between national leaders and government may not be theoretically

significant because many Chinese (respondents) do not make this distinction at the national level. Even the state-run media tends to conflate the two political bodies. Li (2004) points out that media reports typically use the words party and government as one term or single inseparable concept such as *dang he zhengfu* (party and government). Despite the diffuse nature of survey questions, measuring regime support or trust in government can vary from one study to the next.

The measure of support for the central government can be based on a single question or a series of questions creating a support scale. I use the World Values Survey (WVS) 2000–1 question on satisfaction with national leadership as a measure of regime support for the national sample. The selection is based on three considerations. First is that the measure is closer to Geddes and Zaller's dependent variable on 'satisfaction with government policy'. Second, the alternative measure from the WVS survey is 'confidence in the government'. Other studies, such as Zhengxu Wang's (2005), have used this measure to examine support in China. However, the variable only varies from 'a great deal of confidence' (39 per cent) to 'quite a lot' (58 per cent). Only 3 per cent of the sample reported having no confidence in the government. Third, other researchers, such as Tang (2005), have used the WVS 2000–1 questions in their analysis of regime support in China. Tang compares his 1999 six-city survey and questions on regime support with the WVS questions.

I also compare the WVS with a local survey. The aim is to see if the curvilinear education effect is observed in another rural sample. The question I asked in the 2004 local survey is, 'Do you believe the national leadership is acting in your interest?'. Although there are potential problems with comparing measures of regime support or trust, it is important to point out that this analysis focuses more on determinants of regime support than *levels* of support.[5]

Media Exposure

Media exposure is typically measured as the frequency with which respondents read or watch political news and it can have a significant influence on the pattern of political support (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 1993; Zaller, 1992). Li (2004) and Geddes and Zaller (1989) suggest that government control over media outlets can enhance regime support. Political messages from state-run newspapers and television stations highlight only the positive achievements of regimes and critical analysis of regime shortcomings is absent in most news commentaries and reports. Li (2004) presents a clear picture of the relationship between state-controlled media (propaganda machinery) and political support in the Chinese countryside: 'villagers hear many beautiful promises from the central leaders; it is no wonder that many of them come to believe in the center and its policies' (p. 235).

The WVS measure of media exposure is the question, 'How often do you follow politics in the news on television or on the radio or in the daily newspaper?'.[6]

The possible responses are on a five-point scale from 'never' to 'every day'. For the 2004 eighteen-village survey, the question is the same except that respondents are asked about 'national' politics.[7] McGuire (1968) and Geddes and Zaller (1989) suggest there is a strong positive relation between frequency of exposure to government-controlled media and regime support.

Message Acceptance (Education, Authority and Interest)

Education is one of the most important measures in the study of regime support. The common argument is that better-educated and more politically aware citizens are more likely to accept political messages from the regime than less-educated citizens (Azrael, 1965; Geddes and Zaller, 1989; Key, 1961; Zaller, 1992). The educational experience can have a direct influence on an individual's political opinion. Citizens who complete the compulsory education system are exposed to a particular set of ideas or norms (Geddes and Zaller, 1989; Key, 1961). Compulsory education is a measure of formal schooling and it is the number of years in school mandated by the state. Observing American public opinion, V. O. Key (1961, p. 340) argued that 'formal education may serve to indoctrinate people into the more-or-less official political values of the culture'. Compulsory education can also vary from one country to the next. In the United States, it is twelve years (high school graduation), while in China it is nine years (junior high school graduation).[8] Thus, the exposure-acceptance model predicts that respondents with a compulsory level of education will display the largest proportion of regime support, while those with lower or higher years of schooling will show decreased percentages of support.

One crucial element of the exposure-acceptance model is the measure and meaning of higher education. Higher education is typically associated with college. Yet beyond the classroom, the university experience offers a new environment and interactions with people outside the student's familiar community. The mix of new knowledge and people is a supply of alternative information sources that can contribute to questioning pervasive media messages and reduced regime support. In urban China, higher education means going to college and in the WVS sample this represents only 9 per cent. In fact, urban students do not leave home for high school. In the urban sample, 72 per cent of respondents graduated from high school (see Table 1). Thus, completion of high school may have a compulsory effect on regime support (i.e. no difference in the pattern of support between junior high and high school graduates). However, for rural students higher education refers to senior high school, and in the rural sample only 43 per cent completed this level of education (see Table 1). Of course, there is a considerable difference between high school and college academic work, but for rural students the high school experience offers a new urban environment and interactions with people outside their own rural community. This may have a significant influence on support, especially when students return to the village. Therefore, given the rural/urban differences in the meaning of higher education

Table 1: Summary Table for 2000 WVS Rural (*n* = 466) and Urban (*n* = 382) Samples

Satisfaction[a]

	Satisfied (1)[b]	Dissatisfied (0)
Urban	73%	27%
Rural	73%	27%

Gender

	Male (1)	Female (0)
Urban	50%	50%
Rural	52%	48%

Age

	Mean	Min.	Max.
Urban	39	18	65
Rural	40	19	65

Respect for authority

	Bad (1)	Don't mind (2)	Good (3)
Urban	19%	27%	54%
Rural	13%	30%	57%

Educational attainment[c]

	Elementary (1)	Jr High(2)	Sr High (3)	College (4)
Urban	4%	15%	72%	9%
Rural	20%	36%	44%	

Interest in politics

	None (1)	Not very (2)	Somewhat (3)	Much (4)
Urban	9%	19%	51%	21%
Rural	8%	18%	41%	33%

Media exposure

	Never (1)	Less often (2)	Once week (3)	Several (4)	Every day (5)
Urban	3%	13%	9%	20%	56%
Rural	5%	25%	11%	17%	42%

Income

	Low	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	High
Urban	1%	2%	4%	5%	6%	15%	22%	27%	14%	4%
Rural	4%	5%	11%	13%	19%	22%	16%	10%	0	0

[a] Satisfaction is the dichotomous variable with 'very satisfied' and 'fairly satisfied' coded as 1 and 'fairly dissatisfied' and 'very dissatisfied' coded as 0. The 'do not know' responses are not included in the analysis and n = 848. The full sample is 1,000.

[b] This is the code used in the statistical analysis.

[c] 'College' only applies to the urban analysis (1–4). The rural analysis has three measures (1–3; high school and college are combined because there are only 4 rural college graduates in the sample).

and the very low number of college graduates in the whole sample, I expect a significant curvilinear relationship between education and support in the rural sample, but not for urban respondents.

Shi (2001) and Geddes and Zaller (1989) argue that a predisposition toward authority may also be a source of support for an authoritarian regime. One measure of authoritarian attitudes is called the F–Scale (Fascist Scale) developed by Theodor Adorno et al. (1950). Geddes and Zaller use this measure and Shi also adapts several questions based on the scale. The F–Scale is a complex index and was developed to examine authoritarian tendencies within the American public in the 1950s, but the measure has been used in many national and cross-national settings.[9] Although the F-scale takes on several aspects of the authoritarian personality, it is the measure of 'authoritarian submissiveness' that is directly related to this study. The measure includes a series of questions about children's respect for parents, respect for elders and traditional moral values. Shi (2001) uses a series of questions including respect for one's parents in a comparison of political support in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. The WVS has a similar question on love and respect for one's parents, but there is little variation in the response. In the China sample, 95 per cent reported that one must 'always respect' one's parents. In addition, over 90 per cent of respondents in South Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, and over 70 per cent in Japan, reported that they should 'always respect their parents'. This is not surprising given the fact that Confucian values and strong family ties exist throughout East (and Southeast) Asia. Yet this cultural predisposition exists in both democratic and non-democratic regimes and may not be correlated with regime support.

According to John Ray (1990) and Adorno et al. (1950), authoritarian submissiveness is an attempt to measure the respondent's level of respect for authority. In this case, the WVS has a clear question that addresses the predisposition toward authority: 'Please tell me whether you think it would be a good thing, don't mind, or a bad thing to have greater respect for authority?'.[10] While there is variation within the whole sample, there is little rural and urban variation in the pattern of respect with 54 per cent of the urban sample and 57 per cent of the rural sample reporting that respect for authority is good (see Table 1).[11] The cultural explanation suggests a significant positive relationship between level of respect for authority and level of support for an authoritarian regime.

Another predisposition is interest in politics. According to Geddes and Zaller (1989), interest in politics represents a *resistance* factor to government–controlled media. The general assumption is that the 'greater one's attention to politics (or any subject), the greater one's capacity for critical scrutiny of ideas relating to it' (p. 331). The WVS question asks how interested the respondent is in politics, and the four-point response ranges from 'not at all interested' to 'very interested'.[12]

The demographic factors (control variables) in the model include income, age and gender. In Western democracies, studies suggest that the demographic characteristics

Table 2: The Relationship between Satisfaction with National Leadership, Exposure, Acceptance (Education, Authority and Interest) and Demographic Variables for Urban Sample

Variables	Full model 1[a] Coefficient (z-score)	Full model 2 Coefficient (z-score)	Urban model 3 Coefficient (z-score)	Urban model 4 Coefficient (z-score)
Education	−0.28*	1.38	(0.06	0.01
	(2.02)	(1.44)	(0.26)	(0.00)
Education squared		−0.38		−0.02
		(1.75)		(0.03)
Media exposure	0.20**	0.21**	0.20*	0.21*
	(2.87)	(2.96)	(2.02)	(2.02)
Respect for authority	0.11	0.10	0.19	0.19
	(1.04)	(0.89)	(1.26)	(1.26)
Interest in politics[b]	0.17	0.16		
	(1.69)	(1.59)		
Income	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.07
	(1.60)	(1.60)	(1.49)	(1.49)
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	(0.98)	(1.04)	(0.88)	(0.88)
Gender	−0.26	−0.30	−0.36	−0.36
	(1.53)	(1.73)	(1.45)	(1.44)
N	848	848	382	382

[a]The Logit (logit for dichotomous dependent variable) model using the World Values Survey China national sample.

[b]The 'interest in politics' variable is dropped in the urban model because it is highly correlated with 'media exposure'. However, the two variables are not highly correlated in the full model or the rural model. This tends to follow the relationship predicted in the Geddes and Zaller (1989) model.

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$.

have an independent influence on political trust. While gender differences tend to be small, women have more trust in government than men, older citizens are more likely to support the government and individuals with higher incomes are more apt to support the status quo (Citrin and Muste, 1999). However, in the China case, Li (2004) and Shi (2001) find that demographic variables including education do not significantly correlate with political trust. Nevertheless, given the rural and urban gap in income, I expect respondents at the lower income level to be less supportive of the regime than those in the higher income brackets.

Empirical Results from the WVS National and Urban Sub-sample

In Table 2, logistic estimates indicate that conventional control variables, such as respect for authority, interest in politics, income, age and gender, do not have a

significant influence on respondents' satisfaction with the national leadership. The coefficient for respect of authority is in the predicted direction, but it is not statistically significant.[13] Although the measure for cultural influence is difficult to capture in a single survey question, in this study respondent attitudes toward authority do not have an independent influence on levels of regime support. The coefficient for level of political interest is also not statistically significant.

The level of media exposure has a strong consistent influence on regime support. The greater the exposure to political news from state-owned television and newspapers, the greater is the level of satisfaction with the national leadership. The data suggest that government and party control over media outlets has a direct positive influence on attitudes toward the regime. In addition, education has an independent negative effect on support, but only in the full model. As McGuire (1968) and Geddes and Zaller (1989) suggest, the characteristic (education) that increases the likelihood of exposure is also the same characteristic that reduces the likelihood of acceptance. Educated citizens (above the compulsory level) tend to be more critical (or less accepting) of political messages. The key factor is availability of alternative information sources because classroom education has a *socializing* rather than an *informational* influence. Finally, Table 2 shows that education has a linear negative influence in the full model and no effect on the urban sub-sample.

Rural Results

In Table 3, logistic estimates for the rural sample indicate that none of the control variables has a significant influence on respondents' satisfaction with the national leadership. The coefficient for level of political interest is also in the predicted direction, but not statistically significant. This is similar to the Geddes and Zaller (1989) results. Thus, similar to the full and urban sub-sample, none of the demographic variables, such as income, age or gender, have an independent influence on regime support. Nevertheless, the lack of statistical influence of income on regime support is surprising given the rural/urban disparity in economic opportunities.[14] One explanation is that in rural areas villagers tend to blame local officials for their poor economic opportunities. State media channels frequently post the central leadership's desire to increase the wealth of all citizens and display national government successes in economic development in major cities. Therefore, villagers may view underdevelopment in their community and a lack of opportunities to increase their income as a result of corrupt local cadres who are subverting national economic goals.[15]

Recall that previous studies did not delineate between rural and urban samples. However, the different education estimates between the full and urban models suggest that the rural sample may be driving the results in the full model. Figure 2 does in fact reveal a significant difference in the influence of education on regime support between the rural and urban samples. In the urban sample, the highest

Table 3: The Relationship between Satisfaction with National Leadership, Exposure, Acceptance (Education, Authority and Interest) and Demographic Variables for Rural Sample

Variables	Rural model 1[a] Coefficient (z-score)	Rural model 2 Coefficient (z-score)	Rural model 3[b] Coefficient (z-score)	Rural model 4 Coefficient (z-score)
Education	−0.30	2.24*	0.48	0.47**
	(1.72)	(2.04)	(0.75)	(2.53)
Education squared		−0.60*		−0.03**
		(2.32)		(2.38)
Media exposure	0.29***	0.31***	0.75	1.03*
	(3.23)	(3.41)	(1.65)	(2.09)
Respect for authority	0.04	0.01		
	(0.24)	(0.03)		
Interest in politics	−0.03	−0.05		
	(0.24)	(0.43)		
Income	0.04	0.04	−3.51	−5.66
	(0.81)	(0.75)	(0.20)	(0.31)
Age	0.01	0.01		
	(0.96)	(0.98)		
Gender	−0.08	−0.12		
	(0.34)	(0.52)		
N	466	466	120	120

[a]*The Logit (logit for dichotomous dependent variable) model using the World Values Survey China national sample.*

[b]*The Logit model for eighteen-village sample (rural Shaanxi province).*

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.*

percentage of support is about equal between junior (74 per cent) and senior (73 per cent) high school graduates. The pattern of support for the urban college and the rural high school graduates is the same at about 66 per cent (Figure 2). This suggests that beyond the academic classes, urban college and rural high school experiences, such as moving away from home for a few years, may have an influence on perceptions of society and the regime. Nevertheless, in the statistical analysis for the urban model, education is in the predicted direction (negative squared term), but it is not statistically significant (see Table 2).

In the rural sample, as the exposure–acceptance model predicts, the highest percentage of support is among respondents who completed compulsory education (80 per cent), while the lowest percentage (66 per cent) is among respondents who reported to have completed high school (see Figure 2). The multivariate analyses in Table 3 (Models 2 and 4) for the rural samples indicate a significant curvilinear relationship based on the squared education variable.[16] Yet,

Figure 2: The Percentage of Respondents Satisfied with the National Leadership and Level of Education
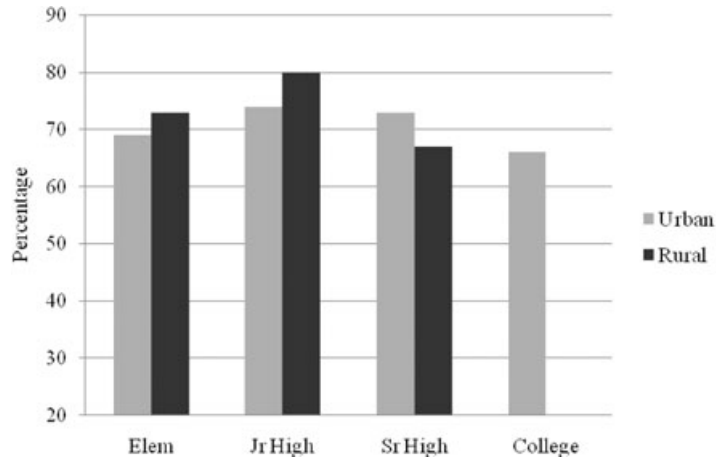
Source: World Values Survey (2000).

once the squared term is dropped from the analysis, education has no significant influence on regime support (Table 3, Models 1 and 3). That is, only examining the linear model may have led to the conclusion that education has no influence on respondents' level of support for the national leadership.

While most rural high school graduates support the national leadership, higher education can also have a negative effect on regime support over time. Studies on rural to urban migration and rightful resistance in the countryside demonstrate that some returning villagers, especially those with a high school education, tend to question local authorities more than those who never left (O'Brien and Li, 2006). This reflects regime support, and they tend to blame local leaders for subverting national reforms. These rural residents with higher education also use national laws to protect their local interests (O'Brien and Li, 2006). However, if some of these villagers discover that over time there is no change in local cadre behavior, they may begin to shift the blame for uneven implementation of political reforms from the local to the national leadership. High school has a socializing effect whereby students learn about the theory and goals of the Chinese Communist party. While learning about party goals and political reforms can be a source of empowerment and regime support, it can also lead to disaffection and alienation from the national leadership. Li (2004) suggests that there is a threshold beyond which educated and informed villagers, who were once strong supporters of the regime, become dissatisfied as their continued attempts to enforce laws and change the behavior of corrupt local cadres fail.[17]

For these villagers, the alternative source of information is their personal experience and immediate village environment. Even for non-activist, but educated villagers, this may lead to greater regime dissatisfaction over time. The implication is that uneven implementation of rural political reforms may be a growing source of discontent for higher-educated rural residents.

The results from the acceptance-exposure model differ from other studies on public support for the Chinese communist regime. While Chen and Shi (2001) find that higher levels of exposure to state-controlled media were associated with patterns of lower regime support in 1994, the 2000 WVS data suggest the opposite. Indeed, the WVS data support Bernstein and Lü's (2000) and Li's (2004) findings that the state-controlled media has a strong positive effect on an individual's support of the regime. Chen and Shi (2001) also point out that education has a strong negative influence on regime support, and they imply that this reflects the failure of the CCP to socialize people through education. The full model in Table 2 supports their argument. However, after the sample is divided into rural and urban sub-samples and the difference between rural and urban education is taken into account, the data suggest that the education system up to compulsory level is very successful in socializing citizens (i.e. increasing regime support). Even though respondents with a university education have a lower level of regime support, over 60 per cent still reported being satisfied with the national leaders. Lastly, Shi (2001) finds that education and other demographic variables do not have an independent influence on regime support. This is what I also found in the rural and urban models *without* the test for a non-linear relationship (see Table 2, Model 3 and Table 3, Model 1).

Finally, although it is difficult to compare survey studies in China, the patterns of influence between education and regime support are the same in the 2000 WVS rural sample and the 2004 eighteen-village survey (see Appendix 1). A significant curvilinear relationship exists between education and regime support (see Table 3, Models 3 and 4). The results of the comparison suggest that the rural and urban educational differences and the non-linear influence of education may exist in similar (or future) studies of regime support in China and other authoritarian regimes.

Conclusion

The results suggest that education and media exposure do have a significant influence on public support for the national leadership in *rural* China, and that the relationship between education and regime support is curvilinear. However, the curvilinear relationship between education and regime support is *not* significant in the urban sample. This reflects the difference between rural and urban higher education and educational experience at the high school level.

Previous studies on China and regime support have examined large national samples or sub-samples of the urban or rural population. None of the previous

studies has compared the patterns of support between rural and urban respondents. Moreover, education is typically treated as a control variable rather than a variable of interest. I find that if educational opportunities and experiences vary between rural and urban residents, then we can observe a noticeable difference in how education influences patterns of support within rural and urban samples.

Yet the acceptance-exposure model and data analysis presented here is not meant to disprove previous studies, but rather to present an alternative model in measuring public support for the national leadership (regime). As Geddes and Zaller (1989) suggest, their model of examining public support under the military regime in Brazil can be adapted to other authoritarian regimes, such as the People's Republic of China, but the rural and urban differences in education need to be taken into account. The rural WVS sample and the smaller village sample reflect similar patterns regarding the sources of support for an authoritarian regime in the Chinese countryside. Changing the linear assumption for the influence of education on regime support can alter the way we measure public opinion toward the central government in China.

The implications of the acceptance-exposure model may reflect the recent CCP attempts to balance the interaction between education and media exposure in the Chinese countryside through policies that ensure the completion of compulsory education and increased efforts to censor alternative news sources including the internet. The central government has made recent pledges to eliminate primary education fees and ensure that rural children complete compulsory education. Eliminating education fees is part of the larger policy to reduce villagers' burdens, but it is also an important element of indoctrination to the values of the party and state nationalism.

However, nationalism can reflect both anti- and pro-regime support. The Tiananmen Square (1919, 1976 and 1989) demonstrations represent nationalist sentiments that were not wholly supportive of the regime, while the response to the 1999 United States bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia was a nationalist pro-regime (anti-American) demonstration by university students in Beijing. The post-Mao Zedong (after 1976) educational and media environment offered some alternative sources of information and a new opening for political discussion in urban areas, while at the same time compulsory education in rural areas lagged behind. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s education policies and propaganda campaigns worked hand in hand to increase the completion of compulsory-level education and support for the regime (Barmé, 1995). One example is the party's 'Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education' published in 1994. Thus, the CCP clearly views education as an important component of regime support. As Key (1961) points out, indoctrination in the classrooms is one of the main elements of support for any regime. The high level of political support among citizens who have completed compulsory education may reflect the success of the Communist regime and its education policies.

The recent crackdown on newspapers, journals and their editors also reflects the CCP's determination to minimize alternative sources of political information. In the acceptance–exposure model, resistance to party propaganda is a combination of higher education and access to alternative political messages. Although there has been a steady increase in the number of high school and university graduates, tight control over the media may maintain the level of regime support. A clear example is the closure, reopening and firing of the top editors of the news journal *Freezing Point* (*bingdian*) in January–February 2006. The weekly supplement in the *China Youth Daily* is known for outspoken journalists and daring editors and has a 'reputation as an informative publication that dares to print stories and articles other official media outlets fear to touch' (Pei, 2006).

So far, the CCP seems to have tapped into the sources of regime support and continues to shape domestic education policies and the propaganda machinery in order to maintain political support, particularly in the countryside where the majority of the population still resides. Of course, the question is how long the CCP can manage to preserve this high level of regime support. In addition, how will political reforms and a more open press influence regime support? If a comparison with other Asian democracies and non-democracies is an indicator, then a true sign of political reform and democratization in China may be the reduced level of political support for the CCP.

Appendix 1

The 2004 data used in this analysis come from a random multi-stage survey of eighteen villages conducted in three counties in Shaanxi province in June 2004. The counties were randomly chosen based on their level of development using G. W. Skinner's core-periphery map of Northwest China.[18] Within each county two townships were randomly selected. At the township level, three villages were randomly chosen. Within each village nine households were selected from the household registration list (*huji*) supplied by the village accountant. In addition to the nine villager respondents, the village leader, party secretary and accountant were also interviewed, as well as formal interviews with one of the township's leading cadres in each township. Twelve graduate students from Northwest University, Xian were trained to conduct the survey in a three-week course on social science research methods. Thus each graduate interviewer was assigned one respondent per village. The average time for each survey interview was 55 minutes. In addition to the survey, the author conducted four village case studies in two different townships.

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Notes

 1 See Appendix 1 for an introduction to the 2004 eighteen-village survey.

 2 In the survey questionnaire, Chen and Shi gauged political fear with this question: 'If you criticized the Party and state leaders in conversations where you live and work, would you be concerned that someone might report you to the authorities?' The question was compared with the measure of political trust. Chen (2004) used a similar question in his 1995, 1997 and 1999 surveys. Both studies found little correlation between the two questions. A similar method was also employed by Geddes and Zaller (1989) to determine the level of sincere responses focusing on the patterns of responses to several questions in Brazil under the military regime.

 3 Given this definition, specific support should typically take place in a political environment that allows the authorities to be held directly accountable for their actions. This is clearly not the case in China.

 4 From the published surveys I have read it is clear that researchers are not asking about individual national leaders (see Chen, 2004; Chen and Shi, 2001; Chen *et al.*, 1997; Li, 2004; Manion, 1996; Shi, 2001; Tang, 2005). This is part of the problem with conducting survey work in non-democracies.

 5 I would argue that Tang (2005), Chen (2004) and Li (2004) also focus on determinants of support. Geddes and Zaller (1989) also explicitly state that they analyze determinants and patterns rather than levels of regime (policy) support. Also for an excellent discussion on the problems with comparing similar questions in cross-national surveys see Heath *et al.* (2005), 'The Globalization of Public Opinion Research'.

 6 The question number from the WVS is e150.

 7 The media exposure is a series of questions that address national, provincial, county, township and village sources of political information.

 8 The 1986 Compulsory Education Law requires nine years of education: six years' elementary school and three years' junior high school. Although rural junior high enrollments were important targets during the 1960s and 1970s, nine years of education was not officially compulsory until 1986.

 9 For an excellent overview of the F-Scale and other measures of authoritarian attitudes or personalities, see Ray (1984), 'Alternatives to the F-Scale in the Measurement of Authoritarianism: A Catalog'.

10 The question number from the WVS is e018.

11 In the whole sample 56 per cent reported 'good'. In Vietnam 80 per cent of respondents reported that respect for authority is good, while in Taiwan 45 per cent reported 'good', in South Korea 19 per cent and in Japan only 4 per cent.

12 Of course there is an obvious potential problem with correlation between 'frequency in reading or watching the news' and 'interest in politics'. For the urban sample, the two are highly correlated and interest is dropped from the urban model in Table 2. However, this is an important measure for the Geddes and Zaller model, and the two variables are not highly correlated in the rural sample.

13 The variable 'respect for authority' has 120 (or 21 per cent) 'do not know (DNK)' or missing observations. I ran three statistical tests: the first was with the DNKs; the second was without the DNKs; and the final test was without the variable 'respect for authority'. In all three cases, the statistical results remained the same.

14 It is also important to note that there are large intra-regional gaps in income and educational opportunities. Moreover, there is also an expected positive relationship between education and income, but the two variables are not highly correlated in this sample.

15 This is an important phenomenon that benefits the central party-government leadership at the expense of the local officials. The central government announces national economic and legal reforms, but leaves the implementation process to the local officials. If the officials experience policy success the national leadership benefits, and if local officials fail then citizens blame them for subverting national policies. See also Li (2004); O'Brien and Li (2006).

16 The statistical test for a curvilinear relationship uses the quadratic equation ($y = ax + bx^2$).

17 I also suggest that passing this threshold implies that educated villagers continue to blame local leaders for poor village economic conditions and at the same time hold the higher authorities responsible for the uneven implementation of political reforms such as village elections and regulations that reduce local fees (Author interviews, June 2004) .

18 For a clear explanation of Skinner's model see Little (1989).

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