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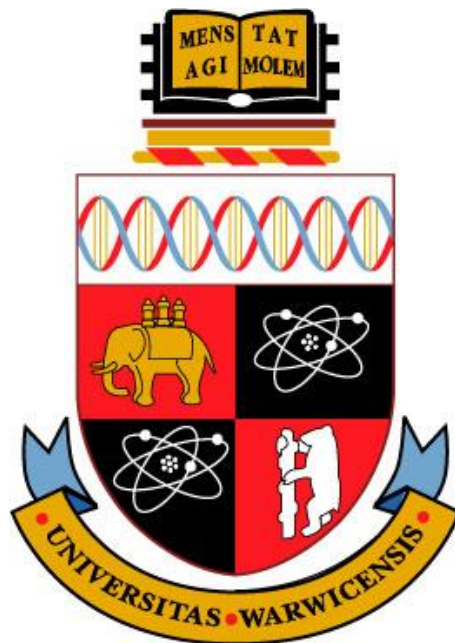
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**The Chinese Communist Party's Capacity to Rule:  
Legitimacy, Ideology, and Party Cohesion**

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**University of Warwick**



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**This dissertation is submitted to the University of Warwick**

**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CASS  | Chinese Academy of Social Science (zhongguo shehui kexueyuan)                                |
| CCP   | Chinese Communist Party (zhongguo gongchandang)  |
| CMC   | Central Military Commission (zhongyang junshi weiyuanhui)                                    |
| CPPCC | Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi) |
| HS    | Harmonious Society (hexie shehui)  |
| KMT   | Kuomintang (guomin dang)   |
| PLA   | People's Liberation Army (renmin jiefangjun)   |
| PRC   | People's Republic of China (zhonghua renmin gongheguo)                                       |
| PSC   | Politburo Standing Committee (zhengzhiju changwu weiyuanhui)                                 |
| SOD   | Scientific Outlook of Development (kexue fazhan guan)  |
| TR    | Three Represents (sange daibiao)   |

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## DECLARATION

This dissertation is submitted to the University of Warwick in support of my application for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. The work presented (including data generated and data analysis) was carried out by the author.

During my doctorate study, I also published the following articles, parts of which are based on or revised from this dissertation.

In English

Jinghan Zeng, Did Policy Experimentation in China Always Seek For Efficiency? – The Case of Wenzhou Financial Reform, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 24, No. 92, March 2015, forthcoming.

Jinghan Zeng, Institutionalization of the Authoritarian Leadership in China: A Power Succession System with Chinese Characteristics? *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3, July 2014, pp.294-314

Jinghan Zeng, The Debate on Political Legitimacy in China: Bridging the Wide Gulf between Western and Chinese Scholarship, *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 23, No. 88, July 2014, pp.612-635

Jinghan Zeng, What Matters Most in Selecting Chinese Leaders: Qualitative Comparative Analysis, *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, Vol.18, No. 3, September 2013, pp.223-239.

In Chinese:

Jinghan Zeng, Zhengzhi hefaxing: weishenme zhongxifang xuejie kanfa ruci butong, *Comparative Economic & Social Systems* (jingji shehui tizhi bijiao), 2014, forthcoming

## ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s capacity to rule in contemporary China by examining (a) its quest for popular legitimacy and (b) its search for party cohesion. In explaining the CCP's ruling basis, a plethora of political science and economics literature has pointed to China's economic growth. Conventional wisdom considers ideology to be obsolete and the political reform to be too limited to take any substantive effect in China.

This thesis argues that ideological adaptation and the institutionalization of power succession play crucial roles in maintaining the CCP's popular legitimacy and party cohesion. China's economic success is certainly important, however, it also creates a fundamental dilemma of the CCP's rule. If a communist party is not to deliver communism and class victory, why is it there at all? There is a potential contradiction between generating economic success by utilizing quasi capitalist economic policies on the one hand, and the fact that this is a communist party that supposedly justifies its rule by being the vehicle to deliver a communist society on the other. This thesis shows how the CCP has been constantly revising its ideological basis for justifying – if not legitimizing – its rule. By studying the CCP's ideological discourses, the mechanism of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to the relevant literature.

In addition to ideology, the institutionalization of power succession is also crucial to the CCP's rule. During Mao Zedong's rule, an un-institutionalized power system had caused endless fierce power struggles within the party, which indirectly led to economic stagnation and social unrest. Thirty years of institutionalization has made leadership transitions in China more stable, transparent, predictable, and smoother now than ever before. By offering a large amount of first- and second-hand data on China's leadership transition, this thesis shows how the institutionalization of power succession helps to maintain regime stability and legitimacy.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

“The Chinese Communist Party is the vanguard of the working class ... the realization of communism is the highest ideal and ultimate goal of the Party.”

– *The Chinese Communist Party, excerpt from its constitution (CCP, 2013)*

“What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”

– *Francis Fukuyama (1989), excerpt from his essay “The End of History?”*

#### 1.1 Introduction

Since the beginning of human civilization, humanity has been looking for the best form of government. For thousands of years, our political systems constantly evolved with the changing political values and the progress of human civilizations until the late 1980s – when it was claimed that this evolution had met an end. The collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union seemed to mark the death knell of communism and seemed to suggest the superiority of Western liberal democracy. Since then, Western liberal democracy has been claimed as “the end point of mankind's ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government” (Fukuyama, 1989). It seemed that, sooner or later, Western liberal democracy – the so-called “best” political system and the “ultimate” achievement of humanity – would defeat all other forms of political system of inferior quality and become the only form of government in the world.

Yet, authoritarianism has not been eliminated as many expected. On the contrary, the resilience of authoritarianism has been posing unprecedented challenges to the overwhelming dominance of Western democracy. Now, three decades after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the communist party in China has posed a strong challenge to Western liberal democracy. Instead of collapsing as many have expected for decades, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has delivered a remarkable economic miracle and led China to become the second largest economy in the world. Now more than ever before, the world, including the communities of international relations, has been wondering whether or even when China – a country governed by an authoritarian regime – will lead the world. Why did the CCP not follow the failure of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union?

This thesis examines this question by studying two crucial strategies that the CCP feels it needs to put in place for staying in power – ideological adaptation and the institutionalization of power succession. A core argument of this thesis is that:

*The CCP's rule in contemporary China is decided by its quest for popular legitimacy on the one hand and its search for party cohesion on the other hand; and the CCP does this by adapting its ideology and institutionalizing its power succession.*



Ideology and power succession play crucial roles in the CCP's survival. However, they have not received sufficient attention in the relevant literature. In analysing the continuation of one-party rule in China, conventional wisdom focuses on economic performance. Thirty years of spectacular economic growth led by China's market reforms have prompted a sizeable amount of economics and political science literature to link it with the CCP's rule (Krugman, 2013; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Perry, 2008; Shambaugh, 2001; Wang, 2005a; Wang, 2005b; Zhao, 2009). Economic success is absolutely important; however, it alone is not enough to explain the entire legitimation of the CCP, and China's economic miracle also creates many legitimacy problems.

More importantly, while the CCP created the economic miracle, it also put its existence into a fundamental dilemma. As quoted at the top of this thesis, according to the CCP constitution, its "highest ideal and the ultimate goal", and theoretically the only reason for its existence, is to achieve communism (CCP, 2013). *If a communist party is not to deliver communism and class victory, why is it there at all?* It seems even more strange that it now plans to establish a capitalist society – and indeed, the mainstream literature misguidedly suggests that the creation of a form of capitalism is a key for the CCP to stay in power. Since the beginning of the CCP's market reforms in the late 1970s, the CCP's rule has been facing a fundamental contradiction between generating economic success by utilizing quasi-capitalist economic policies, and the fact that this is a communist party that supposedly justifies its rule by being the vehicle to deliver a communist society.

Moving away from communist ideals inevitably led to the decline of communist beliefs in China and a huge ideological vacuum. This vacuum made the CCP's ideological basis vulnerable when facing pro-liberal social values in the late 1980s, which gave ways to waves of popular pro-democracy protests across the country. In addition, it did not only shake the CCP's ideological basis but also split the party from the inside. From 1979 to 1992, the fundamental contradiction between quasi-capitalist economic policies and the CCP's socialism commitment generated endless ideological battles among the ruling elites over whether it was right for a communist party to introduce elements of a capitalist system. The reform-minded ruling elites who considered the quasi-capitalists economic policies essential to promote growth were attacked by other groups of less reform-minded ruling elites – from either real conviction or more pragmatic power motivation. This division within the CCP led to a series of serious, negative consequences – notably, strangling the decision-making of the party when dealing with popular protests in 1989, which almost put the party on the brink of death.

Since the official recognition of the market economy in 1992, the cleavage within the party gradually evolved to how far towards capitalism the CCP should or could go and how to deal with the negative consequences of rapid economic growth – such as corruption and socioeconomic inequality. The "New Left" elites – who are critical of capitalism and prefer a new form of national socialism – favour a bigger role of the state in socioeconomic affairs, whilst the pro-liberal elites – who embrace universal values – attempt to put forward liberal reforms not only in socioeconomic affairs but also in the political system, including democratization. By holding high the banner of the New Left and ideological orthodoxy, Bo Xilai took advantage of the ideological division within the CCP to launch democratic, election-like publicity campaigns in order to compete for top power, which posed a strong challenge to the unity of the party and the legitimacy of the power succession system in China.

As such, ideological transitions are important not only to maintain pro-authoritarian values and thus legitimacy, but also to maintain consensus within the party and thus the unity of the CCP's leadership. However, conventional wisdom overemphasizes government performance and pays insufficient attention to ideology. Many consider ideology as obsolete in contemporary China (Dreyer, 2012: 330, 360; Lynch, 1999:10; Misra, 1998; Ramo, 2004). As Holbig (2013:61) points out,

“In the political science literature on contemporary China, ideology is mostly regarded as a dogmatic straitjacket to market reforms that has been worn out over the years of economic success, an obsolete legacy of the past waiting to be cast off in the course of the country's transition toward capitalism.”

Generally speaking, the topic of ideology in contemporary China is under-researched. Although China's assertive foreign policies generated many studies on Chinese nationalism, this thesis does not consider nationalism as an ideology, as I will explain below. This thesis contributes to the limited studies on ideology by arguing that

*Ideology is by no mean obsolete; in contrast, it still plays a crucial role in legitimizing the authoritarian rule and maintaining party cohesion in contemporary China.*

In addition to ideological adaptation, the institutionalization of power succession is a relevant crucial survival strategy of the CCP. As mentioned, since the late 1970s, the ideological turns of the CCP have split the party from the inside and this elite division almost put the party on the brink of death in 1989. The danger of elite divisions is frequently proven by the history – the majority of authoritarian regimes failed not because of being overthrown by the masses, but because of divisions amongst the elites (O'Donnell, *et al.*, 1986; Svobik, 2012). As such, the unity of the ruling elites is crucial to regime survival, and a key threat to this unity is power succession.

For an authoritarian regime, successfully transferring power at the top and preventing a leadership split during this process has always been extremely challenging. During Mao Zedong's rule, an un-institutionalized power system caused endless, fierce power struggles within the party, which indirectly led to economic stagnation and social unrest. Afraid of elite divisions and brutal power struggles, the CCP has taken great efforts to settle disputes of power succession through institutional channels. Thirty years of institutionalization has made leadership transitions in China more stable, transparent, predictable, and smoother now than ever before. A US Congress report called the CCP's leadership transition in 2012 “one of the very few examples of an authoritarian state successfully engineering a peaceful, institutionalized political succession”(Dotson, 2012:4). Dickson (2011:212) argues that China's “routinized process for replacing ruling elites is a remarkably rare practice among authoritarian regimes”.

Arguably, this institutional development is important not only to the internal stability of the CCP but also to its legitimacy. In the CCP's discourses, its ruling capacity is a fundamental inner cause of its legitimacy, as I will explain below. By offering a large amount of first- and second-hand data on China's leadership transitions, this thesis shows how the institutionalization of power succession helps to maintain regime stability and legitimacy. So, this thesis establishes that:

*The institutionalization of power succession is a key for maintaining the CCP's internal stability and its ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy.*

## 1.2 Legitimacy and Party Cohesion

Legitimacy is a complex term, as Chapter 2 will discuss in more details. In this thesis, legitimacy refers to “the capability of the system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society” (Lipset, 1981:64). As Huntington (1993) argued, legitimacy is “mushy” but “essential to understanding the problems confronting authoritarian regimes in the late twentieth century”. Legitimacy lies in the centre of both the history of political philosophy (White, 2005:1) and contemporary Chinese politics (Gilley and Holbig, 2009; Gilley and Holbig, 2010). It provides explanations on the failure of communism and the survival of the CCP. Arguably, a key reason for western scholars failing to predict dramatic changes of the Soviet Union and many Eastern European countries before the fall of those regimes is their insufficient attention paid to the relationship between legitimacy and political stability (Zhao, 2012) – the relevant literature still did not pay sufficient attention to this issue, although there were some studies on legitimacy in the 1980s (e.g. White, 1986).

Popular legitimacy is crucial; however, it is not a sufficient condition of regime survival. Regime survival does not only need the external stability of the regime that is reflected in popular legitimacy, but also the internal stability of the regime that is reflected in the unity of the ruling elites. The relevant literature largely focuses on popular support but pays insufficient attention to the ruling elites. Indeed, how ruling elites view the regime – a kind of self-legitimation – also matters. As Rothschild (1977:491) argues,

“Discussions of legitimacy and legitimation risk irrelevancy if they overlook this crucial dimension of a ruling elite's sense of its legitimacy and focus exclusively on the other dimension of the public's or the masses' perception of that elite's legitimacy.”

Lewis (1984) argues that “it is elite disintegration and the failure of its internal mechanisms of authority that have engendered the more general collapse of legitimacy and the onset of political crises in communist Eastern Europe”.

Following the Weberian typology, the proponents of Weber have widely examined the crucial role of political elites in deciding legitimacy. Therborn (1980:109) argues that “the really critical factor is a basic consensus among the ruling groups themselves, and consent to their legitimacy by members of the state apparatus”. Bialer (1982:194) argues that “what is crucial is the legitimacy of these claims to the other centers of power and not their legitimacy among the people who must take the consequences”. According to Palma (1991:57) “when legitimation comes from the top, the decisive operative relationship is not that between rulers and people, but that between rulers and Weber’s administrative staff – in communist parlance, the cadres. When chiasm becomes embodied in the state, cohesion among power holders, rooted in unimpeachable doctrine, becomes essential for endurance.” The influence of elites and the government is particularly notable in China, which is in the shadow of Confucianism. The cultural traditions of low political participation and high trust in government made the role of ruling elites and the Chinese government more influential.

In addition, most of the relevant quantitative studies heavily relied on the subjective opinions and values of citizens (i.e. surveys); however, how the regime produced its legitimacy claims has not been given a central place. Arguably, the regime’s legitimacy claim is a notable inner cause of popular legitimacy. Thus, the CCP’s ideological discourses that this thesis studies are particularly important to capture the regime’s legitimacy claims and their survival strategies.

More importantly, the CCP's legitimacy and its cohesion are indivisible. Arguably, legitimacy is considered by the CCP as an external manifestation of its ruling capacity. In 2004, the CCP issued a party resolution on strengthening the CCP's ruling capacity (zhizheng nengli) that explicitly attempted to gain legitimacy (CCP, 2004). As one scholar of the Central Institute of Socialism read it, legitimacy was the "unspoken word left to the understanding of the audience" of this resolution (Gilley and Holbig, 2009:341). Another Chinese scholar considered legitimacy as "the key element reflecting the ruling capacity of the CCP" (Gilley and Holbig, 2009:341). This resolution stimulated an intensive debate among Chinese intellectuals on regime legitimacy. In this debate, Chinese intellectuals proposed a variety of policy suggestions to strengthen the ruling capacity of the CCP and thus its legitimacy, as this thesis will show. Obviously, this ruling capacity is built on the CCP's internal cohesion. In other words, this party cohesion is a *prerequisite* of the CCP's ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy – including promoting economic growth, maintaining social stability, and defending China's national interests. Therefore, instead of focusing on the masses' support alone, this thesis explores

*the relationship between both the external stability of the regime (i.e. popular legitimacy) and the internal stability of the regime (i.e. party cohesion).*

This study on the CCP's survival strategies makes a valuable contribution to the literature of Chinese studies, international relations, and comparative politics. This study provides clues to predict whether the authoritarian system in China is sustainable, and whether and when China will democratize driven by its rapidly socioeconomic modernization. Such a study has great implications for international relations scholars' attempts to understand "the rise of China". This thesis also contributes to the field of Chinese studies by re-examining the role of ideology and power succession in maintaining the legitimacy and internal stability of the CCP. In addition, it provides a notable addition to the literature on authoritarian resilience by showing the adaptability and learning ability of the CCP.

### **1.3 Existential Crises in China?**

Nowadays, the international world has two contrary views about the Chinese state. On the one hand, some are optimistic about China's future (e.g. Jacques, 2009). After China successfully held the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and became the second largest world economy in 2010, and following the 2008 financial crisis that undermined Western power, it seems that the world is waiting for the age of China (Jacques, 2009). According to a Pew research survey (Pew, 2013), nearly half (47%) of American and over half of European—including 71% Spanish, 70% French, 66% British, and 66% German – respondents agree that China will ultimately or has already replaced the US to become a leading superpower. In this sense, as long as China can maintain economic growth, Chinese leaders should be cheering for their success and should take over the world order. On the other hand, many consider the CCP's rule as immoral and illegitimate because of its authoritarian nature. Some argue that the spectacular economic growth in China is at the expense of violations of human rights, environmental pollution, and a "Ponzi" economic growth model (Krugman, 2013). Others, in particular the Collapsing China School, doubt the future stability of the regime in China (Feng, 2013a; Pei, 2006; Shirk, 2007). For example, after Chang's (2002) first prediction that the CCP would fall before 2011 was proven to be wrong, Chang (2011) again predicted that "instead of 2011, the mighty Communist Party of China will fall in 2012. Bet on it".

In the academic community, Chinese intellectuals and Western scholars have very different views on the CCP's legitimacy. On the one hand, many experts outside mainland China argue that the CCP enjoys strong legitimacy (Chen, *et al.*, 1997; Fewsmith, 2007; Gilley, 2009; Shi, 2001; Shi, 2008; Tang, 2001; Tong, 2011). This view is strongly supported by various cross-national surveys including the Asian barometer and the World Values Survey (Chen, 2004; Gilley, 2006; Gilley, 2008; Lewis-Beck, *et al.*, 2013; Li, 2004b; Munro, *et al.*, 2013; Shi, 2001; Tang, 2005; Yang and Tang, 2013). For example, the 2008 Asian Barometer Survey finds that 74% of Chinese respondents positively responded to the statement that "whatever its faults may be, our current system of government is still the best for the country" (Chu, 2013:5). According to a professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Wang Shaoguang (2010b:139; 2012b), and a professor at the National Taiwan University, Chu Yunhan (2013:4), the CCP's strong legitimacy is a "consensus" of "scholars familiar with the field". On the other hand, Chinese intellectuals are much more pessimistic than this "consensus". Of 125 Chinese articles on the subject of political legitimacy published in party school journals, university journals, and public policy journals that this thesis studies, over 40% of Chinese intellectuals writing on the subject of legitimacy argue that the regime is in certain forms of legitimacy crises or challenges, while only 1% of them consider legitimacy in China to be high.

Indeed, not only Chinese intellectuals but also Chinese leaders have been seriously concerned about the CCP's rule. As this thesis will show, the existential crisis has been a constant concern of Chinese leaders. Why are they so pessimistic? What are they worrying about? Why does the CCP think reclaiming legitimacy is essential for them? Arguably, this concern is mainly generated by communist ideology, the political legacy of Mao Zedong, and problems caused by rapid economic growth. In Mao Zedong's era, communist ideology and a cult of personality used to be the lynchpin of legitimacy in China for a couple of decades until a series of political campaigns and policy failures seriously undermined the regime legitimacy. After Mao Zedong passed away, the party leaders felt that the CCP's legitimacy reached its lowest point. Driven by the concerns about existential crisis, the CCP was forced to change its primary task from Mao's "class struggle" to economic reconstruction – an approach that shifted the ruling basis of the communist rule from being ideology-based toward being performance-based. However, such a fundamental transition was destined to be challenging because it was more or less an attempt to throw away everything that the party had been previously doing to build revolutionary legitimacy – in particular the communist ideology and Mao Zedong.

Unlike the Soviet Union, that could take a de-Stalinization approach but still adhere to Leninism as the party ideology, the CCP cannot completely get away from its past and negate its founder Mao Zedong; otherwise, the party's history and rule would be put into an illegitimacy dilemma. As Xi Jinping clearly pointed out, "if then we completely negate comrade Mao Zedong, is our party tenable? Is our socialist system tenable? It is not tenable. If it is not tenable, there will be great disorder in China" (Qi, 2013). Thus, on the one hand, the CCP remained to identify Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding theory. On the other hand, it reinterpreted a usable version of Mao Zedong Thought, departing from Mao's literal words.

More importantly, moving away from revolutionary idealism did help the government to improve their performance and deliver economic benefits to the people; however, it lost the very basis of the communist' monopoly on power. As already noted, there is a potential contradiction between the CCP's quasi-capitalist economic policies and the ultimate goal of a communist party – to establish a communist society. This contradiction did not only threaten popular legitimacy but also split the party from the inside. The economic plans of reformists

were frequently attacked by other groups of ruling elites as products of capitalism. As mentioned, this elite division almost led to the collapse of the CCP in 1989.

In the early 1990s, after the failure of the Soviet Union, the party conducted a large number of systematic studies on the failure of communist regimes through its various party organs and think tanks – especially the Chinese Academy of Social Science (CASS). The CASS analysts summarized the failure of Eastern European communist regimes in three reasons (Zhou, *et al.*, 2000:119-120):

1. Democratization within the ruling party led to divisions among the ruling elites.
2. The increasing discontent of the masses was utilized by opposition forces.
3. Western countries' "peaceful evolution" campaign undermined popular support for the one-party rule.

In other words, the lesson that the party learnt from the failure of those communist regimes is to strengthen the unity of party leaders, build popular legitimacy, and resist the "invasion" of liberal political values. In this context, ideological changes and the institutionalization of power succession are crucial to maintaining party cohesion on the one hand and to building popular legitimacy on the other hand.

In contemporary China, although the CCP led China to become the second largest world economy and helped over 600 million people out of poverty, its concerns about existential crisis did not lessen because of problems caused by rapid economic growth. Now more than ever before, the CCP is concerned that economic performance might not be enough to provide sufficient legitimacy, as this thesis will reveal. Rampant corruption, for example, has been threatening the party's rule. As Jiang Zemin (1997b) clearly pointed out at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress,

"The fight against corruption is a grave political struggle vital to the very existence of the Party and the state. Our Party can never be daunted and vanquished by any enemy. But the easiest way to capture a fortress is from within, so in no way should we destroy ourselves. If corruption cannot be punished effectively, our Party will lose the confidence and support of the people."

In addition to corruption, the further deterioration of socioeconomic inequality and changing values provided a widening ground for power struggles under the cover of ideology (i.e. ideological battles / line struggles). As mentioned, Bo Xilai held high the flag of New Left for winning a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC). The orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism were again used as a powerful weapon for power struggles. Although the leadership transitions in China were institutionalized to a certain level at that time, Bo Xilai's way of competing for the top power – through democratic, election-like publicity campaigns involving a distinct policy agenda and a strong appeal to the masses – posed a strong challenge to the unity of the party and the legitimacy of the power succession system. Facing the increasing threats of corruption, socioeconomic inequality and changing values, Xi Jinping clearly warned the party that "popular support decides the survival or death of the party" (Xu and Zhou, 2013).

Above all, driven by those concerns of existential crisis that were generated from communist ideology, Mao Zedong, and problems caused by rapid economic growth, contemporary Chinese leaders have a delicate task built on four things:

- (1) Continuing to stress the importance of economic development.

But (2) explaining why China still needs a communist party to hold a monopoly on power.

(3) Fending off potential internal attacks from within the party itself and from people who might criticize the ideological turn – either from real conviction or from more pragmatic power motivation

And also (4) dealing with the negative social consequences of rapid economic development.

In this context, the CCP has continually promoted economic reforms (i.e. market reforms for economic performance), political reforms (e.g. the institutionalization of power succession for undermining the negative effects of power struggles), and ideological reforms (i.e. justify the CCP's rule *not only to the society but also to the party itself*). While economic reforms are extensively studied in the relevant existing literature, the party's efforts in the ideological and political fields are under-researched, as the following section will discuss.

## **1.4 Popular Legitimacy in China: Bridging the Wide Gulf between Western and Chinese Scholarship**

In the understanding of popular legitimacy in China, this thesis reveals a wide gulf between Western and Chinese scholarship. In this thesis, “Western scholars” refers to those who are not based in mainland China, but they are not necessarily from the West. “Chinese intellectuals” refers to those who are based in mainland China.

### 1.4.1 Understanding Popular Legitimacy in China from a Western Perspective

#### 1.4.1.1 Performance Legitimacy Approach

In explaining legitimacy in China, literature in English concentrates on performance legitimacy. In this thesis, performance legitimacy refers to the idea that a state's right to rule is justified by the performance of all government functions. Pragmatism and market reform have gradually shifted the legitimacy of the CCP from ideology to performance (Zhao, 2009). On the one hand, many consider the communist ideology obsolete under market reforms nowadays, as mentioned. In this sense, with the decline of communist beliefs, the CCP has little ideological legitimacy left in contemporary China. On the other hand, modern history has proved the ultimate failure of communist rule, and classic theories have frequently pointed out the fatal weaknesses of authoritarianism. According to many, the authoritarian system does not have as much rational-legal legitimacy as democratic systems do (Zhao, 2009). It seems that performance legitimacy is the last straw for the CCP's rule. As a professor of the University of Chicago, Zhao Dingxin, argues (2009:428), “government performance stands alone as the sole source of legitimacy in China.” This thesis poses a series of theoretical and empirical challenges to such a claim.

Economic performance is the most frequently mentioned element of performance legitimacy. The conventional wisdom of Western scholarship holds that economic achievement is a principal (if not the sole) pillar of legitimacy in contemporary China (Krugman, 2013; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Perry, 2008; Shambaugh, 2001; Wang, 2005a; Wang, 2005b; Zhao, 2009; Yang and Zhao, 2014). In a major textbook on Chinese politics, Tony Saich (2004:347) argues that “[CCP] legitimacy is currently based on the capacity to deliver the economic goods”.

Economic performance is absolutely important. However, empirical studies show that economic performance matters, but there is no strong evidence to prove that it is the sole, let alone the principal pillar of legitimacy (Chu, 2013; Lewis-Beck, *et al.*, 2013; Munro, *et al.*, 2013; Yang and Tang, 2013). In addition, if economic prosperity leads the high levels of popular support for the government, why do other countries such as Indian and Brazil – that also enjoy economic prosperity – not have high levels of support like China does (Tang, *et al.*, 2013)? Based on a 2010 national survey in China, Dickson (2013) finds a negative relationship between economic development and popular support.

In addition to economic performance, social stability is another key element of government performance, and it has also been widely accepted as a key pillar of legitimacy in China (Breslin, 2009; Dickson, 2011; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Shue, 2004; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). Shue (2004), for example, argues that the CCP “stakes” its legitimacy on its capability to maintain social stability. Needless to say, social stability and economic growth are interdependent. Without a stable social order, the economy cannot grow rapidly; conversely the welfare materials delivered by economic growth might help to enhance social stability. This interdependence suggests that the rules of modern states are based on different combinations of legitimacy sources rather than a sole pillar.

#### 1.4.1.2 Limits of Performance Legitimacy

Legitimacy by nature has many dimensions and its sources are often inter-related. Ideology in particular plays a crucial role in influencing other sources of legitimacy. Arguably, a fatal weakness of the performance legitimacy approach is its insufficient attention to ideological factors. As mentioned, the mainstream of Western scholarship overemphasizes economic growth, and many assume that market reform has also rendered ideology obsolete. This misguided view has underestimated the role of ideology in contemporary China.

Legitimacy generated from government performance is not directly through government performance per se but from citizens’ subjective perceptions of this performance. Ideological factors play a crucial role in shaping people’s subjective perceptions over this performance. Thus, economic performance – crisis or growth – per se is not directly reflected in legitimacy (Gilley and Holbig, 2010); the performance will be framed by ideological factors and transformed by conductive ways into people’s subjective perceptions of economic performance. If economic performance is the sole legitimacy pillar in China, then economic deterioration will unavoidably lead to political crisis. However, the financial crisis of 2008 did enhance rather than weaken the CCP’s rule (Holbig, 2011). By using the Chinese media to highlight the good performance of coping with the financial crisis domestically and the disaster that this crisis caused in other countries, the CCP managed to manipulate this crisis as an opportunity to gain legitimacy and achieve its political purposes – such as marketing its official ideology, Scientific Outlook of Development (Holbig, 2011).

My recent study on Wenzhou’s financial reform of 2012 also shows how the Chinese government could manipulate the idea of “reform” as a political symbol to maintain the status quo when facing the regional debt crisis (Zeng, 2015). By using reform ideas as substitutes for the actual practices, the Chinese government managed to solve the Wenzhou debt crisis without really tackling the core problem. This symbolic financial reform helped the CCP to maintain socioeconomic stability during the power succession at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress. The case of the 2008 financial crisis and the Wenzhou debt crisis suggests that there is a great



deal of rooms for the government to manipulate people's subjective perceptions of economic crisis, and thus maintain – or even strengthen – the CCP's rule.

In addition, many legitimacy problems are caused by rapid economic growth. Now more than ever before, the CCP is concerned that economic performance might not be enough to provide sufficient legitimacy. The three most perceived threats to legitimacy by Chinese intellectuals – changing values, socioeconomic inequality, and corruption – are all problems caused by economic growth. Take environmental pollution led by rapid economic growth as another example. When Beijing's fog haze becomes more visible and undermines the quality of people's lives, people become more and more concerned about the negative effects of economic growth. This negative perception of economic growth has no doubt undermined the positive impact of growth on legitimacy. Indeed, not only this domestic perception but also the international perception of China's growth matters. As mentioned, on the one hand, China's economic growth can be perceived as a symbol of "a rising China" and a role model for developing countries. On the other hand, it can also be described as an immoral, costly growth model, which violates human rights and sacrifices the poor and the environment. These two images of China certainly have contrary impacts on regime legitimacy.

Similarly, ideology also plays a significant role in maintaining social stability. It crucially interacts with the CCP's capability to maintain social stability. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP's (in)stability discourse – liberal democracy brings instability and the CCP is the only capable force to maintain stability – helps to generate popular support for the current political system and thus maintain stability. This stability in return reinforces the regime's stability discourse – the current political system is more capable of maintaining stable a social order and protecting personal safety. In short, ideological factors are important in affecting the impacts of economic performance and social stability on legitimacy.

#### 1.4.1.3 Nationalism

In addition to government performance, nationalism is another frequently mentioned explanatory factor of regime legitimacy in China. China's assertive foreign policies have generated enormous academic and public interest in Chinese nationalism. Many argue that nationalism plays a crucial role in legitimizing the CCP's rule (Breslin, 2009; Darr, 2011; Fang, 1997; Lam, 2003; Li, 2001b; Lieberthal, 2004:334-335; Lin and Hu, 2003; Ostergaard, 2004; Saich, 2004; Shambaugh, 2001; Zheng, 2004). As Gries (2005:112) argues:

“Lacking the procedural legitimacy accorded to democratically elected governments and facing the collapse of communist ideology, the CCP is increasingly dependent upon its nationalist credentials to rule.”

Thomas Christensen (1996) also argues: “Since the Chinese Communist Party is no longer communist, it must be even more Chinese.” As these scholars pointed out, nationalism is no doubt important to the CCP's rule. However, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, empirical work finds that there is no evidence to prove that nationalism is a superior source of legitimacy in China (Chu, 2013).

Many also argue that Chinese nationalism has gradually become the ideological foundation of the CCP by replacing the communist ideals – which has been largely marginalized and weakened nowadays (Christensen, 1996; Gries and Rosen, 2004; He, 2007; Link, 2008; Metzger and Myers, 1998; Zhao, 1997; Zhao, 1998; Zhong, 1996). For example, a professor of Duke University, Liu Kang, argues that:

“‘The current Chinese communist government is more a product of nationalism than a product of ideology like Marxism and Communism,’... today nationalism has probably ‘become the most powerful legitimating ideology.’” (cited from: Bajoria, 2008)

These kinds of arguments suggest that nationalism is an independent value system i.e. ideology. However, nationalism alone does not provide any source of legitimacy for certain political systems or the appointment of political actors (Beetham, 2008). In addition, as Shaun Breslin (2009) argues, Chinese nationalism “seems to lack sufficient coherence and guiding principles to be counted as an ideology as such – it is not a ‘science of ideas’”. Thus, nationalism alone is not an ideology, and so it alone cannot replace communist ideology. In the CCP’s official discourse, nationalism is a part of the “socialist core value system”. As such, the legitimizing role of nationalism is better addressed in the broader context of ideological constructions in China. This thesis agrees that nationalism is crucial to the CCP’s legitimacy, but it considers nationalism a part of the CCP’s broad ideological construction.

Above all, sources of legitimacy in China are a hotly-debated topic. Although scholars have different emphases, the legitimacy formulation “economic growth + social stability + nationalism” is more or less a consensus (Breslin, 2009; Dickson, 2011; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b). All those factors are crucial to the CCP’s legitimacy; however, ideology plays a role in affecting all those factors. Thus, the role of ideology in China should be considered to be more important when analysing legitimacy in contemporary China.

#### 1.4.2 Understanding Regime Legitimacy in China from a Chinese Perspective

Party intellectuals within China may have valuable insights unavailable to those outside and perhaps better understand how China is ruled. In order to investigate the opinions of Chinese intellectuals, this thesis analyses 125 Chinese articles with “legitimacy” in the title published between 2008 and 2012. Based on this primary database, this thesis juxtaposes the Chinese literature with the English literature on this subject. A core finding of this thesis is that

*There is a remarkable cleavage between the international perceptions of the Chinese state and the pessimistic views among Chinese intellectuals about the party’s ruling.*

In terms of the CCP’s level of legitimacy, pessimistic views commonly exist in the writing of Chinese intellectuals. As mentioned above, in the Chinese intellectual’s debate on legitimacy, more than 40% of the party intellectuals argue that the CCP is in certain forms of legitimacy crises or challenges, while only 1% of them argue the CCP’s legitimacy is strong. In order to rescue the CCP’s rule, Chinese intellectuals proposed various strategies to maintain popular legitimacy.

Moreover, this thesis finds that Chinese intellectuals are more pessimistic about performance legitimacy than many Western scholars. In China, it is clearly recognized that simply relying on economics is not enough – even if the economy continues to do well (and of course, there is a clear understanding that bad economic performance will harm legitimacy). Problems caused by economic growth –changing values, socioeconomic inequality, corruption – are considered to be the most perceived legitimacy threats by Chinese intellectuals nowadays. In particular, Chinese intellectuals expressed their serious concern with changing values. How to maintain pro-authoritarian values has become a more and more crucial, urgent challenge to the one-party rule in China.

As such, ideology has been proposed by Chinese intellectuals as a leading strategy to maintain legitimacy. Chinese intellectuals' high emphasis on ideology is in stark contrast with Western scholarship's insufficient attention to this issue. The above findings of this thesis suggest a distinct research agenda of Chinese intellectuals. Indeed, not only Chinese intellectuals but also party leaders considered ideology to be crucial to regime legitimacy. In the past three decades, the party has invested a great amount of energy and human capital in modernizing its ideological basis. In order to understand the CCP's impressive efforts in ideological work, this thesis contributes to the limited studies on ideology by studying the CCP's ideological discourses, mechanisms of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness.

## **1.5. Ideological Adaptation in Contemporary China: A Dual-Ideological Strategy**

### **1.5.1 Is Ideology Obsolete Nowadays?**

As mentioned, many Western scholars consider that thirty years of market reforms in China have rendered ideology meaningless nowadays. This understanding suffers from two major conceptual weaknesses: (1) consider ideology to be communism and (2) consider ideology to be a belief system. First, conventional wisdom solely refers ideology in China to communism.<sup>1</sup> In the context of declining communist beliefs in contemporary China, this conceptualization seems to suggest logically that ideology becomes meaningless. This is obviously inaccurate because the CCP has put forward various formulas of party theories and ideologies – such as Jiang Zemin's Three Represents and Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook of Development – to *justify* if not to legitimize its rule.

Moreover, putting aside other ideological formulas, even communism alone is still significant to the CCP's rule. As mentioned above, theoretically, the only reason for a communist party to exist is to achieve communism. The CCP needs constantly to find some ex post facto ways of explaining why the reality of political economy is not incompatible with its commitment to socialism. This is relevant to the second conceptual weakness of the existing literature: ideology as a belief system. It suggests that the power of ideology comes from people's faith, implying that ideology is only powerful if people believe it.

Yet, even if nobody believes the communist doctrines, they are still powerful in influencing Chinese politics. For example, any party leader who openly supports abandoning the doctrine of Mao Zedong Thought and communism would soon find a powerful coalition within the party against him or her – from either real conviction or more pragmatic power motivation. This is why the reform-minded leaders carefully portrayed their reforms and policies in socialist terms to fend off attacks from the conservative ruling elites who were dissatisfied with market reforms, as Chapter 2 will discuss.

In order to address the above conceptual weakness, this thesis endorses Schull's approach that considers ideology to be a form of discourse (i.e. political language) that includes but is not limited to a belief system. As Schull argues (1992), people who have different personal beliefs can adhere to the same ideology, and the power of ideology does not only lie in faith but also in respect. In the public occasion, the CCP leaders need to show, at least, respect for the communist doctrines no matter whether they believe in them or not. This explains why communist doctrine can still constrain party elites in the context of declining communist beliefs. It is also clearly evidenced by the case of the then party head of Chongqing, Bo Xilai. Orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism and the ideological flag of

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<sup>1</sup> I owe this idea to Peter Sandby-Thomas (private communication).

the New Left were used by Bo Xilai as a powerful weapon to compete for a PSC seat. As Chapter 2 will discuss, Bo Xilai's ideological flag is not only motivated by fundamentally different beliefs but is also an attempt to grab hold of power using ideology.

The above two approaches of ideology raise a notable distinction between legitimacy and regime survival. The first approach that considers ideology as a belief system suggests that ideology is solely about influencing world views and cultivating political beliefs. In this sense, ideology is only produced for legitimacy produces. The second approach that considers ideology to be a discourse suggests that ideology is not only produced for influencing world views and cultivating political beliefs, but also for maintaining socialist conventions that justify the CCP's rule. In this sense, ideology is for maintaining both legitimacy and party cohesion. As discussed earlier, regime survival is not only decided by popular legitimacy (i.e. the external stability of the regime) but also by party cohesion (i.e. the internal stability of the regime). Thus, the second approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of the role of ideology in consolidating and legitimizing the one-party rule. In sum, this thesis argues that:

*In contemporary China, ideology still plays a crucial role in maintaining the CCP's rule.*

### 1.5.2 Is Ideology for Legitimation or Power Consolidation in Contemporary China?

Unlike conventional wisdom, a few keen China scholars still consider ideology important. As Breslin (2009) argues: "despite the promotion of apoliticism and the transition from revolutionary to ruling party, ideology is far from dead in contemporary China." Shih (2008:1186) also argues that "ideological campaigns are by no means obsolete". Among the already limited literature in English, there are roughly two major explanations. On the one hand, some argue that ideological changes were produced for legitimizing the CCP (Bondes and Heep, 2012; Bondes and Heep, 2013; Brady, 2009; Brown, 2012; Gilley and Holbig, 2010; Holbig, 2009; Holbig, 2013; Sausmikat, 2006; Su, 2011; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). For example, Holbig (2013:62) argues that "ideology still, and with a renewed emphasis since the turn of the century, plays an indispensable role in the quest to legitimize authoritarian rule in contemporary China". In addition, the CCP's mass persuasion is also considered to be important to the CCP's legitimacy (Bondes and Heep, 2013; Brady, 2009).

On the other hand, many contend that it was a factional tool to struggle for power (Bo, 2004; Fewsmith, 2003b; Lieber, 2013; Shih, 2008; Zheng and Lye, 2003). For example, Zheng and Lye (2003:65) argues that "Jiang Zemin has succeeded in securing a legacy for himself with his 'Three Represents' theory and in putting his own men in key positions of the Party and government." Shih (2008:1177) argues that "ideological campaigns function as radars that allow senior leaders to discern the loyalty of faction members".

The above cleavage lies in the *primary audience* and *function* of the CCP's ideological discourses. If ideology is a legitimizing device to gain popular support (i.e. the first view), the people should be the primary audience. If ideology is a just tool of factional struggles (i.e. the second view), then its primary audience should be the party members (i.e. the party itself). Indeed, neither of these two views is wrong, and the major division between these two views partly lies in the distinction among the CCP's ideologies.

This thesis proposes a new analytical framework to divide the CCP's dual ideological strategy: formal ideology and informal ideology. Formal ideology refers to those official ideological discourses that are narrowly concerned with the CCP's discipline and the socialist

doctrines, which were incorporated in the CCP constitution including Zhao Ziyang's primary stage of socialism, Jiang Zemin's Three Represents, and Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook of Development. Informal ideology refers to those popular ideations that are broadly concerned with the justification of the party's rule to the entire society including the party, such as the promotion of nationalism/patriotism and the emphasis on virtue. Formal ideology and informal ideology play inter-related but different roles in justifying the party's rule.

Notably, Sandby-Thomas (2014) also holds a similar view. However, Sandby-Thomas (2014) only mentions this view in a single paragraph without giving more details. Moreover, his definition of informal ideology and formal ideology seem to be different from this thesis. For example, Sandby-Thomas considers "reform and opening up" as a formal ideology and "market liberalism" as an informal ideology, while this thesis does not.

### 1.5.3 Division of Formal Ideology and Informal Ideology

The CCP's dual ideological strategy involves two inter-related but different types of justification: the communist rule and the authoritarian rule. The first one is to justify why China still needs a communist party to monopoly on power. As mentioned above, while the CCP created the economic miracle, it also put its existence into a dilemma. Since the CCP launched market reforms in the late 1970s, there has been a fundamental contradiction between the CCP's quasi-capitalist economic policies and its socialist commitment. This contradiction led to endless ideological battles/line struggles within the CCP, as mentioned above. The second problem is to justify why China needs one-party rule rather than liberal democracy, which deals with the popular legitimacy of the authoritarian system in China. Arguably, the CCP adopts its dual ideological strategy to deal with these two problems.

Specifically, the CCP employs formal ideology to justify its communist rule and informal ideology to justify its authoritarian rule. This thesis also argues that the *major* audience of formal ideology is the CCP itself rather than society. This is not to say formal ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism doctrines are not propagated to society. Of course, those formal ideologies will propagate to society; however, their primary goal is to settle ideological battles *within* the CCP by making the reality of the political economy in China consistent with its ideological basis and commitment to socialism. In other words, formal ideology is produced for justifying the CCP's existence to itself (i.e. a kind of self-justification). When it comes to legitimizing the CCP's authoritarian rule as a whole, this is the arena in which informal ideology takes place. In short:

*Formal ideology is used mainly for justifying the **communist** rule to the party itself, while informal ideology is for justifying the **authoritarian** rule to the entire Chinese society including the party. In this way, this dual ideological strategy deals with the internal stability (party cohesion) and external stability (popular legitimacy) of the regime respectively.*

#### 1.5.3.1 Formal Ideology: a kind of Self-Justification

##### 1.5.3.1.1 Message of Formal Ideology

Formal ideology signals two primary messages: (1) an ex post facto justification of the CCP's rule and (2) establishing ideological orthodoxy and a leader's credentials. As mentioned, the CCP is facing a fundamental contradiction between its quasi-capitalist

economic policies and its socialist commitment. The most important function of formal ideology is to redefine what is meant by socialism at that moment in time, and thus to provide an ex post facto justification of explaining why the current political economy is *not incompatible* with the CCP's ideological basis and its commitment to socialism. In short, formal ideology *justifies* if not legitimizes the CCP's communist rule. Second, formal ideology also establishes ideological orthodoxy and a leader's credentials. As formal ideology is clearly identified with specific leaders in China, it reflects the personal authority of Chinese leaders and carries a special meaning to assert their power.

Arguably, formal ideology is crucial in settling ideological battles (or so-called line struggles) within the party and thus maintaining party cohesion. As Chapter 2 will discuss, there were intense debates among the CCP elites over whether it was right for the CCP to introduce elements of the capitalist system for generating economic success. In order to fend off the conservative forces' attacks, the reformists had carefully constructed various ideological discourses by portraying their economic policies in socialist terms. In this way, those discourses helped to minimise opposition from the conservative forces and thus maintain party cohesion. However, as formal ideology closely links with power, it can also cause problems: when it is a manifestation of factional positioning, it can lead to fissures in the party. As Chapter 5 will discuss, Jiang Zemin's motivation for power through Three Represents partly led to factionalism and thus undermined party cohesion. Thus, the impact of formal ideology on party cohesion is decided by how formal ideology is employed.

#### 1.5.3.1.2. The Major Audience

As the major audience of formal ideology is the party, formal ideology is mainly constructed by communist language that is used by the communist elites to communicate with each other. This communist language might not be easily decoded and understood by outsiders, but they contribute to the smooth flow of relevant information within the party. For example, as Chapter 2 will discuss, when confronting Hua Guofeng's "two whatevers" argument, Deng Xiaoping launched various intra-party discussions about "the sole criterion for testing truth" and "seek the truths from facts". In this case, when reading the relevant discourse of party documents and newspapers, the party elites who were familiar with political vocabularies could soon understand who (i.e. Deng, in this case) was going to against whom (i.e. Hua) for what (i.e. Hua's "two whatevers").

On the contrary, the masses that were less educated in general and less familiar with communist vocabularies had many difficulties in understanding the real meaning of those formal discourses. For example, as Chapter 2 will discuss, there was an intense debate over whether the commodity economy was compatible with the socialist planned economy within the CCP. Could the masses understand what "socialist planned economy" and "commodity economy" were? Did they really care? In addition, the masses also had fewer channels through which to receive information about formal ideology. This was particularly true when the Internet was not that popular. At that time, the mechanisms of ideological promotion heavily relied on party newspapers and journals, and government meetings, which were not accessible to the masses. Indeed, the CCP's communication with the masses has usually been conducted by mass propaganda that involves populist elements such as popular slogans, as I will explain below.

#### 1.5.3.1.3. The Changing Tendency of the Dual-Ideological Strategy

Since the CCP was founded, it has valued the importance of mass propaganda. In the early revolutionary era, mass propaganda was heavily used by the CCP to promote the communist revolution. After the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established, mass propaganda was used to mobilize the entire Chinese society to participate in mass campaigns during Mao Zedong's rule. At that time, socioeconomic affairs were highly politicized and ordinary people were expected to participate in those mass campaigns. However, those mass campaigns led to long-term national chaos and economic stagnation, and thus undermined the CCP's legitimacy. In the 1980s, after the CCP adopted Deng Xiaoping's de-politicisation approach that emphasized economic reconstruction, mass propaganda became much less important when reform-minded leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang were in charge (Brady and Wang, 2009:771). During the leadership of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, there were even some kinds of open debates over whether mass propaganda should play a role in the reform era (Brady and Wang, 2009:768,771).

As the popular belief in communist ideology was considered by the reform-minded leaders as less critical in the 1980s, the less reform-minded leaders still stressed communist beliefs. As Chapter 2 will discuss, in the early 1980s, the primary cleavage within the party changed to whether it was right for a communist party to do what it was doing and to introduce elements of capitalist system. As mentioned, the reformists constantly had to portray their economic plans in socialist terms in order to fend off attacks from the conservatives. In this context, from 1979 to 1989, the CCP had produced various formal discourses to justify why China still needed a communist party to the CCP itself, as Chapter 2 will discuss. As such, the party members were the principal audience of the CCP's ideological work. The masses received very limited information about the CCP's ideological transition because of limited knowledge and communication channels. At that time, almost all the promotion of those ideological discourses relied on several party newspapers such as the *People's Daily*, which were not for the consumption of the masses.

Yet, the CCP's ideological strategy gradually shifted after the protests of 1989 taught the party a painful lesson about the importance of popular beliefs. Deng Xiaoping (1989) clearly pointed out that failed to maintain popular beliefs is "the biggest mistake" of his reform. Learning from the protest of 1989 and heeding Deng's warning, the CCP leaders gradually turned the CCP's ideological work from the party to the society, and mass propaganda became a renewed focus for the CCP. The main goal of ideological transitions also shifted from justifying why the communist rule adopted quasi-capitalist economic policies (for maintaining party cohesion) to addressing the negative consequences of rapid growth (for popular legitimacy). This shift was reflected in two ways: the popularization of formal ideology and the increasing production of informal ideology.

Previously, formal ideology was not produced for the consumption of the masses, but it is increasingly produced for that purpose today. For example, Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook of Development strongly signaled to the masses whether China is going and what China will look like in the future. Scientific Outlook of Development includes more elements of populist language than previous ideologies such as the "primary stage of socialism" and "Three Represents". This tendency is also accompanied by the development of technology and the CCP's reforms. Nowadays, the masses can assess political information from the Internet very easily and information about the CCP also becomes more transparent. The smooth flow of information to the masses and their increasing educational qualifications led to a tendency to popularize formal ideological discourses, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

More importantly, the CCP has made more efforts in its political and ideological education for the masses since 1989. As mentioned, the danger of changing social values toward liberal democracy was clearly evidenced by the protests of 1989. The party gradually realized that its ideological problems did not only include the justification of its communist rule within itself but also that of its one-party rule to society. In this context, the CCP has produced various informal ideological discourses to discredit liberal democracy for justifying its one-party rule, as the following section will discuss.

#### 1.5.3.2 Informal Ideology: legitimizing the authoritarian rule by delegitimizing alternatives

As mentioned, informal ideology justifies authoritarian rule to the entire Chinese society; thus, informal ideology is formed by populist language that is more convincing to the masses – as opposed to formal ideology that consists of communist language. Arguably, *the justification of informal ideology is a sort of negative approach that attempts to delegitimize alternative political systems – especially liberal democracy, which legitimates the current political system in reverse.* In this way, the ideological legitimacy of the one-party rule is enhanced by undermining the legitimacy of liberal democracy. Specifically, various informal ideological discourses focus on justifying why China does not have to follow the (purely) Western road to liberal democracy, such as why not liberalism or constitutionalism. For example, the CCP’s (in)stability discourse argues that liberal democracy brings instability and chaos.

This approach also entails going back to create history to emphasize Chinese difference. For example, the proponents of the “China model” and “Chinese exceptionalism” argue that China has carved out its own path to modernization without following the West and that China’s unique cultural heritage makes it possible for it to have its own political system rather than liberal democracy (Kang, 2004; Pan, 2003; Pan, 2009; Pan, 2011; Wang, 2012b; Yao, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Zheng, 2010). In order to strengthen its ideological persuasiveness, informal ideology has incorporated various cultural values and patriotic elements into the socialist agenda of the CCP. For example, Jiang Zemin (2001) officially proposed combining “rule by law” with “rule by virtue” as the CCP’s governing strategy for establishing a socialist ideological and ethical system. Under Xi Jinping’s leadership, this anti-liberal democracy approach becomes more explicit. A goal of the national security commission, established in 2014, is to undermine the influence of Western values in order to prevent the Arab Spring from occurring in China (Hayashi, 2014).

Yet, unlike formal ideology that consists of a coherent value system, informal ideology is formed by a set of relatively fleeting and incoherent values. It alone cannot replace the value system to justify the party’s rules – it neither provides an ideological basis for forming certain policies nor guides the establishment of a political system. Thus, informal ideology is a kind of short-term solution that has a shelf life rather than more fundamental things – it might even be used to go against the CCP’s rule in the long run. For example, if Chinese people take China’s status as a global power for granted, they will have high expectations of China’s role in dealing with international conflicts. If the CCP failed to show it is as strong as it claims to be, its discourse of national rejuvenation and patriotic campaigns might be used to overthrow its own rule. Thus, informal ideology can only discredit liberal democracy in the short term; in the long run, the changing political values might still be inevitable without a widely accepted *belief* system in China.



Because of different audiences and goals, the mechanisms for promoting informal ideology mainly rely on mass propaganda that is embedded into every aspect of Chinese society, such as school educations, popular newspapers, movies, songs, literary works, advertising slogans, big events such as the Beijing Olympic, and others. The promotion of formal ideology employs a series of institutionalized channels, such as party newspapers and journals, documents, school training, study groups, and meeting amongst others. Notably, there is no clear line between formal ideology and informal ideology. As I mentioned above, with the CCP's increasing ideological education for the masses after 1989, the boundary between these two types of ideology in terms of functions, audience, and goals becomes less clear. Table 1 summarizes the major distinctions between formal ideology and informal ideology that I discussed above.

**Table 1: Major distinctions between informal ideology and formal ideology in China**

|  | <b>Informal Ideology</b>   | <b>Formal Ideology</b>   |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Examples</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (In)stability discourse</li> <li>• National condition discourse</li> <li>• Discourse of national rejuvenation and the promotion of patriotism</li> <li>• The emphasis on virtues</li> </ul>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socialist Commodity Economy</li> <li>• Primary Stage of Socialism</li> <li>• Three Represents</li> <li>• Scientific Outlook of Development</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Major Audience</b>                      | The entire society including the CCP members   | The CCP  |
| <b>Composition of languages</b>            | Purely populist language   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communist/socialist language</li> <li>• Populist language</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Discourse System</b>                    | A set of relatively incoherent and fleeting values   | A coherent value system  |
| <b>Function</b>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplement formal ideological discourse</li> <li>• Legitimize the authoritarian rule by delegitimizing alternatives – especially liberal democracy (i.e. justifying the <i>authoritarian</i> rule)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It redefines what is meant by socialism at that moment in time and thus provides an ex post facto justification to make the current political economy compatible with the CCP's ideological basis and its commitment to socialism. (i.e. justifying the <i>communist</i> rule)</li> <li>• Establish ideological orthodoxy and a leader's credentials</li> </ul> |
| <b>Mechanism of ideological promotion</b>  | Mass Propaganda including school education, popular newspapers, movies, songs, literary works, advertising slogans, big events such as the Beijing Olympics, etc.  | Party newspapers and journals, documents, school training, study groups, meetings  |
| <b>Its primary role in regime survival</b> | Popular legitimacy   | Party cohesion   |

## 1.6. The Institutionalization of Power Succession

In addition to ideological reforms, the institutionalization of power succession is another crucial survival strategy of the CCP. In this thesis, the institutionalization of power succession refers to “the creation and perpetuation of formal and informal guideline that stipulate how and by whom leaders are selected and removed from power” (Frantz and Stein, 2013:2). As mentioned, ideology and power succession are inter-related. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP has produced various informal ideological discourses, such as political meritocracy and traditional abdication, to justify if not legitimize its power succession. More importantly, ideological battle or line struggle is essentially a kind of power struggle. During Mao Zedong’s rule, ideological battles and power struggles were inseparable elements of mass campaigns – such as anti-rights campaigns and the Cultural Revolution. After the CCP launched its market reforms, the huge gap between communist ideology and the reality of the political economy led to wider ideological cleavages within the party. As mentioned, the elite division seriously strangled the CCP’s decision-making when facing the protests of 1989 and put the party on the brink of the collapse. In this context, the institutionalization of power succession is crucial to minimizing the negatives effects of ideological battles.

As mentioned, the majority of authoritarian regimes failed because of elite divisions rather than being overthrown by the masses. For an authoritarian regime, how successfully to transfer power at the top and prevent a leadership split in the process have always been extremely challenging. Before institutionalization, power succession in China had always been a moment of crisis and chaos, which seriously delegitimized the CCP’s rule. The purge of Mao Zedong’s successors, Liu Shaoqi and Lin Biao, plunged the country into chaos. During the Cultural Revolution in particular, Chinese leaders were dismissed in an arbitrary way. In addition to the national upheaval that was brought about by power struggles, the lack of an institutionalized power had made the general public wary of the party and the way it operated and thus undermined regime legitimacy.

Afraid of elite divisions and brutal power struggles, the CCP has taken great efforts to institutionalize its power succession system. It helped the regime to reduce the negative effects of elite divisions that commonly exist in authoritarian regimes. Through institutionalization, the CCP has developed a power succession system with Chinese characteristics that is capable of maintaining the unity of the leadership during power transitions. Thus, this thesis argues that

*In contemporary China, the institutionalization of power successions is key to maintaining the CCP’s internal stability and ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy.*

This institutionalization has significantly changed contemporary Chinese elite politics. My empirical study on the selection of PSC members suggests that institutional rules have become increasingly important in selecting Chinese leaders at the expense of patron-client ties (Zeng, 2013). The selection of 18<sup>th</sup> PSC members in 2012 strongly emphasized the stability among top leaders.

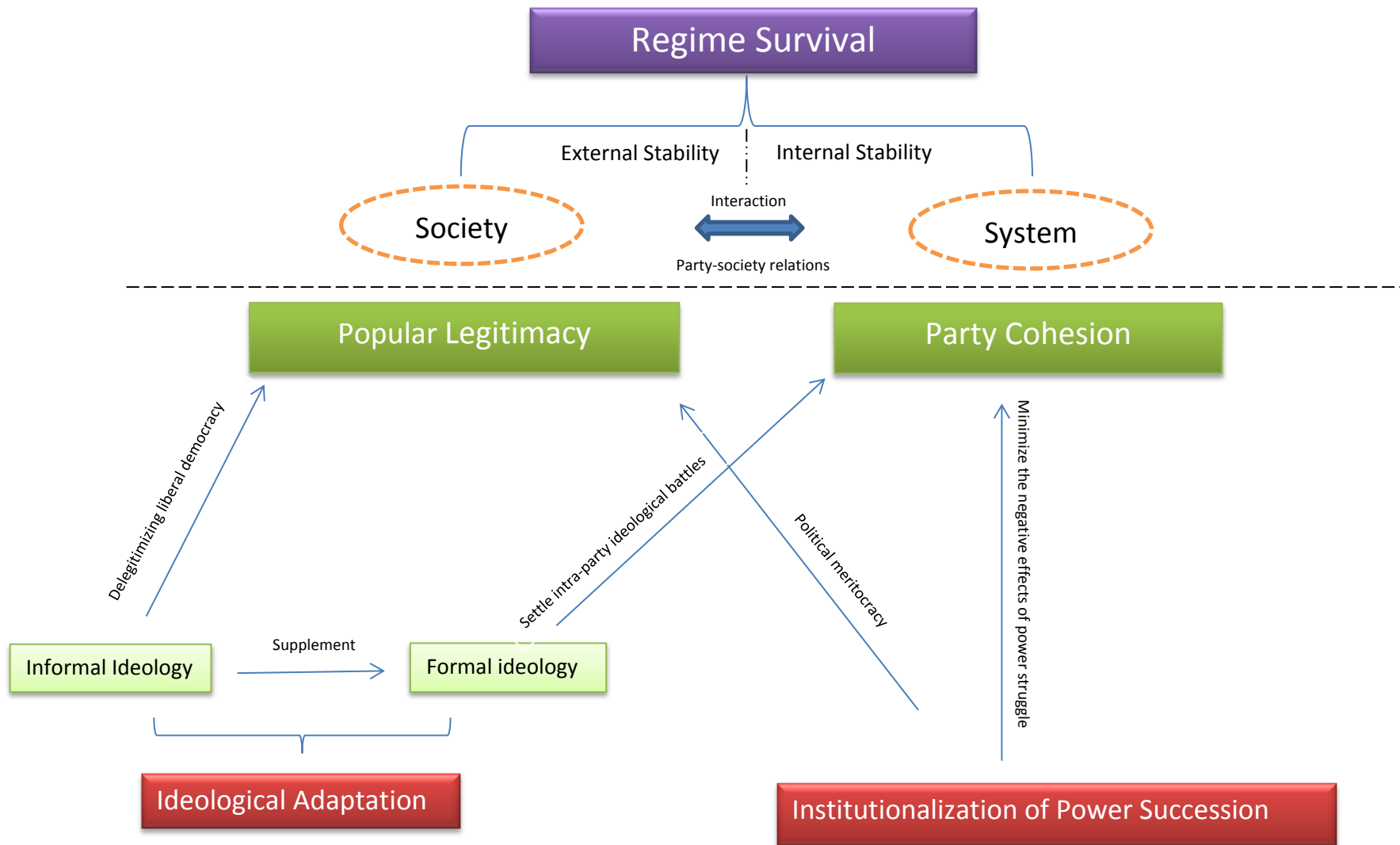
Although there are many doubts about the hidden intense political struggles among Chinese leaders, an undeniable fact is that the CCP has managed to maintain a critical degree of internal stability in the past two decades. The fall of top officials – Chen Xitong in Jiang Zemin’s era, Chen Liangyu and Bo Xilai in Hu Jintao’s era– suggests that power struggles within the CCP remain intense; however, the removal of those officials followed certain rules, such as trial. In Mao Zedong’s era, the interrogation of Mao’s heir apparent and PRC President Liu Shaoqi and his wife had neither formal resolution nor formal written document.

In this regard, the removal of those top officials is much more institutionalized now than in Mao's era.

More importantly, none of the power struggles or the removal of those top officials has generated a considerable level of instability and crisis compared with the cruel political purges before institutionalization. This is not to say that the current level of institutionalization is sufficient to guarantee the unity of the leadership in the long run. Of course, even institutionalized bodies can be subject to manipulation, and there are many grey areas, as this thesis will examine. In the long run, the CCP's destiny is in the hands of internal consensus (i.e. party cohesion) and external support (i.e. popular legitimacy).

The core arguments raised by this thesis are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Core Arguments of This Thesis**



## **1.7. Research Method: A Mixed Qualitative/Quantitative Approach**

This thesis involves a number of qualitative and quantitative research methods. First of all, it relies on a discourse analysis to investigate various Chinese newspapers and journals in order to study the CCP's ideological discourses. The influence of media and state propaganda on authoritarian rule has been widely studied not only in the field of Chinese studies but also in comparative politics. Contrary to the standard claim that the marketization and the diversification of media and the development of the Internet would undermine authoritarian rule, empirical studies on China suggest that they play a positive role in generating legitimacy in China (King, *et al.*, 2013; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011). Empirical evidence shows that more exposure to official propaganda generates greater support for the regime (Bernstein and Lü, 2000; Li, 2004b). The experiment and survey-based quantitative approach provides a way to understand the overall impact of political messages on legitimacy; however, a comprehensive understanding on this issue cannot be reached without studying the specific content and the development of the CCP's ideological discourses. Thus, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach in order to study the CCP's ideological discourses.

Moreover, this thesis also employs a mixed qualitative/quantitative analysis for investigating the views of Chinese intellectuals on the subject of legitimacy. Specifically, I collected 125 Chinese articles with legitimacy in the title published between 2008 and 2012. By using a content analysis, I read all 125 articles and coded them with 75 variables. In terms of data analysis, this thesis uses Pearson's Chi-squared test to analyse how the Chinese intellectuals' arguments are influenced by their research background (including institutions, research locations, and funding sources). It also employs a principal component factor analysis to study how different policies proposed by Chinese intellectuals are knitted together. After factor analysis framed the debate among Chinese elites, I used discourse analysis to study the specific content of the Chinese debate on legitimacy. In addition, I also conducted email interviews with four influential Chinese intellectuals who contributed to this debate in order to study some distinct features of Chinese literature.

## **1.8. Contribution to the Literature**

This thesis makes a number of empirical, theoretical, and methodological contributions to the literature. Parts of this thesis have already been published or are under-review by some journals, as listed on the section of declaration.

### **1.8.1 Empirical contribution**

The empirical contribution of my thesis involves primary data and empirical findings. As mentioned above, this thesis establishes a primary database about the Chinese intellectuals' debate on legitimacy. This Chinese language materials database provides a shortcut for non-Chinese speakers to understand Chinese discourses of legitimacy. Thus, it can be used to build future research studies.

Based on my primary database, this thesis presents many new empirical findings. First, Western scholarship focuses on performance legitimacy and pays insufficient attention to ideology; however, analysts within China still consider ideology to be crucial and express serious concern about performance legitimacy. Second, while many in the West frequently point out the successes of the Chinese response to the financial crisis, Chinese intellectuals seem to become more pessimistic. Third, this thesis finds a fundamental shift in the

legitimacy debate in China, which is driven by various worsening problems caused by economic growth – socioeconomic inequality in particular. Fourth, while many overseas China observers are focusing on the search for Chinese philosophies to underpin a new polity, the Chinese intellectuals are looking to the West instead. Fifth, there is a distinct rising appeal of social autonomy that runs counter to the dominant official line in this debate. Finally, this study finds a correlation between authors’ backgrounds (institutions, research locations, and funding sources) and their dominant arguments about legitimacy. Overall, my empirical study reveals a variety of different views on the CCP’s legitimacy between the Western and Chinese scholarship.

In addition, in order to study the institutional development of power succession in China, this thesis also collects a large amount of primary and secondary data about Chinese elite politics.

### 1.8.2. Methodological Contribution

The mixed qualitative/quantitative research method is developed from the pioneering work of Gilley and Holbig (2009). More details about how it departs from the previous work will be explained in Chapter 4. This research method can be used in many other fields, as it provides a systematic way to study Chinese language materials. For example, it can be used to study the domestic discourse of China’s foreign policies. Specifically, it can help to understand how Chinese intellectuals view “China Dream” and contribute to the field of international relations.

### 1.8.3. Theoretical Contribution

#### 1.8.3.1. Literature of Chinese Studies

This thesis poses a series of theoretical challenges to the relevant literature on the subject of the CCP’s legitimacy. As mentioned, conventional wisdom argues that performance legitimacy – in particular economic performance and stability – is a principal pillar of legitimacy in China. If we observe China from the outside, it is very easy to focus on economic performance. However, within China itself, it is clearly recognized that economic growth may also undermine legitimacy and that economic growth alone may not be able to provide sufficient legitimacy for the CCP’s rule, as Chapter 4 will show. Thus, this thesis suggests that China observers should move from simply growth/performance-focus to consider other elements – for example, how to deal with the negative consequences of economic growth.

Moreover, although there were a few studies on ideology, as discussed above, the issue of ideology is still under-researched in the political science literature on contemporary China in general. This thesis contributes to the limited studies on this topic. By proposing a new analytical framework, this thesis shows how the regime used informal ideology and formal ideology to maintain its rule, which provides a valuable contribution to fill the gap in the relevant literature.

This thesis also contributes to the limited studies on political reforms in China. As Schubert (2008:191) pointed out:

“Political reform is not considered viable and usually discredited as too limited and manipulated by the Communist Party as to deserve its name. Consequently, the impact

of these reforms on the current regime's legitimacy is under-researched, arguably blinding us for a better understanding of its resilience.”

As such, Schubert (2008:191) proposes a new research agenda to study the CCP's legitimacy. Unlike Schubert's agenda that focuses on political reforms at local levels, this thesis contributes to the relevant literature by studying political reforms at the top (i.e. the institutionalization of power succession).

There are many studies that focus on political reforms at local levels – in particular village elections and their impact on regime legitimacy – in both English and Chinese language literature (e.g. Kennedy, 2009; Ma and Wang, 2012; O' Brien and Han, 2009; Schubert, 2008; Schubert, 2014; Schubert and Chen, 2007). Both Chinese and Western scholars agree that village democracy has enhanced legitimacy of local governments in China. As Chapter 4 will discuss, many Chinese intellectuals suggest the further implementation of elections at local levels to maintain legitimacy. Although many Chinese intellectuals highly value village elections, it is notable that none of them suggests extending them to the national level.

Many Western scholars are also very positive on the development of village elections. The positive consequences of village elections in increasing political participation and legitimacy have inspired a debate on future research agendas for the study of village democracy (O' Brien and Han, 2009; Schubert, 2008; Schubert, 2014; Schubert and Chen, 2007). For example, O' Brien and Han (2009) argue that future research should focus less on election procedures and more on democratic quality. In other words, the outcome of democratic election in Chinese villages is worth more attentions than the specific election procedures. However, Kennedy (2009:359) argues that “researchers should not dismiss the importance of elections procedures too quickly.” In my view, election procedures and outcomes are perhaps equally important. Procedures are the essence of electoral democracy; however, only with a positive democratic outcome, electoral democracy will be appealing to the Chinese society.

This thesis accepts that institutional changes at local levels are clearly important – and this is reflected in the relatively large body of work that these elections have spawned. The intention here is not to deny their significance, but instead to focus on the much less often studied dimension of institutional development at the top, and its impact on regime legitimacy. This relative lack of interest is understandable given the opaque nature of elite politics in China and, more importantly, the lack of any move towards elections of top leaders, as I will discuss in Chapter 3. However, the argument here is that there is more to institutional change at the top than elections, and by focusing on the institutional development at the top and its implications for regime survival, this thesis can make a more substantial contribution to the study of legitimacy in China than repeating existing debates on local elections.

#### 1.8.3.2. Literature of Comparative Politics: Authoritarian Resilience?

Authoritarian systems are widely considered as rigid; however, the theory of “authoritarian resilience” suggests that authoritarian regimes can be resilient. By providing a notable addition to support this theory, this thesis also contributes to the literature on comparative politics. Indeed, the debate on authoritarian resilience is inspired by the CCP’s first smooth leadership transition in 2002. While some argue that the institutional changes have made the authoritarian system more sustainable (Miller, 2008; Nathan, 2003; Shambaugh, 2008c:176) and served to strengthen the CCP’s rule (Brown, 2009; Dickson, 2008; Fewsmith, 2006), others contend that this view overestimates the strength of the authoritarian system and ignores its vulnerability (Baum, 2007; Gilley, 2003; Li, 2012a; Pei, 2008; Shirk, 2007).

The success of the leadership transition in 2012 further supports the existence of authoritarian resilience. In 2002, Jiang Zemin only handed over the posts of PRC President and CCP head and still retained the post of military head until 2004. However, in 2012, Hu Jintao handed over all power including military head to Xi Jinping. It was the first time that a new CCP head could take charge of the Chinese army at the beginning of his term since 1978. The full retirement of Hu Jintao marked a more complete and normalized leadership transition. In this regard, the transition in 2012 was more institutionalized than that in 2002.

As mentioned, how to successfully transfer power at the top and prevent a split in the leadership during this process have always been extremely challenging to authoritarian regimes. However, having learnt from the dangers of elite divisions, the CCP has taken great efforts in institutionalizing power succession. The CCP has instituted many rules – such as a retirement age limit – to ensure a rapid cycle of ruling elites without holding democratic elections. Its peaceful leadership transition is arguably a role model for other authoritarian regimes.

Moreover, as mentioned learning from the protest of 1989 and the fall of other communist regimes, the CCP gradually realized the danger of the changing social values toward liberal democracy. In order to maintain its rule, the regime has produced various informal ideological discourses to delegitimize liberal democracy. By deploying this ideological strategy, the CCP has managed to maintain its one-party rule. It posed a strong challenge to the theory of modernization, which asserts that socioeconomic modernization brings value shifts and democratization.

## **1.9. Thesis Structure**

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 looks into the CCP’s concerns about its rule after post-Mao China (from 1976-2012). It shows that the existential crisis has been a constant concern of the party leaders. It argues that the Chinese leaders’ concerns are generated mainly from communist ideology, Mao Zedong, and the negative effects of rapid economic growth.

Chapters 3 and 4 review and juxtapose the English language and Chinese language literature on the subject of regime legitimacy in China respectively. Chapter 3 studies the topic of legitimacy from a Western perspective. Its first part reviews concepts and theories of legitimacy and discusses whether those Western theories can be used to analyse the case of China. The second part of Chapter 3 reviews the English language literature on the subject of legitimacy in China.



Chapter 4 turns to Chinese literature on the subject of legitimacy. It presents an empirical study of Chinese intellectuals' debate on legitimacy by analysing 125 Chinese journal articles with "legitimacy" in their title. Based on this primary dataset, I employed a mixed qualitative/quantitative analysis to understand Chinese discourses of legitimacy. Chapters 3 and 4 reveal a wide gulf between Western and Chinese scholarship in understanding legitimacy in China.

Chapter 5 studies the topic of ideology in contemporary China. It examines formal and informal ideological discourses, the mechanisms of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness. It shows how the regime deployed informal ideology and formal ideology to build popular legitimacy and maintain party cohesion respectively.

Chapter 6 studies the issue of power succession in China. Specifically, based on a large amount of data on Chinese elite politics, it discusses the institutional development of power succession in the past three decades. It argues that the institutionalization of power succession is key to maintaining the CCP's internal stability and capability to maintain legitimacy.

Chapter 7 summarizes the arguments and findings of this thesis and its implications for China's future.

All in all, while Fukuyama (1989) predicted Western liberal democracy as "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution" and "the final form of human government". Ideology and the political system of the authoritarian rule has constantly adapted in China. China provides an invaluable case for understanding the authoritarian resilience and testing our established political theories. But in any case, the evolution of human society in particular ideological and political systems will never meet an end.

## Chapter Two

### Existential Crises of the Chinese Communist Party?

“If we do not reform now, our modernization program and socialist cause will be doomed.”

- *Deng Xiaoping(1978), excerpt from his talk at a conference*

“Popular support is related to the survival or the death of the party.”

- *Xi Jinping, excerpt from his report at a conference (Xu and Zhou, 2013)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter studies the CCP’s concerns about the continuation of its rule and how it addressed these concerns in post-Mao China (1976 – 2012). As it will show, existential crises have been a constant concern of Chinese leaders. This chapter argues that the CCP’s concerns mainly derive from the gap between the reality of the political economy in China and its ideological basis and commitment to socialism, the justification of its founder Mao Zedong, and the negative consequences caused by rapid economic growth. These three sources of existential concerns have been shifting with time in the past four decades.

The first and foremost fundamental dilemma of the CCP’s rule is how to make its ideological basis and commitment to socialism consistent with the reality of the political economy over which it was ruling. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the success of market reform has also created a fundamental dilemma for the CCP’s rule. As this chapter will show, this dilemma has constantly generated the CCP’s concerns about illegitimacy and forced party leaders to portray their economic plans in socialist terms in order to undermine resistance from within the party. In this context, the CCP has constantly put forward various formal ideological discourses to provide an *ex post facto* way of justifying why the current political economy is not incompatible with its commitment to socialism. As this chapter will show, those formal ideologies – such as the socialist commodity economy and the primary stage of socialism – were produced for the party itself rather than society.

The second dilemma of the CCP’s rule comes from the justification of the CCP’s founder, Mao Zedong, and his rule. Recognizing the failure of Mao Zedong’s policies, the CCP fundamentally shifted its primary focus from Mao’s “class struggle” into economic reconstruction after Mao died. However, as established in the Introduction Chapter, if the CCP completely purge the memories and policies of its founder leader Mao, its rule would have a legitimacy crisis. As this chapter will show, the resolution on the party’s history in 1981 officially set the tone to evaluate Mao Zedong and ended the then cleavage within the party; however, driven by the changing socioeconomic and political landscapes, the justification of Mao Zedong has again become a problem for contemporary leaders.

In the case of the second dilemma, the party’s concerns about existential crises are generated from the past. It is about how the party justifies what it is doing now in light of what it has done in the past (i.e. from 1949-1976). In other words, the concerns about existential crises are from what was done and said before. Unlike the second dilemma, the party’s concerns about the existential crisis in the third dilemma are generated from the party’s present problems – in particular the problems caused by economic growth. When it

comes to these problems, the existential crisis derives from what is being done now. As this chapter will show, the problems caused by economic growth, such as corruption, are considered by the party leaders as a matter of “life and death”.

This chapter explores how the above three issues have combined together and dominated the CCP’s concerns about the continuation of its rule by analysing a series of debates within the party since 1976. This chapter divides the intra-party debates into three stages. During the first stage (1976-1981), the debate was primarily about how the party should deal with Mao Zedong and his political legacies (i.e. party history). While Hua Guofeng and his supporters continued to stress the “genius of Mao” after 1976, Deng Xiaoping claimed that parts of Mao’s policies were wrong. This debate ended with Deng’s victory after the CCP released the resolution on party history in 1981, which officially evaluated Mao Zedong’s contribution and mistakes, as this chapter will discuss.

Afterwards, the focus of the intra-party debate shifted to whether it is right for a communist party to be doing what it was doing and introducing elements of a quasi-capitalist system. The reformists considered the quasi-capitalist economic policies to be essential to promote economic growth, whilst the conservatives argued that the economic plans of the reformists were products of capitalism that betrayed communism. After the second stage of debates (1981-1992) ended with the CCP’s determination to establish a market economy in the early 1990s, the debate moved to the third stage (1992- present) that is still on-going. It focuses on two major issues: (1) how far towards capitalism the CCP should/could go and (2) how to deal with the negative consequences of the transition from socialism and the impacts on legitimacy that were beginning to emerge.

## **2.2 The Existential Crisis in Mao Zedong’s Era (1949–1976): the fall of communist fanaticism and the cult of personality**

As mentioned above, the ultimate goal of – and theoretically the only reason for the existence of – a communist party is to deliver communism. During Mao Zedong’s rule, the CCP primarily legitimized its monopoly on power by being a vehicle to deliver a communist society. After the CCP established the PRC in 1949, the party explicitly built its legitimacy on communist ideology. Although communist ideology in China integrated the elements of Chinese nationalism, as Chapter 4 and 5 will discuss, it did not undermine the determination of the CCP to achieve communism. The CCP (1958) clearly pointed out that the fundamental goal of its second five year plan (1958-1962) was to complete the socialist construction and “to create conditions for the transition into communism”. During the Great Leap Forward campaign, the entire country was enthusiastic about establishing a communist society under the communist slogans such as, “to establish a decent communism within two years” and, “one day is equivalent to twenty years, communism is in sight”.

A clear-cut line between communism and capitalism was another distinctive characteristic during Mao’s rule. Mao’s “continuous revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat” theory suggested that the CCP should continue the communist revolution even after it took power in order to eliminate capitalism *completely*. According to Mao, the “major” contradiction of Chinese society was still “between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, and between the socialist road and the capitalist road” (CCP, 2001). “Class struggle” was thus set as a primary task of the CCP. The party launched waves of radical mass campaigns – such as the anti-rightist campaign of 1956 and the Cultural Revolution – to eliminate private

ownership, exploitation, and capitalism. At that time, the entire country had been encompassing the pervasive communist projects; socioeconomic affairs were highly politicized and ordinary people were expected to participate in those mass campaigns.

In addition to the above communist fanaticism, the cult of personality of Mao Zedong was another key pillar of legitimacy in Mao's era. Mao's loyal supporters deliberately built Mao's personal authority. For example, in the mid-1960s, the party's various mouthpieces – including the *People's Daily*, the *Liberation Army Daily*, and the *Red Flag* – published a series of articles entitled: “to vigorously and particularly establish the absolute authority of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought” (e.g. Yang, 1967). “The great leader Chairman Mao” was then described as a figure who led China to fight against imperial invaders and feudalism and to establish a “new China”. Some propaganda also deified Mao, for example, as “‘the venerable heavenly ruler’ who was ‘better than the Red sun’ and ‘more enduring than heaven’” (Weatherley, 2006:33). Yet, the rise of Mao's personal authority (i.e. charismatic legitimacy) was made at the expense of the authority of rules and the law (i.e. rational-legal legitimacy).<sup>2</sup> Mao frequently used his personal authority to go against the established rules and procedures, and the decisions of the majority of the leadership, which seriously undermined the authority of those rational-legal procedures (Weatherley, 2006:34).

Arguably, communist ideology and the charismatic authority of Mao Zedong had been the foundation of regime legitimacy in China for a couple of decades after the PRC was founded until a series of policy failures and radical campaigns led to certain kinds of legitimacy crises. Lack of an institutionalized power succession system led to cruel power struggles within the party in Mao's era. Driven by the power struggles within the party, the CCP launched a series of mass campaigns under the name of ideology (i.e. line struggle or ideological battle). As Chapter 6 will discuss, both of Mao's heirs apparent who were also the second-most powerful men in China – Lin Biao and Liu Shaoqi (then the PRC President) – fell during these campaigns, followed by waves of large-scale political purges to their families and supporters. The lack of an institutionalized succession system made the general public wary of the party and the way it operates, and this therefore undermined the regime's legitimacy.

Moreover, the long-term national chaos – instigated by endless radical campaign and many flawed economic policies – seriously damaged the Chinese economy. The Cultural Revolution in particular had already begun to unravel the old system even before Mao died (Weatherley, 2006). Driven by the radical communist ideology, many economic principles – such as “the development of productive forces”, “the development of the commodity economy”, and “distribution according to work” – were criticized as products of capitalism and thus abandoned. In the meantime, the radical communist slogans – for example, “it is better to have socialist grass than capitalist seedlings”, “to cut off the tail of capitalism” and “to criticize ‘the theory of productive forces’” – seriously undermined the enthusiasm of the entire society for economic production.

In addition, the long-term national chaos led by the Cultural Revolutions did not only seriously disrupt people's normal lives but also many normal economic activities. As Hua Guofeng (1978) clearly recognized at the 5<sup>th</sup> People's Congress, “from 1974 to 1976 ..., the entire national economy almost reached the brink of collapse”. Economic stagnation instigated by the Cultural Revolution made the CCP increasingly incapable of delivering the

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<sup>2</sup> The definition of legitimacy including rational-legal legitimacy will be discussed in Chapter 3

socialist goods that it promised before. The widening gap between the poor reality of people's living standard and the utopia of the communist ideology inevitably led to Chinese people's doubts about the party and its communist ideals.

### **2.3 The Existential Crisis under Hua Guofeng's rule (1976-1981): the Shadow of Chairman Mao Zedong**

In the mid-1970s, the existential crisis deteriorated after Mao Zedong, whose charisma was a key source for the CCP's legitimacy, passed away. In the same year, the death of all three key founders of the PRC and the CCP (Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai, and Marshall Zhu De) and the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake were considered by many Chinese people as an indicative of the coming regime change that the CCP had lost its "mandate of Heaven" (Zhong, 1996) – a traditional Chinese philosophy concerning legitimacy as Chapter 3 will discuss. In addition, as mentioned, the long-term national chaos and the nearly collapsed economy seriously undermined the CCP's popular support. All the above factors together led to the CCP leaders' serious concerns about the continuation of the CCP's rule. In 1978, Deng Xiaoping (1978) clearly pointed out the possibility of "the death of the party and the state" and warned that "if we do not reform now, our modernization program and socialist cause will be doomed".

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao, ideology and politicisation became the *problem* rather than the solution, because people were reluctant to participate in mass campaigns. Driven by the party's concern about the existential crisis, the reformists finally grasped the initiative to make a fundamental shift in the CCP's ruling strategy from "class struggle" in Mao's era to "four modernizations" – especially economic reconstruction. In other words, the party attempted to shift its legitimation from being ideology-based towards being performance-based. This transition turned a new page in the PRC's history; however, such a fundamental transition was destined to be challenging, because it was more or less an attempt to throw away everything that the party had been previously doing to build revolutionary legitimacy – in particular the communist ideology and Mao Zedong.

After 1976, there were a series of debates within the CCP about how to justify the shifting emphasis on "four modernizations" in light of Mao and his political legacies. Based on their contrary views about Mao and Mao's policies, Deng Xiaoping and Hua Guofeng adopted two different approaches to justify the party's shifting emphasis on economic reconstruction: Hua Guofeng attempted to redefine Mao's speech and thought, whilst Deng Xiaoping chosen to re-justify the party's history including Mao.

#### **2.3.1 Hua Guofeng's Redefinition of What Mao Thought and Said**

After Hua arrested the Gang of Four in 1976, Hua Guofeng attempted to get rid of the radical Maoist policies and put forward his new agenda; however, such a transition was extremely difficult to Hua – a hand-picked heir apparent of Mao. As mentioned earlier, Mao Zedong's excessive charismatic legitimacy left little room for rational-legal legitimacy at that time, because Mao frequently used his personal authority to go against the established rules and laws. Although Hua was then the Premier and the first deputy chairman of the CCP, these institutional posts did not grant Hua much rational-legal legitimacy. The legitimacy of Hua

Guofeng as the top leader mainly came from Mao's words, "with you in charge, I am at ease"; thus, Hua had to keep his loyalty to Mao Zedong and Mao's doctrines (Weatherley, 2006; Weatherley, 2010).

In this context, Hua and his supporters continued to stress the "genius" of Mao (Weatherley, 2006). In justifying the party's shifting focus on to economic reconstruction, Hua Guofeng attempted to legitimize this shift by using Mao Zedong's legacies. On the one hand, Hua proposed a "two whatevers" argument – "we firmly uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made and we unswervingly adhere to whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave". By endorsing Mao's decisions, including the decision to select Hua as heir apparent, Hua intended to consolidate his power.

On the other hand, Hua began to redefine what Mao thought and said in order to justify why the party shifted its focus from Mao's "class struggle" to "four modernizations". At that time, a series of Mao's texts that mentioned economic problems were first officially published in newspapers under Hua's leadership (Chen, 1995a). In short, what Hua's leadership really argued was that it was Chairman Mao's ideas to stress economic development.

### 2.3.2 Deng Xiaoping's Re-justification of Mao Zedong

Contrary to Hua Guofeng's full adherence to Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and his supporters held that Mao should be considered responsible for the failure of past policies, especially the Cultural Revolution. However, Deng Xiaoping also recognized that the CCP's rule would be in danger if the party *fully* repudiated Mao and Mao's doctrines. Thus, on the one hand, when launching an alternative way of Mao's agenda, Deng Xiaoping actually called his approach "holding high the banner of Mao Zedong Thought". On the other hand, Deng Xiaoping launched a series of intra-party debates to prepare a theoretical basis for his new agenda. In order to oppose Hua Guofeng's "two whatevers" argument, Deng Xiaoping chose to highlight Mao Zedong's words about "seeking truth from facts". Deng criticized some party cadres who "talk about Mao Zedong Thought every day, but often forget Comrade Mao Zedong's fundamental Marxist viewpoint and abandon or even oppose his method of seeking truth from facts and of proceeding from reality and integrating theory with practice" (English translation: Chen, 1995a: 42). Indeed, what Deng really argued was that it was Mao's ideas to focus on "seeking the truth from the facts", and thus the party should assess Mao Zedong and Mao's legacies from the facts. The theory of "seeking truth from facts" did not only help Deng to defeat Hua Guofeng's "two whatevers" argument, but also provided a theoretical basis from which to reassess Mao Zedong.

Moreover, Deng Xiaoping and his supporters also launched a "socialist democracy campaign" in the late 1970s. This "socialist democracy campaign" advocated a collective leadership and opposed the cult of personality, and thus undermined Hua's position (Goodman, 1985). This campaign is also related to the CCP's institutionalization of leadership transition, as I will discuss in Chapter 6. In addition to intra-elite conflicts, the CCP also attempted to use this campaign to legitimize its rule by providing democracy under its leadership (Goodman, 1985).

In the late 1970s, after Deng gradually seized the initiative, Deng and his supporters considered a re-justification of the party history – especially of Mao Zedong – to be essential for reconciling the party's past and their new agenda on economic reconstruction. In this way, the party blamed a part of the past failure on Mao Zedong, and thus legitimized the new

emphasis on economic reconstruction by being distinct from Mao's wrong policies. However, as mentioned, if the CCP completely purge the memories and policies of its founder Mao Zedong, the party's history and rule would be in trouble. Thus, Deng's strategy was to maintain Mao Zedong Thought as the guiding theory, but distance this from what Mao Zedong himself actually thought and what was done under the banner of his thought.

In this context, the resolution on the party history was made in 1981 after two years of drafting work led by Deng Xiaoping and Hu Yaobang. The "resolution on certain questions in the history of our party since the founding of the PRC" was the first official evaluation of the party on several crucial, controversial issues. The resolution was largely positive about Mao Zedong's contribution, but it also clearly pointed out Mao's mistakes. It denounced the failure of Mao's ruling strategies and policies – such as the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward – which were mainly based on communist ideology and the cult of personality, and thus provided a theoretical basis for Deng to take a different approach based on economic performance. In addition, it also contributed to ending the cleavage within the party on the topic of the party's history so that the party could concentrate on economic reconstruction. Yet, thirty years later, with the problems caused by economic growth – especially corruption and socioeconomic inequality – had deteriorated: Mao Zedong and his doctrines again became a problem for the CCP, as I will discuss below.

In short, by criticizing the failure and the loss of Mao's agenda on "class struggle", Deng and his supporters legitimized their new agenda – a de-politicisation approach that shifted the legitimation of the communist rule from being ideology-based toward being performance-based. This de-politicisation approach allowed room to make quasi-capitalist policies for generating economic success; however, the loosening ideological and political control also inevitably led to an ideological crisis. This ideological crisis did not only undermine the popular support of the CCP but also split it from the inside, which almost overthrew the CCP in the late 1980s, as I will discuss below. Ironically, the danger of the de-politicisation approach – that was used by Deng as an alternative to correct the problems with Mao Zedong's ideology-oriented approach – was clearly highlighted by Mao in 1958:

"To ignore ideology and politics, to be always preoccupied with business matters—the result will be a disoriented economist or technologist and that is dreadful. Ideological and political work is the guarantee for the completion of economic, technological work and it serves the economic base. Ideology and politics are, moreover, the commanders, the 'sour'. A slight relaxation in our ideological and political work will lead our economic and technological work astray." (Mao, 1990)

## **2.4 The Existential Crisis under Deng Xiaoping's Rule: Walking the Tightrope between Economic Success and Communist Doctrines (1981-1992)**

The above section explores the disputes within the CCP over how to deal with Mao Zedong and his legacies (1976-1981). In the early 1980s, this cleavage was settled by the resolution on the party history, and the focus of the intra-party debate gradually moved to the second stage. Simply by not being Mao and the Gang of Four, Deng was allowed room to promote his own policy agenda (Weatherley, 2006); however, Deng and his supporters used two different strategies to prove to the party and to society that their de-politicisation approach was theoretically the right way forward.

In dealing with economic affairs, the CCP leadership avoided the influence of Marxist-Leninist doctrines in order to be more flexible in promoting economic growth. As

productivity and efficiency were the core of Deng's reforms, a series of quasi-capitalist economic policies were adopted. This strategy had been successful in winning popular support for the party until at least the 1980s when the negative consequences of rapid growth emerged. However, in the political field, the CCP leadership still strictly endorsed Marxist-Leninist doctrines, and any challenge to the party's monopoly on power was an absolute taboo. In this way, Deng attempted to prove to the party that his reforms would not harm the party's rule.

The CCP's contrary attitude in economic and political fields led to a fundamental contradiction of its rule between generating economic success by utilizing quasi capitalist economic policies and the fact that this was a communist party that should justify its rule by achieving communism. As this section will show, this contradiction generated endless power struggles within the CCP – from either real conviction or more programmatic power motivation. This stage of debate mainly lay in the cleavage between the reform-minded leaders (reformists) and the less reform-minded leaders (conservatives). Notably, there was no clear division between these two groups of leaders, and it was not just a completely two-line struggle; however, this simple, defective framework helped us to understand better the forces that were for and against market reforms.

The reformists felt that it was essential to adopt more quasi-capitalist economic policies for generating economic success. The pragmatic economic policies helped to promote growth; however, they also challenged the ruling basis of the communist party – a vehicle to deliver a communist society. From the perspective of orthodox communism and the conservative ruling elites, the communist party's initiatives in market reforms were illegitimate because they veered away from communism. Using the orthodox of Marxist and communist doctrines, some conservatives accused the privatization and quasi-capitalist policies of reformists as being products of capitalism that would put an end to socialism. For example, many argued that the development of the private economy – in which exploitation widely existed – had gradually replaced the dominant role of the state economy, and that the party members should get away from those private businesses (Ding, 2006:172). Indeed, these kinds of disputes commonly existed in communist regimes. As the Marxist literature does not endorse privatisation, the question of private property was one of the most fundamental challenges to communist regimes that promoted economic reforms (Schroeder, 1988).

In short, the second stage of debates within the party (1979-1992) was about whether it was right for a communist party to introduce the elements of a quasi-capitalist system and to move away from communist doctrines. The resistance of the conservatives increased the difficulties of making and implementing the market reform programmes. In this context, on the one hand, the reformists continued to push forward market reforms in order to use economic success to establish their credentials. On the other hand, they portrayed their economic plans in socialist terms in order to undermine the resistance from the conservatives. In this context, various formal ideological discourses were produced for the self-justification of the CCP.

#### 2.4.1 The Evolution of Ideological Discourse on the Socialist Economy: the Birth of a Market Economy from the Body of a Planned Economy (1982-1992)

This section explores the debates that occurred in the second stage (1982-1992), and how they were resolved by analyzing the evolution of the CCP's ideological discourses on the socialist economy from the “planned economy supplemented by the market economy”, the



“socialist commodity economy”, “the combination between planned economy and market regulation”, to the “socialist market economy”.

#### 2.4.1.1 The Battle over the Market Elements: “Planned Economy Supplemented by Market Economy” (jihua jingji weizhu, shichang jingji weifu, 1982)

In order to promote economic transition, the reformists gradually embedded market elements into China’s planned economy after 1979. In the relevant period, a series of market elements, such as the law of value, were hotly debated among the party theorists. During the Cultural Revolution, the law of value was not highly esteemed, as it was often linked with capitalism. Even in 1978, some still held that the law of value might destroy the socialist planned economy and even lead to capitalism if not halted (Liu and Gong, 1978:6). After 1979, the Chinese academics gradually reached the consensus that the state should apply the law of value (e.g. Tao and Cao, 1979; Yuan and Zhang, 1979).

During the first stage of China’s market reforms (1979-1984), the role of the “planned economy” – that was widely considered as the principal (if not sole) subject of the socialist economy – was unshakable. According to the birdcage theory of Chen Yun (1995b), who was one of the top leaders, the relationship between economic development and national plans was like that between a bird and its cage. In other words, economic development (i.e. the bird) needed to be controlled by the national plans (i.e. the cage). At that time, the party theorists widely agreed that the socialist economy was equivalent to the planned economy; however, their disagreements lay in the extent to which the planned economy should contain the market elements (Zhu, 2006:110). The mainstream view was that the socialist economy should be a planned economy but one from which the market should not be excluded (Su, 1982:17; Tao and Cao, 1979:51; Yuan and Zhang, 1979). Some pro-reform theorists took a further step to support the development of the “commodity economy” in the late 1970s. For example, Zhang Yuanyuan, an economist based in Guangdong, argued that China’s socialist economy was a commodity economy rather than a planned economy (Zhang, 1980). However, the discourse of the “commodity economy” was still a relatively sensitive concept, because it was often linked with capitalism. Thus, Zhang’s argument received wide criticism from the conservatives at that time (e.g. Jiang, 1981).

Soon after Hua Guofeng’s fall, the formulation of the “planned economy supplemented by the market economy” appeared in the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report. As this report clearly pointed out (Hu, 1982), a fundamental principle of China’s economic reforms should be that “a planned economy is the principal subject of the Chinese economy, whilst the production and the circulation of some products could be adjusted by the market”. This official recognition of the market marked the victory of the reformists; however, there was still much resistance to the increasing proportions of the market elements in the Chinese economy. For example, some party theorists criticized the reformists for their over-emphasis on the market and their ignorance towards the planned economy (e.g. Tian and Zhang, 1981; Ye, 1982).

The discourse of the “planned economy supplemented by the market economy” succeeded in breaking down the commonly held views of Mao’s era that the socialist economy should be a pure, planned economy. Yet, in essence, this discourse was still a formulation of the planned economy because it considered the state plan as the essence and the foundation of socialism with the market as the secondary and the subordinate. In other words, the market was operated in the framework of a planned economy.

Did the masses in the early 1980s understand and care what the “planned economy supplemented by the market economy” is? The audience of this battle over the planned economy and market elements was clearly the party rather than society.

#### 2.4.1.2 The Battle over Commodity: “Socialist Commodity Economy” (shehui zhuyi shangping jingji, 1984)

Driven by rapid economic growth, the market gradually took root in the Chinese economy in the mid-1980s. The reformists attempted to push for further market reforms and to recognize officially the development of the commodity economy; however, they received much resistance. Following the debate in the late 1970s, the relationship between the commodity economy and the planned economy became a hot topic among the party theorists. On the one hand, some argued that the planned economy and the commodity economy were mutually exclusive because they were fundamentally contradictory (Ma, 1982). According to this view, the commodity economy could easily be outside the planned economy’s control, and only the production and exchange of commodities rather than a commodity economy existed in the socialist economy (Ma, 1982). More importantly, many considered the commodity economy a product of capitalism. For example, a party theorist argued that if the commodity economy were to be highly developed, China would no longer be a socialist society (Ma, 1982).

On the other hand, some argued that the commodity economy and the planned economy were not mutually exclusive (Peng, 1982). According to this perspective, as China had already allowed the production and the exchange of commodities, the development of a commodity economy seemed to be inevitable. This view argued that the state could control enterprises in many ways, even in a commodity economy, so it could therefore reconcile the fundamental contradiction between the commodity economy and the planned economy (Peng, 1982).

In the end, the reformists won the battle over the commodity economy, marking a remarkable milestone in China’s market reforms. In 1984, the discourse of the “socialist commodity economy” was officially introduced by the party document “The CCP’s Decisions on Economic System Reform”. This document addressed a series of theoretical conundrums about the socialist economy. The most notable ideological transition was to break the view that “the planned economy and the commodity economy are mutually exclusive”. It argued that: (1) only by developing a commodity economy could the party invigorate the economy, which could not be achieved purely by administrative measures and mandatory plans; and, (2) the development of the socialist commodity economy needed certain kinds of planned regulations and administrative management; therefore, the planned economy and the commodity economy were not mutually exclusive (CCP, 1984). In order to highlight the importance of the commodity economy, this document clearly pointed out that a commodity economy was a “prerequisite” for China’s modernization.

In order to justify the socialist nature of this discourse, the party document also clearly distinguished the socialist commodity economy from the capitalist economy. It claimed that

“Regarding the issues of the commodity economy and the law of value, the fundamental difference between the socialist economy and the capitalist economy do not lie in whether a commodity economy exists and whether the law of value plays a role, but in the different ownership, the existence of the exploiting classes, whether labouring people are masters, the purposes of production, whether the party could

consciously apply the law of value to the scale of the society, and the different range of commodity relations. In China's socialist conditions, labor and all state-owned enterprises and resources – including land, mines, banks, and railways – are not commodities” (CCP, 1984).

According to a party theorist, the discourse of the “socialist commodity economy” was an attempt of the CCP's ideological construction to foster the ideas of the commodity economy in the minds of the party cadres and the masses for promoting a smooth transition toward a new economic structure (Liu, 1991). By moving the relevant theoretical obstacles of the commodity economy and socialism, the reformists intended to put their relevant economic policies into practice in a more effective and efficient way. However, as established in the Introduction Chapter and mentioned above, the audience of the formal ideology was the party. Did ordinary Chinese people really understand what the “socialist commodity economy” was? Did they care whether the commodity economy was compatible with the socialist planned economy? Obviously, the masses who were less educated and less familiar with communist vocabulary were not the major audience of the relevant communist discourses.

2.4.1.3 Primary Stage of Socialism (shehui zhuyi chuji jieduan): “the state regulates the market and the market guides enterprises” (guojia tiaojie shichang, shichang yindao qiye, 1987)

Following the establishment of the socialist commodity economy, the role of the market was further elevated by the CCP in 1987. Zhao Ziyang's report at the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, (Zhao, 1987) introduced a new discourse: “the state regulates the market and the market guides enterprises”. Notably, this report did not mention the “planned economy” at all, which was the first time that a relevant party report had abandoned this discourse. Moreover, facing increasing pressure from the conservatives on the growth of the private economy in the mid-1980s, Zhao's leadership also put forward the theory of the “primary stage of socialism” at Congress in 1987.

According to Zhao, this theory has two key meanings (CCP, 2001). The first is that “China has already been a socialist society; and we should insist on rather than abandon socialism”. Although the practical significance of this theory did not lie in its first meaning, the emphasis on socialism was quite important for the reformists to demonstrate their loyalties to the party and to communist ideology, and thus to fend off attacks from the conservatives who were criticized of reformists' quasi-capitalist policies – either from real conviction or from more pragmatic power motivation.

The second meaning of this theory was that “China is still at the primary stage of socialism”. In essence, the primary stage of socialism meant a stage of underdevelopment – which would endure for at least 100 years according to Zhao Ziyang (CCP, 2001). Unlike the previous communist discourses that emphasized whither China was going (e.g. communism and prosperity), this theory justified where China was now. This theory also justified the huge gap between China's socioeconomic reality and the utopian ideology of Marxism. In other words, it provided an ex post facto way of explaining why China was still – and would continue to be – poor after almost 40 years' rule of the “brilliant” CCP leadership. It suggested that the poor socioeconomic reality of China was not a result of the CCP's rule but of the “objective historical circumstances” (Weatherley, 2006:113).

This theory also provided a justification for the party's history and the focus on economic construction. It explained why the past policies of the CCP in Mao's era failed. As

Zhao argued (CCP, 2001), the primary stage of socialism was a special stage that China – but not all socialist countries because of China’s lagging productivity and underdeveloped commodity economy – was bound to go through, which China could not simply go beyond. It suggested that the past strategies of Mao – such as the “Great Leap Forward” that intended to “jump” from the primary stage of socialism into full communism – were wrong in the first place. In this way, it justified why Deng’s leadership moved away from Mao’s “class struggle” towards economic reconstruction.

Most importantly, this theory suggested that the primary stage of socialism cannot be surpassed, and thus the party had to concentrate on economic development so that full communism would be achieved one day. At this stage, the “means” of capitalism could be used for the “ends” of achieving communism. In other words, the quasi-capitalist economic policies were legitimate for achieving the goals of communism. This theory thus provided a basis to allow the reformists to adopt more quasi-capitalist economic policies. In practice, this concept was so widely used by local officials to defend their economic policies that it was surrounded by widespread cynicism. A popular Chinese saying was that “the theory of the primary stage of socialism is like a big basket that everything can be put in” (Ding, 2006:173).

Similarly with the discourse of the “socialist commodity economy”, the masses were clearly not the major audience of the “primary stage of socialism”. Zhao’s words that the “primary stage of socialism would endure for at least 100 years” might pass a message to society for justifying why people’s poor situation would not be improved soon; however, the primary audience of the “primary stage of socialism” was clearly the party itself, because this theory attempted to fend off attacks from the conservatives and allow more rooms for reformists to make more quasi-capitalist economic policies.

#### 2.4.1.4 The Protest of 1989 and “the Combination Between the Planned Economy and the Market Regulations” (jihua jingji yu shichang tiaojie xiang jiehe, 1989)

As mentioned above, a delicate task for the reformists to push forward their plans was to use economic success to convince the party and society on the one hand and to construct various socialist discourses to justify the socialist nature of their economic policies on the other. This already complex task became increasingly unlikely in the mid-1980s – when the social complaints about the negative social consequences of rapid economic growth gradually exacerbated and gave way to popular protests. Social instability caused by those complaints undermined the reformists’ power to confront the oppositions from other groups of elites.

The conservatives joined forces with other elites whose benefits were undermined by market reforms and argued that the popular protests were a result of Hu Yaobang’s – the General Secretary and a reform-minded leader – connivance in “bourgeois liberalization”; thus Hu was held responsible for social instability. After Hu Yaobang was dismissed under the pressures exerted by those dissatisfied leaders in 1987, the CCP leadership split further. On the one hand, the then Premier Zhao Ziyang – a reform-minded leader – replaced Hu Yaobang to put forward continually market reforms. On the other hand, Li Peng – a conservative leader – was appointed as the new Premier. Unlike his predecessor Zhao Ziyang, Li Peng was more critical of market reforms. The disputes over market reforms within the top leadership left a hidden danger the effects of which eventually surfaced in 1989.

Arguably, the protest of 1989 was so dangerous and damaging to the CCP’s rule mainly because it happened when two “contradictions” coincided. In 1989, the party was highly divided by the struggles between the conservatives and the reformists. This intra-party

contradiction more or less strangled the decision-making of the party when the protests broke out. At the same time, the external contradiction between the party and the society became sharp with the deteriorating negative consequences of market reforms. The complaints of society gradually erupted in the form of extensive popular protests across the country. A highly divided party was thus unable to confront the social forces and maintaining social stability in 1989. In the same logic, a key for the CCP's survival after the protest of 1989 was the re-unification of ruling elites led by the strong intervention of the veteran leaders. Soon after the CCP reached a consensus at the expense of the reformists, it was able to put down the protest immediately.

The CCP survived the protest of 1989 with the resurgence of conservative forces. Five days after 4 June, 1989, during his talk with the martial law troops in Beijing, Deng Xiaoping (1989) reaffirmed that China should continue to adhere to "the combination between planned economy and market regulation". Deng's discourse of the socialist economy was quite similar to Zhao Ziyang's "the state regulates the market and the market guides enterprises". Nonetheless, market reforms were inevitably obstructed with the fall of the reformists in the late 1980s.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, after the protest of 1989, the CCP's ideological focus gradually shifted from the internal consumption (i.e. how to justify what the party was doing to itself) towards the external consumption (i.e. how to justify negative consequences to society). In the mid-1980s, the CCP gradually realized that not only the self-justification of its communist rule but also the broader justification of its authoritarian rule to society was important. Five days after the CCP used military forces to end the protest on 9 June, 1989, Deng Xiaoping (1989) pointed out clearly in his speech to martial units that:

"During the last ten years, our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education – not just of students but of the people in general".

Learning from the protest of 1989 and heeding Deng's warning, the CCP made greater efforts in the political and ideological education of the masses. In this context, many informal ideological discourses have been produced to resist pro-liberal democratic values in order to maintain popular beliefs in the one-party system, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

#### 2.4.1.5 The Socialist Market Economy and Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour (1992)

The political climate changed dramatically after the protest of 1989. Many reformists including the then General Secretary Zhao Ziyang fell, and the conservatives who turned against liberalism and market reforms took control of the party. After 1989, as the term "reform" was easily linked with "bourgeois liberalization" and "peaceful evolution", many party bureaucrats deliberately kept their distance from it. In the meantime, the argument of the conservatives – that the market economy was a product of capitalism – prevailed. For example, the then head of *People's Daily*, Gao Di (1990), argued that "the market economy is going to remove public ownership; in other words, it rejects the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, and it is going to promote capitalism". Accordingly, the CCP's emphasis on the planned economy increased at the expense of the market economy.

Yet, the dominance of the conservative forces did not last long. In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union shocked the CCP. The CCP's increasing concern about whether it would

repeat the failure of other communist regimes stimulated its desire to change. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, after 1991 the CCP's think tanks conducted a large numbers of systematic studies on the failure of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. CASS analysts summarized the failure of Eastern European communist regimes in three ways (Zhou, *et al.*, 2000): the division among rule elites, dissatisfied masses, and the penetration of pro-liberal values. The CCP realized the urgency and significance of reclaiming legitimacy.

Under pressure to generate popular support, the CCP was forced to promote market reforms for economic performance. In this context, the market reform programme re-captured the CCP's attention. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping started his famous "southern tour" to push for the market reform programme. Soon afterwards, the report of the 14<sup>th</sup> Party Congress officially set the establishment of "the socialist market economy" as a fundamental goal. After over two decades of theoretical and practical exploration, the market economy finally replaced the planned economy in China. In addition to economic reform, the CCP also put forward further ideological reforms (e.g. informal ideology) and political reforms (e.g. institutionalization of power succession). Yet, whilst the CCP's efforts in economic reform have been widely acknowledged, the relevant literature pays insufficient attention to those reforms in the discourses of ideology and the political system.

In sum, the above section explores the debate over the socialist economy within the party (1979-1992). It shows how various ideological discourses were constructed by the reformists to fend off the attacks from the conservative ruling elites. As I argued in the Introduction Chapter, these formal ideological discourses were not for the consumption of the masses but the party itself. In other words, at this stage these formal ideologies were still primarily there for reconciling the contradictions among ruling elites (i.e. party cohesion) rather than building popular legitimacy. The understanding of the masses was not only restricted by their poor educational background and knowledge about communist vocabularies but also the limited channels to transfer the relevant information – party newspapers such as the *People's Daily* that was not mainly for the consumption of the masses.

In the early 1990s, the second stage of debate was over. After two decades of debating the socialist economy, the CCP finally decided to embrace a market economy. Then, the intra-party debate entered the third stage that is still on-going. In this stage (1992- present), it focuses on two major aspects: (1) how far towards capitalism the CCP should and can go and (2) how to deal with the negative consequences of the transition from socialism, and those consequences' impacts on legitimacy, which were beginning to emerge, such as corruption and socioeconomic inequality.

## **2.5 The Existential Crisis in Post-Deng China (1989-2012): the Side Effects of Economic Growth**

The economic success completely changed the political-socioeconomic landscapes in contemporary China. As Chapter 3 will discuss, economic performance is widely considered by Western scholars as a principal pillar of the CCP's legitimacy. It seems that as long as China can maintain economic growth, the Chinese leaders can sit back and relax. However, as Chapter 4 and the following section will show, economic success does not undermine the CCP's concerns about the continuation of the one-party rule; indeed, those concerns are

generated by this growth. Problems caused by rapid economic growth have created both internal and external problems of the CCP's rule: popular legitimacy and party cohesion.

First of all, problems caused by economic growth have been undermining popular legitimacy in China. In other words, thirty years of spectacular economic growth – a major source of legitimacy in China – is also *a major source of legitimacy crisis*. In contemporary China, the top three perceived legitimacy threats by Chinese intellectuals are all problems caused by economic growth – socioeconomic inequality, changing values, and corruption, as Chapter 4 will discuss. With the further deterioration of those problems, reclaiming legitimacy became more urgent and important to the CCP's rule.

As such, the primary focus of the CCP's ideological work shifted from justifying why the CCP should adopt some quasi-capitalist economic policies (for maintaining party cohesion) to addressing the negative consequences of rapid growth (for popular legitimacy). As Chapter 5 will discuss, the party has produced various informal discourses to delegitimize pro-liberal democracy values and has revised formal ideological discourses to provide an ex post facto justification of the negative consequences of rapid growth.

Notably, this shifting focus is not driven by the declining importance of the CCP's self-justification but the urgency of reclaiming popular legitimacy. The self-justification of the party is still crucial for: (a) maintaining the already unpopular communist beliefs within the party; and, (b) justifying why the current reality of political economy in China is not incompatible with its commitment to socialism. As discussed above, moving away from revolutionary idealism did help the government to improve their performance and deliver economic benefits to the people; however, it lost the very basis of the communist party's monopoly on power – a vehicle to deliver the class victory and a communist society.

Moreover, although the danger of the elite divisions declined in comparison with before – a decline which was driven by the institutional development of power succession and the changing elite politics –, the danger was still fatal. The deterioration of problems caused by economic growth exacerbated the ideological division between the New Leftists and the Liberals. This ideological division provided a widening ground for ideological battles and power struggles. Similar to Mao's era, ideology continues to be used as a weapon for power in contemporary China, as the following section will discuss in the case of Bo Xilai.

In sum, after 1989, the contemporary Chinese leaders had a delicate task built on four factors:

- (1) continuing to stress the importance of economic development,
- (2) explaining why the communist party has a monopoly on power;
- (3) fending off potential internal attacks from within the party itself and from people who might criticize the ideological turn – either from real conviction or from more pragmatic power motivation;
- (4) dealing with the negative social consequences of rapid economic development.

As proved by the fall of Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, the above, complicated task seem to be an impossible mission. As such, Chinese leaders' concerns about the continuation of the CCP's one-party rule have not lessened in contemporary China.

### 2.5.1 Corruption and Three Represents in Jiang Zemin's term

In Jiang Zemin's era, the rampant corruption bred by economic growth had become increasingly damaging. The report of the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress clearly pointed out that if the party did not crackdown on corruption, "the party will run the risk of losing its ruling position and the party might head for self-destruction" (Jiang, 2002). Towards the end of his term, Jiang Zemin put forward his formulation of party theories: Three Represents. This theory urged the party members to maintain their "advanced nature" (e.g. probity). More importantly, the first 'represent' of Three Represents – to represent the most advanced social productive forces – provided a theoretical basis for expanding party membership to private entrepreneurs. In other words, it justified why those "capitalists" could be a part of the party. It seemed to be an attempt of the CCP to form a kind of alliances between political and economic elites, marking a transition of the CCP from a proletariat party towards an elite governing party.

Yet, this transition towards the elite approach seems to get away from the very basis of the CCP's rule – communism and being there for the proletariat. Expanding the party's membership to private entrepreneurs suggests that the CCP officially acknowledges entrepreneurs and managers as the new social "strata" (jie ceng) – a major target that was destroyed by Mao's "class struggle" (Holbig, 2009). As such, Three Represents inevitably led to strong resistance from many party elites. Some party members criticized that the ideological turn of Three Represents disobeys the CCP's commitment to socialism and thus made the CCP illegitimate. For example, Zhang Dejiang (2000b; 2000a) – who was then the party chief of Zhejiang Province and is now the chairman of the People's Congress – published an article in 2000 in which he accused some party cadres of having "many muddled understandings" over this issue and argued that private entrepreneurs should not be allowed to join the CCP. Otherwise, Zhang (2000b) warned:

"It will make indistinct the party's nature and its standard as vanguard fighter of the working class and mislead people into thinking that 'he who is rich has the qualification to join the party'. The basic masses of workers and peasants who knew just too well the pains of what it was like in the old society when people fawned on the rich and looked down on the poor would be led to misunderstand the party ideologically and distance themselves from the party emotionally. This will affect and weaken the mass basis of the party." (English Translation: Holbig, 2009)

In order to end the dispute within the party and maintain the unity of the party, Hu Jintao reinterpreted Three Represents as "Three for People" (san wei min). Hu's emphasis of Three Represents shifted from the first 'represent', the most advanced social productive forces, to the third 'represent', the interests of most Chinese people. In this way, this new interpretation reverted back to the populist approach of the party.

### 2.5.2 The Widening Socioeconomic Inequality and Ideological Divisions in Hu Jintao's Era

In Hu Jintao's term, China became the second largest economy in the world. Nonetheless, economic success did not reduce the party's concern about legitimacy; on the contrary, this concern became more explicit. The report of a party plenum in 2004 clearly expressed this concern (CCP, 2004):

"It is not easy for a proletarian political party to seize power, and still less easy for it to hold onto power, and especially over a long period. The party's governing status is not congenital, nor is it something settled once and for all. We must think of danger in time



of peace, strengthen our awareness of peril, profoundly absorb the experiences and lessons of the rise and fall and success and failure of certain ruling parties in the world, more consciously strengthen the building of the party's ability to govern, and always govern and hold power well for the people.” (English translation: Ash, 2004:1154)

This report explicitly warned of the importance and the urgency to strengthen the CCP's ruling capacity for maintaining legitimacy. As I mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the CCP considers this ruling capability as an inner cause of its legitimacy. According to the report (CCP, 2004), to strengthen the CCP's ruling capacity is “a major strategic issue bearing on the success or failure of China's socialist cause, the future and destiny of the Chinese nation, the life or death of the party, and enduring political stability in the land” (English translation: Ash, 2004:1153). Notably, the above report significantly intensified the debate over legitimacy among Chinese intellectuals that is observed in Chapter 4 and in a previous study of Gilley and Holbig (2009). As Chapter 4 will discuss, over 40% of the party intellectuals in the legitimacy debate argue that the regime is in certain forms of legitimacy crises or challenges, compared with only 1% of them who considered legitimacy in China to be high.

In Hu Jintao's era, the problems caused by economic growth further deteriorated. The control of corruption did not improve. As Hu Jintao (2012b) clearly warned at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, “if we fail to handle this issue [corruption] well, it could prove fatal to the Party, and even cause the collapse of the Party and the fall of the state”. In addition to rampant corruption, the further deterioration of socioeconomic inequality became another crucial obstacle to the CCP's rule. In this context, Hu Jintao proposed his formulation of party theories – Scientific Outlook of Development and Harmonious Society. As Chapter 5 will discuss, Scientific Outlook of Development attempted to adjust the party's ruling philosophies from being efficiency-oriented towards being equality-oriented in order to promote more sustainable development.

#### 2.5.2.1 Division between the Leftists and the Liberals

The problems of corruption and socioeconomic inequality did not only threaten popular legitimacy but also party cohesion. Indeed, for the past three decades, the CCP has not been singing with one voice. The ideological battles between the pro-left elites and the pro-liberal elites have never ended. Although there is neither clear division between these two groups of elites nor consensus on the definitions of “The Leftist” and “the Liberal”, these two terms help us to understand the general ideological divisions between elites in contemporary China.

The Leftists and the Liberals point out the same problems in contemporary China, such as the widening socioeconomic inequality and corruption; however, their solutions are completely different (Ma and Zhang, 2014). The Leftists consider the inequality to be a product of liberalism and market reforms. They argue that the state should play a bigger role in China's socioeconomic affairs, such as providing more social welfare, and redistributing of socioeconomic resources. Some Maoists argue that China should move towards Maoism and socialism. However, the Liberals consider the inequality to be a result of inadequate market reforms; thus their solution is that the state should retreat from socioeconomic affairs. Over the issue of ideology, they argue that China should accept universal values – democracy, human rights, and freedom.

The different visions of the Leftists and the Liberals lead to a series of disputes. The justification of Mao Zedong and the party's history is particularly notable. As discussed

above, the resolution on the party history in 1981 ended the dispute; however, the party's history again becomes a problem for contemporary CCP leaders, influenced by today's various problems created by economic growth. The major cleavage lies in the assessment of Mao Zedong's rule – in particular the merits and demerits of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution – and Deng Xiaoping's "reform and open up".

From the perspective of the Leftists, the current socioeconomic problems are a result of over-marketization and moving away from socialism in the period of "reform and open up". Although it is questionable whether the majority of the Leftists really support Mao's policies such as mass campaigns and communes, Mao Zedong is used as a political symbol to support pro-left policies in contemporary China. The Leftists attempt to arouse underprivileged groups' and nationalists' memories of Mao's rule – a "great" era without corruption and inequality and a strong China that had a hardline stance against the West. To some extremists among the Leftists, Deng Xiaoping's new approach of "reform and open up" was a kind of coup that betrayed Maoism and communism. In their discourses, Mao Zedong is a hero who saved China, and the Cultural Revolution achievements outweigh its errors. Thus, some, such as members of Utopia, argue that China should move back to the first thirty years of Mao's rule.

From the perspective of the Liberals, Mao Zedong's rule including communist fanaticism and the cults of personality in the first thirty years of the PRC is completely wrong, and the new period of "reform and open up" is moving toward universal values. As the Liberals intend to push for further market reforms and even political reforms that move towards liberal democracy, they appeal to the party to get further away from the communist doctrines and Maoism. In the discourse of some Liberals, Mao is nothing but a dictator who brought disaster to China (e.g. Mao, 2013).

#### 2.5.2.2 Bo Xilai's Challenge: fundamentally different beliefs or just an attempt to grab hold of power by using ideology?

The above ideological battle combined with the disadvantaged groups' discontent about the negative consequences of the rapid economic growth intensified the power struggles among the CCP leaders. In this context, the then Chongqing party head Bo Xilai held high the flag of New Leftists in order to gain the membership of 18<sup>th</sup> PSC. In Chongqing, Bo launched a series of red culture movements – including the promotion of Mao Zedong's quotes, red or revolutionary songs, and revolutionary TV programmes – to establish his ideological orthodoxy. In order to cater to people's dissatisfaction about socioeconomic inequality, Bo Xilai also launched the "strike the black / anti-organized crime campaign", which brought about the arrest of many private entrepreneurs. At that time, Bo's policies were widely endorsed not only by Chongqing people but also by New Leftists.<sup>3</sup> For example, some pro-left scholars including Wang Shaoguang and Cui Zhiyuan argue that Chongqing's development provide a unique experience and could be characterised as the "Chongqing model" (Cui, 2009; Ji, 2009; Su, *et al.*, 2011; Wang, 2011b). This model relied on the role of

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<sup>3</sup> At that time, this view was shared by most of my friends in Chongqing where I was born and grew up. However, many entrepreneurs disliked Bo Xilai and his policies because he destroyed the local economic and political ecology; and some entrepreneurs fled from Chongqing because of his anti-organized crime campaign. Those New Leftists include nationalists and Maoists. Bo Xilai and his policies are acclaimed on the New Leftists' websites including Utopia and Red China.

the state in socioeconomic affairs, which was different from the pro-liberal, market developmental models of coastal developed regions such as Guangdong.<sup>4</sup>

Similar to line struggle in Mao's era, the orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism were again used as a powerful weapon for power in Bo's case. Although the leadership transition in China was institutionalized to a certain extent at that time, Bo Xilai's way of competing for the top power – a democratic, election-like publicity campaign involving a distinct policy agenda and a strong appeal to the masses – posed a strong challenge to the legitimacy of the power succession system in China. Bo's challenge suggests the significance to further institutionalizing the CCP's power succession system – especially with regard to the contested elections of central leaders, as Chapter 6 will discuss.

The case of Bo Xilai also raised a question that this thesis addresses: is Bo Xilai's ideological banner motivated by fundamentally different beliefs or just an attempt to grab hold of power by using ideology? Is Bo Xilai a real left-wing advocate? Obviously, Bo's challenge involved many elements of political opportunism. Bo Xilai neither showed his pro-left nor orthodox Marxism stance when he served as the Mayor of Dalian, the Governor of Liaoning, and the Minister of Commerce. His pro-left approach became evident only after he was appointed to work in Chongqing. Chongqing's special circumstances were a key factor leading to Bo's pro-left campaigns and policies, because its growth heavily relied on the government. Bo would not have promoted the same policies and campaigns if he were appointed the governor of Guangdong. In this respect, Chongqing's socioeconomic conditions played a role in affecting Bo's policies.

Moreover, quite a few aspects of Bo Xilai's economic policies were liberal. The foreign investments in Chongqing had increased by over 50% per year during the first three years after Bo arrived in Chongqing (Ji, 2009). The Chongqing government also took great effort to attract big enterprises including Foxconn who was accused of squeezing labour benefits. The Chongqing government also ambitiously planned to become a regional financial centre. In short, on the one hand, Bo used mass campaigns to portray himself as a protector of underprivileged social groups and to establish him as an orthodox socialist/communist leader. On the one hand, he maintained the liberal elements of his economic policies in order to maintain economic performance. All of these efforts were perhaps taken in order to strengthen his political bargaining chip for the 18<sup>th</sup> PSC seat. Thus, Bo's challenge – a “self-promotion campaign” – was not a pure product of his political beliefs.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, there are two approaches to understanding ideology: through the belief system and through the discourse. Obviously in this case, Bo's campaigns were driven not only by his beliefs but also by a more pragmatic power motivation. As long as Bo could show his respect to Maoism and Marxism, ideological orthodoxy would grant Bo power and influence – no matter if he really believed in them or not. In this sense, the approach that considers ideology to be a discourse enables a more comprehensive understanding over the role of ideology in China.

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<sup>4</sup> The Guangdong experience is also the so-called Guangdong Model, which is frequently mentioned in contrast to the Chongqing model. However, Zhang Dejiang, who replaced Bo as the Party Chief of Chongqing and who is now a PSC member, denied the existence of the Chongqing model, although the reports of the “Chongqing model” frequently appeared in Chinese newspapers before Bo's fall.

## 2.6. Summary

This chapter explores the CCP's concern about the continuation of one-party system (1976-2012). As it shows, existential crises have been a constant concern of party leaders in China. It argues that this concern mainly comes from how to justify the CCP's rule in light of three issues: communist ideology, Mao Zedong, and the problems caused by economic growth. These issues combined have dominated the debates within the party. After Mao Zedong died in 1976, the cleavage within the party mainly lay in how to deal with Mao and his legacies. After this debate ended with Deng Xiaoping's victory in the early 1980s, the focus of intra-party debates gradually moved to whether it was right for a communist party to introduce elements of a capitalist system and move away from communist doctrines. Since the final acknowledgement of a "market economy" in the early 1990s, the party elites have concentrated on: (1) how far towards capitalism the CCP should and can go and (2) how to deal with the negative consequences of the transition from socialism and their impact on legitimacy.

In order to reconcile the fundamental contradiction between the reality of the political economy and the CCP's ideological basis and commitment to socialism, contemporary Chinese leaders have constantly revised party ideologies – not only formal ideologies such as Jiang Zemin's Three Represents and Hu Jintao's Scientific Outlook of Development, but also informal ideologies, as Chapter 5 will discuss. However, these heavy investments in ideology did not receive sufficient attention in the English language literature. As the next chapter will examine, in analysing regime legitimacy in China, the topic of ideology is under-researched, because conventional wisdom of Western scholarship highly emphasizes performance legitimacy and many consider ideology obsolete nowadays.

## Chapter Three

### Understanding Popular Legitimacy in China from a Western Perspective

“Everyone agrees that economic performance represents the foundation of the CCP’s continued ability to assert its authority.”

– *Laliberté and Lanteigne (2008b:5)*

“Government performance stands alone as the sole source of legitimacy in China.”

– *Zhao Dingxin, a sociology professor of the University of Chicago (2009:428)*

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and reviews concepts and theories of legitimacy and the English language literature on the subject of legitimacy in China. The first part discusses Western theories of legitimacy – including normative legitimacy, empirical legitimacy, and critical legitimacy – and their limits in analysing the case of China. The second part of this chapter reviews regime legitimacy in China from a Western perspective. It shows that ideology is a crucial topic that does not receive sufficient attention from the English language literature on the subject of regime legitimacy in China.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, conventional wisdom emphasizes performance legitimacy, especially economic performance, and many misguidedly consider ideology to be obsolete nowadays. However, economic success alone could not explain the entire legitimacy source of the CCP. The rapid economic growth also creates many legitimacy problems, as discussed in Chapter 4. Moreover, ideological factors play a significant role in transforming people’s perceptions of economic growth, as this chapter will discuss. In other words, the impact of economic growth on legitimacy is affected by ideology.

Similarly, ideology is also important to the CCP’s capability to maintain social stability. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP’s instability discourses carefully constructed and disseminated a potential scenario – that without a strong ruling party, China might fall into civil unrest, national turmoil, and economic stagnation. This discourse exploited the people’s concern about an unstable and splitting China and thus contributes to people’s compliance with the current social order.

In addition to economic performance and social stability, nationalism is another important pillar of legitimacy in China (Breslin, 2009; Darr, 2011; Fang, 1997; Lam, 2003; Li, 2001b; Lieberthal, 2004:334-335; Lin and Hu, 2003; Ostergaard, 2004; Saich, 2004; Shambaugh, 2001; Zhao, 1998; Zheng, 2004). Yet, nationalism alone is not an ideology, as this chapter will discuss. As such, the legitimizing role of nationalism is better addressed in the broader context of ideological discourse in China.

In addition to ideology, institutional change is another crucial aspect that did not receive sufficient attention in the relevant literature. As Schubert (2008) argues, political reforms have been generating a “critical degree” of regime legitimacy in China. Thus, Schubert (2008) set up a new research agenda to study political reforms in China in order to fill the gap of the literature, as the Introduction Chapter discussed.

### 3.2 Legitimacy: Concepts and Theories

Legitimacy is an important concept of political studies. This term comes from the Latin word *legitimare/ legitimus*, which means “to make lawful”, and is similar to the term *legality*. In the context of law, it refers to citizens’ compliance with the law no matter whether the law is right or not. In the field of political studies, legitimacy refers to the rightness of a state, which is more than just “legality”. The term legitimacy is used in many disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, and law. As a doctorate thesis in political studies, legitimacy here refers to political legitimacy.

For the purpose of this thesis, I adopt Lipset’s (1981:64) definition of legitimacy that “involves the capability of the system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society”, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. Huntington (1993:46) suggests that political scientists should avoid discussing legitimacy because “legitimacy is a mushy concept.” Legitimacy is hard to measure, and the term per se is complex and controversial. Opinions differ on definitions and understandings of legitimacy. There are three main schools of legitimacy theories: normative legitimacy, empirical legitimacy and critical legitimacy.

#### 3.2.1 Three Schools of Legitimacy

##### 3.2.1.1 Normative Theorists’ Approaches

Normativists approach legitimacy from a philosophical perspective. The normative legitimacy of an institution or a regime is measured by a set of right and just standards. In other words, a regime is legitimate if it meets those standards. The moral justification of political authority is an essential element of political legitimacy; however, a potential problem with this approach is that it is hard to define what is just and right. As societies have different cultures, they therefore have different values. Liberal democracy, freedom, and human rights that developed from Western countries are limited in their ability to measure legitimacy in China – which has different normative values, as I will address below.

Moreover, a set of eternal, universal values is almost unrealistic. Values and moral standards are dynamic rather than static. The ancient normative values, such as the divine right of kings, have now been replaced by democracy, human rights and freedom. Social values and norms are changing with time, and so are normative standards. The normative approach of legitimacy can be divided into three in terms of time periods: classical normativists, modern normativists, and contemporary normativists.

##### 3.2.1.1.1 Classical Normativists

In Europe, studies of political legitimacy can be found as early as in Ancient Greek times. According to Habermas (1991:181): “problems of legitimacy are not a specialty of modern times. The formulas of *legitimum imperium* or *legitimum dominium* were widespread in Rome and in the European Middle Ages. Political theories occupied themselves with the issue of the rise and fall of legitimate domination, in Europe at the latest since Aristotle, if not since Solon”.

Classical normativists are the earliest thinkers in the field of legitimacy. Classical Greek philosophers, including Plato (Plato, 2000) and Aristotle (Aristotle, 2000), were interested in searching for a set of eternal standards – particularly justice and virtues – and using them as

criteria to measure the legitimacy of political regimes. In ancient times, the justification of legitimacy was always associated with divine power. For example, the divine right of kings represent the foundation of legitimacy in ancient Western states.

### 3.2.1.1.2 Modern and Contemporary Normativists

The rise of modern normativists was perhaps associated with people's declining belief in theocracy. Modern normativists gradually replaced old standards with new ones – the rule of law, democracy, and freedom. For example, *The Social Contract* of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who is one of the most famous modern normativists, reshaped the relationship between the citizens and the state (Rousseau, 2008). Building on the thoughts of those who previously studied the social contract, John Rawls (1971; 1993), one of the most famous contemporary normativists, proposes modernized values to measure legitimacy. In *A Theory of Justice*, for example, Rawls (1971) argues that there are two principles of justice:

“First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.”

These principles of justice tend to be so utopian that they are almost impossible to practice.

Contemporary political philosophers are debating the relationship between democracy and political legitimacy. On the one hand, many considers democracy necessary for political legitimacy (Buchanan, 2002). Pure proceduralism holds that the legitimacy of democratic outcomes simply depends on the fairness of the democratic procedures rather than on the quality of such an outcome (Manin, 1987; May, 1952). In this sense, only democratic regimes are legitimate. Rational proceduralism contends that both the fairness of the democratic procedures and the quality of the democratic outcome are important (Pettit, 2001; Pettit, 2003). On the other hand, some proponents of democratic instrumentalism argue that the quality of the democratic outcome is key to deciding whether democracy is necessary for legitimacy (Raz, 1995). In this sense, legitimacy does not necessarily need democracy if democracy does not produce a better outcome.

The above debate emphasizes the quality of the democratic outcome and the fairness of the democratic procedures; however, the factors of historical traditions and political culture also matters. As Peter Burnell (2006:560) argues,

“The absence of a democratic culture among the mass of society might not prevent autocratic opening by a regime, but it would certainly obstruct democratisation's progress further on... an absence of liberal democratic convictions among both elite and mass looks very unpromising indeed, even if outside actors do tilt the incentive structure in favour of making some limited opening.”

In the case of China, insufficient liberal democratic procedures have not prevented the authoritarian regime from receiving strong popular support. As the Introduction Chapter mentioned, various studies find that the CCP enjoys strong legitimacy. As China has different historical-cultural traditions, it has different legitimacy philosophies, as I will discuss below. Thus, using Western philosophies of legitimacy – such as democracy and human rights – to measure the normative legitimacy of the Chinese regimes, may meet with some problems.

### 3.2.1.2. Empirical Theorists' Approach

Popular support plays a key role in the legitimacy of a regime; thus, unlike the normative approach that emphasizes normative values, the approach of empirical theorists focuses on empirical elements. This approach argues that the political legitimacy of an institution or a regime should be measured from the perceptions of its people. The most influential work of this approach is Max Weber's classification of legitimacy. Weber's formulation inspired many studies on legitimacy and is still one of the most influential works in political studies. Thus, some argue that Weber's formulation "has the same status in social science that an older Trinity has in Christian theology" (Cited from White 1986).

According to Weber (1968), a state is based on three aspects of legitimacy: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy. The traditional form of legitimacy rests on "an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of the status of those exercising authority under them" (Weber, 1968). The traditional belief of the divine king is an example. The charismatic form of legitimacy rests on "devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him" (Weber, 1968). It is relevant to those revolutionary or religious leaders, such as Lenin and Mao Zedong. The rational-legal form of legitimacy rests on a belief in the "legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (Weber, 1968). Democratic countries are most relevant to this form of legitimacy. Modern states are based on different combinations of the above forms of legitimacy.

Notably, these three types of legitimacy are inter-related. Charismatic legitimacy might be both a cause and consequence of traditional legitimacy. For example, the successor of a charismatic leader might acquire some charismatic legitimacy from the predecessor if they have a very close relationship – kin in particular. The long-existing ruling may become routine, and thus enhance traditional legitimacy. In ancient societies, traditions might generate charismatic legitimacy by idealizing and deifying the rulers. For example, in ancient China, the emperors declare themselves to be the sons of Heaven. In the long run, the belief that the emperor is the son of Heaven becomes a holy tradition, and thus generates traditional legitimacy for the empire. The new successor will gain charismatic power because he "is" the son of Heaven according to the holy tradition. In modern democratic countries, elections and democracy can form some kinds of traditions, and thus generate traditional legitimacy for the regime and newly elected leaders.

Yet, Weber's formulation work has also been widely criticized. According to Beetham (1991:8), "the whole Weberian theory of legitimacy has to be left behind as one of the blindest of blind alleys in the history of social science." Weber's work on legitimacy has several flaws. First, it ignores the moral basis of legitimacy (Gilley, 2009). The empirical legitimacy approach emphasized whether people obey the rules of the regime, but paid insufficient attention to whether this regime is moral or not. Second, Weber emphasized the relationship between the leaders and their subordinates, but the relationship between the leaders/their subordinates and the ordinary people is much less examined (Pakulski, 1986). Third, claiming legitimacy does not define what legitimacy is, and nor does it equate to legitimacy (Gilley, 2009). Weber's formulation of legitimacy suggests that legitimacy claim is equal to legitimacy; however, those claims per se are not a part of legitimacy, nor do they define what legitimacy is. Although the state always tends to legitimize itself, people do not always believe its claims.



Following Weber's formulation, many political scientists have studied the topic of legitimacy further, and this topic has gradually become a core concept of political science. For example, Linz (1988) argues that legitimacy refers to "the belief that in spite of shortcomings and failures, the existing political institutions are better than others that might be established and therefore can demand obedience." Lipset (1981) argues that legitimacy "involves the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society."

### 3.2.1.3 Critical Theorists' Approach

As discussed above, the normative school is considered to be flawed for ignoring empirical elements, and the empirical school is criticized for its insufficient attention to normative values. Habermas attempted to mix those two approaches and reconstructed legitimation theories by combining empirical elements and normative values – a school of critical legitimacy. Habermas (1991:204) argues that empirical legitimacy "can be employed in the social sciences but is unsatisfactory because it abstracts from the systematic weight of grounds for validity" and normative legitimacy "would be satisfactory in this regard but is untenable because of the metaphysical context in which it is embedded." Thus, Habermas proposed a new concept of legitimation: "reconstructive legitimacy".

According to Habermas (1991:178), legitimacy refers to "a political order's worthiness to be recognized." Although there is much room to argue that this definition can be categorized into normative legitimacy, critical legitimacy is different from normative legitimacy in some ways. The values and norms of normative legitimacy tend to be eternal, ideal, and supernatural; however, those of reconstructive legitimacy are closer to the socio-cultural circumstances at that time. Yet, as Zhao Dingxin (2009:417) argues, the critical legitimacy approach "can be very penetrating. At the same time, such analysis also tends to be elitist and arrogant, producing conclusions that are often empirically unverifiable and in some cases naively wrong."

### 3.2.2 Western Legitimacy Theories and the Case of China

After reviewing Western philosophies of legitimacy, this section discusses whether they can be used to explain political legitimacy in China.

#### 3.2.2.1 Can the Western Theory of Normative Legitimacy Explain the Case of China?

As discussed above, many contemporary political philosophers argue that democracy is necessary for legitimacy. In this sense, non-democratic regimes including the authoritarian rule in China are illegitimate. Indeed, except a few prominent scholars (e.g. Burnell, 2006; Burnell and Schlumberger, 2010), conventional wisdom of Western scholarship argues that autocracy is inherently instable and lacks of legitimacy. Fukuyama (1996), for example, classified China into the category of low "trust" nations. This view is theoretically and empirically flawed. Theoretically, as Sandby-Thomas (2014: footnote 9) argues, "if one accepts that all democratic systems are not equally legitimate, then it follows that all non-democratic systems are not equally illegitimate and so the corollary must be that non-democratic systems can acquire legitimacy". Empirically, various survey data including the World Value Survey and the Asian Barometer Survey find that the CCP enjoys strong political support in China, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter.

Arguably, the deep-rooted ideological beliefs among many Western scholars are one reason for the normative inference that the CCP is “illegitimate”. In the 1990s, many Western scholarly journals refused to recognize the results of those surveys that found that the CCP enjoyed strong legitimacy. According to Wang Shaoguang (2010b; 2011a:304), those surveys had problems getting published in Western scholarly journals for a while because they challenged the popular bias against authoritarian regimes. The journal reviewers frequently doubted that political fear in China might lead to inaccurate responses to survey interviewers (Wang, 2010b; Wang, 2011a:304). Even now, some are still questioning the validity of attitude surveys in China (e.g. Feng, 2013a:10-11; Huang, 2013). However, almost no systematic empirical evidence is provided to support their normative understanding about low popular support in China.

On the contrary, the result of those studies about strong popular support in China remain robust, when many methods – such as “external validity of institutional trust measurement” and “control for political fear in multivariate analysis” (Yang and Tang, 2013) – are used to test their reliability, validity, and replicability (Chu, 2013; Kennedy, 2009; Yang and Tang, 2013). In order to address the concerns about politically sensitive questions in China, some surveys include “don’t know” answers. Previous literature suggests that if respondents want to “conceal” their true views, they will often refuse to answer or choose the “don’t know” option (Yang and Tang, 2013:420). However, the nonresponse level of the 2004 China Values and Ethics Survey is lower than that of major democratic countries (Yang and Tang, 2013:420).

A core problem with the popular normative bias against the CCP’s strong legitimacy may be its insufficient attention to Chinese normative values of legitimacy. Many Western scholars tend to use Western normative values to measure political legitimacy in China. If we use Western values – democracy, human rights, and freedom – to judge the CCP’s rule, then the CCP is no doubt illegitimate. However, political legitimacy is formed by perceptions of Chinese people, not the outside world, including the West. As such, whether the CCP is legitimate or not should be measured by Chinese normative values (i.e. Chinese ruling philosophies). As some argue, “an observer sitting outside the system might find a particular arrangement unjust and unacceptable, but they must nevertheless conclude that it is legitimate when those governed believe it to be so” (Bradford, *et al.*, 2013). Indeed, China has its own ruling philosophies that are distinct from those of the West, as the following section will discuss.

### **3.2.2.1.1 Traditional Chinese Philosophies of Legitimacy: Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism**

Similar to Western classic philosophers, ancient Chinese thinkers also approach the right to rule from a normative perspective; however, their normative values of legitimacy are fundamentally different from the Western ones. In order to contrast the fundamental difference between Chinese and Western philosophies of legitimacy, it is necessary to review the ruling philosophies of ancient China here. The three major ancient Chinese schools of thoughts – Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism – have their own discourses of legitimacy.

#### **3.2.2.1.1.1 Confucianism: Rule by Virtues**

Confucianism is a developed ruling philosophy and the most influential school of thought in ancient China. Tiao dao (also tian ming) and wang dao are two core elements of Confucian philosophy. The first element, tiao dao, refers to the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven is the symbolic foundation of legitimacy of traditional Chinese dynasties. Chinese emperors claimed that their rights to rule were granted by Heaven; thus this legitimacy claim is called the Mandate of Heaven. The empire is also called the son of Heaven, which deifies the empire and justifies why Heaven grants power to the empire. The Mandate of Heaven is complementary with the second element of dao: wang dao. Wang dao refers to rule by virtue. A core element of wang dao is using the ruler's virtues to make people obey and follow (yi de fu ren). Virtue here refers to benevolence (ren), and benevolent governance is a basic criterion of wang dao. According to Confucianism, a regime is legitimate if it practises benevolent governance.

The Mandate of Heaven remained unchanged until the Shang dynasty was overthrown by King Wu of Zhou (zhou wu wang). King Wu of Zhou claimed his predecessor King Zhou of Shang (shang zhou wang) failed to practise benevolent governance and thus lost his mandate. King Wu of Zhou also claims the legitimacy of this regime change came from his benevolence and rule by virtue. In other words, the mandate is not granted forever, and the ruler will lose his or her mandate if he or she fails to practise benevolent governance. This revised version of the Mandate of Heaven justifies why it was entirely right for King Wu of Zhou to rebel and seize power from his predecessor King Zhou of Shang. In short, the Mandate of Heaven is a prerequisite for a regime's rule, and the rule of virtue and benevolent governance is a criterion to measure whether a regime is legitimate or not. If a regime fails to practice the latter, it will also lose the former.

Confucianism also argues that rule of virtue is superior to rule by force. It initiates wang dao (i.e. rule of virtue) and opposes ba dao. Ba dao refers to rule by force, and its core idea is repression. Ba dao is a philosophy that suggests the rulers to use military and state power to make people yield and obey. Mencius argued that wang dao and ba dao were different ruling philosophies (Feng, 2000). In *Gong Sun Chou I*, Mencius (2011) said :

“He who, using force makes a pretence to benevolence is the leader of the princes. A leader of the princes requires a large kingdom. He who, using virtue, practises benevolence is the sovereign of the kingdom. To become the sovereign of the kingdom, a prince does not have to own a large kingdom. Tang did it with only seventy li (a Chinese unit of measuring an area) territory, and king Wen with only a hundred. When one by force subdues men, they do not submit to him in heart. They submit, because their strength is not adequate to resist. When one subdues men by virtue, in their hearts' core they are pleased, and sincerely submit, as was the case with the seventy disciples in their submission to Confucius. What is said in the Book of Poetry, ‘From the west, from the east, from the south, from the north, nobody wants to resist his ruling,’ is an illustration of this”.<sup>5</sup>

Mencius' comparison of wang dao and ba dao above argues that a monarch should implement rule of virtue and practise benevolent governance. In short, according to Confucianism, rule of virtue that can convince people to obey the rule is much better than rule of force that relies on repression.

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<sup>5</sup> This translation is borrowed from the website <http://ctext.org/mengzi/gong-sun-chou-i/zh?en=en> accessed on December 1, 2013; some parts of this translation have been revised by the author.

Notably, those traditional philosophies of Confucianism still matter in contemporary China. Various studies suggest that the Mandate of Heaven and benevolence still play an important role in explaining the CCP's legitimacy (Guo, 2003; Schneider and Hwang, 2014; Tong, 2011; Zhao, 2009; Zhu, 2011). The CCP also attempts to incorporate those traditional values into its socialist agenda for legitimizing authoritarian rule. For example, the CCP proposed using "rule by virtue" as its governing strategy in 2001, and some party theorists also use "the Mandate of Heaven" to justify the CCP's historical mission, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

#### **3.2.2.1.1.2 Daoism: rule by doing nothing against nature (wu wei er zhi)**

Daoism/Taolism considers dao a natural law of Heaven and the Universe. Unlike "rule by virtue" of Confucianism, Daoism advocates rule by doing nothing against nature. It initiates a philosophy of retreat and withdrawal and proposes that people control and reduce their appetite/desires. As Lao-Tzu elaborated in *Dao De Jing*:

"If we stop looking for 'persons of superior morality' to put in power, there will be no more jealousies among the people. If we cease to set store by products that are hard to get, there will be no more thieves. If the people never see such things as excite desire, their hearts will remain placid and undisturbed. Therefore the Sage rules by emptying their hearts, filling their bellies, weakening their intelligence and toughening their sinews. Ever striving to make the people knowledgeable and desireless, indeed he sees to it that if there be any who have knowledge, they dare not interfere. Yet through his actionless activity all things are duly regulated, particularly in the sense of 'having ideas of one's own'." (Lao 1997: 3)

In other words, Lao-Tzus suggests that if people are all desireless and knowledgeable, they can be governed by actionless activity; in this way, a political order can be easily maintained. In short, Daoism advocates a ruling philosophy of retreat.

#### **3.2.2.1.1.3 Legalism: rule by law and governing strategies**

Legalism advocates a ruling philosophy that emphasizes rule by law and shu zhi. Rule by law here refers to making and implementing harsh, strict laws to punish and reward citizens. Shu zhi refers to using the rulers' political trickery to govern their subordinates. Legalism argues that rule by law and shu zhi are two important strategies for emperors to stay in power.

In sum, the above discussion shows that normative values of Chinese traditional philosophies, including Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism, are fundamentally different from Western ones.

#### **3.2.2.1.2. The Distinct Understanding of Democracy in Contemporary China**

The traditional ruling philosophies have substantial impacts on socio-political values in contemporary China. Chinese people's distinct understanding of democracy is an example. According to the 2008 Asian Barometer Survey, 76% of respondents agree that "China is a full democracy, or a democracy with minor problems" (Wang, 2010e); however, Chinese people have very distinct understandings of democracy (Dickson, 2011:214; Shi and Lu, 2010). Empirical studies find that the Chinese understanding of democracy is built on the idea

of “minben” that is very different from liberal traditions of democracy (Shi and Lu, 2010). Minben is a traditional Confucian ruling philosophy, and it is still frequently mentioned by the CCP leaders. Minben promotes the idea that the government should treat the well-being of people as its ruling foundation.

Although both minben and liberal democracy highly value the significance of promoting public welfare, they are different in three important ways (Shi and Lu, 2010). First, when assessing regime legitimacy, the doctrine of minben emphasizes government performance rather than how the government took power, while liberal democracy heavily relies on the procedures of democratic elections (Shi and Lu, 2010). Second, liberal democracy often develops various democratic procedures to make the government accountable, whilst minben argues that “rulership should be entrusted to a minority of persons who are specially qualified to govern by reason of their superior knowledge and virtue” (Shi and Lu, 2010:125). Third, the minben doctrine suggests that ordinary people are much less capable than their leaders when making decisions (Shi and Lu, 2010). Thus, it argues that leaders should make decisions based on their own judgments instead of consulting the masses.

Above all, China has its own distinct ruling philosophies, and the cultural-historical traditions of China play an important role in affecting the CCP’s normative legitimacy. Thus, Western normative values of legitimacy have many difficulties in measuring the legitimacy of the CCP.

### 3.2.2.2 Can Weber’s Legitimacy Framework Explain the Case of China?

This section discusses whether Weber’s legitimacy framework can explain the case of China. It is necessary to revisit past debates over the legitimacy of communist states here. Some scholars endorse Weber’s legitimacy framework to explain the legitimacy of communist states. Lane (1984), for example, argues that the legitimacy of the Soviet Union is “best characterized in the terms of Weber’s remaining type-traditional authority.” According to Lane (1984), traditional legitimacy is related to the claimed “three holy Soviet traditions, the revolutionary tradition (the time of the Revolution and Civil War), the patriotic tradition (the War period) and the Labour tradition (starting with industrialization in the early thirties),” rather than the Russian tradition.

On the other hand, many scholars argue that none of Weber’s types of legitimacy captures the essence of legitimacy in communist states; and thus they began to look for new explanations. Rigby (1982), for example, developed a new type of legitimacy, goal-rational legitimacy, to explain the legitimation of the Soviet Union. According to Rigby, a number of goals and tasks needed to be undertaken by the Soviet states in order achieve the ultimate goal of the communist states: full communism. Thus, the regime could gain legitimacy and the compliance of the people through its capacity to achieve those tasks and goals under the appeal of communism. In this process, the state sets and transmits targets to people and makes announcements about whether targets have been met or not. The state control of information is essential in this process of enhancing legitimacy. The regime needs to disseminate the information received by people through its control of propaganda and other forms of media. In addition to goal-rational legitimacy, socioeconomic performance legitimacy is another notable legitimacy formula, as I will discuss below.

There is no doubt that the legitimation of the communist states more or less includes elements of traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal legitimacy, although academia has different understandings of Weber's framework. In some cases, Weber's concepts of legitimacy are illuminating for understanding the CCP's legitimacy. For example, Weber's traditional legitimacy provides a good basis for understanding what is referred to in this thesis as ideological legitimacy. The term "traditional legitimacy" is particularly helpful in explaining the importance of historical-cultural traditions – such as the Chinese philosophy of legitimacy including Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism as discussed above – in maintaining political legitimacy. However, traditional legitimacy is only part of the ideological basis of legitimacy in China because historical-cultural traditions are only parts of the CCP's ideological discourses. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, in addition to the discourse of the uniqueness of Chinese culture and history, the (in)stability discourses and the discourse of national condition, for example, also play important roles in legitimating the CCP. In order to explain the impacts of ideology on political legitimacy in China, this thesis uses the term "ideological legitimacy", as I will explain below

As Weber's formulation encounters many difficulties in explaining the impacts of ideological factors and government performance on political legitimacy, a modified legitimacy framework is necessary.

### 3.2.3 A New Legitimacy Framework

Considering the problems with Weber's legitimacy framework, Zhao Dingxin (2000; 2001; 2009; Zhao, 2012) modifies it into ideological legitimacy, performance legitimacy and legal-electoral legitimacy. According to Zhao (2009:418), ideological legitimacy refers to the fact that "a state's right to rule is justified by a certain value system in the forms of tradition, religion and political philosophy"; performance legitimacy refers to the fact that "a state's right to rule is justified by its economic and/or moral performance and by the state's capability of territorial defence"; and the regime is based on legal-electoral legitimacy "when it takes laws as binding principles for all social groups, including the state elites themselves, and when top leaders are popularly elected on a regular basis". Zhao's classifications of legitimacy contain both empirical and normative elements of legitimacy.

Based on Zhao's legitimacy framework, this thesis proposes a new framework – ideological legitimacy, performance legitimacy, and procedural legitimacy – and redefines these terms in order better to explain regime legitimacy in China.

#### 3.2.3.1 Ideological Legitimacy

As mentioned, ideological legitimacy includes Weber's notion of traditional legitimacy. This thesis also endorses Zhao's argument that charismatic legitimacy is a type of ideological legitimacy. However, Zhao's definition of ideological legitimacy has two problems. Zhao's definition that "a state's right to rule is justified by a certain value system in the forms of tradition, religion and political philosophy" implies that ideological legitimacy is based on certain coherent value systems. As Chapter 5 will show, the ideological legitimacy of the CCP is generated by informal ideologies that consist of a set of incoherent and relatively fleeting values.

Second, as discussed in the Introduction Chapter, ideology is better considered as a discourse rather than a belief system. Thus, my thesis redefines the term “ideological legitimacy” as a state’s right to rule is justified by certain discourses in the forms of tradition, religion and political philosophy.

### 3.2.3.2 Performance Legitimacy

Zhao’s definition of performance legitimacy focuses on three narrow dimensions of government performance: economic performance, moral performance, and territorial defence. It pays insufficient attention to other crucial aspects of performance legitimacy. In the case of China, social stability, crisis management, and the provision of public goods are certainly important parts of performance legitimacy, as I will discuss below. Thus, my thesis redefines the term “performance legitimacy” as a state’s right to rule is justified by its performance of *all* government functions.

Some argue that the term “performance legitimacy” is flawed, although it is frequently used in academic discussions. Bruce Gilley (2009:5), for example, argues that legitimacy is “a particular type of political support that is grounded in common good or shared moral evaluation,” and thus the concept “performance legitimacy” is “either oxymoron or redundant.” However, this thesis still uses this term, because the alternatives offered are worse and this term is particularly useful when explaining China.

### 3.2.3.3. Procedural Legitimacy

This thesis replaces Zhao’s “legal-electoral legitimacy” with procedural legitimacy. Zhao’s “legal-electoral legitimacy” misguidedly argues that the state is based on procedural legitimacy when its “top leaders are popularly elected on a regular basis”. It problematically implies that democratic elections are a necessary condition for the state to enjoy legitimacy from compliance with the law and procedures. Democratic elections provide procedural legitimacy for the political system and leaders; however, it is not a necessary condition for the state to be legitimate, as discussed above. My thesis defines the term “procedural legitimacy” as a state’s right to rule is justified by its compliance with the law and procedures.

Notably, the term “procedural legitimacy” is similar to Weber’s “rational-legal legitimacy”, and both of them can be used to explain legitimacy generated by the CCP’s institutionalization in some ways. However, these two terms are slightly different. As I discussed earlier, Weber’s “rational-legal legitimacy” rests on a belief in the “legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands”. This concept includes the elements of “normative rules”; however, “procedural legitimacy” purely refers to procedures and laws. In this thesis, the impacts of normative rules on legitimacy are considered as a kind of ideological legitimacy.

## 3.3 Legitimacy Sources in Contemporary China

After examining concepts and theories of legitimacy, this section reviews the English language literature on the subject of regime legitimacy in China, including the performance legitimacy approach (economic performance, stability, the provision of public goods, and

crisis management), nationalism, cultural-historical traditions, and institutional change. As it will show, ideological factors play a crucial role in all those aspects.

### 3.3.1 Performance Legitimacy Approach

In the English language literature, performance legitimacy is the mainstream approach to explain legitimacy in China. It enlightens our understanding of legitimacy in non-democratic countries and explains the existence and collapse of most communist states. With the declining influence of communist ideology and inadequate procedural legitimacy in China, many argue that popular legitimacy in China primarily (if not solely) relies on government performance (Dickson, 2011; Ho, 2011:219; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Roskin, 2009:426; Zhao, 2009; Yang and Zhao, 2014). The following section reviews the major dimensions of performance legitimacy and its limits. As it shows, the exclusion of ideological factors is a major problem with this approach, which is why this thesis will revisit the issue of ideology in contemporary China.

#### 3.3.1.1 Economic Performance

Economic performance is a principal element of performance legitimacy. The rapid economic growth is widely considered by Western scholars as a principal (if not the sole) pillar of the foundation of legitimacy in contemporary China (Krugman, 2013; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008b; Perry, 2008; Shambaugh, 2001; Wang, 2005a; Wang, 2005b; Zhao, 2009). For example, as quoted at the beginning of this Chapter, Laliberté and Lanteigne (2008b:5) argue that “everyone agrees that economic performance represents the foundation of the CCP’s continued ability to assert its authority.” These kinds of arguments can be characterised as belonging to the socioeconomic performance legitimacy approach that originated from early communist studies.

As mentioned earlier, many argue that Weber’s formulation of legitimacy cannot explain the essence of legitimacy of communist states and thus turned to a new approach: socioeconomic performance legitimacy. This approach argues that socioeconomic performance is the foundation of legitimacy in communist states (Fehér, *et al.*, 1983; Kusin, 1978; Lowenthal, 1976). The legitimacy claims of communist regimes rest on the state’s role of providing socioeconomic benefits to people. It is argued that the communist regimes provided a package of welfare benefits – such as education, health care, and rising living standards – to their citizens, while strictly controlling civil liberties – such as freedom of speech. This is often described as a “social contract” (Fehér, *et al.*, 1983; Kusin, 1978), suggesting people’s primacy of socioeconomic over political rights.

This approach also pointed out that no regime can “guarantee a continuously successful performance”(Lowenthal, 1976). For example, Lowenthal (1976) argues that the mechanism of using good performance to acquire legitimacy in communist states is not sustainable in the long run, and the regime will fall if they fail to transform into a pluralistic democracy. Similarly, many predict that the slowing down of China’s economy will bring a major legitimacy crisis to the CCP if it fails to establish enduring legitimacy sources, such as Weber’s rational-legal legitimacy (Zhao, 2009). The logic of this view is that, in democratic countries, poor government performance will reduce the legitimacy of the rulers and thus might lead to the alternation of government, but the legitimacy of the democratic systems is maintained. However, the legitimacy of rulers and system are binding in the authoritarian



regime, so poor performance will not only reduce the legitimacy of the rulers but also the entire political system.

Even if the government continually performs well, people's rising expectations will undermine the impacts of performances on legitimacy. Thus, as Peter Burnell (2006:556) elaborates

“Autocracies that draw heavily on performance legitimacy seem exceptionally vulnerable to whatever reduces their ability to meet people's needs, wants and expectations. Perhaps more telling still, they are vulnerable to whatever causes society to believe that the regime cannot or soon will prove unable to meet people's needs, wants, and *aspirations*.”

Similarly, many China scholars argue that performance legitimacy is very fragile and unsustainable in the long term because of people's rising expectations and unsustainable growth (Wang, 2005a; Zhao, 2009; Zhao, 1997; Zhu, 2011; Lü, 2014; Yang and Zhao, 2014).

Moreover, socioeconomic modernization promoted by economic growth will bring a series of value shifts, which will challenge the authoritarian regime in the long run. For example, the “critical citizens” theory argues that social and economic development will cultivate a new political culture, which is related to decreased public support for the government (Inglehart, 1990; Norris, 1999). Inglehart's studies on self-expression values also find that socioeconomic development in the long run will lead to increased demands for political participation and civil liberties (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Baker, 2000), and the same pattern of self-expression values in China was found by Wang and Tan (2006). It is argued that those value shifts will inevitably trigger a quest for democracy in the long term.

As Huntington concludes (1993:46), whether authoritarian regimes do or not deliver their promises of the “social contract”, their legitimacy would be undermined. Huntington termed the problems of those efforts to rest legitimacy on performance as “performance dilemma” (1993:46) and the “king's dilemma” (1968). The term, “performance dilemma”, is translated as “zhengji kunju” in Chinese and imported into the Chinese discourse of legitimacy (Long and Wang, 2005). As I will discuss in the next chapter, 21% of Chinese intellectuals argue that China is or will soon be facing “performance dilemma”.

Similarly to the view on “performance dilemma”, James Davies' (1962:5) “J curve” theory of revolution also suggests that performance-based legitimacy is fragile. This theory argues that “revolutions are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal. People then subjectively fear that ground gained with great effort will be quite lost; their mood becomes revolutionary.” In other words, the CCP's rule is highly likely to be overthrown by revolutions once China's economic growth cannot meet people's rising expectations.

Moreover, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, there is no empirical evidence to prove that the CCP's legitimacy solely relied on economic success. Arguably, there are two major problems in the relevant literature: the exclusion of ideological factors and the narrow focus of government performance.

### 3.3.1.2 Why Do Ideological Factors Matter?

The major problem with the socioeconomic performance approach lies in its exclusion of ideological factors, which led to many problematic arguments and predictions. The

performance legitimacy approach implies a problematic relationship between economy and politics (White, 1986). The argument – that legitimacy of the CCP primarily relies on economic performance – implies that economic crisis or the slowdown of economic growth would lead to some kinds of legitimacy crises or big disasters in China. This is also explicitly warned by many who argues that economic deterioration will unavoidably lead to political crisis (Krugman, 2013; Zhao, 2009). This kind of arguments implies that economic factors are the independent or dominant variables and political factors are subordinate or dependent variables. It is flawed to contend that the regime is helpless in an economic crisis. This thesis endorses White’s assertion (1986) on the primacy of politics that proper political actions can fill the deficit in legitimacy created by economic difficulties.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, legitimacy directly comes from neither economic crisis nor economic growth per se (Gilley and Holbig, 2010). Ideological factors will transform economic performance into people’s subjective perceptions of economic performance, and regime legitimacy is based on “those perceptions” rather than economic performance per se. As such, an economic crisis is not a direct threat to a regime – its impacts on political legitimacy depend on people’s perceptions of the crisis and the regime; thus, how the government frames this crisis is crucial (Gilley and Holbig, 2010). In other words, how political actors use ideological factors to frame people’s perceptions about the crisis (i.e. discourse) is key to deciding the impact of the crisis on legitimacy.

Proper political actions and effective crisis management will contribute to minimizing legitimacy loss or even sometimes enhance legitimacy. As I will discuss below, there is much room to manipulate people’s dependency on the government and its irreplaceable role during a crisis. This is especially true in China where people’s dependency on the government is more obvious because of historical traditions (Tong, 2011). The CCP has abundant experience and the capability to market its authoritarian rule through information control and powerful propaganda campaigns. In the 2008 financial crisis, for example, the Chinese government actually won, rather than lost, legitimacy credits, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. The regime strategically manipulated this crisis as an opportunity to achieve its political purposes including the promotion of Scientific Outlook of Development (Holbig, 2011). The Chinese media highlighted the good performance in coping with the financial crisis domestically in contrast with the disaster that this crisis caused in other countries, and they also made efforts to project international recognition on to China’s crisis management. By using those propaganda strategies, the CCP successfully transformed its performance during this crisis into positive perceptions, thus legitimacy (Holbig, 2011).

If economic crisis is not a direct threat to legitimacy, then by the same logic, economic growth should not be considered as a *direct* source of legitimacy. If we consider economic growth as a direct source of legitimacy, then rapid economic growth will definitely lead to strong popular support. However, if this growth creates a widening gap between the poor and the rich, and the majority of the population fails to benefit from this growth, this growth may even undermine popular support. This is why many societies such as Hong Kong still have high levels of discontent during the rapid economic growth period.

Indeed, economic growth might cause many threats to regime legitimacy. In China, various socioeconomic problems caused by rapid economic growth have posed an unprecedented challenge to the CCP’s rule. As the next chapter will reveal, the most perceived threats to the CCP’s legitimacy – socioeconomic equality, changing values, and corruption – by Chinese intellectuals are all problems caused by economic growth.

Thus, it is perhaps better to understand economic growth as an *indirect* source of legitimacy. Economic growth needs to be transformed by (a) the provision of public goods in particular public welfare and (b) ideological discourses in conductive ways into public support. In other words, the impact of economic growth on popular support comes from whether the regime actually delivers material benefits to people and whether the society considers the regime to be capable of promoting economic growth.

As I will discuss below, rapid economic growth will lead to strong popular support only when it is transformed into material economic benefits to the people. In addition to material benefits, ideology also plays a crucial role in transforming economic growth into legitimacy because it will frame people's subjective perceptions about rapid economic growth. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, the impact of ideology on legitimacy partly comes from whether Chinese people believe the CCP's discourse that the current one-party system is more capable of promoting economic growth than a liberal democratic system is.

Similarly, people's negative perceptions on economic growth will undermine the positive impacts of economic success on popular support. Environmental pollution is another notable example. In recent years, people's concern about the potential pollution caused by some business projects has led to many local popular protests in China. Those protests have shaken social stability and thus delegitimized the regime. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, Beijing's fog haze has made Chinese people seriously concerned about the negative effects of rapid economic growth. This negative perception of economic growth has undermined the positive impacts of economic success on popular support. This again suggests that ideology is crucial in influencing people's perceptions of economic growth and thus legitimacy.

In short, ideology matters – it does not only play a role in generating ideological legitimacy but also in affecting the impact of government performance on regime legitimacy.

### 3.3.1.3. Redefine Performance Legitimacy

Another problem in the literature of Chinese politics is the narrow focus on government performance – many scholars concentrate on very few (if not solely economic) aspects of government performance. For example, as mentioned, Zhao's definition of performance legitimacy only focuses on the elements of the economy, morality, and nationalism. This kind of understanding misguidedly implies that the functions of government are separate and independent. Indeed, most functions of government are indispensable and inter-related. Economic performance, for instance, is based on a stable social order. Without a stable social order, economic prosperity cannot be achieved. As discussed in Chapter 2, mass campaigns such as the Cultural Revolution did not only undermine social stability but also lead to the stagnation of the Chinese economy. In this sense, a stable social order is a prerequisite for economic growth.

Moreover, economic performance needs to be transformed by other aspects of government performance in order to gain legitimacy. The public provision of welfare, for instance, is an important channel through which to transform economic growth into material benefit to citizens. Without an effective provision system of public goods, economic growth

will not lead to popular support because the poor cannot share the benefits of economic prosperity. As the next chapter will discuss, some studies conducted by Chinese intellectuals suggest that the public provision of welfare has replaced economic growth to become the most important source of legitimacy. As such, the narrow focus of performance legitimacy on very few aspects of government performance is misguided. Thus, this thesis redefines performance legitimacy, as a state's right to rule is justified by its performance of *all* government functions, as discussed above.

The following section will examine several critical aspects of government performance, including social stability, provision of welfare, crisis management and moral performance. As we shall see, ideology plays a crucial role in all those aspects.

### 3.3.1.3.1. Stability: External Stability and Internal Stability of the CCP

Unlike those who emphasize economic performance, some also consider stability important to the CCP's legitimacy (Breslin, 2009; Dickson, 2011; Laliberté and Lanteigne, 2008a; Shue, 2004; Sandby-Thomas, 2011; Sandby-Thomas, 2014). Shue (2004), for example, argues that the CCP "stakes" its legitimacy on its capability to maintain social stability. Some also argue that the central state rather than local government is a principal provider of social stability (Shue, 2004; Yu and Chen, 2012). Shue (2004), for example, argues that local governments are responsible for promoting economic growth, and the primary task of the central state in China is to maintain social stability.

In the literature on the subject of stability and legitimacy in China, there are two major problems. First, the existing literature in general does not pay sufficient attention to the interaction between social stability and ideology, although some address this issue, as Chapter 5 will discuss. Popular beliefs about the CCP's one-party rule play a role in affecting the social order in China. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP's (in)stability discourses have helped to enhance people's compliance with the current social order by exploiting the people's concern about instability.

Second, not only social stability but also political stability within the CCP is important to legitimacy. The existing studies usually use stability to refer to social stability – an unwritten "social contract" between the party and the society. According to this contract, the party delivers material benefits to the citizens as a trade-off for their compliance with the existing social order. In China, it is called "use the money to buy stability", which suggests that economic success will generate social stability.<sup>6</sup> As discussed, social stability is crucial, because it is a prerequisite for other aspects of government performance such as economic growth. However, the word "stability" emphasized by party leaders represents a much broader spectrum – it also includes the political stability of the regime. For example, "stability and unity" stressed by Mao in 1975 mainly pointed to the unity of the CCP leaders (Mao, 1996). In this thesis, "stability" not only refers to social stability (i.e. external stability of the regime) but also to political stability among ruling elites (i.e. internal stability).

The vitality of the authoritarian political system lies in the strength of the ruling party, and in China, the CCP is a core of the political system. Taking a step back, political stability

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<sup>6</sup> This is valid to a certain point; however, economic growth does not guarantee social stability. Indeed, many local popular protests in China are led by problems of economic growth – the grievances of social inequality created by the unequal distribution of economic benefits, people's dissatisfaction with the local economic policies, and people's concerns about environmental pollution, as mentioned above.

among ruling elites is the key prerequisite for the party to use its full power. As Chapter 2 discussed, the inability of the CCP to quell the protest of 1989 was largely owing to the divisions among ruling elites. In this sense, the party's ruling capability to maintain social stability is actually built on the internal stability of the party first. In other words, without the internal stability of the CCP, there is no external stability of the party, as the CCP is unable to quell social unrest and protect the personal safety of the masses. In this sense, the internal stability of the CCP is a *prerequisite* of the CCP's ruling capacity to maintain legitimacy by maintaining social stability, promoting economic growth, and defending the national interests of China.

### 3.3.1.3.2. Provision of Public Goods

The provision of public goods is another important dimension of performance legitimacy. As mentioned, rapid economic growth will lead to popular support only when it is transformed into material economic benefits to the people. A strong economy is the necessary condition to enable the state to deliver material resources. As the distribution of economic benefits is very unequal in China, improving the public goods provision system is quite important to maintaining the CCP's legitimacy. Currently, China still lacks a well-developed public welfare system that is able to deliver sufficient material benefits to the majority of the society. This is one of the reasons why Chinese intellectuals are so pessimistic about the impact of rapid economic growth on legitimacy, as I will discuss in Chapter 4. With its increasing concerns over social inequality, the CCP has gradually shifted its growth model from efficiency-oriented towards a more equal position between equity and efficiency under the ideological guidance of Scientific Outlook of Development and Harmonious Society, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

As Chapter 4 will discuss, some Chinese intellectuals argue that the public provision of welfare has replaced economic growth to become the most important source of legitimacy in China nowadays (Ma and Wang, 2012). For example, based on their survey, Meng and Yang (2012) argue that economic growth is not helpful to win popular support any longer; however, to improve the performance of public service is still effective in generating legitimacy. Another study also finds that the public provision of welfare is the key to enhancing the legitimacy of Chinese local governments (Ma and Wang, 2012).

The theoretical origin of the above views can be traced back to the aforementioned studies of communist regimes. The theory of the social contract suggests that communist states provided a package of welfare benefits while strictly controlling civil liberties (Kusin, 1978). In this contract, the provision of welfare acts as an intermediary to complete this deal by transforming economic growth into actual material benefit and delivering to the people. Notably, this "social contract" is based on the assumption that human are completely rational. The trade between civil rights and economic benefit in this contract indicates a rational calculation and implies that the relationship between society and the state is based on pure interest (Tong, 2011).

Yet, humans are often subjective. Under the influence of propaganda and ideology, people might support their leaders at the expense of their own well-being. For example, after the three-year famine starting in 1959, many Chinese people still firmly trusted the CCP and Mao Zedong, although some began to doubt the policies. On the one hand, it was because the control of information helped the government to hide the actual loss, and thus most Chinese people only knew about the tragedies that happened around them. On the other hand, official

propaganda combined with strong communist beliefs managed to convince many people that sufferings were the necessary cost of achieving full communism. In this way, the regime stayed in power even it failed to deliver material benefits. Therefore, ideological factors again play an important role in affecting the impact of public goods on legitimacy.

### 3.3.1.3.3. Crisis Management

Crisis management is also an important part of government performance in China. The control of information and the authoritarian system's mobilization capability allow the regime to manipulate crises. The literal meaning of the term – crisis (weiji) – in Chinese refers to danger and opportunity, which implies that a crisis is also an opportunity. It is particularly true for the CCP's crisis management strategies. The CCP's overwhelming capability of mobilization and powerful propaganda make it capable of transforming a crisis into an opportunity to win popular support. As Xiao Yuefan (2013: 8) argues, “the CCP has managed to sustain its political hegemony to date through the manipulation of these major crises and through the maximum tinkering with the current political system it reigns over.”

As discussed above, in facing the 2008 financial crisis, the CCP managed to win popular support through its strategic official propaganda. In the case of the Wenchuan earthquake in 2008, the CCP also managed to gain legitimacy (Schneider and Hwang, 2014; Wang, 2012a; Xiao 2013). After the earthquake, the CCP launched a series of relief, reconstruction, and propaganda campaigns to highlight their effective disaster management. A relevant study finds that, in the month after the earthquake, 53% of the news in the *People's Daily* was about this earthquake (Wang, 2012a). 37.7% of those news stories reported activities of the central leaders, party and state institutions, military soldiers and officers, and CCP members (Wang, 2012a). In particular, 21.6% of those reports portrayed a positive image of the role of central leaders in the earthquake reconstruction. Thus, this study concludes that the CCP used all possible occasions to enhance its legitimacy through powerful propaganda.

Another study finds that the governments' disaster relief and post-disaster reconstruction after the Wenchuan earthquake led to an interesting double-track effect on political legitimacy – the legitimacy of the central government increased, whilst the legitimacy of the local government decreased (Chen, 2012). On the one hand, official propaganda managed to enhance the legitimacy of the central government after the earthquake. The relevant news stories focused on reporting the central government's emphasis on people's livelihoods, equality, hope, and the leaders' charisma. The Chinese government also used the earthquake reconstruction as a marketing opportunity to build a positive national image and increase China's soft power. The CCP spent a great amount of human capital and energy reconstructing Wenchuan after the earthquake. In the end, Wenchuan recovered from this magnitude-8 earthquake within three years; after reconstruction, its various material conditions – such as its infrastructure and cities' appearance – are over twenty years more advanced than they were before.

On the other hand, Chen's study finds that the political legitimacy of local government somehow decreased. Chen suggests that the efforts of local government were hidden and ignored in the propaganda, but the flaws in their governance were magnified because people could observe the activities of local governments. In other words, the propaganda campaign is a key factor leading to the double-track effect on political legitimacy, which again suggests that ideological factors matter.

In addition to the 2008 financial crisis and the Wenchuan earthquake, a similar manipulation strategy was also used in managing the crisis of the 2003 SARS epidemic, the Sanlu milk scandal, and the 2011 Wenzhou train collision (Xiao 2013).

#### 3.3.1.3.4. Moral Performance

Moral performance is another important aspect of performance legitimacy. Corruption is a principal problem which undermines the CCP's moral performance. As Chapter 4 will explain, corruption has been considered by Chinese intellectuals as one of the biggest threats to political legitimacy. The CCP has taken great efforts not only to strengthen anti-corruption institutions but also reform ideology for rebuilding the moral basis of legitimacy. For example, Jiang Zemin's ideological formula Three Represents aimed to urge the CCP to maintain its advanced nature – especially probity, as Chapter 5 will discuss,

The lifestyles of party cadres are another problem. The CCP is concerned that the extravagant lifestyle of party members would not only undermine its strength but also its popular support. A serious charge against Bo Xilai was his immoral life style as a CCP leader, such as inappropriate sexual relationships with many women. In order to improve the CCP's moral performance, Chinese leaders attach importance to traditional cultural values such as “virtues”. For example, “rule of virtue” is incorporated by the CCP as a ruling strategy, as Chapter 5 will discuss. Thus, ideological factors are used by the CCP as attempts to improve its moral performance.

In sum, the above section examines the performance legitimacy approach that is a mainstream approach to explaining regime legitimacy in China. The above discussion shows that ideological factors play a crucial role in affecting people's perceptions of almost every aspect of government performance.

#### 3.3.2. Cultural-historical Traditions Approach

Instead of underscoring the economic component, the cultural-historical traditions approach highlights the importance of Chinese cultural, historical and political traditions. It adopts an interpretive approach to search for explanations of political legitimacy in contemporary China from the past, especially cultural-historical traditions. Nowadays, China scholars have been increasingly focusing on the search for Chinese philosophies to underpin a new polity (Guo, 2003; Shue, 2002; Shue, 2004; Tong, 2011; Zhao, 2009). For example, some argue that Chinese cultural-historical traditions are the foundation of the CCP's legitimacy in contemporary China (Tong, 2011). The cultural traditions and historical experience of Chinese society underlined by this approach develops our understanding of legitimacy in China. Moral values, in particular, help to understand why Chinese leaders and intellectuals are highly concerned about rampant corruptions.

The importance of cultural-historical traditions is clearly evidenced by various studies (e.g. Chu, 2013). For example, the East Asia Barometer Survey finds that fewer respondents in all three culturally Chinese societies – Mainland China (67%), Hong Kong (66.8%) and Taiwan (59%) – considered democracy suitable, compared with at least 75% of respondents in the other East Asian societies, suggesting “the lingering influence of the Chinese culture, which privilege order and harmony” (Chu, *et al.*, 2008). Shi and Lu (2010) find that Chinese understandings of democracy are largely affected by Confucianism, which is very different from liberal democracy, as discussed above.

Cultural-historical traditions certainly matters in contemporary China, however, political culture is dynamic rather than static. During Mao Zedong's rule, those cultural-historical traditions were considered feudal dross that needed to be destroyed. In contemporary China the CCP has adopted a completely different approach to dealing with those traditions – the CCP's ideology has incorporated various traditional cultural values into the socialist agenda for legitimizing its authoritarian rule, as mentioned and as Chapter 5 will discuss. The impacts of cultural-historical traditions are certainly different in those two periods. As such, how Chinese history is recreated to justify the present and how traditional Chinese cultural values are incorporated by the CCP's ideology are crucial to exploring their impacts in contemporary China.

### 3.3.2.1. Important Work of Cultural-historical Traditions Approach

As mentioned, China scholars have been increasingly focusing on using Chinese philosophies to explain contemporary politics (Guo, 2003; Shue, 2002; Shue, 2004; Tong, 2011; Zhao, 2009). This section reviews the most notable and latest relevant work on the subject.

#### 3.3.2.1.1 Vivienne Shue: truth, benevolence, and glory

One of the most notable pieces of work on this issue is contributed by Vivienne Shue. Shue (2004) argues that the CCP's capability to preserve stability – constructed by truth, benevolence, and glory – provides the foundation for the regime's legitimacy in China. Truth refers to knowledge of the universe, such as Confucianism and modern scientific rationalism; benevolence means the state's responsibility to ensure and promote popular welfare, such as post-disaster reconstruction; and glory is related to the pride in Sinic culture and civilization, such as cultural superiority and the vision of a rising China (Shue, 2004). In other words, regime legitimacy in China relies on ideological (truth), moral (benevolence), and nationalistic (glory) factors instead of primarily economic factors.

Shue's study largely advanced the culturalist arguments and inspired many relevant studies such as Tong (2011). Considering the significance of Shue's study, it is worth discussing this study in details. Shue's study provides valuable insights in to understanding legitimacy in contemporary China; however, it is vague about the origins of these traditional philosophies and based on problematic evidence. Benevolence, for example, is the ruling traditional philosophy in ancient China that was promoted by Confucius as early as 156 BC, as discussed before. Shue's article pays insufficient attention to the origins of her concepts, which also caused another problem of her article: the validity of her evidence.

Shue's arguments about Chinese traditions are based on the evidence of late-imperial times – most are from the Qing dynasty. That evidence might not be typical of Chinese culture and history because the Qing dynasty had its own ruling philosophy, which was less influenced by Confucianism. The Qing dynasty was the last dynasty in China's 5,000 year' feudal history and it was founded by Manchus. Manchus is an ethnic minority group from north-eastern China with its own language and culture, which is different to the majority of Chinese people – Han. Although Confucian culture also influenced Manchus to some extent, Manchus repressed many Han cultures and forced Han people to adopt many of their traditions during the Qing dynasty. Take Queue Order (ti fa ling) as an example. The traditional Manchus male had a specific hairstyle called Queue (bian zi), in which they would



shave their foreheads and leave a long ponytail. However, hair has a special meaning in Han culture, and traditionally cutting hair is taboo to a Han Chinese adult. After the Manchus came to power, they commanded all men to adopt their hairstyle in China, which was called Queue Order. Many of those who refused to obey were killed.

The Qing dynasty was also regarded by many Han as an alien regime at that time. Many problems with the Qing dynasty were related to ethnic issues – mostly between Han and Manchus. This made the Qing dynasty very different from the conventional Chinese dynasties. As an ethnic minority regime, many of the Qing dynasty's policies were designed to deal with conflicts of culture and race – mostly between Manchus and Han. Their sophisticated system of food supply – an example used by Shue to support her argument – could involve some concerns about ethnical issues and the rule of Manchus. Qing's policy of territorial expansion – another example used by Shue – might be problematic to consider as a typical glory of Sinic culture and civilization. It might be true that the invasion of the West in the late Qing period harmed the national pride of some Chinese including Han; however, it might be problematic to assume that Qing's prosperity would lead to the rise of nationalism among Han people, especially in the early and mid of Qing period.

Moreover, a key reason that Shue (2004) disagrees with performance legitimacy approach is that the market power and local governments hold more responsibility for economic development in China nowadays. Thus, Shue (2004) argues that the central government is “ill positioned to claim direct credit for whatever economic advances are in fact taking place”. Although the central government has decentralized economic power to lower levels, it still won much credit for economic growth in China. The job of the central government is to monitor the Chinese economy at the macro level. For example, if the central government did not take the direct credit for overcoming the 2008 financial crisis and ensuring China's GDP growth in such a hard time, who should? Although this thesis does not consider economic performance to be the sole, let alone source of legitimacy of the CCP, it still endorses the importance of economic growth in China. At the very least, sources of legitimacy are inter-related, as discussed.

#### 3.3.2.1.2. Tong Yanqi: morality/responsibility-based legitimacy

Building on Shue's work, Tong (2011) argues that the legitimacy of the CCP rests on the moral bond between state and society. This moral bond is created by three overlapping layers: the morality of officials, benevolent governance, and the state's responsibility for the well-being of the people. According to Tong (2011), morality/responsibility-based legitimacy is based on a moral commitment and implies a bonded relationship between the society and the state; however, performance legitimacy indicates rational calculation and implies the relationship between the society and the state based on pure interest.

#### 3.3.2.1.3. Guo Baogang: moral/original and utilitarian justifications

Guo (2003) argues that moral/original justifications and utilitarian justifications are the key components of regime legitimacy in China. Guo (2003) also argues that the legitimacy of the CCP is “being seriously challenged” because the transition of the Chinese market economy has “redefined the meanings of the century-old cognitive model.” According to Guo, moral/original justification includes four Chinese concepts: Mandate of Heaven, rule by virtue, *minben*, and legality; utilitarian justification consists of the Chinese political thought of benefiting the people (*li min*), and equality (*jun fu*).

### 3.3.2.2. Limits of the Cultural-historical Traditions Approach

Cultural-historical traditions do matter in contemporary China; however, they also have some limits. First of all, political culture is a dynamic rather than a static given, and thus it is difficult to use traditional values to explain the present. Although contemporary Chinese culture is fundamentally different from Western culture, it is also far different from traditional Chinese culture. Political culture is changing, as many studies show (Inglehart, 1990; Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 1999). Political values in China have gone through dramatic changes with socioeconomic development.

Nowadays, not only political traditions but the entire Chinese political system have been based on modern political products, and Chinese political culture has been moving away from – rather than moving toward – the past. In the early twentieth century, the Chinese elites intended to reproduce Chinese culture by deliberately destroying many traditional values and advocating Western political thought. The May Fourth Movement, for instance, led to a nationwide wave of efforts to challenge traditional Chinese values – particularly Confucianism – and to promote modern political terms – such as democracy, science, human rights and freedom, etc. Those traditional values included the mandate of Heaven, benevolence, and benevolent governance, which are highlighted by the cultural-historical traditions approach. Leading scholars of modern China, such as Chen Duxiu, Lu Xun, and Hu Shi, tended to create a new Chinese culture through the May Fourth movement, and therefore this movement was also called the New Culture Movement. It is worth mentioning that this movement also contributed to the spread of communism and the establishment of the CCP. Later, both the Kuomintang (KMT) and the CCP continued to break Chinese traditions by launching repeated campaigns, such as anti-superstition campaign.

The current political system in China is established on modern political products – such as rule of law and the party system – rather than traditional thoughts. Thus, traditions certainly are not the key factors to explain regime legitimacy in contemporary China. Western political ideas, such as political accountability and transparency, are gradually taking root in Chinese political discourses under globalization, marketization and perhaps democratization. Both contemporary Chinese leaders and intellectuals are more and more interested in and willing to accept Western norms (Li, 2008b; Weatherley, 2008). For instance, Yu Keping (2008), the deputy director of the Central Translation and Compilation Bureau and a prominent party intellectual, argues that Western concepts – such as human rights, private property, the rule of law, civil society, and political civilization – have now become “mainstream” values in China. Some sensitive topics such as human rights have also received increasing attention from Chinese scholars (Weatherley, 2000; Weatherley, 2001; Weatherley, 2008). It is notable that the term “legitimacy” itself is a Western political term. It translates as “he fa xing” in Chinese, which was only used to refer to a term of law, meaning “legality”, before being imported into the discourse of Chinese political science in the 1990s.

As political culture is dynamic, a crucial problem with this approach is how the political discourse of Confucianism can be incompatible with modern civilization. The relevant studies selectively pick certain components of Chinese culture, such as benevolence, to support their arguments without mentioning other indivisible components. In fact, many parts of Confucianism are incompatible with modern civilization – which is why the Chinese discourse of legitimacy is based on Western theories instead of Chinese traditional philosophies, as Chapter 4 will discuss.

Some Chinese scholars attempt to modernize Confucianism. For example, Kang Xiaoguang (2004), a leading Chinese scholar promoting Confucianism, argues that the “modern” benevolent governance of Confucianism provides the political legitimacy for the CCP. In Kang’s “modern” benevolent governance, the authoritarian regime’s value orientation is based on people-oriented principle (*min ben zhuyi*); its basic responsibility is to make civilians rich (*fumin*) and to teach civilians (*jiaomin*); its power succession is based on an abdication system; and in this system, the social ideal is a stateless world (or great society of harmony) (*datong shijie*). Even though he admits that benevolent governance is ideal, Kang insists that it does not necessarily prevent benevolent governance from providing legitimacy for the CCP. Kang also suggests that the power succession system of Confucianism – the abdication system – can be a good choice for China to solve authoritarian problems of power succession. However, even in ancient China, the abdication system is only a symbolic deal rather than a practical way of leadership transition, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

Moreover, traditional Chinese ruling philosophies approach legitimacy from a normative view, and thus they suffer from the problems of normativists. As discussed above, a weakness in this normative legitimacy is its ignorance of empirical elements. Chinese traditional philosophies’ normative standards, such as the mandate of Heaven and benevolence, are the state’s claims to legitimacy – which are not the same as its entire foundation of legitimacy. Other aspects of state legitimacy are certainly important. For example, the performance of the ancient regime played a crucial role in maintaining legitimacy (Zhao, 2009). This is related to the separation of moral performance and moral standards, as I will discuss as follows.

### 3.3.2.3. Separation of Moral Standards and Moral Performance

Obviously, there are many overlaps between the approaches through cultural-historical tradition and through performance legitimacy. Some proponents of performance legitimacy also use historical and cultural components of China to support their arguments (e.g. Zhao, 2009). The moral commitment or responsibility of the government, such as benevolence, is closely related to performance. However, these two approaches have different interpretations about the relationship between responsibility/morality and the performance of the government. It raises an question: should the government’s morality/responsibility include or be a part of its performance? The cultural-historical tradition approach argues that morality/responsibility includes performance (e.g. Tong, 2011), whilst the performance legitimacy approach argues that performance legitimacy includes moral performance (e.g. Zhao, 2009). The above cleavage is owing to the confusion between moral standards and moral performance. The performance approach ignored the ideological factors of morality and the cultural-historical tradition approach neglected the practical aspect of morality.

Moral standards and moral performance are better understood as two inter-related but different things. When it comes to legitimacy, moral standards are about traditional values and thus ideological legitimacy; however, moral performance is more about empirical performance and thus performance legitimacy. How the CCP should act (i.e. moral standards) is not equal to how it actually performs (i.e. moral performance). Moral standards are very ideological. In ancient China, Confucianism had been the official ideology of Chinese dynasties since the Western Han Dynasty. Confucianism, in fact, is a sort of moral philosophy which justifies the rightness of a state or emperor by a set of standards, such as “rule by virtue” and “benevolence”, as discussed above. In this sense, moral standards provide a normative foundation for regime legitimacy. Unlike moral standards, moral

performance involves more empirical elements. The regime's actual moral performance will be reflected in a part of its performance legitimacy. In modern states, there is always a gap between ideal moral standards and actual moral performance, which partly reflects the difference between ideology and social reality.

In China, corruption is actually a governance-based performance failure, whilst declining moral standards are a problem of ideology. In this sense, effective anti-corruption is a way to strengthen government performance and thus performance legitimacy, and the reconstruction of moral standards should be understood as an attempt to enhance ideological legitimacy. In this regard, the CCP focuses on two aspects: moral performance and moral standards. On the one hand, the CCP has made efforts to make various rules and regulations to reduce corruption for its moral performance. On the other hand, it employs ideology to improve the ethical requirements of the party cadres. For example, the CCP's "Eight Dos and Don'ts" and the Socialist Concept of Honour and Disgrace are proposed as an important dimension of ideological construction of the Socialist Core Values System.

In sum, traditional Chinese cultural-historical values play a significant role in affecting political legitimacy in contemporary China. However, political culture is dynamic rather than static. Thus, their impacts on regime legitimacy need to be examined in the framework of contemporary ideological discourses.

### 3.3.3. Nationalism

In addition to economic growth and social stability emphasized by the performance legitimacy approach, nationalism is also widely considered as a crucial source of legitimacy in China, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter (Breslin, 2009; Darr, 2011; Fang, 1997; Lam, 2003; Li, 2001b; Lieberthal, 2004:334-335; Lin and Hu, 2003; Ostergaard, 2004; Shambaugh, 2001; Zhao, 1998; Zheng, 2004). For example, Zhao Suisheng (1998:297) argues:

"The leadership of the CCP was claimed because of the CCP's patriotism in China's long struggle for national independence and prosperity not because of its Communist ideals. Patriotism rather than communism, thus, became the basis of the CCP's rule of legitimacy."

Kenneth Lieberthal also (2004:334-335) argues:

"By 2020, China may become an authoritarian, one-party system that is closely linked to domestic business elites and attempts to keep the lower classes quiescent by promoting ardent nationalism .... The most likely way to maintain social peace in a system that basically serves the interests of the wealthy political and economic elite is to encourage nationalism".

There is little doubt that nationalism is an important source of legitimacy in China; however, no empirical evidence shows that it is a superior source, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. Notably, patriotism and nationalism in China are "empirically distinct" (Gries, *et al.*, 2011). The official propaganda adopts the word "patriotism" (i.e. love of the country) rather than "nationalism" to avoid the negative connotations of nationalism.

It is argued that Chinese nationalism has gradually replaced the marginalized communist ideals and thus become the new ideological basis of the CCP (Christensen, 1996;

Gries and Rosen, 2004; He, 2007; Link, 2008; Metzger and Myers, 1998; Zhao, 1997; Zhao, 1998; Zhong, 1996). For example, Cabestan (2005) argues that

“There was first of all the irruption of a state nationalism which some dubbed ‘nationalism of substitution’, because to a large extent it replaced a communist ideology which had shown its futility and above all its inadequacy in the face of the economic and social realities which the Communist Party was allowing to take root in China.”

This view suggests that Chinese nationalism is an ideology. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, Chinese nationalism is not an ideology because it is not formed by a set of coherent values. This thesis considers Chinese nationalism as an informal ideology that supplements rather than replaces the CCP’s value system. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP’s discourse of national rejuvenation interacts with its (in)stability discourse to suggest that the CCP’s one-party rule is for the greater good of China – restoring China to its rightful position of pre-eminence.

Although the significance of nationalism to China’s political development has been widely recognized, no consensus on its exact political meanings has been reached yet, as the following sections will discuss.

### 3.3.3.1. The Debate over the Causes of Rising Nationalism in China

Scholarship offers contrary understandings on the impact of state propaganda on nationalism. The mainstream approach – the government manipulation perspective – considers the rising Chinese nationalism as a product of state propaganda (e.g. Christensen, 1996; Gilley and Holbig, 2010; Metzger and Myers, 1998; Zhao, 1997; Zhao, 1998). It is argued that the Chinese government has been manipulating nationalism to fill the ideological vacuum and re-legitimize the regime by pushing patriotic education campaigns. The political manipulation of Chinese history is considered to be an important factor in the rise of nationalism. For example, Gilley and Holbig (2010) argue that the CCP embedded national myths into the collective memory of Chinese people. Yinan He (2007) argues that the state also strategically recreated the official war history to highlight the victimhood of China. In addition to manipulating history, some argue that using external threats to unite internal society is another strategy of the CCP. Callahan (2005), for example, argues that the CCP and public intellectuals have made use of the “anti-China” view, such as the “China Threat Theory”, to consolidate the national identity of the Chinese people.

The CCP definitely plays a role in the rise of Chinese nationalism. As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP has made great efforts to present a version of history in order to justify the present; and it has also used the discourse of national rejuvenation to resist pro-liberal democracy values. However, political manipulation is not the only reason for the rising nationalism in China. Other factors, such as the impacts of economic success on national moods in China, also matter.

Unlike the mainstream view, some doubt the impact of official propaganda on the rising nationalism (Wang, 2004; Zhang, 1997). It is argued that there was no clear relationship between rising nationalism and patriotic education campaigns in China. For example, Wang (2004) argues that many nationalists – such as well-educated students who can access the Internet, scholars, and students who had studied in Western countries – are hardly influenced by the CCP’s propaganda. In addition, some argue that official propaganda is not always effective. According to Wang (2004) and Rose (2000), the patriotic education campaign in

the 1980s and 1990s had a limited influence on nationalism, although the CCP made great efforts to promote this campaign. Thus, some did not consider the rise of Chinese nationalism as a product of official propaganda. As Zhang Ming (1997:122) argues, the “nationalist wave in China is a broad-based public reaction to a series of international events, not a government propaganda”.

It is true that the CCP’s state propaganda has many limits. Indeed, many argue that the marketization and the diversification of the media and the development of the Internet would definitely undermine the authoritarian rule. However, state propaganda in general has positive impacts on the authoritarian rule in China. As evidenced by various empirical studies, the CCP’s propaganda helps to generate popular support (Bernstein and Lü, 2000; King, *et al.*, 2013; Li, 2004b; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011; Lü, 2014). The above debate on the interaction between state propaganda and nationalism is relevant to the following debate about different types of nationalism.

### 3.3.3.2. The Debate over the Interaction between State-led and Popular Nationalism

The relevant literature distinguishes between two different but intertwined types of Chinese nationalism: state-led/state-centred and popular nationalism (Breslin, 2009; Gries, 2004; He, 2007; Link, 2008; Seckington, 2005; Wang, 2008; Zhao, 2004), which are interconnected mechanisms of top-down and bottom-up mobilization. State-led nationalism refers to “a state-sponsored ideology with a set of coherent ideas intended to influence the populace, legitimate the authoritarian political system, and provide a theoretical guide to action”; popular nationalism refers to “a catch-call term for a wide range of popular sentiments that lack internal coherence, but share basic assumptions about the hostile nature of the international environment and the goal of restoring China to a perceived rightful position of a, if not the, global power” (Breslin, 2009). Tang and Darr (2012) find that popular nationalism in China is at one of the highest levels in the world.

State nationalism and popular nationalism interact with each other. However, there is some cleavage in terms of the extent of their interactions. On the one hand, some argue that the impact of public opinion on the authoritarian system is very limited, and therefore popular nationalism is incapable of shaping government policies. Rose (2000), for example, argues that the rising nationalism in both China and Japan in the 1980s and 1990s “is not necessarily translated into an aggressive foreign policy.” On the other hand, some argue that popular nationalism plays an important role in affecting China’s foreign policies. Seckington (2005) argues that “popular nationalism can be critical of official policy.” Yanan He (2007) argues that popular nationalism has tied Beijing’s hand to deal with Japan. According to Yanan He (2007), popular nationalism aggravated the bilateral economic friction between Japan and China, and student nationalism has directly affected China’s position in negotiating trade friction.

### 3.3.3.3. The Debate over the Impacts of Rising Nationalism on Democratization

Scholars also have different opinions about the impact of rising nationalism on China’s democratic development. Many argue that the rising nationalism in China will inevitably harm the development of China’s democracy (Xu, 2001). As Chapter 5 will discuss, the CCP’s discourse of national rejuvenation discredits liberal democracy in order to maintain the legitimacy of the authoritarian rule in China. The empirical study of Tang and Darr (2012) finds that Chinese nationalism shows a strong tendency towards anti-democratic and pro-

authoritarian values, and concludes that nationalism has a negative effect on the demand for liberal political change and democracy. On the contrary, some argue that nationalism promotes democracy. Wang Shaoguang (2004), for example, argues that Chinese nationalism might positively contribute to democratic development. According to Wang (2004), the current Chinese nationalism is “reactive nationalism” – which is “inclusive, passive, pragmatic, defensive, and moderate”.

Indeed, the relationship between rising nationalism and democracy has caused a striking debate in China’s paper media and on the Internet. Generally speaking, the Liberals tend to endorse the first view and express their deep concern about the negative effects of nationalism on China’s liberalization. The New Leftists, however, tend to defend the rise of nationalism. Their positions are elaborated in one of the most popular books, *China Can Say No*, that has now attracted widely public and academic attention.

#### 3.3.3.4. The Debate over How to Deal with China

Western scholarship has different views on dealing with China. On the one hand, some China observers suggest that Western governments should act more rigorously in supporting democracy in China. Link (2008), for example, blames the US government for being too weak to support China’s liberal changes. In his words, “the United States, which is widely viewed in China as the world’s strongest democracy, could do much more good than it is now doing by using dignified, clear, and strong public statements.” This view misguidedly implies a “saviour” role of the West and a “suffering” China. Although democratic states and authoritarian states are very different, we should respect both equally. Otherwise, it might easily cause anger of Chinese nationalists because of national memory.

On the other hand, others argue that the West should not be eager to promote democracy in China. For example, Tang and Darr (2012) argue that outside calls for China to change will “further fuel nationalism, which ironically serves the CCP by diverting the public demand for democratization”.

Empirical studies find that Chinese nationalism has largely been shaped by historical belief (Gries, *et al.*, 2008). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the West colonized many parts of China through wars, and this “‘century of humiliation’ is central to Chinese nationalism today” (Gries, *et al.*, 2011). Chinese people might interpret the West’s support for separatist movements as another attempt to divide China as the West did to their Chinese ancestors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In China, nationalists frequently criticize the Chinese government’s position as too weak to confront the diplomatic disputes. They request much tougher actions than Beijing may be willing to take. Thus, the Western government should be cautiously to avoid the sensitive national zeal.

#### 3.3.3.5. Nationalism: a Double-edged Sword

How could the CCP benefit from the rising nationalism? As mentioned, some argue that nationalism replaced the weakening communist ideology and provided a renewed ideological claim for the CCP to influence and guide the populace (He, 2007; Link, 2008; Rose, 2000). The legitimacy of the regime is enhanced by turning “support China” into “support the Chinese government.” By claiming to be the defender of China’s national interests, the CCP won popular support from the Chinese nationalism. Nationalism also serves to draw people’s

attention away from popular complaints (Link, 2008) and is used to mobilize Chinese society for political purposes. In addition, nationalism sometimes can be used as a diplomatic tactic.

Yet, nationalism can also easily be out of a government's control; thus, both Western scholars and Chinese intellectuals recognized nationalism as a "double-edged sword". As White (2005:16) points out:

"The patriotic genie is hard to keep in a bottle. It never completely, but only ambiguously, legitimates a regime".

As such, nationalism has tied the CCP's hands on foreign diplomacy. Sometimes, the CCP has to play a hard-line foreign policy under the pressure of public opinion, which might lead to the deterioration of foreign relations. The events of the anti-Japan protests frequently demonstrated that unleashed national sentiments were difficult to contain and put the government into a dilemma. To contain nationalism might lead to nationalists' doubt over the CCP's determination and capability to defend national interests, while to tolerate the fire of nationalism would consolidate US-Japan alliance to contain China. In September 2012, one month before the once-in-a-decade leadership transition of the CCP, Japan's nationalization of Diaoyu Island once again put the CCP in an awkward position. The CCP needed a stable social order to perform a leadership transition smoothly, but the rising national sentiment certainly did not allow the government to keep a low profile in this case.

In addition, this aggressive nationalism might lead to the antipathy of foreign countries and violates the official, declared principle of "peaceful development". An aggressive nationalism might hurt foreign relations, which would be very harmful to the Chinese economy. Rising nationalism might systematically discourage direct foreign investment and the export of China's products. Moreover, the PRC is a multi-ethnic country with a majority of Han and most Chinese culture in general is from Han. The Chinese language is often called hanyu in Chinese, which means the language of Han. The Chinese language test is called the test of Han language (hanyu shuiping kaoshi). In Taiwan, many called Han language the national language (guo yu).

The rising nationalism might not be appealing to other ethnic minorities and could deconstruct their national identity. As Chapter 4 will discuss, some Chinese intellectuals are concerned that nationalism might contribute to the rise of separatism in China, because the ethnic minorities do not identify with nationalism of Han. In short, nationalism is a double-edged sword.

#### 3.3.4. Institutional Changes

Institutional changes are closely related to legitimacy. Legitimacy theories suggest that institutional change is both a cause and consequence of legitimacy (Gilley, 2008; White, 2005). While the mainstream literature focuses on economic, socio-political, and historical factors to explain institutional changes, Gilley (2008) develops a legitimacy-based approach based on the case of China. Other than a few studies which focus on institutional change (Heberer and Schubert, 2006; Heberer and Schubert, 2008; Lee, 2010; Schubert, 2008; Schubert, 2014), the general Chinese studies literature still pays insufficient attention to this topic, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. The issue of institutional change involves several debates, as follows.



#### 3.3.4.1. The Collapsing China School

After 1989, many (or the so-called “Collapsing China School”) predicted the downfall of the CCP after the failure of the Eastern European communist states and the protests of 1989 in China. For example, MacFarquhar (1991) argued that the collapse of the CCP would come “in the not-too-distant future.” Although most of those predictions were proven wrong, this school still has a few loyal supporters nowadays. For example, Gordon G. Chang (2002) predicted that the CCP would fall by 2011 in his controversial book, *The Coming Collapse of China*. After this prediction proved to be wrong, Chang (2011) again predicted that “so, yes, my prediction was wrong. Instead of 2011, the mighty Communist Party of China will fall in 2012. Bet on it.”

Chang’s updated prediction is based on his pessimistic view about the CCP’s once-in-a-decade leadership transition in 2012. As Chang (2011) writes:

“So will China collapse? Weak governments can remain in place a long time. Political scientists, who like to bring order to the inexplicable, say that a host of factors are required for regime collapse and that China is missing the two most important of them: a divided government and a strong opposition. At a time when crucial challenges mount, the Communist Party is beginning a multi-year political transition and therefore ill-prepared for the problems it faces. There are already visible splits among Party elites, and the leadership’s sluggish response in recent months – in marked contrast to its lightning-fast reaction in 2008 to economic troubles abroad – indicates that the decision-making process in Beijing is deteriorating. So, check the box on divided government.”

It is true that for an authoritarian regime, power succession has always led to the division among ruling elites and thus the downfall of the regime. Thus, Chang predicted that cruel power struggles within the CCP during the power transfer in 2012 would lead to the fall of the CCP. However, Chang’s view fails to notice the importance of the CCP’s institutionalization. As Chapter 6 will discuss, this institutionalization has managed to undermine the negative effects of cruel power struggles and thus maintain regime stability during the leadership transition of 2012.

#### 3.3.4.2. The Debate on Authoritarian Resilience

After misguidedly predicting the CCP’s fall in the early 1990s, some scholars began to reassess the authoritarian system in China – especially its vitality. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the term “authoritarian resilience” is pioneered by Andrew Nathan who used to belong to the “Collapsing China School” after the CCP’s first smooth transition in 2002. According to Nathan (2003), authoritarian resilience in China was largely owing to the CCP’s institutionalization.

Afterwards, “authoritarian resilience” received wide-ranging interest among the academic community. On the one hand, its proponents argue that institutional change/institutionalization in China explains the resilience of the authoritarian system, which has consolidated the CCP’s rule in China (Brown, 2009; Dickson, 2003a; Fewsmith, 2006; Heberer and Schubert, 2006; Schubert, 2008; Tsai, 2007; Yang, 2004). In addition to institutionalization, the CCP’s adaptive capability is also considered as a reason to explain its resilience. Shambaugh (2008a) argues that China has systematically learned from the

experiences, including the failure and success of other political systems, in order to reinvent itself.

On the other hand, the opponents of “authoritarian resilience” argue that there is no such thing like “authoritarian resilience”, and they contend that the CCP is able to stay in power because of its coercive repression and weak democratic awareness. In the same volume of Nathan’s “authoritarian resilience” article, Bruce Gilley (2003) argues that the CCP’s levels of institutionalization could not sustain its rule, and the CCP stayed in power because of the coercive repression and weak civil society in China. Dickson (2003b) argues the CCP largely relied on its twin strategies of corporatism and co-optation.

The above debate is still on-going; however, its focus seems largely to shift from the existence of “authoritarian resilience” to the limits or durability of this “authoritarian resilience”. Gilley, a strong opponent of “authoritarian resilience”, began to use the word “authoritarian durability” when referring to the CCP’s rule (Gilley and Holbig, 2009:358). Li Cheng’s (2012a) recent article argues that the CCP’s resilient authoritarianism might meet an end. It, at least, implies that this resilience used to exist.

#### 3.3.4.3. Is There Any Political Reform in China?

Another relevant debate is whether there were substantial political reforms launched by the CCP or not in the past three decades. Conventional wisdom holds that China has gone through dramatic socioeconomic transformations, while little progress in political reforms has been achieved in the past three decades (Li, 2012c:3). As such, political reform in China has been under-researched. Many argue that Chinese leaders know that the party needs political reform, but they either are unsure what political reform should be or are nervous about moving ahead with it. On the contrary, a few scholars argue that the CCP has made much progress in political reforms (Heberer and Schubert, 2006; Lee, 2010; Schubert, 2008). The above two contrary views are mainly owing to the cleavage in the different conceptualizations of political reforms.

The first view tends to use a dichotomy to “identify political reform with the approximation of Western democracy” (Dittmer, 2003:347). In this sense, only reforms moving towards liberal democracy counted as political reforms. This understanding struggles to reconcile political transformation in China, because almost no reform launched by the CCP has been for the purpose of liberal democracy since 1989. Although some might eventually weaken the authoritarian system, their goals were designed to strengthen rather than democratize the one-party rule. However, can we thus contend that the Chinese political system has not changed in the past three decades? An undeniable fact is that both the Chinese political system and elite politics nowadays are fundamentally different from the way they were in the 1980s.

In the Chinese context, political reform represents a much broader spectrum – it refers to any kind of political system reform, including administrative reforms and the institutionalization of elite politics. This understanding suggests that democratic reforms are not the only solution to building a better bureaucracy. As Gilley and Holbig (2009) find, institution-building has become a leading strategy proposed by Chinese intellectuals to maintain the CCP’s legitimacy. Hu Angang (2003), a leading policy adviser of the Chinese government and the head of China Studies at the Qinghua University, pointed out that the CCP has been going through a second transition, which should focus more on political

reforms in order to confront the challenges. Hu and Zeng argue that local institutional reforms helped to contain social conflicts and thus generate regime legitimacy.

The importance of political reform on regime legitimacy is also recognized by analysts outside China. Zheng and Lye (2005) argue that the CCP leadership attempted to expand their sources of legitimacy in three experiments: social democracy (the establishment of a village election system and the emergence of NGOs and other civil organizations), constitutionalism (strengthening the role of People's Congress at both national and local level and emphasizing the rule of law) and intra-party democracy (greater political participation). As mentioned above, Schubert (2008) argues that political reforms have legitimized the CCP's rule. Unlike Schubert's (2008) research agenda that focuses on low-level administrative reforms, my thesis provides a critical analysis of political reform at the top (i.e. the institutional development of power succession).

### **3.4. Summary**

Above all, ideology plays a role in deciding legitimacy in contemporary China. However, as this chapter shows, Western scholars largely focus on performance legitimacy and many argue that ideology is meaningless nowadays. Unlike Western scholarship, Chinese intellectuals have quite a different research agenda and emphasis on the subject of regime legitimacy in China. As the next chapter will discuss, changing values is considered by Chinese intellectuals as the most perceived threat to legitimacy, and thus ideology is proposed as a leading strategy to maintain the CCP's legitimacy.

## Chapter Four

### Understanding Popular Legitimacy from a Chinese Perspective

“This performance-based political legitimacy has made socioeconomic development more and more imbalanced. Social development is seriously lagging behind economic development, and thus leads to a series of social problems. ... if those problems are not solved, it may lead to ‘growth without development’”.

– *Excerpt from one of the 125 Chinese articles studied in this chapter (Jing, 2011:29)*

“To strengthen the ideological education of the people is an important way to maintain political legitimacy.”

– *Excerpt from one of the 125 Chinese articles studied in this chapter (Dong, 2010:148)*

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter studies popular legitimacy in contemporary China from a Western perspective. This chapter approaches this issue from a Chinese perspective in order to juxtapose the Chinese literature with the English literature on this subject. Chinese intellectuals may have valuable insights unavailable to those outside and perhaps better understand how China is ruled. However, no systematic study has been conducted to link Chinese intellectuals’ opinions with the English literature – except for Gilley’s and Holbig’s (2009) work. Building on the previous work, this study identifies continuities, new trends and shifts in emphasis in the Chinese elite debate about political legitimacy by analysing 125 Chinese articles with “legitimacy” in the title published between 2008 and 2012. As we shall see in this chapter, Chinese intellectuals have very different views on political legitimacy in China from Western scholars.

This study departs from the previous research in several important ways. First, this study comprehensively analyses the influence of both Western theories and traditional Chinese philosophies in contemporary Chinese discourse of legitimacy. To date, there has been no systematic attempt to study this issue. This issue is important, because it is closely related to the theoretical foundations of the “China Model” and “Chinese exceptionalism”. In addition, in order to understand better the debate and distinct patterns in the Chinese literature, I have also conducted several email interviews with key contributors of this debate. Second, instead of focusing on the debate alone, this study also examines how the party intellectuals’ views are shaped by their research backgrounds. As this article reveals, institutions, research locations, and funding sources have differentiated Chinese intellectuals’ legitimacy concerns and policy suggestions. Third, as this study covers a more recent period of time, it is able to include critical events such as the 2008 financial crisis.

Several key findings can be highlighted. First, Western scholars emphasize performance legitimacy especially economic performance, as Chapter 3 discussed, whilst Chinese intellectual express serious concern about performance legitimacy. This concern led to a fundamental shift in emphasis around political legitimacy. The top perceived legitimacy threats between 2003 and 2007 – changing interests and the exhaustion of revolutionary-historical legitimacy – have now been replaced by socioeconomic inequality, corruption, and

incapability of bureaucratic system, while changing values remains a leading item in both of this study and the previous study. In addition, While there is now a growing school of thought that China might be heading towards a financial crisis (Naughton, 2009; Ross, 2012), Chinese analysts tended to be more pessimistic earlier than their Western counterparts. It again indicates that Chinese intellectuals are concerned that economic performance alone cannot sustain the CCP's rule. Now more than ever before, the CCP has been concerned that economic performance might not be enough to provide sufficient legitimacy.

Second, while many Western scholars argue that ideology is meaningless nowadays, Chinese intellectuals still consider ideology a leading strategy to maintain the CCP's legitimacy. Arguably, ideology is considered by many Chinese intellectuals to be helpful when facing almost all of the most perceived legitimacy threats including changing value towards liberal democracy, socioeconomic inequality, corruption, and the inability of the bureaucratic system. For example, some argue that ideological education – especially moral education – for government officials is crucial to enhancing bureaucratic efficiency and reducing corruption (Shen and Zhang, 2010; Xia, 2008b). Some argue that Hu Jintao's Harmonious Society and Scientific Outlook of Development helped to gain support from under-privileged groups in the context of widening socioeconomic inequality (Wang, 2011c). In addition, ideology is obviously crucial when facing changing values towards liberal democracy. The Chinese intellectuals' strong emphasis on ideology again indicates the importance of ideology. As Chapter 4 will show, ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining the internal stability of the CCP and legitimizing its authoritarian rule in contemporary China.

Third, while many overseas China observers are focusing on the search for Chinese philosophies to underpin a new polity, as Chapter 3 discussed, the Chinese intellectuals are looking to the West instead. Fourthly, there is a distinct rising appeal of social autonomy that runs counter to the dominant official line in this debate. Lastly, this study finds a correlation between authors' backgrounds (institutions, research locations, and funding sources) and their dominant arguments about legitimacy.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the Chinese debate on legitimacy was mainly inspired by the party resolution on strengthening the CCP's ruling capacity in 2004 – there were several articles concerning legitimacy published before 2004, however, most of them were published after the resolution was released. Thus, the debate on legitimacy between 2002 and 2012 presents the academic discourse of legitimacy in contemporary China. This chapter will compare my dataset (2007-2012) with that of Gilley and Holbig (2002-2007) in order to reflect the entire debate on regime legitimacy.

## **4.2 Research Method and Data**

### **4.2.1 Method**

In order to understand the legitimacy debate in China, this chapter developed a coding manual and coded 125 Chinese articles on legitimacy (Appendix A). The coding manual is redesigned from Gilley's and Holbig's (2009) work, which studies a similar legitimacy debate between 2002 and 2007. More information about my coding manual, please see Appendix A. The coding of each article starts with the following questions.

- How does the author evaluate political legitimacy in China?
- What are the perceived threats to legitimacy?
- What are the suggested strategies for maintaining legitimacy?

- Whose studies have they cited?

125 articles were selected from the China Academic Journals Full-text Database <http://www.cnki.net/> – the largest academic journal full-text database in the world. Its humanities and social science database covers 3,300 official social and humanities journals, papers from 9,964 significant conferences, and 515 important newspapers (CNKI, 2012). All articles with “legitimacy” in the title and which include discussions about the legitimacy of the Chinese state and the CCP (published between 1 January 2008 and 1 September 2012) in this database have been selected. Articles which studied the legitimacy of public policies, ideologies, civil organizations and political parties (other than the CCP) were filtered out.

In addition to the content analysis, I also contacted several key contributors of this debate to understand some distinct patterns of Chinese literature.

#### 4.2.2 Limitations

Owing to the nature of the database and the limitations on what is published in Chinese journals, the selection does not include the opinions of dissidents or confidential discussions about the state. In addition, the database does not include books; however, no cutting-edge Chinese book on state legitimacy was published in the period, and what has been published is typically discussed in articles and thus captured by this analysis (albeit in a secondary manner).

While proposing the dissolution of CCP rule or the move to a competitive multi-party democracy remains taboo, this analysis reveals a remarkably open and plural debate. If the focus is on how to maintain and strengthen CCP rule (rather than replace it), then the debate over legitimacy is an open and public one. This includes ideas that run counter to the dominant official line.

Notably, policies do not always originate from academic debate in China; it can be the other way around, in that academic discussions are sometimes used to test and promote the preferred policies of individual leaders. Either way, this debate about political legitimacy is closely related to the survival strategies of the CCP.

#### 4.2.3 Compositions of the Selected Articles and the Contributors

Among the selected articles, 17% are based on government-funded projects.<sup>7</sup> I find that those funded projects are more likely to advocate improvement in public welfare provision [ $X^2(1, N = 125) = 6.395, p < .05$ ] (see Appendix B). This finding mirrors the way that the regime has shifted its emphasis towards improving people’s livelihood. Interestingly, I also find correlations between authors’ research locations and their arguments.<sup>8</sup> Intellectuals based in richer regions are less likely to worry about socioeconomic inequality [ $r = -0.345, n=123$ ,

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<sup>7</sup> The funding came from various governmental institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, and some large national foundations, such as the National Natural Science Scientific Foundation of China, which is an institution controlled directly by the State Council. The funding source (if there is any) is usually listed on the first page of each Chinese article.

<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Shaun Breslin for suggesting that I study this relationship. The independent variable is coded according to the GDP per capita of the province where the authors’ institutions were located in 2009. N=123 because two articles are filtered: one is anonymous and the other is translated from English articles. In cases where there are two authors, the first author has priority.

p=0.000],<sup>9</sup> the sustainability of China's economy [ $r = -0.245$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ], corruption [ $r = -0.200$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.027$ ], and inadequate political participation [ $r = -0.213$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ]. One possible reason for this is that richer regions have benefited more from China's economic growth than poorer regions; therefore, they are more capable of solving problems caused by economic growth.

Authors based in poorer regions showed a significant inclination towards suggesting that the government should increase bureaucratic efficiency and transparency [ $r = -0.179$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.047$ ], increase citizen participation [ $r = -0.228$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.011$ ], and encourage the development of civil society [ $r = -0.194$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.031$ ]. Those in richer regions are more likely to propose that the government should improve its ability to guide public opinion [ $r = 0.255$ ,  $n = 123$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ]. These findings indicate very diverse demands and interests among Chinese provinces.

In this debate, 17 authors are from different party schools, including the Central Party School in Beijing and various provincial and municipal party schools. It is notable that the party school system is the key think tank and the "incubator of reform ideas and policies" of the CCP (Shambaugh, 2008b). The authors from the party school system and the government were more interested in party democracy [ $\chi^2(1, N = 125) = 7.995$ ,  $p < .01$ ].

Selected articles are written by university professors/researchers (81.7%), party school professors/researchers (13.4%), government officials (2.4%), and military officers (1.6%). Some authors hold positions in both universities and party schools. This needs to be noted, as there is no clear line between officials and scholars in China. For instance, Yu Keping, an author in this debate and one of the most influential party intellectuals, is both the deputy director of the Central Compilation & Translation Bureau and a professor at Peking University. Another author Cao Yanzhong is a senior colonel and also a researcher who works for the Chinese military.

### 4.3. Overview

#### 4.3.1 Citation Rates of Scholars

The results of the reference rates are shown in Figure 2.<sup>10</sup> Only 2% of articles in the debate considered Chinese philosophies concerning legitimacy compared with 19% of articles which mentioned the ancient Western philosopher Aristotle. This is interesting because it seems to go against the grain of thinking of China as in some way exceptional and built on different philosophies to Western states. On the one hand, many Chinese officials and scholars have frequently reminded the Western scholars about the uniqueness of China and the move towards the concept of "harmony" built on China's specific historical traditions. Indeed, the criticism that Western scholars failed to pay enough attention to Chinese culture and misused Western theories in their study of China rose in the very early stages of China Studies (Harding, 1984:297). To a certain extent, the rise of "Chinese exceptionalism" is a response to this kind of criticism. As Chapter 3 discussed, many analysts outside China have been increasingly interested in using China's past to explain the present. On the other hand,

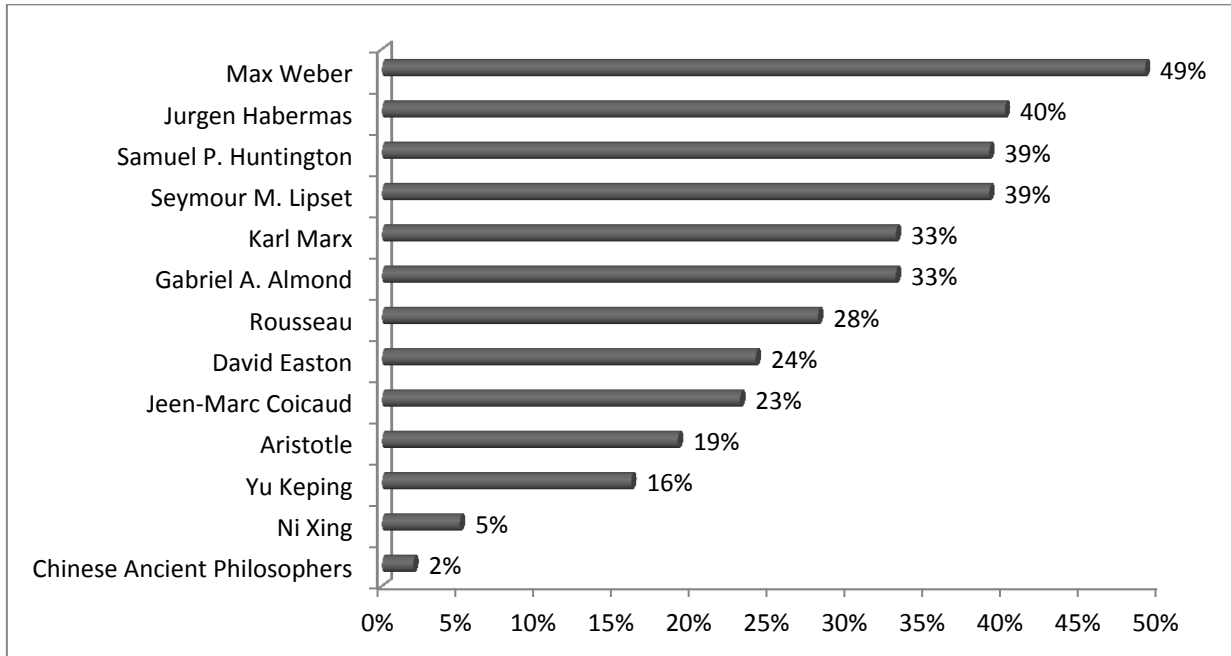
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<sup>9</sup> They are more likely to mention regional inequality.

<sup>10</sup> Instead of importing the bibliography into Endnote as the previous study did, this study manually coded the citation and provides specific rates for comparison. This is because sometimes when those Chinese authors simply mention the names of the scholars or their books in the text, this is not reflected in the bibliography. In addition, problems can easily be caused by different Chinese translations of scholars' names.

the Chinese debate is much more influenced by Western theories than traditional Chinese philosophies.

**Figure 2: Reference rates of scholars in the Chinese discourse of legitimacy**



Source: the author's own database

This finding indicates that the advocates of the “China Model” have not convinced party intellectuals yet. Indeed, Western theories currently dominate the Chinese literature of modern politics. A major reason for this is that traditional Chinese political philosophies have not been sufficiently adapted into modern civilization. Although great efforts are made to modernize Chinese philosophies, they have not yet reproduced a more convincing system to compete with the well-established Western theories. To a certain point, it is true to say that Western theories cannot necessarily easily explain China, and that Western analysts cannot understand China because of its unique historical and cultural traditions (Pan, 2011; Zheng, 2012), but the alternatives offered (if there are any) tend to be worse. In the words of Ma Deyong (2012), an influential author in the legitimacy debate:

“Currently, none of the Chinese scholars can create a widely accepted academic system. All we can do is to develop new concepts and theories based on the current academic system in order to explain the present.”

As indicated in Figure 2, western scholars dominate not only in ancient but also in modern and contemporary Chinese discourses of legitimacy. The most popular scholars in the debate are all from the West: Max Weber (49%), Jurgen Habermas (40%), Samuel P. Huntington (39%) and Seymour M. Lipset (39%). Interestingly, Karl Marx, the founder of communist ideology, has only been mentioned in 33% of articles – not many in comparison with other Western thinkers. In the debate, the empirical school of legitimacy is more influential than the critical school and the normative school. This is not only because of the higher reference rate of the empiricists such as Weber and Lipset, but also owing to the fact



that the empirical school has been adopted more frequently to approach the issue of legitimacy in a practical way. Weber’s framework of legitimacy in particular and the subsequent modified versions are widely endorsed in the debate.

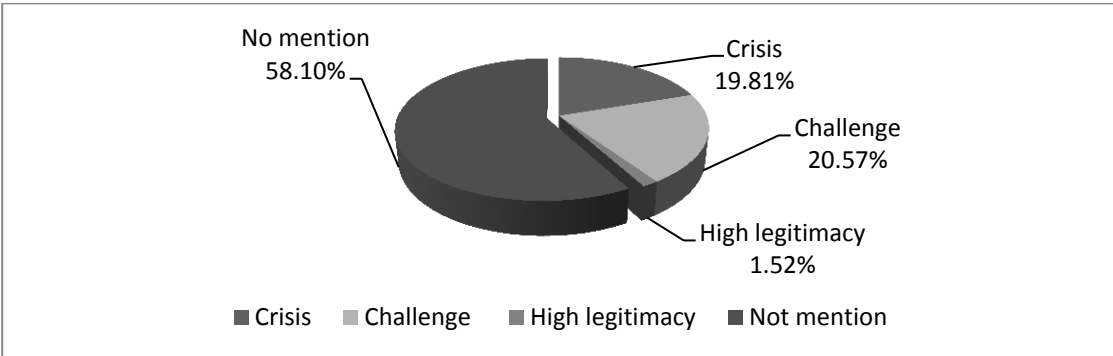
During the coding, I find that almost no author in the debate directly challenged or responded to others although all of them were discussing the same topic and presenting different opinions. A similar pattern was also found in the previous study, in which Chinese elites do not only rarely give a direct response but also avoid citing others. Gilley and Holbig (2009:342) argue that this might be because of “a latent fear among scholars of being grouped with each other, categories as holding as a partisan view and ending up as representing the ‘wrong line’”. However, there seems to be less fear now than before. Yu Keping, one of the key authors and also the most cited Chinese scholar in the debate, has been cited by 16% of articles. Yu’s “good governance” is one of the most popular terms used in this debate.

Indeed, it is a common phenomenon that Chinese literature of political studies has relatively short reviews of other Chinese colleagues’ work. This is partly because of the current Chinese academic norms and standards (Ma 2012; Huang 2012; Yu 2012). Chinese intellectuals are reluctant to judge others’ articles, especially in term of giving critical comments, because of “(their) academic culture” (Yu 2012).

4.3.2 Evaluations of political legitimacy

As discussed in Chapter 3, many intellectuals outside China argue that the CCP has enjoyed strong popular support or political trust; and this view is strongly supported by various cross-national surveys including the Asian barometer and the World Values Survey. According to a professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong Wang Shaoguang (2010b:139; 2012b) and a professor at National Taiwan University Chu Yunhan (2013:4), the CCP’s strong legitimacy is a “consensus” of “scholars familiar with the field”. Chinese intellectuals, however, seem to be much more pessimistic than this “consensus”.

**Figure 3: Evaluation of Chinese intellectuals on different levels of regime legitimacy**



Source: the author’s own database

As indicated in Figure 3, only two articles argue that regime legitimacy is high or relatively high. Nearly 20% of authors argue that the regime was experiencing a legitimacy crisis and 21% of authors, including Yu Keping, hold that the party-state is facing some forms

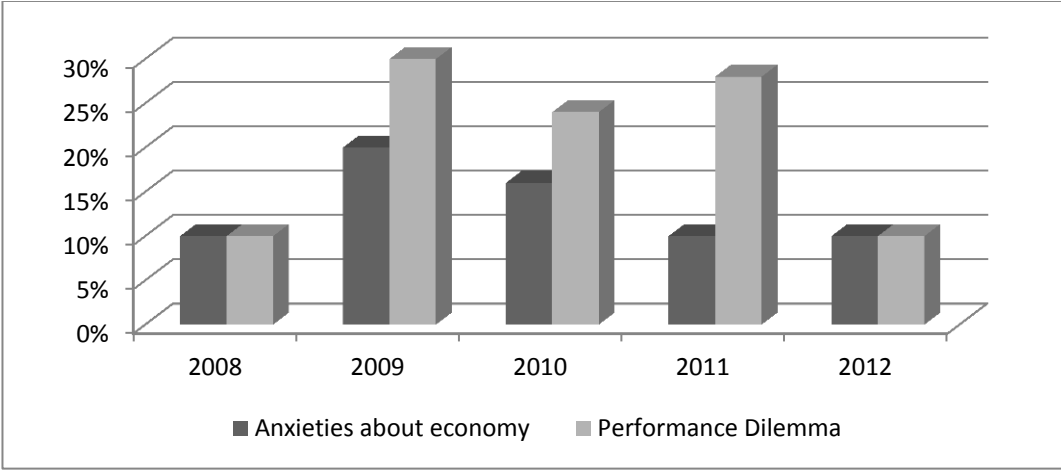
of challenges or threats to its legitimacy. Possible interpretations of the pessimistic view held by Chinese intellectuals are: party intellectuals have insights unavailable to the outside; those whose job it is to look for challenges to legitimacy tend to see problems everywhere; or, most persuasively, both of the above.

4.3.3. Legitimacy Threats

Various domestic (mainly social and political) factors rather than international factors are considered to be the main source of perceived threats in the debate. Only 14% of authors mentioned globalization as a reason why legitimacy has declined and 5% blamed this on the West – the so-called “foreign or Western hostile forces”. Moreover, 13% of authors expressed their concern that the current pace of economic growth is unsustainable, while 21% were concerned about the on-going or imminent “performance dilemma”.

As indicated in Figure 4, anxieties about the economy and performance dilemma largely increased after 2008. It suggests that the 2008 financial crisis led to serious concerns about China’s economy. As mentioned, in the West, there is now a growing school of thought that China might be heading towards a financial crisis (Naughton, 2009; Ross, 2012). The IMF(2010) called Chinese response to the financial crisis “quick, determined, and effective”. However, Chinese analysts tended to be more pessimistic earlier than their Western counterparts.

**Figure 4: Frequency of performance dilemma and anxieties about the economy between 2008 and 2012**



Source: The author’s own database

**Table 2: Threats to political legitimacy in Chinese intellectuals’ opinions**

| Variables                | Frequency | Note  |
|--------------------------|-----------|---|
| Socioeconomic inequality | 49%       | e.g. the gap between the rich and the poor, social inequality, regional inequality, the gap between the rural and urban areas |
| Changing values          | 49%       | e.g. weakening of communist ideology, increasing  |

|  |     |  |
|--|-----|--|
|  |     | civic awareness and promoting Western political values                             |
| Corruption                             | 43% | e.g. corruption  |
| Bureaucracy (threat)                   | 39% | e.g. inefficiency, opacity, incapability of bureaucracy                            |
| Inadequate political participation     | 30% | e.g. inadequate political participation of citizens or NGOs                        |
| Interest                               | 21% | e.g. conflicting interests of different social groups, classes, or interest groups |
| Environmental degradation              | 14% | e.g. environmental pollution, pressures of large population                        |
| Inadequate public provision of welfare | 13% | e.g. health, education, social security, housing, and pensions                     |
| Inadequate rule of law                 | 13% | e.g. poor legislative quality and inadequate judiciary, and implementation of law  |
| Development of technology              | 5%  | e.g. Internet, new mass media, social network                                      |

Source: The author's own database

As indicated in Table 2, almost half of the authors consider socioeconomic inequality (49%) and changing values (49%) to be the major threats to legitimacy, followed by corruption (43%) and bureaucracy (39%). This finding is strikingly concordant with the insights of Chinese leading cadres who considered inequality and corruption to be the most serious social problems, according to a report of the Chinese Social Science Academy (Ru, *et al.*, 2008). Whyte's survey study is worth mentioning to make some interesting comparisons here. Whyte (2010) finds that most Chinese are not bothered by socioeconomic inequality and consider the current system fair. These two seemingly contradictory findings present an interesting phenomenon – that Chinese leaders believe that the masses to be worrying about an issue when, in fact, they are not.

Regarding the issue of corruption, two contradictory opinions exist in Chinese mass media. Many argue that the government should immediately promote strong reforms and democratic development to curb corruption (Cao, 2012). Others hold that corruption will decline in line with socioeconomic development, because the widespread corruption is an issue associated with the modernization of developing countries. Thus, removing corruption from the system is a long process and China should guard against undue haste (Times, 2012). Ramirez's optimistic study about corruption in China is worth mentioning here. By comparing China's level of corruption with that of the US at a similar state of development, Ramirez argues that corruption levels in China will gradually decline with further modernization, as was the case with US (Ramirez, 2012). However, no article provides an in-depth analysis of the latter view in the legitimacy debate, although corruption is frequently mentioned. It indicates that Chinese intellectuals have not examined this issue comparatively and so perhaps miss the "normalcy" of the Chinese situation.

The finding about technology development is notable. While many contend that the development of the Internet, in particular social networks, has tremendously changed China in many aspects (Baum, 2008; Liu and Chen, 2012), only 5% of authors mentioned it in the legitimacy debate. Most authors do not perceive the development of technology to be a direct threat to legitimacy. Rather, the Internet is regarded as an intermediary that would enlarge various socioeconomic problems. The authors either argue that strict control over the Internet

is not feasible in the long run, or they tend to emphasize solving the root problems over increasing Internet censorship.

#### 4.3.4. Policy Options for Maintaining Legitimacy

While China watchers tend to explain political legitimacy in terms of economic prosperity, Chinese intellectuals have already realized that economic growth alone will not guarantee the CCP's ruling position. As mentioned, a number of intellectuals expressed anxieties about economic and "performance dilemma". Moreover, in the legitimacy debate between 2002 and 2007, 50% of intellectuals suggested promoting better, faster and more sustainable economic growth to maintain legitimacy (Gilley and Holbig, 2009), but only 21% still insist on doing so now. Many articles continuously warned about the fleeting nature of performance legitimacy and the necessity of establishing more solid legitimacy foundations, especially rational-legal legitimacy. Arguably, in China, it is a near consensus that the state should find sources of legitimacy other than economic performance.

In order to address the threats to legitimacy mentioned above, public intellectuals have suggested a set of diverse solutions. In the debate between 2008 and 2012, the most frequently mentioned strategies are: the improvement of bureaucracy (46%, 25% in the previous study)<sup>11</sup>, propaganda (38%), citizen participation (37%) and civil society (27%, 10% previously) compared with rule of law (64%), economic growth (50%), democracy (50%) and propaganda (48%) in the debate between 2003 and 2007 (Gilley and Holbig, 2009).

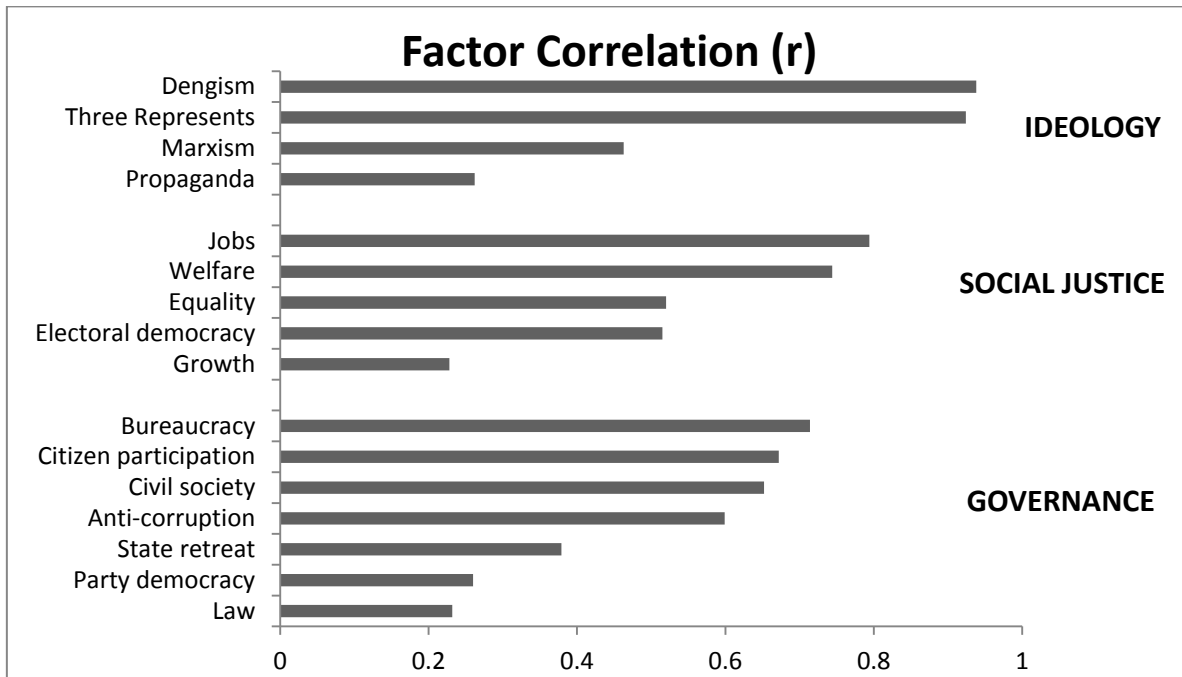
Among those legitimacy strategies, some might serve as competing alternatives to one another, whilst others – such as citizen participation and civil society – might work to complement each other. To understand better how those strategies knit together and identify specific forms of strategies, I performed a principal component factor analysis on the 29 variables in my coding book. This study labels the top components as ideology, social justice, and governance, as indicated in Figure 5. The dispersion of all variables along with ideology (component 1) and governance (component 3) are shown in Figure 6.

As indicated in Figures 5 and 6, bureaucracy, citizen participation and civil society are more likely to be proposed together as ways to address threats to legitimacy. Therefore, they are not only some of the most frequently mentioned strategies, but also more united in their prescriptions for the party-state, which indicates a clear rising appeal of social autonomy. The next section examines proposed strategies through a qualitative analysis.

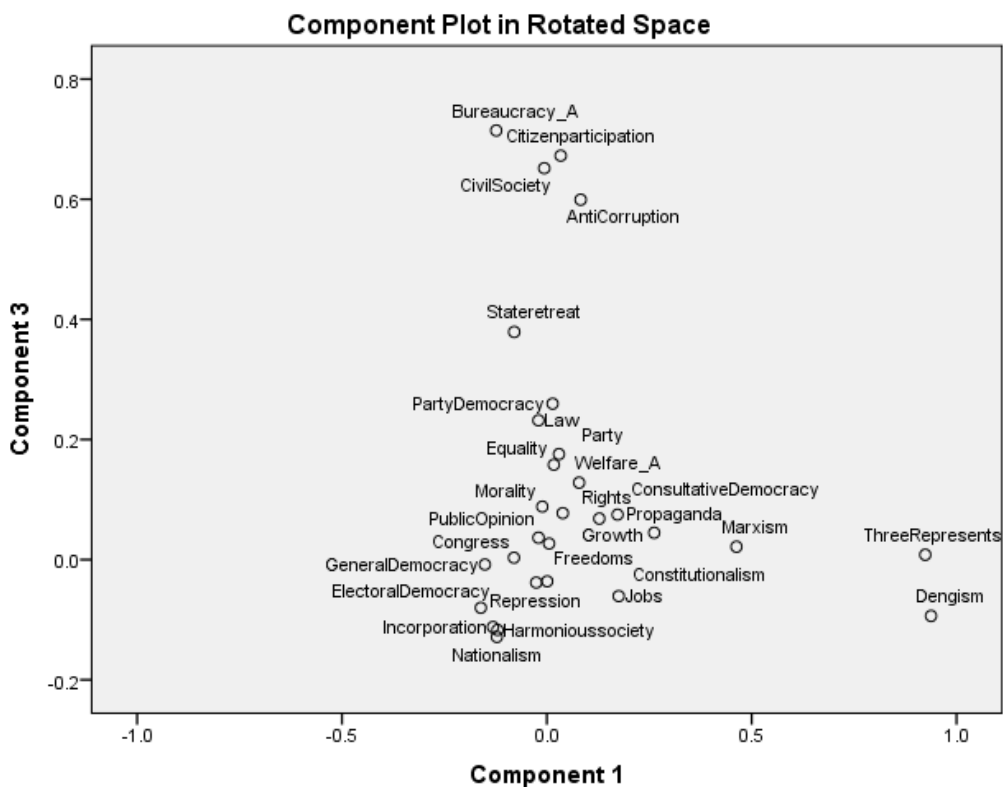
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<sup>11</sup> It generally refers to creation of a more responsive, transparent, and predictable bureaucratic structure that is efficient and effective.

**Figure 5: Three dimensions of proposed strategies for maintaining legitimacy (factor correlations  $r$ )<sup>12</sup>**



**Figure 6: Correlations (r) of variables along ideology and governance**



<sup>12</sup> No author in the debate advises the separation of the party and the government and the promotion of Maoism; therefore, those two variables are filtered. For more information, please see Appendix C

#### 4.3.4.1 Ideology

As discussed in Chapter 3, many Western scholars considered ideology obsolete. Chinese leaders and intellectuals, however, have always taken it seriously. Various ideological discourses have been produced to justify the CCP's rule. When new ideological formula is launched, previous ideologies have been "discarded" to a certain extent. Mao Zedong Thought, the bible of China's rising New Leftists, is completely discarded in the debate, although many observed similar problems – socioeconomic inequality in particular – with the New Leftists. In addition, only three articles mentioned Deng Xiaoping Theory compared with four articles on Jiang Zemin's Three Represents. Almost all relevant articles symbolically mentioned those previous ideologies by name without giving any detail. This result is completely different from the debate five years ago, in which all major ideologies were mentioned: Marxism (34%), Mao Zedong Thought (13%), Deng Xiaoping Theory (24%), Three Represents (39%), and Harmonious Society (18%).

The new fashionable proposition is the Socialist Core Values System. This system is proposed in the new rounds of ideological adaptation in order to strengthen the attractiveness and cohesiveness of socialist ideology. Much of the relevant discourse in the debate is about this adaptation. As proposed in a party report that has been frequently cited in the debate, the construction of a Socialist Core Values System is the foundation of the harmonious culture. This system consists of Marxism (its guiding ideology), socialism with Chinese characteristics, patriotism, and the Socialist Concept of Honour and Disgrace" (CCP, 2006). As Chang Sumei (2009) put it, "the diversification and differentiation of values have increased the disorder of social values and have thus reduced party legitimacy". Thus, some suggest that the state should use the Socialist Core Values System to integrate various social values and form an ideological structure – in which Marxism is the leading ideology coexisting with other diversified thoughts. Indeed, this system includes elements of both formal and informal ideologies, as Chapter 5 will discuss.

##### 4.3.4.1.1 Marxism

Marxism (16%) is proposed as a guiding ideology of the Socialist Core Values System in the debate. As Chapter 5 will discuss, Marxism in the Chinese context refers to Marxism with Chinese characteristics instead of orthodox Marxism. Nowadays, the primary task of "Sinification of Marxism" is to "combine Marxism with Chinese national condition" (makesi zhuyi he zhongguo guoqing xiang jiehe). The CCP has spent a great amount of human capital to reinvest Marxism. For example, the project of "Marxist Theory Research and Construction Engineering Project" alone has over 1,000 Chinese scholars to participate in (Holbig, 2013: Footnote 20).

In the legitimacy debate, many authors used the party reports and Hu Jintao's report on the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress to highlight the significance of Marxism. For example, Sun Yong and Liu Qingfeng (2009) argue that "the Socialist Core Values System is the very foundation of China's common ideals, which is the premise underlying the party-state. The party-state might be at risk of splitting and collapsing without this foundation".

Marxism has an irreplaceable role in the past, present and the future of the CCP's ruling according to many in the debate. For instance, Xu Jialing, the visiting scholar of the Central Compilation & Translation Bureau, argues that "Marxism has been a key legitimacy pillar of the CCP, revolution, and reforms in the past decades, and only Marxism, rather than any other

theory, can provide the legitimacy to combine socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Xu, 2009).

#### 4.3.4.1.2. Patriotism and Nationalism

Nationalism has been discussed in 12% of articles in the debate compared with 15% in the previous study. Similar to the previous study, nationalist positions distributed evenly over the legitimacy debate analysed here. In the debate, nationalism is discussed as a part of the Socialist Core Values System. It is generally considered as a helpful tool to increase Chinese people’s national identity. Whilst most relevant articles actually refer to patriotism (aiguo zhuyi) rather than nationalism (minzu zhuyi), there are two articles published in the Guangxi Journal of Ethnology which do refer to nationalism. Zhang Wenjing and Du Jun (2010b) argue that nationalism is a double-edged sword that can split China because nationalism helps to provide legitimacy and effective political mobilization on the one hand, and promotes separatism and intensifies the contradiction between Han and ethnic minorities on the other hand. They suggested launching patriotic education campaigns and suggested highlighting the fact that China is a united political entity in order to improve ethnic minorities’ national identity. It is very important to prevent the ideological infiltration and political propaganda of dissenters from overseas, so they argue that information control is necessary. In another article, they argue that the government should reduce ethnic consciousness and construct a common Chinese culture (Zhang and Du, 2010a).

Another article argues that the demonstration of military power can enhance legitimacy by increasing national pride. Wang Haizhou (2010a) contends that China’s National Day Military Parade has enhanced legitimacy by serving as a political ceremony.

#### 4.3.4.2 Governance

Further market reform and rapid economic growth have created many problems in China, which are shaking the legitimacy of the party-state. As mentioned, various social problems – inequality in particular – are considered as the top threats nowadays. Various plans regarding social reforms and the improvement of bureaucratic system are proposed to help the party-state.

##### 4.3.4.2.1 Citizen Participation

As Li Liang warns, if people’s desire for political participation cannot be satisfied, they will be easily disappointed with the political system, which will further shake the legitimacy (Li, 2010b). The problems with citizen participation in China are analysed in the debate in two ways: excessive informal participation and inadequate channels of formal participation. Informal participation refers to illegal and inappropriate ways – such as popular protests and bribes – to influence policy making, and formal participation refers to the institutionalized ways to influence policy making – such as public hearings. Increased informal participation causes either corruption or social instability, both of which are destructive to political legitimacy. Some in the debate consider the inadequate institutionalized channels of citizen participation to be an important factor in the increasing popular protests in China (Yang, 2010b).

The benefits expected from citizen participation are numerous. Liu Dongjie (2009) argues that citizen participation in policy making will help to make better policies and strengthen the supervision over policy implementations and evaluations. Xia Jingmei (2008a) argues that citizen participation will help to maintain stability by “solving conflicting interests of different social classes, protecting people’s rights, increasing bureaucratic efficiency, and enhancing national identity”. Notably, citizen participation is considered by some as a way to unite social forces and to restrict state power. For example, Wang and Li (2011) argue that “dispersed citizens cannot confront the strong administrative power” and thus citizen participation is necessary to help citizens to balance state power.

In order to promote more orderly citizen participation, many urge the state to play a role in nurturing civic spirits. As Yang Xuedong (2007), an associate researcher of the Central Compilation & Translation Bureau pointed out, the government should cultivate the public spirit of participation rather than “buying citizens’ compliances”. Yao Jingjing (2009) argues that traditional civic awareness is “too passive” and the state should cultivate people’s willingness to participate through education and official propaganda.

#### 4.3.4.2.2 Civil Society, Limited Government, and Social Autonomy

Civil society (27%) has been much more frequently proposed in the legitimacy debate now compared with five years ago (10%). Modern theories of public administration – limited government and citizen participation in particular – are frequently cited to support relevant arguments. Reasons for supporting civil society and social autonomy in this debate are manifold: changing values, the rise of the third sector, the inability of the traditional bureaucracy, and corruption.

Consequently, many in the debate suggest a new governance model that is co-managed by the society, the state, and the market. For instance, Huang Jianrong (2010) argues that “the current management model of the state has become a barrier to political and economic developments”, and the state should “face the fact that both social and public affairs cannot be well managed by the government alone”. In Huang’s opinion, civil society and NGOs are the main forces to harness in order to supervise and restrict state power, which eventually can prevent and reduce corruption. Civil society is also suggested in order to consolidate the CCP’s ruling in ethnic minority areas. Deng Mei (2009) argues that civil organizations will increase interactive communications between the political system and the citizens, strengthen the uptake rate of social resources, and maintain social order.

The rising recognition of civil society is partly because of civil organizations’ constructive roles in the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake. Various NGOs have helped the government through the entire process of disaster relief and reconstruction. They have been considered by many as a helping hand rather than a threat. For instance, Chun Yumiaoling and Liang Xiao (2009) argue that the government should promote the development of NGOs as complementary to the state in order to maintain legitimacy and to overcome future crisis.

##### 4.3.4.2.2.1 Pitfall of Civil Society (gongmin shehui xianjing) vs. Cooperated Governance

Clearly, the government might be reluctant to share power with the social forces. According to Xue Tao (2008), “some party cadres regarded civil society as alien to resisting



or confronting the state power; some even argued that the development of civil society would reduce the party's capability of leading and managing society".

The "pitfall of civil society" is a notable and controversial idea which serves to resist the development of civil society; it is proposed by the Secretary-General of the Central Commission for Politics and Law and the deputy director of the Central Commission for Comprehensive Management of Social Security Zhou Benshun. Considering its significance, it is necessary to introduce briefly the cleavage over civil society, although it is not a part of the legitimacy debate. Zhou (2011) argues that the current mode of social management is an "advantage"; thus, the regime should not promote civil society – "a pitfall designed by some Western countries" – to govern the society. Zhou (2011) also argues that the state and party committees should "put social management and public services in place rather than let society be in charge".

Partly because of Zhou's official capacity, this article published in the party's primary mouthpiece *Seeking Truth* reflected the official position of civil society to a certain extent and thus received wide attention. However, no author in the legitimacy debate openly endorses this position. All relevant articles mentioning civil society endorse the development of civil society. Although a few articles pointed out negative impacts of civil society on legitimacy, the relevant discourse appears as a comparison with positive impacts and ends with the conclusion that the government should promote rather than repress it. For example, Xue Tao (2008) from the Shandong Provincial Party School pointed out four positive impacts and three negative impacts of civil society on the CCP's legitimacy. First, a rising number of civil organizations can lead to diversified demands and groups of interests, which makes it more difficult for the ruling party to manage the society. Second, civil society can challenge the party's control over ideology. Third, the development of civil society can lead to an increased change in value, which has been eroding the relationship between the party (and its cadres) and the people. The positive impacts include pushing the party's values from absolute rule towards governance, accelerating the reform of the party-state's governing style, increasing bureaucratic efficiency, and reforming the party system.

#### 4.3.4.2.2 Limited Government (youxian zhengfu)

"Limited government" is another popular term in the debate. 20% of authors suggested that the government should retreat from social areas and return power to society. For example, Yu (2010) argues that the state withdrawal/retreat can help to avoid bureaucratic inefficiency and thus can help to increase the effectiveness of governance. According to Yu (2010), state withdrawal/retreat is an important step towards good governance. Zhang Jian (2008) argues that the rising civil society and the ideas of limited government are "historical tendencies" that are unavoidable in a market economy; for this reason, the state should follow those tendencies.

Many argue that traditional political totalism and the "big government, small society" mode should be abandoned in order to face up to the legitimacy crisis (Li, 2011). Some argue that corruptions will be reduced if the state restricts its field of activities (Zheng and Tu, 2008). The state is offered as an option that can allow the market to provide more public services (Shen and Zhang, 2010).

#### 4.3.4.2.3 “Strong State and Weak Society (da zhengfu, xiao shehui)” vs. “Weak state and Strong society (xiao zhengfu, da shehui)” = “Strong State and Strong Society (da zhengfu, da shehui)”?

In the debate, some criticized the state’s strict control over social affairs and the “strong state and weak society” model. For example, Xu Chengyu (2011) argues that the state’s monopoly on power and information has made its relationship with the citizens more intense. In addition, it also leads to inefficient resource allocation and unfair competition.

Even though Chinese intellectuals recognized the problems of the “strong state and weak society,” none openly advised a “weak state and strong society” model in the debate. Zhou Benshun’s “pitfall of civil society” article partly explains why. Zhou (2011) was directly critical of those “who do not understand the social management model in foreign countries” and argues that “not all the developed countries adopt the ‘weak government and strong society’ model and many of them have ‘strong states; many social organizations have government backgrounds and are under the control of their governments’”. In Zhou’s opinions (2011), China must tighten its control over social organizations and prevent the multiplication of those organizations with “ulterior motives”.

Interestingly, “strong society and strong state” is proposed as an alternative in order to balance “strong state and weak society” and “weak state and strong society”. Ma Xiaoni and Cheng Weijie (2011), for example, argue that only “big society and big government” can help the state to win more support. It seems that this alternative could solve the problems of “weak society” by promoting a “strong society” and avoid conflicting with the state by maintaining a “strong state”.

#### 4.3.4.2.3 Bureaucracy (solution)

Under the guidance of the Scientific Outlook of Development, the idea of People-Oriented (yi ren wei ben) has been promoted as a basic value of the entire state. It attempts to change the ruling philosophies and functions of the state from growth-oriented to public service-oriented. In the legitimacy debate, this idea is frequently used to highlight the importance of rebuilding bureaucracy. Many argue that the state should change its main priority from economic growth to social management in order to build a public service-oriented government and to strengthen the provision of public service (Shong and Wang, 2009; Zhu, 2008).

Chinese intellectuals propose both external and internal ways to restrict state power and officials. Externally, they suggest public supervision and transparency. For instance, Chen Bohui (2008) argues that public overseeing is the most effective way to restrict state power. According to Chen (2008), “Chinese mass media does not dare and is not willing to investigate corruption because of the government interventions”; therefore, China should enact laws to protect mass media. The establishment of internal institutions and regulations are also advised for the purposes of preventing corruption and increasing performance (Wang and Li, 2011).

Promoting transparency of information is considered to be a way to maintain stability and legitimacy. For example, Li Chuxue and Luo Zhang (2012) argue that the development of the Internet and mass media provide channels for rumours and inaccurate information. Therefore, local governments should objectively publicize rather than attempt to hide the

relevant information. In Yu's (2010) "good governance", transparency is a basic component of modern states and it is popular with supporters of "good governance".

The rapidly changing circumstances have led to concern about the state's decision-making capabilities. By listing past problematic policies, Huang Jianrong (2010) argues that the government should strengthen its decision-making ability by changing its ruling philosophies from economic efficiency-oriented to people-oriented. Ren Hongjie (2011), a professor of the People's University of Public Security, warns that the information explosion led by the Internet's development has made it more difficult for the state to make scientific decisions. "Once the inappropriate policies and their consequences were exposed on the Internet, legitimacy would be significantly reduced". Therefore, Ren (2011) suggests that the government should "establish special mechanisms to collect and filter internet information for decision-making, build channels to communicate with the public about important policies, and increase the leaders' decision-making abilities by providing sufficient training".

Moral education is also suggested as complementary to bureaucratic rebuilding. For example, Xia Lei (2008b) argues that "the entire moral image of the party-state is reflected in each civil servant or party cadre"; as such, strengthening moral education for civil servants is essential. In addition, Shen Jingchen and Zhang Dawei (2010) argue that "the political education of civil servants should move from general, ideological education to a more specific education of administrative accountability".

#### 4.3.4.3 Social Justice

The promotion of social justice is the most direct way to respond to rising legitimacy concerns with regard to social problems. Inadequate social justice is considered both a direct and an indirect threat to party legitimacy: it leads to decreased support from disadvantaged groups and the poor, and also shakes social stability. As Yang Songlu (2010a) warns, if the state fails to improve people's livelihood, "it will not only slow down economic growth and damage social stability, but also threaten the regime's legitimacy". Peng Hua (2012), writing in house journal of the Beijing Youth Politics College, finds that social inequality and inadequate public provision of welfare have led to low political identities of the rural youth – a dangerous sign of social instability. Peng (2012) further argues that market reform in China has led to many socioeconomic problems and the government should take responsibility to improve people's livelihood and promote equality.

##### 4.3.4.3.1 People's Livelihood (min sheng)

With widening social inequality, focusing on people's livelihood is very critical to winning support from the poor. Jing Haixin argues that the issue of people's livelihood has become the root cause of social conflict in China (Jing, 2011). Notably, the term "people's livelihood" is not new to China as it used to be a part of Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People". The exact definition of "people's livelihood" is never settled because Sun never clearly or fully explains it, but the equal ownership of land is fairly clear as it is based on Henry George's Georgism (Sun, 1930). In the current context, people's livelihood represents a much broader spectrum. Both the ideas of "people-oriented" and people's livelihood imply a similar message: that economic means alone cannot sustain the CCP's ruling, but being

“people-oriented” focuses more on ideological values and the latter is more like a direct policy responding to the inadequate provision of public welfare.

Nowadays, an improvement in people’s livelihood is regarded by many as the new source of legitimacy in China (Lu and Shen, 2011). Based on two influential government funded survey projects in 2012, some even argue that the provision of public goods has replaced economic performance to become the most important legitimacy source. Ma Deyong and Wang Zhengxu (2012), for example, argue that the public provision of welfare and the fairness of institutional arrangements are the keys for local governments to overcome a legitimacy crisis. In another survey, Peking University’s Meng Tianguan and Yang Ming (2012) find that “economic growth can no longer help to maintain political trust, yet the increasing provision of public services – such as reducing the unemployment rate and Gini coefficient – and public welfare expenditure are still effective”.<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.3.4.3.2 Equality

As mentioned above, socioeconomic inequality has become the top legitimacy threat. Recognizing the widening of social inequality, the Scientific Outlook of Development intended to move the state’s priority from efficiency-oriented to a more balanced position of equity and efficiency.

In the debate, some argue that the government should play a role in compensating for market deficiencies and promoting equality. For example, Qu Wanhong (2011) argues that the government should compensate for market deficiencies, provide fairer competition in the market, and promote social justice – in particular regional equality. Specific economic policies to reduce inequality are also proposed. For example, Fu Jingtao and Li Ming (2009) suggest adjusting the structures of income tax and financial expenditure.

#### 4.3.4.3.3 Grassroots Democracy/ Basic Level Democracy (jiceng minzhu)

As noted above, intellectuals have been looking for more solid legitimacy sources other than economic performance; democracy is clearly a key way of establishing Weber’s rational-legal legitimacy. In Hu Jintao’s speech at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, socialist democracy – grassroots democracy in particular – has been proposed as a way to promote social justice. In the debate, grassroots democracy is considered by 13% of the articles as an effective way of promoting social justice and satisfying people’s rising demands to participate in the political process. Grassroots democracy is also considered an effective way of increasing the political legitimacy of local governments. For example, Ma and Wang’s (2012) study finds that the effective implementation of direct elections in villages and towns can enhance the legitimacy of the local states. Therefore, they suggest that the implementation of electoral democracy at local levels is worth trying.

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<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, their articles specifically point out that effective provision of welfare, rather than elections and citizen participation, is the main source of legitimacy in contemporary China. They also mention that this finding has confirmed the previous studies published in another legitimacy article in 2007. As mentioned, most articles did not directly challenge or respond to other competing views; however, this is the only exception. This is also the only article that mentioned citizen participation and elections but did not support them.

Interestingly, the debate seems to be systematically refraining from any conceptualization of the term “grassroots democracy”. Although it is mentioned frequently in the debate, no author has an interest in defining what “basic” (jiceng) is. Also, no author mentions what should follow after the success of basic democracy. Li Meiling (2009) argues that “democratic development has to be gradual because of the inadequate democratic traditions and values in Chinese history” and emphasizes that both high-level democracy and grassroots democracy are important. However, Li does not explain this so-called “high-level” in details.

Elections are, of course, an essential component of grassroots democracy. In the debate, only an article written by a senior colonel of the Chinese military openly opposes electoral democracy. It argues that the benefits of electoral democracy – such as increased political identity and stability – cannot compensate for the cost – such as decreased national identity, increased ethnic separatism, and low efficiency (Cao, 2010). According to this article, “the West attempts to use electoral democracy to bring disorder and chaos to China under the guise of protecting human rights”. The article considers party democracy as an alternative to electoral democracy.

Elections are also suggested in order to strengthen the Party’s ruling capabilities and subsequently its legitimacy. The Central Party School’s Zhao Yao (2011) argues that the party’s personnel system should make efforts to increase elections and gradually reduce appointments from the top. Zhao (2011) considers the electoral system to be a revolution of the appointment system and advises the implementation of gradual reforms, although he clearly recognizes that the electoral system might have risks associated.

#### **4.4. Summary**

This chapter studies Chinese literature on the subject of regime legitimacy in China. It shows Chinese intellectuals and Western scholars have very different views on this subject. Unlike the Western scholarship that places strong emphasis on performance legitimacy and consider ideology to be meaningless, Chinese intellectuals are seriously concerned that performance legitimacy might not be sufficient to maintain the CCP’s rule. Accordingly, ideology is proposed by Chinese intellectuals as a leading strategy to maintain the CCP’s legitimacy. As the next chapter will examine, ideology plays a crucial role in (a) legitimizing the CCP’s authoritarian rule by delegitimizing liberal democracy and (b) maintaining party cohesion by justifying the communist rule in contemporary China.

## Chapter Five Ideological and Political Education in Contemporary China:

### Formal Ideology and Informal Ideology

“Getting to grips with the leadership of thought control is the first priority in maintaining overall leadership.”

- *Mao Zedong, excerpt from his talk in 1942(Mao, 1991:435).*

“During the last ten years, our biggest mistake was made in the field of education, primarily in ideological and political education – not just of students but of the people in general.”

- *Deng Xiaoping (1989), excerpt from his speech to high-level cadres of the martial law units five days after the CCP used military force to end the protest of 1989.*

“The first thing for strengthening the party is to grasp ideological and political work, because solving ideological and political problems is the premise and foundation for other works.”

- *Jiang Zemin, excerpt from a talk in a conference on ideological and political work in 2000 (Jiang, 2005).*

“Ideology is an important front that we fiercely fight against hostile forces; if this front has some problems, it might lead to social turmoil and even the fall of our regime”.

- *Hu Jintao, excerpt from a talk in the sixth plenary session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the CCP (Literature, 2006:318).*

“Ideological work is extremely important.”

- *Xi Jinping, excerpt from a talk in the national conference of propaganda and ideological work, 19 August, 2013 (Ni, 2013)*

### 5.1.Introduction

This chapter examines various discourses of formal and informal ideologies, the mechanisms of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness. As established in the Introduction Chapter, a core argument in this thesis is that ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining party cohesion and the popular legitimacy of the CCP. The CCP has made great efforts in reinventing its ideologies; however, Western scholars argue that ideology is obsolete, as Chapter 3 discussed. Unlike in Western scholarship, ideological reform has been considered by Chinese intellectuals as a leading strategy for maintaining legitimacy, as Chapter 4 discussed. Chinese leaders also considered ideology crucial to their rule. All top leaders including Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping, attached great importance to ideological work, as I quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

## **5.2. Understanding the Role of Ideology in Post-Deng China from a Western Perspective**

As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, the existing literature suffers two conceptual weaknesses about ideology: (1) Chinese ideology is solely referred to communism and (2) ideology is considered as a belief system. Based on this understanding, it is reasonable for conventional wisdom of Western scholars to argue that ideology is meaningless in the context of declining communist beliefs among Chinese people. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, this thesis considered ideology as a form of discourse, which is capable of constraining words and deeds of the party elites even if they do not believe in it.

In addition to the mainstream view that ideology is obsolete, a few Western scholars still attach importance to ideology. As discussed in the Introduction Chapter, there are two different opinions on the role of ideology in contemporary China. While some argue that the CCP adapted its ideologies in order to legitimize its rule, others argue that contemporary Chinese leaders used ideology to struggle for power. These two views involve different types and functions of ideologies. The theoretical distinction between formal ideology and informal ideology provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the role of ideology. As mentioned, formal ideology – that is produced for the internal consumption of the CCP – involves establishing personal authority of top leaders, and thus it has a function of asserting power, and informal ideology – that is propagated to the entire society – plays the role of legitimating the authoritarian rule in China.

## **5.3. Understanding the Role of Ideology in Post-Deng China from a Chinese Perspective**

Unlike Western scholars, Chinese intellectuals are highly concerned about ideology. As Chapter 4 discussed, changing values is considered as a chief threat to the CCP's legitimacy. This issue leads to serious concern about the CCP's rule because the rise of pro-liberal democracy values in the 1980s was a key factor leading to the protest of 1989. In order to face the challenge of changing values, ideological innovation has been proposed as a leading strategy for maintaining the CCP's legitimacy, as Chapter 4 discussed. The Chinese intellectuals' articles about ideology focus on the new round of ideological reforms in 2004. In this round of ideological changes, the CCP (2006) proposed building a Socialist Core Values System, which is considered by the Chinese intellectuals to be crucial in strengthening the attractiveness and cohesion of the socialist ideology. This system includes elements of both formal and informal ideologies, as this chapter will examine.

## **5.4. Formal Ideological Discourses from Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping**

As the Introduction Chapter establishes, the CCP has used a formal type of ideology to revise the definition of socialism and thus explain why its policies are not incompatible with socialism. In this way, formal ideology helps to maintain consensus between reform-minded leaders and less reform-minded leaders. However, as formal ideology reflects the personal authority of top leaders, it may also intensify intra-party conflicts when it is used for factional purposes. This section will examine these aspects of formal ideology in contemporary China (2000-2013).

#### 5.4.1. Jiang Zemin and Three Represents (san ge dai biao)

Three Represents was first proposed by Jiang Zemin in 2000, which received wide domestic and international attention. Three Represents refers to “the importance of the communist party in modernizing the nation – representing the demands for the development of advanced social productive forces, the direction of advanced culture, and the fundamental interest of the greatest majority of the people” (English translation: Holbig, 2009). It used these “represents” to redefine the CCP’s commitment to socialism. In this regard, Three Represents followed some respects of Zhao Ziyang’s Primary Stage of Socialism, which provided more space for reformists to make quasi-capitalist economic policies, as discussed in Chapter 2. Although Three Represents was also propagated to the society, its major audience was clearly the party because its principal subject was the CCP and it mainly elaborated where the *party* should go. This is why some small controversies were caused when Three Represents was incorporated into the PRC constitution. Some scholars argue that Three Represents was just about a political party and thus it was inappropriate for it to be included in the national constitution (Li, 2004a).

To a certain extent, Three Represents’s ideological turn was driven by the changing political-socioeconomic landscapes. The context in which Three Represents was proposed was one in which corruption was encouraged by and grew out of economic growth; the corruption has become increasingly threatening to the party’s rule, as Chapter 2 mentioned. In order to fight against corruption, Jiang Zemin attempted to use Three Represents to stress the importance of the party’s discipline. Specifically, the second represent of Three Represents urged the party to maintain its advanced nature – especially its probity.

More importantly, the growing influence of private entrepreneurs led by the rapidly growing private economy in China could no longer be ignored by the CCP. As a ruling party, the CCP felt that it was more and more urgent and important to form some kinds of alliances with business elites. Three Represents’s first represent – that the party should represent the demands for the development of advanced socially productive forces – provided a theoretical foundation for the party to co-opt those business elites. Under this ideological guidance, the CCP officially expanded the party membership to include private entrepreneurs. It marked the CCP’s transition from a proletarian party towards an elite-governed party. This transition helped to win support from business elites; however, it also got away from the very ideological basis of a communist party – communism and proletariat. It suggested the party’s official acknowledgement of entrepreneurs and managers, so-called “capitalists”, as the new social “strata” if not “class” (Holbig, 2009). During Mao Zedong’s rule, both “capitalists” and social “strata/class” were major targets that the CCP were keen to destroy, as Chapter 2 discussed. As such, Three Represents also caused great controversy within the party.

As Chapter 2 discussed, some party members criticized the fact that “allowing the capitalists to join the proletariat party” contravened the CCP’s commitment to socialism/communism. For example, Zhang Dejiang (2000b; 2000a) argued that the CCP should not allow private entrepreneurs to join, otherwise, it would “blur the party’s nature and the standard of the working class vanguard”, estrange the relations between the party and the masses, and undermine the party’s popular support. In order to settle intra-party conflicts about the ideological turn of Three Represents, Hu Jintao had to reinterpret Three Represents as Three for People. This new interpretation of Three Represents emphasized the third “represent” of Three Represents (the interests of most Chinese people) instead of the first “represent” (the most advanced socially productive forces). In this way, Hu’s emphasis of



Three Represents moves back to the populist approach of the party without openly going against Jiang Zemin's legacy.

The above resistance to Three Represents was closely related to the second function of formal ideology: the personal authority of top leaders. As some suggest, Three Represents was an attempt by Jiang Zemin to put his stamp on history and on the party by proposing his own version of party theory (Fewsmith, 2003b; Zheng and Lye, 2003). In this sense, Three Represents is Jiang's political legacy. At the beginning, Jiang also attempted to insert his name into the Three Represents discourse – following the traditions of previous formal ideologies such as Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory. Thus, some party documents also referred to it as “Jiang Zemin's Three Represents”, but this seemed to violate the norm against cults of personality that was formed after Mao Zedong died. This attempt was resisted by Jiang's opponents and failed in the end.

In addition to political legacy, Three Represents was also closely related to Jiang's strategies to consolidate power and maintain influence after his retirement. As Bo Zhiyue (2004:35) argues, “Jiang saw ideology more a shortcut to frame and power than as a vision for the country.” As such, it led to different responses within the party. On the one hand, Three Represents received strong opposition from Jiang's political rivals such as Wan Li and Yang Baibing and small groups of communist believers. As mentioned, many criticized the fact that Three Represents betrayed the CCP's socialist commitment and that Jiang's attempt to build personal authority violated the norm against the cult of personality – from either real conviction or more pragmatic power motivation. On the other hand, Three Represents was highly praised by Jiang Zemin's followers. For example, the then vice-party secretary of Hubei, Yang Yongliang (2000), argued that

“Comrade Jiang Zemin's thought concerning the ‘Three Represents’ is like a giant building that overlooks the whole situation and contains rich content and deep meanings. It is a creative usage and development of Marxist theory and is strongly theoretical, scientific, creative, and practical” (English Translation: Shih, 2008).

Shih's study (2008) finds that Jiang Zemin's protégés are more likely to echo the campaign of Three Represents.

In this context, the ideological campaign of Three Represents became an arena to identify supporters and opponents of Jiang Zemin. During the campaigns, Jiang's supporters paid social and political costs to pander to Jiang (Shih, 2008). Political actors who shamelessly praised a senior leader and thus violated the norm against cults of personality might be despised as a boot-licker (i.e. social cost). In addition, junior leaders who pander through public grovelling to a senior leader suffer politically, because they are unlikely to be recruited by another rival coalition if their patron falls from power (i.e. political cost). By bearing the cost of being despised by others and closing the door to alternative factions, public grovelling through ideological campaigns sends creditable signals to senior leaders about political actors' loyalties (Shih, 2008). In this way, senior leaders can identify which followers are truly loyal. Thus, the ideological campaign of Three Represents was a chance for Jiang to obtain knowledge about his followers so that he could promote his true, loyal followers into powerful positions and thus maintain his influence after he retired. It again suggests that the principal audience of Three Represents was the party rather than the society.

The above power motivation of Jiang Zemin had no doubt undermined Three Represents's positive effects in maintaining party cohesion. On the one hand, Three Represents justified the CCP's quasi-capitalist economic policies and reforms, and thus

undermined the resistance of less reform-minded leaders. On the other hand, Jiang's power motivation through Three Represents also intensified factionalism within the party. In order to pull the unity of ruling elites back, Jiang's successor Hu Jintao launched a new formal ideology to justify the CCP's rule.

#### 5.4.2. Hu Jintao and Scientific Outlook of Development (kexue fazhan guan)

Right after Jiang Zemin handed over the last official position – the head of People's Liberation Army (PLA) – to Hu Jintao in 2004, Hu announced his own formulation of party ideology, Scientific Outlook of Development. It carried out a new vision of party ideology and served as an attempt by Hu to step out of the shadow of Jiang Zemin. Unlike the previous formal ideology such as the Primary Stage of Socialism and Three Represents that were narrowly concerned with self-justification, Scientific Outlook of Development involved more popular elements. As discussed in Chapter 2, the party's ideological focus gradually shifted from justifying the CCP's rule towards addressing the negative consequences of rapid economic growth. The discourse of Scientific Outlook of Development clearly indicated such a shift. Rapid economic growth in China has caused a series of problems – socioeconomic inequality and environmental pollution in particular – which led to the party's concern about the sustainability of economic development. As discussed in Chapter 4, socioeconomic inequality is considered by Chinese intellectuals as the most perceived threat to the CCP's legitimacy nowadays. In this context, Scientific Outlook of Development attempted to adjust the party's ruling philosophies from being efficiency-oriented towards being equality-oriented in order to promote more sustainable development. As such, unlike the previous ideology that was narrowly concerned with the justification of communist rule, Scientific Outlook of Development is based on the logic of a ruling party over how to improve governance.

Moreover, unlike Three Represents that focuses on the party, Scientific Outlook of Development is about China as a whole. To a certain extent, Scientific Outlook of Development is also a continuation of the Primary Stage of Socialism. The latter justifies where China was now and the Scientific Outlook of Development sends a strong signal to the society about where China is going in the future. Or, to put it another way, Scientific Outlook of Development presents a vision in which the party notices the problems caused by the current development model and will lead China to develop in a better way. In these aspects, Scientific Outlook of Development also turns towards society and indicates the quest for popular legitimacy.

Yet, the major audience of Scientific Outlook of Development was still the party. It was an attempt for the then new leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao to appease those party elites who were dissatisfied with policies and the ideological turn of Hu's predecessor Jiang Zemin. In other words, Scientific Outlook of Development was proposed to maintain party cohesion. As discussed in Chapter 2, various socioeconomic problems led to a widening cleavage within the CCP during Hu Jintao's term. For example, some conservatives criticized the fact that the widening inequality under the CCP's rule betrayed its commitment to communism (i.e. an equal society), and new Leftists considered the widening inequality to be a result of over-marketization. The power of those dissatisfied forces was clearly evidenced by the case of Bo Xilai.

As discussed in Chapter 2, in order to compete for an 18<sup>th</sup> PSC seat, Bo Xilai took advantage of the intra-party cleavage to hold high the flag of the New Leftists. In Chongqing, Bo Xilai launched a series of campaigns and policies – the “Chongqing Model” – to echo the

conservative forces. This Chongqing Model represented a distinct development model that relied on the role of the government in socioeconomic affairs – such as providing welfare and redistributing economic resources (Ji, 2009; Su, *et al.*, 2011; Wang, 2011b). By promoting the campaign of “sing red song”, Bo Xilai showed his Chongqing Model was legitimate by following the ideological orthodox doctrines of Marxism and Maoism. At that time, Bo Xilai’s new deal received nationwide support from the conservative forces – especially the New Leftists.

Harmonious Society is another notable ideological reformulation of Hu Jintao; however, it is not a formal type of ideology because it is less about asserting power than Scientific Outlook of Development is, as I will discuss below.

#### 5.4.3. Xi Jinping and China Dream (zhongguo meng)

The concept of “China Dream” was first proposed by Xi Jinping during his visit to an exhibition on 29 November, 2012 – only 20 days after he was appointed as the new leader. In Xi’s report to the National Congress when he was appointed as the President of the PRC, China Dream was mentioned nine times. In this respect, similar to Hu Jintao’s Scientific Outlook of Development, China Dream was an attempt to assert the power of Xi Jinping as the new top leader and to carry out a new vision. It took Hu Jintao two years but Xi Jinping only several months officially to propose new formulations of party theories after becoming party heads. Xi’s immediate ideological turn suggests that Xi took control of power and seemed to be a stronger leader than Hu Jintao – and perhaps Jiang Zemin. It is still unclear whether China Dream is a formal type of ideology or not because its content is still developing. Qian Gang (2014) argues that China Dream is not “a banner term or legacy term” (i.e. a type of formal ideology), because the CCP has a process to introduce banner terms, and “these are not things leaders simply toss out as soon as they take the stage”.

According to Xi’s report to the National Congress, China Dream is mainly an aspiration for China’s national renaissance as well as the personal achievement of the Chinese people. This interpretation has been strongly under-pinned by nationalist sentiment. In this sense, China Dream justifies the CCP’s rule by being a vehicle to lead China’s rejuvenation. This is related to the discourse of national rejuvenation that attempts to justify the one-party rule by promoting the idea about the greater good of China, which I will discuss in more details later. As such, China Dream involves much more populist elements than Hu Jintao’s Scientific Outlook of Development and Jiang Zemin’s Three Represents. It might indicate an interesting development of the public use of communist language moving from the Party doctrine towards populist slogans. Deng Xiaoping also used a similar populist construction of communist language, as evidenced by, for example, Deng’s famous quote that has been widely popular in Chinese society: “it doesn’t matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice”. More details about popular slogans will be discussed below.

### **5.5. Protect Yourself by Attacking Your Enemy? Informal Ideological Discourses: marketing the authoritarian rule by discrediting liberal democracy**

After exploring formal ideological discourse, this section studies informal ideological discourse in China, which supplements formal ideology. Unlike formal ideologies that are narrowly concerned with the party, the audience of informal ideologies is all the Chinese people including the party members. This is closely related to official propaganda or the so-called “the work of guiding public opinion” (yulun yindao gongzuo).

As the Introduction Chapter establishes, the CCP has employed informal ideological discourses to legitimize its one-party system by delegitimizing liberal democracy. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Deng Xiaoping considered the failure to maintain popular beliefs to be the “biggest mistake” of his reform. Learning from the protest of 1989, the CCP has strengthened its ideological and political education for the masses in resisting the “invasion” of liberal political values. In this context, various informal ideological discourses are produced and embedded into the CCP’s official propaganda in order to discredit liberal democracy.

### **5.5.1 The Discourse of (in)stability: the necessity of stability contrasts with a scenario of chaos**

(In)stability discourse is one of the CCP’s most notable informal ideologies. It involves two intertwined discourses: stability discourse and instability discourse. Stability discourse refers to a popular ideation that China’s development needs a stable social order. This discourse has two key implications: (a) stability – as a public good – needs to be provided by a strong centralized state power and (b) the current status quo including the one-party system should be maintained or at least not overthrown, otherwise a stable order cannot be maintained. It is explicitly elaborated by the white paper of China’s state council:

“The CCP’s leadership and rule is needed for making the statepower stable. China is a vast country with a large population. There are great disparities in terms of development between urban and rural areas, and between different regions. It is of unusual significance for China to have a stable state power. Only then can China concentrate on construction and development, and only then can the country’s development strategy and goal of modernization be pursued for a long time and through to the end” (Council, 2005).

Like two sides of a coin, the above stability discourse is intertwined with the instability discourse that portrays a potential scenario in which China might fall into civil unrest, national turmoil, economic stagnation, etc. The construction and dissemination of this scenario is closely and carefully linked with the modern history of China that has been deeply rooted in Chinese people’s memories – the national humiliation during the late Qing dynasty and the invasion of Japan, decades of civil wars among the warlords and between the CCP and the KMT, social turbulence and economic stagnation during the Cultural Revolution, etc. It is argued that the failure of practising liberal democracy in China (e.g. Sun Yat-sen’s democratic experiments) was a root cause of civil strife in the early 20th century. This is closely related to the discourse of national rejuvenation, which asserts that one-party rule is necessary to lead the rise of China, as I will discuss below.

The instability discourse suggests that if China does not have a strong centralized state power to provide stability, China might repeat its horrible past. As the then chairman of the People’s Congress Wu Bangguo warned (2011), China should maintain the current one-party rule; otherwise, it might fall into “the abyss of civil strife”. Xie Chuntao, a professor of the CCP Central Party School, warned that if China adopts the multi-party system and separation of power, China will definitely be in chaos and it will also be a “disaster to the world” (Lei and Hou, 2013).

Indeed, top Chinese leaders have frequently warned about the potential consequences of social disorder when they emphasized the crucial importance of social stability. During his talk with the then US President George H. W. Bush, Deng Xiaoping(1994:284) said “in China,

the overriding need is for stability. Without a stable environment, we can accomplish nothing and may even lose what we have gained.” In his speech at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Jiang Zemin(1997a) clearly elaborated that “without stability, nothing can be achieved”. Hu Jintao (2005) also warned that “we should always keep in mind that there is nothing we can achieve without social stability; we should properly handle the relationship among reform, development, and stability, and maintain the overall social stability”.

As Chapter 3 discussed, the relevant literature considers social stability to be important to the CCP’s legitimacy; however, it does not pay sufficient attention to the interaction between stability and ideology. This chapter argues that the CCP’s capability to maintain the social order interacts with its (in)stability discourse. In other words, ideology plays a crucial role in maintaining social stability in China. The regime’s (in)stability discourse generated popular support for the current political system, which indirectly contributes to a stable social order; this stability in return reinforces this discourse that the current political system is more capable of maintaining stability. If we use the words of my theoretical framework of legitimacy, the regime’s performance in maintaining social order (i.e. performance legitimacy) is enhanced by the popular support for the current political system (i.e. ideological legitimacy). As such, it again shows that ideology plays a crucial role in the CCP’s legitimacy.

Several studies on the subject of stability in China touch upon ideology (Breslin, 2012; Feng, 2013b; Marinelli, 2013; Shue, 2004; Sandby-Thomas, 2011). For example, as Chapter 3 discussed, Shue’s stability (2004) is constructed by “truth”, “benevolence”, and “glory” that involves ideological, moral, and nationalistic factors. This work makes a notable contribution to explain contemporary Chinese politics by using Chinese historical traditions; however, Chinese traditions mentioned by Shue are primarily based on the ruling logic of late-imperial times – most are from the Qing dynasty and not from typical Chinese traditions, because the Qing dynasty is less influenced by Confucianism. This chapter will trace back to the typical Confucian traditions to explore how the CCP incorporated traditional cultural values into its socialist agenda.

Another notable contribution is given by Peter Sandby-Thomas. Sandby-Thomas (2011) critically examined the CCP’s (in)stability discourse by analysing the articles of the *People’s Daily* between 1989 and 2007. By focusing on three major events – the protest of 1989, the anti-Falun Gong campaign in 1999, and the anti-Japan demonstrations in 2005 –, Thomas demonstrates how the CCP deliberately exploited the people’s concern about an unstable and fracturing China in order to gain legitimacy. As Weatherley (2011:383) noted, the choices made in the stability discourse of Sandby-Thomas’ book (2011) is not up-to-date, partly because of the long publication process; and recently, the regime has “very audibly redoubled its efforts to present itself as a stabilising force” in reporting democratization in the Middle East and the Jasmine Revolution. This chapter will show the CCP frames the events of democratization to strengthen its (in)stability discourse.

While the above studies examined the CCP’s discourse of domestic events, this thesis focuses on the CCP’s efforts to reframe foreign events in order to delegitimize liberal democracy. As I argued, a key marketing strategy of the authoritarian rule in the (in)stability discourse is to link liberal democracy with national chaos on the one hand and to stress the necessity of a strong ruling party to maintain a stable social order and public safety on the other hand. In this way, the CCP wins credit by contrasting the stable social order in China with chaos in democratic countries.

On the one hand, the CCP has been taking great efforts to propagate its instability discourse (i.e. “liberal democracy brings chaos”). Arguably, this discourse has been deeply rooted in China as evidenced by various surveys. For example, Shi’s survey of “Social Change and Social Value” in 1993 shows that 45% of respondents were concerned that “introducing more democracy might cause instability or a loss of social order” and over 60% agreed that “if there were too many political parties, this would bring chaos to national politics” (Wang, 2007:568). It suggests that the official propaganda succeeded in associating liberal democracy with chaos.

On the other hand, the CCP’s marketing strategy has painted itself as the only force capable of providing social stability and the safety of the masses. The survey by Nathan and Shi (1996:544) finds that over 76% of respondents agreed that developing democracy in China should be dependent on the leadership of the CCP, and 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed the same in another survey (Wang, 2007:572). Arguably, it is widely accepted by Chinese people that stability is a precondition of economic growth, and only a strong ruling party (i.e. one-party rule without checks and balances) can provide stability.

After exploring the overall impacts of the (in)stability discourse, the following section will focus on three cases of democratization – the Soviet Union, Taiwan, and the Arab Spring – to analyze the specific content of the discourse. The marketing strategy of the (in)stability discourse is particularly and obviously reflected in these cases – although Thailand and Ukraine are also notable cases, however, this thesis will not explore them in details because of limited space. These small case studies updates the existing studies of the regime’s (in)stability discourse and – more importantly – provide a new perspective for understanding how the official propaganda deliberately presents a version of democratic failure for delegitimizing liberal democracy.

#### 5.5.1.1. The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union used to be a role model for the CCP. The disintegration of the Soviet Unions has been frequently used by the CCP as a negative example of the dangers of democratization (Zhong, 1996). Official propaganda has been keen to market the idea that if China copies the democratization of the Soviet Union, China will split as the Soviet Union did. Take a controversial article – “An unstable China will only be worse than the Soviet Union” – as an example (Wang, 2013b). This article was the headline on many big news websites for several days in July, 2013. According to some unverified sources, it was the Information Office of the State Council’s order to ask various media to reproduce this article as the headline on their websites (Hai, 2013; Wu, 2013a). This article presents a version of a poor Russia after democratization to contrast with China’s prosperity under the CCP’s rule. It argues that liberal democracy – a “pitfall of the West” – will only bring endless instability to China. This article also harshly criticized that the advocates of liberal democracy in China were the “lackeys of the West”.

The case of the Soviet Union is also used by many articles in the *People’s Daily* as a negative example of the constitutionalism (e.g. Ma, 2013b; Ma, 2013c; Ma, 2013d). For example, an article published on the cover page of the *People’s Daily* argues that “the rise of constitutionalism in China is funded by various foundations that are supported by U.S. intelligence agencies – such as the project of ‘Comparative Constitutional History in the contemporary world’ funded by the Ford Foundation”; and a significant reason why the Soviet Union collapsed is that the Soviet Union adopted various theories of socialist

constitutionalism which were actually invested with money from U.S. intelligence (Ma, 2013b).

#### 5.5.1.2. The Arab Spring

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the CCP reacted nervously to any possible threats. Internet censors exaggerated the crackdown on information about the “Jasmine Revolution” for weeks (Breslin, 2012; Dickson, 2011). Yet, the official propaganda became very active after the political turmoil in the Middle East in 2013. Immediately after the military coup in Egypt on 4 July, 2013, official media launched full media coverage which served to mock liberal democracy and the Arab Spring. An article in the *People’s Daily* argued that Egyptian democratization proves that democracy was a source of chaos rather than stability, and therefore simply transplanting Western democracy will not help (Wu, 2013b). On 5 July, 2013, another article published on the front cover of the *People’s Daily* argues that “democracy is not a panacea. Especially to developing countries, economic prosperity, social stability, and national security are much more important than Western democracy’s ‘one person one vote’” (Lin, 2013). This view is related to the CCP’s discourse of national conditions, which asserts that democracy should not be a priority of developing countries, as I will discuss below.

Moreover, the cost of instability that was led by Middle East democratization is closely linked with the well-being of individuals. It strengthens the CCP’s instability discourse by exploiting people’s concern for their personal safety in an unstable social order. For example, an article published on the cover of the *People’s Daily* entitled with “Populace paid a huge price for Arab Spring” argued that

“Ordinary people are the biggest victim of the chaos. Since the unrest, bloodshed has led to thousands of Syrian people dying and many ordinary people becoming refugees. According to the UN statistics, the number of Syrian refugees currently registered is nearly 100,000, and the actual number may be much higher than this. Syria’s political transformation opened a ‘Pandora’s Box’, of which the cost is much higher than the benefits” (Tian, 2012).

This suggests that Chinese people should not pursue liberal democracy as those in the Middle East did, otherwise, they will pay the similarly huge price or even lose their lives. By emphasizing the losses of Middle Eastern people during democratization, the relevant propaganda has been marketing an image of democratic failure and the necessity to maintain one-party rule to Chinese people.

#### 5.5.1.3. Taiwan

Unlike the Soviet Union and Arab countries, Taiwan shared cultural traditions with mainland China. Taiwan’s democracy shows strong evidence against the relevant discourse of Chinese uniqueness that asserts that liberal democracy is incompatible with China’s historical cultural traditions, as I will explain below. As such, the CCP’s propaganda has made great efforts to discredit Taiwan’s democracy. In particular, when Chen Shuibian – a Taiwan independence advocate – was in office, China’s news coverage of Taiwan’s politics was frequently associated with the corruption scandals of Chen Shuibian, the fights among legislators in the Taiwanese Legislative Council, and the economic difficulties of Taiwan.

The official media in China is also keen on inviting Taiwanese people to criticize Taiwan's democracy. For example, an article in the *People's Daily* written by a Taiwanese person described Taiwan's democracy as pure "populist politics" (Ma, 2013a). This article describes how meetings of Taiwan's Legislative Council are filled with fights, splashing water, cries, or even rape among legislators. Another article in the *People's Daily* written by the same Taiwanese author called Taiwan's legislature "a big tree that is decayed from its root (Ma, 2012).<sup>14</sup>

Arguably, the negative propaganda about Taiwan's democracy has been successful so far. According to my conversations with many ordinary Chinese people who have not been to Taiwan, their images of Taiwan are full of the corruption scandals of Chen Shuibian and the fight and brawl in the Taiwan Legislative Council.<sup>15</sup> This strategy might not work in the long run with increasing communication between Taiwan and mainland China.

### 5.5.2. The Discourse of the Chinese National Condition

The discourse of the Chinese national condition is another notable informal ideology. It holds that liberal democracy – and perhaps the universal values – is not suitable for China because of the national condition. As the report of the then chairman of the People's Congress, Wu Bangguo (2011), elaborates: "based on Chinese national conditions, we seriously declare that we will not adapt the multiparty system, ideological pluralism, separation of three powers and bicameral, federalism, and privatization". Arguably, this discourse of the national condition has become a widely accepted ideation of the Chinese people. According to the 2008 Asian Barometer, over 93% of respondents agreed that "although our political system has various kinds of problems, it is still the best that fits our national condition" (Wang, 2010e).

The discourse of the national condition is closely related to the (in)stability discourse and China's uniqueness. In contemporary ideological discourses, the national condition mainly includes two elements: China's uniqueness and the developmental stage. First, the uniqueness of China suggests that China is unique because of its unique historical and cultural traditions; and thus, liberal democracy is not suitable for China, as I will discuss in more detailed below. Second, the developmental stage suggests that China is still a developing country. As mentioned, the CCP's discourse of the Arab Spring argues that economic prosperity, social stability, and national security are much more important than liberal democracy to a developing country, and thus liberal democracy should not be a priority for a developing country. In this regard, this discourse of the national condition complements the (in)stability discourse which states that liberal democracy might undermine social stability – without which economic growth cannot be achieved.

In addition, rule of law is also considered by many Chinese elites to have precedence over democracy in developing countries such as China. For example, the Law School Dean of Qinghua University, Wang Zhenmin(2013d), argues that "democratic states might end up with corruption" without rule of law, as demonstrated by Taiwan's Chen Shuibian and many Philippine Presidents who were arrested after they stepped down. Thus, Wang concludes that China should never adopt democracy before rule of law, and a democracy without rule of law is a "disaster". This view justifies why the CCP's reforms concentrates on practising rule of

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<sup>14</sup> For other articles about the fight and brawl in the Taiwan Legislative Council published in the *People's Daily*, please see (Wang 2013a)

<sup>15</sup> These talks took place in 2007



law rather than democracy. It also links to the China Model that values rule of law but not liberal democracy, as I will discuss below. The feasibility of this model and the relationship between democracy and rule of law inspired a hot debate within and without China (e.g. Zhao, 2006).

Yet, as mentioned, informal discourse is a kind of short-term solution for legitimizing the CCP's rule – in the long run, it may be used against the CCP's rule. The discourse of the national condition implies that democracy is important for developed countries but not for developing countries. In this sense, should China abandon authoritarian rule in the future when China become developed? This discourse can only legitimize one-party rule in the short term (i.e. when China is still a developing country), and would delegitimize one-party rule in the long term (i.e. when China becomes a developed country).

Notably, the discourse of the national condition is an essential element of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” that supplements the CCP's value system. According to the CCP's discourses, all formal ideologies including Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, Three Represents, Scientific Outlook of Development, and China Dream are great theories that “combine Marxism with the Chinese national condition”. Since revolutionary times, communist ideology in China has been established as a distinctive Chinese form of socialism, separate from the Soviet Union and orthodox Marxism.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, China has Sinicized Marxism i.e. the “Sinification of Marxism” since revolutionary times. In 1938, Mao Zedong began to urge that the CCP needed to “learn how to apply theories of Marxism-Leninism to China's specific national conditions” and “to apply them [Marxist-Leninist theories] according to Chinese characteristics”, which was considered by Mao as a “problem that the entire CCP needs to understand and solve” (Mao, 1991:534). In revolutionary times, the emphasis on the national condition was perhaps an attempt by the CCP to claim the legitimacy of an independent China as not part of the Soviet Union (Schurmann, 1966) and to undermine the attacks from culturalists who considered communist ideology to be alien.

The “national condition” in Mao's times was of course quite different from now. As discussed, nowadays the discourse of the national condition that refers to China's uniqueness and the developmental stage is used to justify why liberal democracy is not suitable in China. Indeed, the CCP has made a great effort in reinvesting in Marxism. For example, schools of Marxism spread all over Chinese universities, especially in top universities such as Beijing University and Qinghua University. Indeed, a research centre in the China University of Political Science and Law is named the “Research centre of Marxism and Chinese national conditions”. According to Hu Jintao's (2007) 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report, Marxism “can only glow with great vitality, creativity and appeal” when “combined with China's national conditions”.

### 5.5.3 The Discourse of National Rejuvenation and the Rise of Patriotism

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Western scholars widely agree with the important role of nationalism in legitimizing the CCP's rule. Many argue that Chinese nationalism has replaced communist beliefs and gradually become the CCP's new the ideological basis. However, nationalism alone is not an ideology – it should be examined as an element of a value system rather than a self-contained value system. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, this thesis considers nationalism as an informal ideology that legitimizes the CCP's rule by

supplementing and surpassing – rather than replacing – the CCP’s formal ideological discourse.

The discourse of national rejuvenation argues that the current one-party rule exists for the greater good of China. Or, to put it in another way, it is there to restore China to its rightful position of pre-eminence. It suggests that what the CCP has been doing now is a kind of continuation of the revival campaigns of the past – as early as the self-strengthening movement in the Qing dynasty in the late 1880s. This is why the CCP’s propaganda often refers to the rejuvenation of China as a century-old dream of Chinese people – it relates to “China Dream”, as mentioned above.

The greater good of China is not only about collective national pride but also individual well-being. The CCP has been keen to link “strengthening the country” (qiang guo) with “enriching the people” (fu min), which suggests that a prosperous nation will enrich its people. For example, an article in the *People’s Daily* argues that “‘strengthening the country’ is a prerequisites for ‘enriching the people’; if the country is not strong, it is hard to enrich the people” (Wang, 2010c). The relevant discourse can be traced back to the propaganda in Mao Zedong’s China. A popular slogan of the CCP – “the small streams rise when the main stream is high; when the main stream is low, the small streams run dry” – was used to promote the people’s commune in rural areas. It suggests that only if the people’s commune ran well could the members of the people’s commune become rich. In contemporary China, the idea that national interests and individual interests are inseparable has been indoctrinated through school education. For example, the standard text book “Thoughts and Politics” –required reading at high school in China – clearly declares that “to protect national interests is to protect the fundamental interests of the broad masses” (Vickers, 2009:529). As such, the discourse of national rejuvenation also carries Chinese people’s individual expectations for better lives.

The elements of the national rejuvenation discourse has been carefully embedded into various big events – such as the Beijing Olympics, Asian Games, the Shanghai Expo, and the Shenzhou Space Project – as part of the CCP’s national political marketing for both international and domestic audiences, as I will discuss below. In addition, official propaganda also explicitly and implicitly contrasts the old China that was humiliated by Western powers in the late 1880s and the early 1990s with contemporary China – the second largest world economy and a rising international power that can say “no” to the West. In this way, it portrays the CCP as a legitimate heir apparent of the Qing dynasty that does not only save China but also leads China to revive. For example, a *People’s Daily* editorial argues that the current prosperous China is “a relentless pursuit of countless people with lofty ideals since the Opium War” in the mid-1800s and achieving the century-old dream of national rejuvenation has never been as close as it is now (Editorial, 2013). It concludes that all Chinese people should make persistent efforts and work hard in unity under the CCP’s leadership to fulfill this dream.

It is important to distinguish the term “national rejuvenation” with that of “modernization” here. Modernization usually stands for a Western version of society, suggesting that Western civilization is superior to Eastern civilization. In this sense, Western liberal democracy is a role model of a political system that China should follow. On the contrary, the term national rejuvenation suggests that China should restore itself to its rightful position of pre-eminence – the superiority of Chinese civilization. In this sense, the Chinese political system should build on its own civilization rather than move towards Western liberal democracy.

### 5.5.3.1. Universal Values: Non-Chinese and Anti-Chinese?

As I argued earlier, the strategy of informal ideology is a sort of negative approach to delegitimize liberal democracy. Chinese nationalism has similar effects in discrediting liberal democracy. Based on the 2008 China Survey, Tang and Darr (2012) found that Chinese nationalism “serves as a powerful instrument in impeding public demand for democratic changes”. To link liberal democracy with Western imperialism is a central concern in the discourse of national rejuvenation, especially as it serves to discredit democracy. First of all, the CCP’s propaganda emphasizes that liberal democracy is a Western product, which is not suitable for China. This relates to the discourse on China’s uniqueness, which asserts that universalism is actually a purely European phenomenon that is built on a narrow set of experiences and histories in a very small part of the world, as I will discuss below. It suggests that Western democracy is an inappropriate form of political system for China.

Second, the CCP’s propaganda also portrays China’s success under authoritarian rule as a strong enemy of the West in order to gain national identity domestically. As an article in the *People’s Daily* argues that, the rise of China poses a strong challenge to universal values – a synonym of the hegemony of Western values– and thus the China Model becomes a threat to the West (Wang, 2013c). As Callahan (2005) argues, the CCP has been making use of the “anti-China” view – such as the “China Threat Theory” – to consolidate the national identity of the Chinese people.

More importantly, liberal democracy is portrayed as a Western effort to contain the rise of China – a kind of contemporary Western imperialism. Specifically, those Western efforts in promoting democracy in China have been frequently linked to Western imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is closely related to a version of the past that the CCP recreated in order to justify the present, as I will discuss below. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the West colonized many parts of China through wars, and this “‘century of humiliation’ is central to Chinese nationalism today” (Gries, *et al.*, 2011). The CCP has kept reminding Chinese people about this “century of humiliation” to contrast with a strong and prosperous China under the CCP’s rule. For example, the legacy of Beijing’s Old Summer Palace has been kept alive – as a part of the Patriotic Education Campaign – to remind Chinese people about the military crimes that British and French troops committed in China during the Opium Wars (Weatherley and Rosen, 2013). In this context, Western attempts to promote universal values in China can be easily portrayed as having an “ulterior” motive. Thus, the West’s support for separatist movements and separatists, such as the Dalai Lama, is widely interpreted by many Chinese people as a similar attempt to divide China as the West did to Chinese ancestors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to national sentiment about the memory of “national humiliation”, the discourse of national rejuvenation also involves realistic concerns about individual wellbeing. As mentioned, the discourse of national rejuvenation carries not only national pride but also individual well-being. If “strengthening the country” is a prerequisite for “enriching the people”, then the fading of China would undermine the quality of life for individuals. Thus, Western interventions are not only about the collective (i.e. the PRC and the CCP regime) but also individuals (i.e. Chinese people). In other words, those interventions can damage not only the collective national pride of China but also the personal lives of Chinese people. Thus, Western states’ deliberate efforts to promote democracy can be portrayed as threats not only to the one-party system (i.e. the CCP’s rule) but also to Chinese people.

Ironically, some advocates for Western democracy help the CCP to resist liberal democracy. As discussed in Chapter 3, many Western scholars suggest that Western governments should be tougher in supporting democracy in China. Unfortunately, this kind of policies will arouse Chinese people's memory about "national humiliation" and anti-West sentiment, which is not helpful to China's democratization.

#### 5.5.3.2. "Liberal Democracy is not Suitable for Leading the Rejuvenation of China"

In addition to linking liberal democracy with Western imperialism, state propaganda also emphasizes that liberal democracy cannot serve the greater good of China and accomplish the grand mission of national rejuvenation. For example, an article in the *Red Flag* – a leading theory journal of the CCP – that was also reproduced by the *People's Daily* argued that Western democracy only focuses on short-term interests rather than long-term goals, and it protects small groups rather than the national interest (Cao, 2013). It suggests that liberal democracy cannot be used to accomplish national rejuvenation, which is a long-term project and highly emphasizes the overall national interest of China. As such, this article concludes that the current one-party system is necessary for restoring China's great power status.

Another article in the *People's Daily* written by the CASS' research centre of socialism with Chinese characteristics also argues that "Western theories, no matter whether they be neo-liberalism or democratic socialism, neither line up with Chinese national conditions nor represent the fundamental interests of China. They could not help China to find a scientific, correct development path" (CASS, 2013). Thus, it concludes that national rejuvenation can only be accomplished by relying on China's own system. This is closely linked with the (in)stability discourse. As I discussed above, the (in)stability discourse portrayed China's democratic experiments in the early 20th century (e.g. Sun Yat-sen's democratic experiments) as a root cause of China's civil strife.

The discourse of national rejuvenation is strongly backed up by economic success in China. This economic success has made China a rising power on the international stage that increase Chinese people's national pride. This success has been frequently linked with national pride to create an image of revival in the CCP's propaganda (Cong, 2013). In addition, by contrasting specular economic performance in China with economic difficulties in democratic countries, the regime has been implicitly and explicitly marketing the idea that the current political system is more effective and efficient at promoting economic growth and increasing people's livelihood than any other alternative political system – especially liberal democracy.

Economic development has also led to China's rising military strength. The regime has been keen to contrast China's capability to defend itself under the CCP's rule with the humiliation of the 20th century. For example, the National Day Military Parade has always borne symbolic meanings, such as those representing an increasingly successful China (Hwang and Schneider, 2011).

#### 5.5.3.3. Nationalism: a double-edged sword

As mentioned above, the CCP won a great deal of credit for its success by creating an image of a strong China under its rule. However, the problem is that the rising nationalism

also constrains the regime's ability to deal with international affairs. If the regime fails to meet people's rising expectation when dealing with international conflicts, nationalism will become a problem. This is clearly evidenced in the failure of the Beiyang government in the early 1900s. As a member of the First World War allies, Chinese people considered China a victorious power which led to nationwide discontent and the May Fourth movement when the Beiyang government failed to gain the expected benefits from the Treaty of Versailles. Thus, when the CCP deals with Japan about Diaoyu/Senkaku Island and the Philippines in the South China Sea, many of its actions are enforced by domestic expectations.

Similarly, when the CCP's propaganda has embedded patriotic elements into various national projects as part of its political marketing, it also stakes its legitimacy on the success of those projects. For example, the CCP's propaganda has taken great effort to link the Shenzhou Space Project with national pride and to portray this project as a symbol of China's rejuvenation. The CCP will gain legitimacy when these space exploration projects succeed. However, once those projects meet some big problems or even fail, the linkage between the symbol of China's rejuvenation and those space projects may be harmful to the CCP's rule. The negative national sentiment may easily work against the CCP's rule. In short, nationalism is a double-edged sword, which again suggests that informal ideology is a short-term solution.

#### 5.5.4. The Uniqueness of China: Establishing the Cultural Basis of the CCP

The above discourses of national rejuvenation, (in)stability, and the national condition are closely related to the discourse of China's uniqueness. The discourse of China's uniqueness emphasizes that China should have its own political system rather than embrace liberal democracy. It suggests that there should be no expectation whatsoever of convergence with some forms of supposed "universal endpoint" (i.e. Western democracy), as this "universalism" is actually purely a European phenomenon built on a narrow set of experiences and histories in a very small part of the world. By highlighting Chinese differences, the relevant discourses justify why China *does not* have to adopt Western political system, which in reverse legitimizes the current "socialism with Chinese characteristics".

This uniqueness involves two different logics. The first is a kind of "anti-universalism" – which assumes that every country is different as they all have a different culture and history; therefore, every country should define their own human rights, freedom, and democracy. In this sense, there is no such thing as "universal values". On the contrary, the second logic argues that China is uniquely unique. In other words, only China is unique because of its unique history, culture, and national conditions.

The proponents of the "China model" and "Chinese exceptionalism", for example, argue that China does not have to follow Western path to achieve modernization because China can find its own because of its unique cultural heritage (Kang, 2004; Pan, 2003; Pan, 2009; Pan, 2011; Wang, 2012b; Yao, 2011; Zhang, 2010; Zheng, 2010). Many empirical studies lend strong support to these kinds of claims, pushing toward thinking of China as in some way exceptional and built on different philosophies to Western states (Shi and Lu, 2010; Shin, 2011). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Chinese understanding of democracy has been strongly shaped by Confucian culture, which makes it distinct from the liberal traditions of democracy.

The academic community is still debating whether the "China model" and "Chinese exceptionalism" exist or not; however, these academic uncertainties have not obstructed the

CCP's propaganda. The key utility of the relevant discourses does not lie in what China's own path to modernization is but *why* China should *not* adopt liberal democracy. As such, the relevant discourses have been embedded into the CCP's propaganda strategy. As Xi Jinping elaborated in a national conference on propaganda and ideological work, propaganda and ideological work should clearly elaborate that – China should have its own path of development because of its unique culture, historical traditions, and national condition (Ni, 2013).

Notably, the CCP used to be a pioneer in removing the influence of Chinese traditions in revolutionary times and Mao's era. The CCP's "anti-Confucianism" campaign, for example, reached its peak during the Cultural Revolution, and many Confucian sites were destroyed by the Red Guards. After Mao died, Deng's less ideology-focused approach has allowed for the resurgence of traditions. In contemporary China, driven by the quest for legitimacy, the CCP has been taking a very different approach to deal with Chinese traditions and culture. Nowadays, the CCP claims to be a "defender" of Chinese Confucian traditions (Buckley, 2014); Confucianism has been pragmatically promoted by the CCP in order to secure the CCP's cultural leadership (Wu, 2014) and – more importantly – supplement its formal ideologies. In this context, the CCP's various discourses have been moving towards Chinese traditions in order to co-opt and integrate them into its own agenda.

On the one hand, various informal ideological discourses have been produced to replace the gaps left in establishing a cultural basis of Chinese society that was lost when revolution was abandoned. In order to do so, informal ideology has refurbished Chinese traditions with socialist elements. On the other hand, the relevant discourses have recreated a version of Chinese history. This entails a sort of blurring of different philosophical trends into a single version of the Chinese past – even when there were at the time contending world views during the Warring States period. This version of Chinese history and tradition is mainly built from the perspective of Confucianism that preserves order and harmony – which was often used by Chinese dynasties to maintain their rules.

#### 5.5.4.1. Refurbishing Chinese Traditions with Socialist Elements

This section examines how the CCP have refurbished Chinese traditions with socialist elements to incorporate traditional cultural values into the CCP's socialist agenda.

##### 5.5.4.1.1. Rule by Virtue (*yide zhiguo*)

Rule by virtue is a notable example of the CCP's ideological shift towards Chinese traditions. As discussed in Chapter 2, rule by virtue is a traditional ruling philosophy of Confucianism. A core element of *wang dao* – a Confucian doctrine – is to use the ruler's virtues to make people obey and follow. Virtue here refers to benevolence, and benevolent governance is a basic criterion of rule by virtue. According to the normative values of Confucianism, a regime is legitimate if it practises benevolent governance.

In 2001, Jiang Zemin (2001) officially proposed combining "rule by law" with "rule by virtue" as the CCP's governing strategy. However, this "rule by virtue" is very different from the traditional Confucian doctrine – it is refurbished with socialist elements. According to Jiang (2001), this "rule by virtue" is guided by Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and Deng Xiaoping Theory. The CCP aimed to use "rule by virtue" to establish a "socialist

ideological and ethical system” that would employ certain norms that would be widely accepted and followed by people (Jiang, 2001).

This ideological transition towards virtue is also a response to the rampant corruption in China. As Chapter 3 discussed, 43% of Chinese intellectuals considered corruption a threat to legitimacy, which is the third most frequently mentioned threat. The emphasis on virtue is an attempt to establish moral guidelines for civil servants and party cadres and to improve the moral performance of the party-state. According to Jiang Zemin (2001), “rule by virtue” can use its “persuasiveness” to increase “ideological understanding and moral consciousness of social members”, which complements rule by law. In other words, the promotion of “virtue” as a kind of moral education was an attempt to gain regime legitimacy by combating corruption.

#### 5.5.4.1.2. Socialist Harmonious Society (hexie shehui)

The proposition of a Socialist Harmonious Society is a clearer ideological move towards Chinese traditions. Harmony is a traditional Confucian value that highly preserves a stable social order and has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture. The result of the East Asian Barometer suggests persistent influence of Chinese cultural values – which privileges a harmonious social order – still common exists in Chinese societies including Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan (Chu, *et al.*, 2008:21). This harmony is reinterpreted by the CCP(2006) as an “essential attribute” of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this way, it refurbishes the traditional Confucian doctrine of harmony into a socialist version of harmony (i.e. Socialist Harmonious Society).

The primary purpose of Socialist Harmonious Society is to maintain a stable social order in the context of a disparate Chinese society that suffers from various socioeconomic problems – especially worsening social tensions. Harmonious Society implicitly appeals to society to tolerate greater inequality in the current socioeconomic standings. Its key message is that Chinese people should not “rock the boat” by complaining about tensions, because the greater good of society is more important than any feelings that an individual may have about inequality.

It is worth mentioning Deng Xiaoping’s “Xiaokang Society” – means moderately prosperous – here. Like “harmony”, “Xiaokang” is also a Confucian concept that means “moderately prosperous”. Both Harmonious Society and Xiaokang Society signal a future vision of what China will look like by absorbing elements of traditional cultural ideals. In addition, in terms of development stages, Harmonious Society is a kind of continuation of “Xiaokang Society”. It suggests the progress of Chinese society under the CCP’s leadership – the primary task of the CCP shifted from delivering economic growth emphasized by “Xiaokang Society” into socioeconomic equality emphasized by Harmonious Society. In other words, since the CCP succeeded in establishing a moderately prosperous (i.e. Xiaokang) society, the party is now leading China toward becoming a harmonious society. In these respects, Harmonious Society was an attempt to gain popular legitimacy.

As mentioned earlier, Harmonious Society spans informal and formal ideologies. Although both Scientific Outlook of Development and Harmonious Society were Hu Jintao’s contributions to party theories, the former involves much more personal authority than the latter. It is evidenced by the fact that Scientific Outlook of Development has been incorporated into the party constitution while Harmonious Society is not. My recent study also finds that factional ties with top leaders have a statistically significant correlation with

the variation of provincial leaders' willingness to echo Scientific Outlook of Development and Three Represents campaigns; however, those ties have no statistically significant impact on the leaders' willingness to echo Harmonious Society campaigns (Zeng, 2014). It suggests that Harmonious Society is focused on asserting the power of the top leader than the other two.

In addition, the discourse of Harmonious Society consists of much more populist language than that of Scientific Outlook of Development and Three Represents. This is perhaps because the latter two are formal ideologies that were mainly for the consumption of the party, whilst Harmonious Society is not only produced for the party but also for society (i.e. appeal the society to tolerate socioeconomic inequality).

#### 5.5.4.1.3. The Mandate of Heaven? The transition from a communist party to a ruling party

The CCP's rule is also linked to traditional ruling philosophies, in particular the Mandate of Heaven. As discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese emperors claimed that they were the sons of Heaven and their rights to rule were granted by Heaven, and therefore, this legitimacy claim is called the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven was a clear and deliberate state strategy designed to legitimize regime transition without throwing away all the other legitimizing tools of the previous regimes. Thus, this concept is widely used by subsequent Chinese dynasties to justify regime transition.

Various studies suggest that the Mandate of Heaven has been embedded in Chinese culture and history and thus it still plays an important role in maintaining the CCP's legitimacy (Guo, 2003; Schneider and Hwang, 2014; Tong, 2011; Zhao, 2009; Zhu, 2011). However, their stance is ambiguous because the CCP is neither willing to reject nor able to associate themselves openly with this term through their official propaganda – as it claims to be atheist and officially against feudal superstition.

In order to get rid of the above ambivalence, some intellectuals have attempted to legitimize the CCP's rule by creating a new mandate – the rise of China or, perhaps more correctly, national revival. For example, an article published on the *Red Flag* links the CCP's rule with the Mandate of Heaven (Cao and Ma, 2013). This article reinterprets the Mandate of Heaven as a sacred mission – national unity, social stability, and economic growth – that the CCP is required to complete. In other words, the CCP's mandate is to lead the revival of China, and China needs a strong party to lead for its national prosperity. This idea of the Mandate of Heaven is implicitly embedded into the CCP's propaganda. For example, in the celebration of the PRC's sixtieth anniversary, the grand musical epic *Road to Revival* portrayed the CCP as a legitimate heir apparent that took over the Mandate of Heaven from the Qing dynasty and as a chosen regime that led the rise of China (Cong, 2013).

Yet, similar to other informal ideologies that are short-term solution, the discourse of the CCP's mandate has two serious flaws. The above discourse uses the Mandate of Heaven to redefine the CCP as a ruling party – that is dedicated to producing national unity, social stability, and economic growth. This might be a response to people's needs, because these three items are considered by Chinese people as the top three national priorities according to a World Value Survey, as mentioned. However, it also legitimizes – perhaps even demands that – the CCP to be overthrown if it loses the mandate. In other words, it suggests that people should overthrow the CCP if it fails to promote economic growth, maintain stability and national unity. Will Chinese economy always perform well? As discussed in Chapter 4,



Chinese intellectuals are seriously concerned about whether the economy will continue to do well.

More importantly, the discourse of the CCP's mandate also challenges the meaning of the CCP's existence. As discussed, a communist party should justify its rule by delivering class struggle and a communist society instead of maintaining social stability, promoting economic growth, and defending national interests.

#### 5.5.4.2. The Recreation of the History: The Use of the Past (gu wei jin yong)

In addition to refurbishing Chinese traditions with socialist elements, the use of the past is another notable ideological strategy of the CCP. "The use of the past" is a famous Chinese idiom, which means to use the past for the present. In China, historical writings are always virtually political, and they are often re-created for political purposes. In ancient China, the histories of past dynasties written by official historians were often related to corruption, moral turpitude, and the suffering of people – a sign of losing the Mandate of Heaven.

In contemporary China, the CCP has taken great efforts to present a version of history that can then be used to justify the present (Lary, 2008; Zhang and Weatherley, 2013b). For example, the history of Qing has great implications for proving the glorification of China's past and the CCP's legitimate role as an heir of a late imperial dynasty and the ruler of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan; thus, the CCP has heavily sponsored relevant projects (Lary, 2008). As another example, the history of modern China – the May Fourth Movement, Japan's invasion, civil war – is written very differently by the CCP and the KMT because of their different political stances.

Yet, the strategy of creating history is not always successful – sometimes, it may delegitimize the CCP (Zhang and Weatherley, 2013a; Zhang and Weatherley, 2013b). For example, the CCP has beautified its contributions during the war against Japan to legitimize its rule at the expense of the KMT's contribution. However, this legitimacy claim has been challenged by the increasing communication between the CCP and the KMT. As Zhang and Weatherley observes (2013a), the CCP's recognition of the role of the KMT during the war led to a public debate over the contribution of the KMT, which has delegitimized the CCP's contribution during the war. Similarly, when the CCP attempted to acknowledge the positive aspects of the "republication era" for building a united front with the KMT, the increasing public support for the Republican era in mainland China has been eroding the CCP's legitimacy (Zhang and Weatherley, 2013b).

As this thesis emphasizes ideology and power succession, this section will explore how the ideological discourses legitimize and justify power succession in contemporary China by idealizing Chinese traditions. As Chapter 6 will explore, various institutional rules have been developed to maintain the internal unity of the CCP; however, these rules cannot provide as much procedural legitimacy for the new leadership as democratic elections did. In order to justify its opaque power succession, the party has turned to ideology – various informal discourses that link the CCP's succession to idealized historical tradition. Two key elements of the relevant discourses are abdication and political meritocracy. Abdication emphasizes the moral *process* of power transfer, while political meritocracy focuses on the merit of the *outcomes*. They both suggest a distinct Chinese philosophy of producing leaders that is completely different from Western liberal democracy.

#### 5.5.4.2.1. Legitimizing the Opaque Procedures of Power Transitions: “abdication” (shan rang)?

Without the transparent process of democratic elections, Chinese traditions are one of few tools to *justify* the opaque procedures of Chinese succession system. A notable example is linking the contemporary power succession with the idealized ancient succession – the abdication system. Abdication is an ideal form of leadership transition in ancient China. In this system, top leaders voluntarily step down and hand over their power to a more sage (xian neng) leader. In practice, however, it was employed as a symbol to legitimize successful coups in ancient China. When subordinates replaced the emperor, they often followed with a symbolic abdication in order to avoid the criticism of disloyalty and gain legitimacy.

Kang Xiaoguang, a leading Chinese scholar promoting Confucianism, pioneers a set of ideas to modernize Confucian thoughts for enhancing regime legitimacy. Kang (2004) argues that the power succession system of Confucianism, i.e. the abdication system, can be a good option for China to solve the authoritarian system’s power succession problems. Another Chinese scholar goes a step further. Song Zhenglu (2013) argues that the top leadership transition in China “has the elements of traditional ‘abdication’”. The article was reproduced on *Seek Truth* – the party’s primary mouthpiece and an official publication of the CCP Central Committee. As its publication date was closely followed by the leadership transition in November 2012, this article caused some controversies in China. By implicitly linking Hu Jintao’s full retirement with an ideal version of “abdication”, it attempted to justify the procedures of the leadership transition in China and to cover the secretive power struggles – such as the fall of Bo Xilai.

Ideally, the power transfer of abdication is legitimate, because the old leader voluntarily steps down rather than being forced and this transition is recommended by other elites. As the leaders’ voluntary resignation is particularly important in this process. In ancient China, the new leaders would usually refuse twice to take power before it was finally agreed upon. It symbolically shows that new leaders take power not because they want to but because they have to. In other words, a new leader decides to take power not for his personal gain but because it is in the national interest. It reflects the Chinese value of “being humble” (qianbei).

A similar appreciation of humility can also be found when Jiang Zemin took power. Jiang emphasized that he did not want to take power but he had to. According to Jiang Zemin’s (2006:57; 1989) inaugural speech on 24 June 1989:

“The Central Committee recommends that I become a PSC member and the Secretary General. I am not mentally prepared and also lack experience in central government, and therefore I feel very stressed and powerless. Now, the decision has been made by the Central Committee; I appreciate comrades’ trust, and have decided to work and study hard, and try my best to do my work in order not to live up to the expectations of the veteran revolutionaries and comrades”.

The above words portray a moral image similar to abdication: that the then party leader Zhao Ziyang was incapable of solving the protest of 1989, and thus a more “sage” leader, Jiang Zemin, was strongly recommended – or even forced – by veteran leaders to take power and manage the chaotic situation after 1989. In this way, it covered the intense, secretive power struggle and justified (if not legitimized) the new leadership of Jiang.

#### 5.5.4.2.2. Praising the Outcome of Chinese Succession: Political Meritocracy?

Political meritocracy is a key opinion about talent in China, which means the government should select virtuous and talented people. Unlike abdication that emphasizes the process of the leadership transition, political meritocracy stresses the outcome (i.e. the merit of leaders). Indeed, the Chinese understanding of democracy influenced by Confucian culture highly values government performance (i.e. the outcome), whilst liberal democracy emphasizes how the government take power (i.e. the procedures) (Shi and Lu, 2010). As such, the CCP has implicitly and explicitly linked its leaders with political meritocracy to legitimate its rule. Meritocracy is a principle of cadre selection according to the CCP's constitution (CCP, 2013).

The discourses of meritocracy are often linked with an idealized version of China's imperial examination system. This system has been an examination mechanism of ancient China in selecting civil servants since the Sui Dynasty in 605. It mainly examines students' philosophical knowledge and literary skills, such as the writing of eight-legged essays – a special writing style in the imperial examination system. Some argue that this system was an institutionalized way to practise political meritocracy in ancient China (Bell, 2012; Zhang, 2012). A strong proponent of the China Model, Zhang Weiwei (2012), for example, portrayed the imperial examination system as an effective way of facilitating social mobility and the search for talents. By presenting an ideal version of the imperial examination system, Zhang argued that China's meritocracy that originated from this historical tradition is better than Western democracy.

Yet, this idealized understanding of the imperial examination system perhaps goes too far. Historians suggest that “over 90%” of the Chinese population are not eligible to take the imperial examination system because of the unequal distribution of social and educational resources (Elman, 1991: 17). Elliott (2012) also argues that “family connections and material resources” rather than merit are the keys to political success for “a majority” of Chinese imperial political elites. Moreover, there is no natural link between literary skills and the ability to manage the country. Excellent writing skills do not necessarily mean management expertise. Similarly, a PhD degree indicates expertise in specific areas rather than general administration or management skills. The old method of writing eight-legged essays, in particular, is very pedantic. There is much doubt about whether those people who do well in the examination are capable of organizing and managing social affairs. In this sense, the imperial examination system is a way to co-opt educated elites and is set as a symbol of social mobility rather than a search for governing talent.

## **5.6. The Mechanism of Ideological Promotion and its Effectiveness**

After exploring the messages of formal and informal ideological discourses above, this section discusses how those messages are transmitted to the party and society, and the effectiveness of ideological promotion in contemporary China.

### **5.6.1. Promoting Formal Ideological Discourse to the Party**

As mentioned, the party has different strategies to promote its informal and formal ideologies. The promotion of formal ideological discourse heavily relies on various party newspapers and journals, especially *People's Daily* and *Seeking Truth*, which are considered significant opinion fronts. The General Office of the CCP usually issues a notice about the promotion of party newspapers and journals each year that requires party-state organizations to subscribe – including party organs and governmental agencies at all levels, party branches

in urban areas, township-level party committees in rural areas, people's organizations, public enterprises and institutions including their subordinate units, universities/colleges and their affiliated primary and secondary schools, grass-roots organizations of public security, industry and commerce, and the taxation system, etc. (Office, 2013). The mechanism of ideological promotion heavily relies on those party newspapers and journals. Thus, formal ideology was not accessible to the masses before the Internet became popular in China. In contemporary China, those party newspapers and journals are still mainly consumed by the party – partly because their content is not attractive to the masses.

In addition to the *People's Daily* and the *Seeking Truth*, various levels of governmental and party organs also have their own newspapers and journals that publish information about formal ideological discourses. For example, each provincial unit has its own official newspaper that is directly controlled by provincial propaganda departments, and their content is closely supervised by the provincial standing committee. Shih's (2008) empirical study finds that there is statistically a significant correlation between the frequency of Three Represents articles published by provincial official newspapers and the factional background of provincial leaders. Specifically, provinces governed by Jiang Zemin's followers are more likely to publish articles about Jiang's Three Represents. My recent study also finds a similar correlation between the frequency of Scientific Outlook of Development articles and the factional background of provincial leaders (Zeng, 2014).

Moreover, the CCP has also institutionalized many formal channels to tighten the thinking of members and cultivate communist beliefs. The party cadres are required to attend ideological training in various party schools, cadre schools, academies of social sciences, universities, and theory study groups for studying party theories. Formal ideologies – Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, Three Represents, and Scientific Outlook of Development – are required courses in those training programmes. For example, the Central Party School holds a one-year or six-month full-time young cadre training class for departmental level (ting ji) or deputy departmental level local cadres. This young cadre training class is designed for potential local leaders who are usually promoted after the training, and a key goal of this young cadre training class is to cultivate communist beliefs and study formal party theories. The role of school training in cultivating communist beliefs is highly valued by Chinese leaders. For example, Xi considered various party schools, cadre schools, academies of social sciences, universities, and theory study groups as important fronts through which to study, research, and propagate Marxism (Ni, 2013).

In addition to school training, party members are required to study various government instructions, articles, and textbooks. Various levels of government in China also hold a regular series of meetings to study party theories. Various activities have been held to review the party history and difficult times during the revolutions, including arranging for the party cadres to revisit the famous revolutionary sites such as Yanan or re-walk the roads of the Long March.

#### 5.6.2. Transmitting Informal Ideological Discourses to Society

Compared to formal ideology, ideological promotion to the masses takes a looser approach which promotes pro-authoritarian values rather than communist beliefs. This is also why informal ideologies formed by populist language – rather than formal ideologies formed by complex communist language – are the main messages being passed to the society. The promotion of informal ideological discourses heavily relies on mass propaganda that is highly

valued by the CCP. As discussed in Chapter 4, 38% of Chinese intellectuals advised the state to improve its official propaganda, which is the second most frequently mentioned strategy for maintaining legitimacy.

Indeed, informal ideological discourses are embedded into almost all aspects of the masses' information channels, including school education, TV drama programmes, movies, songs, literary works, and popular newspapers. In Chinese high schools and universities, students are required to take courses such as "Thoughts and Politics" that disseminates the CCP's political messages. Since the late 1990s, Chinese universities have required students to complete 210-314 academic hours of political education courses (Yan, 2014:9). Ideological and political education – in particular patriotism – is also embedded into various extracurricular activities such as sports events, flag-raising ceremonies, and activities of "young pioneers" (Vickers, 2009:526).

In addition to school education, various culture and arts organizations, such as the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the China Writer Association, and the Photographic Association, are directly led by the CCP to convey relevant political messages. For example, the mission of the China Writer Association is to link the party-state to writers and become an important social force to build socialist civilization. As such, various popular literary and artistic works carry many messages of ideological discourses.

For example, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala Evening – the leading TV event of the year – involves many ideological elements every year. Through its songs, skits, and dance, the CCTV Spring Festival Gala Evening implicitly and explicitly disseminates pro-authoritarian discourses, such as the national revival of China and the wise leadership of the CCP. It is clearly evidenced by a longitudinal study on CCTV's Spring Festival Gala in the past 26 years. This study finds that "29.7% of the (Gala) performance promoted a political agenda" and that "the act or intent to promote new and socially acceptable behaviors and morals, and reference to current social problems were identified in 32.4% of all performances" (Wang, 2010d:402-403). This study also finds that the more recent Galas "were more likely to focus on national pride" than before. This is perhaps because of the CCP's increasing propaganda emphasis on China's improving living standards and because "the use of national pride is potentially more effective than the traditional, blatant chanting for loving and serving the country and the people" (Wang, 2010d:403). In addition, the Gala also promotes cultural values, such as family unity, which "at the national level extends the Confucian concept of harmony and integration and implies the desire for national unity" (Wang, 2010d:402-403).

The CCP has carefully embedded ideological elements into various big national events as part of its national political marketing to both domestic and international audiences, including the Beijing Olympics, the Shanghai Expo, the Asian Games, and the Shenzhou Space project. Domestically, those events were explicitly portrayed as a sign of the rise of China. They enhanced the CCP's legitimacy by promoting patriotism. On the international stage, all those events sent a strong signal about "a prosperous and strong" China and thus highlighted the success of the one-party rule – a way for the CCP to win international recognition from both developing and developed countries. This international recognition satisfied Chinese national pride and thus further strengthened domestic support for the CCP. For example, by selectively reporting Western countries' positive comments on the Beijing Olympics in China, the CCP won credit for its success domestically.

Some popular newspapers also actively propagate informal ideological discourses. For example, the Global Times, one of the most popular newspapers in China, is famous for its

pro-government stance and nationalistic appeals. School education is also an important channel through which to promote informal ideological discourses. I learnt many popular pro-CCP songs in my primary school, such as “if there is no CCP, there will be no new China”. The song lyrics were catchy: “there is no new China without the CCP; the CCP works hard for the nation, and the CCP wholeheartedly; it pointed out the road to liberation of the people, and it leads China towards the light; it insisted on fighting against Japan for more than eight years, and it improves people’s lives ...”

Moreover, the CCP has been marketing its authoritarian rule through advertising slogans. Its propaganda units assisted by local neighbourhood party committees post countless catchy slogans in streets and back lanes – including gardens, park plazas, highways, and schools. Those slogans include a variety of content but they all carry positive information about the CCP’s rule such as “Why is China strong? It is because of the CCP” (zhongguo he yiqiang? yuan you gongchandang). It is also common to see those catchy slogans even in remote poverty-stricken areas. Some slogans have also reflected timely ideological discourses. For example, since Xi Jinping proposed the China Dream, China is now filled with various advertising slogans for the China Dream, such as “China Dream, My Dream”, “China Dream, Power Dream” (zhongguo meng, qianguo meng), and “use wisdom and sweat to achieve China Dream” (yong zhihui hanshui zhujiu zhongguomeng). In addition, some slogans also propagate Chinese traditions and moral educations such as “filial piety is the first virtue” (baishan xiao weixian) and “learn from Leifeng”. As I discussed above, that cultural and moral education helped to maintain social stability in China.

Notably, the development of technology has posed unprecedented challenges to society’s traditional channels of information. In particular, the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo, has become an important channel to pass on pro-liberal democracy values. In order to guide public opinions on Weibo, the CCP has taken a series of actions to contain the changing social values toward liberal democracy since Xi Jinping took power. On the one hand, various traditional mass media outlets such as the *People’s Daily*, governmental organs (especially propaganda units), and many high-level officials are encouraged to open Weibo accounts and they have become an important force through which propagate pro-government opinions on Weibo – the so-called positive energy of the Internet (wangluo zheng nengliang). On the other hand, in the name of combating rumours, the regime has been controlling arena for propagating pro-liberal democracy values – the so-called negative energy of the Internet (wangluo fu nengliang).

A key to this battle is to undermine the influence of – or perhaps delegitimize – pro-liberal democracy public intellectuals. Public intellectuals are significant advocates for democracy on Weibo, and they are a key force for promoting constitutionalism. Notably, there is a public debate on the Chinese Internet over the definition of “public intellectuals”. In this thesis, “public intellectuals” only refer to pro-liberal democracy opinion leaders. Many of them have won many followers on Weibo because of their harsh criticism of the government and praise for liberal democracy. For example, the Weibo account of Yu Jianrong (2014), a director of the CASS and a leading pro-liberal public intellectual, is currently followed by over 1.83 million Chinese fans.

Since 2013, the CCP’s propaganda has strengthened its attacks on those advocates of liberal democracy. An article in the *Seek Truth* clearly criticized some public intellectuals who harshly criticized the government and attempted to overthrow the CCP’s rule (Shi, 2013). This article blamed the deliberate instigation of some public intellectuals as an important

reason for the emergence of the Internet's "negative energy", including excessive negative news, wide spread anti-government sentiment, and Internet violence.

In addition, the aforementioned article, "An unstable China will only be worse than the Soviet Union", called public intellectuals "the slaves of the West". It warns that such intellectuals have been employing liberal democracy to weaken China's national strength and to "let Chinese people become the dogs of America". As this article has been widely reproduced and it explicitly criticized public intellectuals, some intellectuals openly responded it. For example, Yu Jianrong (2013) commented on his Weibo that "Yes, I am the traitor of China that you cursed. However, I love the piece of land that I was born and raised on, and the people who live on this land. The reason I criticized demolitions, reeducation through labour, child begging, and luxury military cars, and hope to put the votes of the constitution into practice and to transparent the officials' property, is to wish that this country is not going to unstable!"

In addition to the media offensive, the CCP also targeted several influential opinion leaders in order to deter others. For example, an active opinion leader, Xue Manzi, was arrested ostensibly for prostitution. At the end of 2013, the influence of pro-government opinions was seriously strengthened at the expense of that of pro-liberal democracy intellectuals. The CCP's success of control over Weibo suggests that the authoritarian regime is able to contain the tendency of changing social values toward liberal democracy in the age of information. This is also evidenced by empirical studies on the censorship programme in China, which suggests that the Internet under the CCP's censorship strategies has strengthened the CCP's rule (King, *et al.*, 2013; Lorentzen, 2013).

### 5.6.3. Effectiveness of Ideological Promotion

After exploring ideological discourses and their channels of promotion, a consequential question is: how effective are they? From the outset, it is important to concede that the answers to such a question will necessarily be tentative and incomplete, because the effectiveness of ideological promotion is hardly measureable. Considering its significance, it is still necessary to address this question. I argue that the promotion of informal ideology and formal ideology have been relatively effective in maintaining popular legitimacy and party cohesion respectively, so far.

#### 5.6.3.1. Informal Ideological Promotion: Maintaining Popular Legitimacy

It is difficult if not impossible to prove, but there is some evidence that indicates that informal ideological discourses have been widely accepted in China. First of all, as mentioned above, socioeconomic modernization will bring a series of value shift – such as increased demands for political participation and civil liberties – that will inevitably trigger the quest for liberal democracy in the long run. However, as noted above, various studies show that Chinese people widely agree that the current political system is the most appropriate. For example, the 2008 Asian Barometer Survey finds that 74% of Chinese respondents responded positively to the statement that "whatever its faults may be, our current system of government is still the best for the country"(Chu, 2013:5). In this regard, the CCP's political marketing has been effective in convincing the masses to accept one-party rule so far.

Second, Chinese people are ambivalent about democracy. On the one hand, they widely support the idea of democracy. For example, the 2002 East Asia Barometer Survey finds that 96% of respondents agree that “democracy is completely suitable” for China and 74% agreed that “democracy is always preferable” (Wang, 2007: 567).. The 2001 World Value Survey finds that 96% of respondents agreed that “having a democratic political system is good” and 90% agreed that “democracy is better than other forms of government” (Wang, 2007: 567). Notably, this “democracy” is not the same with Western or liberal democracy.

On the other hand, Chinese people fear democracy. The survey of Nathan and Shi (1996:544) finds that 54.8% of respondents agree that “China needs more democracy now”, while 37.7% are afraid that “more democracy will lead to chaos”. The survey “Social Change and Social Value” in 1993 also shows that 94% respondents agree that China should “expand democracy now”; however, 45% worry that “introducing more democracy might cause instability or a loss of social order”, 65% think that “if there were too many political parties, this would bring chaos to national politics”, 40% agree that “too many interest groups in national or local politics would harm the interests of everyone”, and 74% agree that the Chinese government should “decide whether a certain school or trend of thought can be allowed to circulate” (Wang, 2007:568). Similarly, the 2002 East Asia Barometer Survey finds that 76% agree that “too many interest groups in the national or local politics would harm the interests of everyone”, and 63% agree that the Chinese government should “decide whether a certain school or trend of thought can be allowed to circulate” (Wang, 2007:568).

A key factor contributing to the above ambivalent view about democracy might be the regime’s anti-liberal democracy strategy. As discussed above, the rise of liberalism in the late 1980s almost led to the fall of the regime. After the protest of 1989, Deng Xiaoping (1989) clearly pointed out that the “biggest mistake” of his “reform and open up” was the inadequate ideological and political education for “not only young university students but Chinese people in general”. Afterwards, the CCP strengthened its mass propaganda to resist liberal democracy. The effectiveness of state propaganda on political support is clearly evidenced by various empirical studies, which suggests that the CCP has managed to use the media and state propaganda to generate popular support (Bernstein and Lü, 2000; King, *et al.*, 2013; Li, 2004b; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011).

The regime has also successfully maintained people’s preferences for socialist democracy – rather than liberal democracy – and legitimized the party’s role in leading political development in China. The survey of Nathan and Shi (1996:544) finds that over 76% of respondents agree that developing democracy in China should be dependent on the leadership of the CCP, and 95% of respondents agree or strongly agree with this in another survey (Wang, 2007:572).

Table 3 shows the effectiveness of three key informal ideological discourses in China. It suggests that the (in)stability discourse, the national condition discourse, and the national rejuvenation discourse are widely accepted in China. However, as mentioned, various discourses of informal ideology can only legitimize one-party rule in the short term – they might serve to delegitimize the CCP’s rule in the long run. For example, if the CCP fails to meet nationalist’ expectations when deal with international conflict, the national rejuvenation discourse might be used against the CCP’s rule. Similarly, if the CCP fails to maintain social stability and promote economic growth, those informal ideological discourses can be used to delegitimize the CCP’s rule. In addition, as mentioned, the national condition discourse suggests that social stability and economic growth should be national priorities of developing countries, while democratic rights are not that important. If China maintains its current



economic growth, it may become a developed country within decades. Then, should Chinese people maintain or abandon the authoritarian rule?

Moreover, we should also bear the huge cost of the CCP’s national political market in mind. In addition to the considerable human capital of the CCP’s department of propaganda and advocacy group at all levels of governmental and party organs, the CCP has also spent a great amount of money in reinvesting its ideological changes, posting pro-government popular slogans across the country, holding big events such as the Olympics and Shenzhou Space Project that cost billions of dollars, funding countless party newspapers and journals, etc. Thus, the CCP’s national political marketing is a huge expense.

**Table 3: Effectiveness of Key Informal Ideological Discourses in China**

| Informal Discourse              | Survey evidence  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| (In)stability discourse         | Shi’s survey of “Social Change and Social Value”: 45% of respondents were concerned that “introducing more democracy might cause instability or a loss of social order” and over 60% agreed that “if there were too many political parties, this would bring chaos to national politics” (Wang, 2007:568).   |
| National condition discourse    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2008 Asian Barometer: over 93% of respondents agreed that “although our political system has various kinds of problems, it is still the best that fits our national conditions” (Wang, 2010e).</li> <li>• 2001 World Value Survey: the majority of respondents ranked economic development, national defence, and stability as the top national priorities, while democratic rights such as political participation and freedom of speech were considered less important (Wang, 2007).</li> </ul> |
| National rejuvenation discourse | Based on the 2008 China Survey and 2003 ISSP National Identity Survey, Tang and Dar (2012:815) find that “China shows the highest level of nationalism among all countries and regions, with a score of 80 out of 100”.  |

5.6.3.2. Formal Ideological Promotion: Maintaining Party Cohesion

In terms of cultivating beliefs, the promotion of formal ideologies to the party is hardly effective. In contemporary China, the declining communist beliefs within the party are an undeniable fact. The school training of party cadres, for example, has become a kind of social occasion for building personal networks and a period of holiday for many trainees. As the training sessions are considered by many trainees as opportunities to build political networks and form groups, those trainees often use public funds to entertain or buy gifts to other classmates during the training. It is also common for many to ask their secretaries to write essays assigned in the training. Thus, those school training classes are called, by many Chinese people, “the classes of corruption” (fu bai ban).<sup>16</sup>

In addition, as mentioned, Three Represents urged the party to maintain its advanced nature – especially its probity. However, until now, the CCP has still failed to control

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<sup>16</sup> After Xi Jinping took power, the party has been taking action to regulate the training session. The organization department has issued a stipulation for cadre trainings in order to improve their unhealthy practices. (Organization, 2013).

corruption. Similarly, socioeconomic inequality deteriorated during Hu Jintao's term, although the CCP proposed Scientific Outlook of Development and Harmonious Society so as to shift its focus on welfare. This is also why Bo Xilai's Chongqing Model received the enormous, nationwide support of New Leftists. In these respects, formal ideology did not achieve its goals. In these respects, the CCP's formal ideological work failed to cultivate beliefs even within the party.

Nonetheless, formal ideology is still important in justifying the CCP's rule in contemporary China. As mentioned above, formal ideology provides an *ex post facto* justification to make the ideological basis of the CCP consistent with the reality of the political economy in China. Although it cannot become the sincere beliefs of party members, it helps to *justify* if not legitimize the CCP's rule to itself. This self-justification is crucial to explain why China needs a communist party to monopolise power and settle intra-party disputes. It also shows that establishing ideological orthodoxy and leaders' credentials are important for inner party consolidation and organization. Yet, formal ideology is not always a force of regime stability. As Jiang Zemin's Three Represents proved, it may sometimes contribute to factionalism and thus division among ruling elites.

## 5.7. Summary

Chinese leaders and intellectuals are highly concerned about ideology; however, western scholarship has made far less of an effort to understand the puzzle of ideological modernization in China. As this thesis demonstrates, ideology is crucial to the CCP's survival. The CCP has heavily relied on formal ideology to maintain party cohesion by justifying the communist rule and informal ideology to discredit liberal democracy.

Arguably, this dual ideological strategy has managed to maintain the CCP's internal stability (i.e. party cohesion) and external stability (i.e. popular legitimacy). Although modernization theories suggest that socioeconomic modernization will lead to democratization, the case of China shows that the authoritarian rule is much more resilient than expected. The capability of the CCP to maintain popular support in the age of information has been greatly underestimated by the literature on comparative politics and media. As this chapter shows, the regime has developed a set of ideological discourses and advanced propaganda strategies to gain political support. In the short term, the development of technology might help the authoritarian regime to reach some goals that the traditional propaganda mechanism will never achieve. Yet, this is not to say that the political marketing of the regime's ideation-based popular support can sustain the authoritarian rule in the long run. As discussed, informal ideology is only a short-term solution.

More importantly, to achieve communism is the ruling basis of a communist party. Making the ideological basis of the CCP consistent with the political economy of China is crucial to settling intra-party disputes and thus maintaining internal stability of the CCP. In this regard, the CCP will definitely continue to revise its formal ideology. Yet, ideology also creates problems sometimes when formal ideology is heavily used for power struggles. As this chapter shows, Three Represents was used by Jiang Zemin to consolidate his power and thus intensified intra-party conflicts. Thus, whether party cohesion can be continuously maintained or not is not decided by ideology alone: how to minimize the negative effects of power struggles is also very important. In this respect, the institutional development of power succession plays a crucial role in maintaining the internal stability of the CCP, as the next chapter will address.

## Chapter Six

### The Institutionalization of the Authoritarian Leadership in China

“If we don't carry out this revolution [streamlining organizations] but let the old and ailing stand in the way of young people who are energetic and able, not only will the four modernizations fail but the Party and state will face a mortal trail and perhaps perish.”

– *Deng Xiaoping (1983:397), excerpt from his talk at a Politburo conference*<sup>17</sup>

#### 6.1 Introduction

A core argument in this thesis, as established in the Introduction Chapter, is that the institutionalization of power succession in China plays a key role in maintaining the CCP's internal stability and its capability to maintain legitimacy. Leadership transitions have always been turbulent moments for authoritarian regimes (Clapham, 1988; Hughes and May, 1988). A challenging task for authoritarian regimes is to prevent the division between ruling elites during the process of power succession. A smooth leadership transition rarely proceeds without violence in authoritarian regimes. Yet, owing to institutionalization, power succession in contemporary China has demonstrated a high degree of stability in the past two decades. This chapter studies the institutional development of the Chinese succession system and its impacts on party cohesion and legitimacy.

Before institutionalization, power transfer had caused endless fierce power struggles and thus national chaos in China. The purge of Mao Zedong's two successors plunged the country into chaos, which indirectly led to economic stagnation and national upheaval. Afraid of elite divisions and brutal power struggles, the CCP has taken great efforts to institutionalize its power succession system. This concern about a split in the leadership was firmed up following the protest of 1989. Arguably, three decades of institutionalization has produced a relatively stable and predictable power succession system.

The institutional development of power succession in China provides a dramatic example of “authoritarian resilience” – a hotly debated academic discussion inspired by the CCP's first smooth leadership transition in 2002. As Chapter 3 discussed, while some argue that the institutional changes have made the authoritarian system more sustainable and served to strengthen the CCP's rule, others contend that this view overestimates the strength of the authoritarian system and ignores its vulnerability. The success of the leadership transition in 2012 further supports the existence of authoritarian resilience.

Although power struggles within the party remain intense in contemporary China, the institutionalization has undermined the negative effects of political struggles. None of the fall of Chen Xitong, Chen Liangyu, and Bo Xilai generated considerable level of political instability and crisis compared with power struggles before the institutionalization. In addition, the removal of those high-level leaders followed certain institutional procedures, whilst the interrogation of Liu Shaoqi and his wife was launched without any formal resolution or any written document, as this chapter will examine.

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<sup>17</sup> For the English version of the Selected Work of Deng, please see page 284

## 6.2 Academic Debates about Power Succession in China

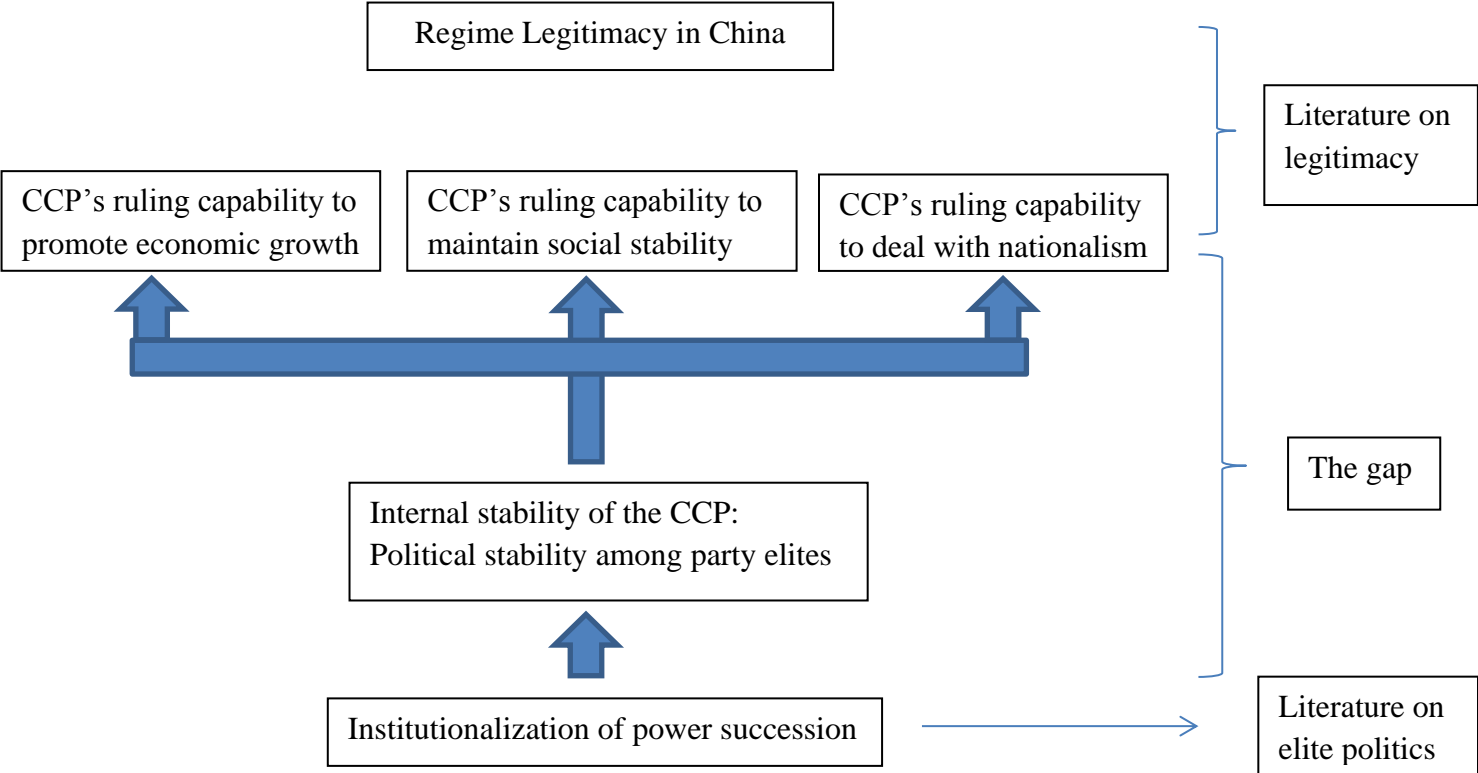
In addition to the aforementioned debate over authoritarian resilience, the topic of power succession in China also involves several relevant debates.

### 6.2.1 The Relationship between the Institutionalization of Power Succession and Regime Legitimacy

The CCP’s survival is decided by party cohesion and popular legitimacy, as established in the introduction chapter. Obviously, institutionalization of power succession is crucial to minimize the negative effects of power struggles and thus maintain the unity of the CCP leadership. Equally importantly, the institutionalization of power succession also plays a role in deciding the CCP’s legitimacy. As Hughes and May (1988) argues, the “transfer of political power from one substantive ruler to another is generally regarded as a major test of the stability and legitimacy of a political system.”

In the CCP’s discourse, its ruling capability decides its legitimacy, as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter. Arguably, the CCP’s ruling capability is built on its internal stability. In other words, this internal stability is a prerequisite for the CCP’s ruling capability to maintain its legitimacy by maintaining social stability, promoting economic growth, and defending national interests. The institutionalization of the leadership transition is a crucial factor in maintaining this internal stability. Thus, the institutionalization of power succession is a prerequisite for the CCP to maintain its legitimacy. As a professor of the Central Party School argues, the cadres appointment system is crucial to the CCP’s ruling capacity and thus to its legitimacy (Zhao, 2011). Figure 7 summarizes the argument raised above.

**Figure 7: Regime legitimacy and the institutionalization of power succession**



This chapter focuses on the impacts of institutional development at the top level, because of the gap in the existing literature and its significance. Most of the existing literature focused on the CCP's popular support as a whole (i.e. its overall legitimacy); however, how has the CCP gained and lost its legitimacy? As Schubert (2008:194) argues, "deficits in legitimacy which might occur at one point within this system can be compensated by gains in legitimacy, at another point, resulting in overall regime support". This is particularly true in China. Empirical studies show that the central government of China enjoys strong support in contrast with the relatively low legitimacy of the local states (Cai, 2008; Gilley, 2008; Saich, 2005; Tong, 2011; Wang, 2005a). In other words, the legitimacy of the central state has been compensating for the legitimacy deficit of the local states. In addition, as discussed in Chapter 3, the regime's disaster relief and post-disaster reconstruction after the Wenchuan earthquake led to the increased legitimacy of the central government and the decreased legitimacy of local governments because of the propaganda campaigns. Thus, partial legitimacy – of which the overall regime legitimacy is made up – is important.

In order to analyze this partial legitimacy, it is necessary to disaggregate the Chinese political system and to examine potential "zones of legitimacy" at different levels of the bureaucracy (Schubert, 2008:194). In studying this partial legitimacy in China, scholars proposed different research agendas. On the one hand, some argue that the political elite are more important than the masses in determining regime legitimacy (Sandby-Thomas, 2014). The Weberian typology of legitimacy disaggregates society into three principal groups – chiefs, staff and masses; when applying this classification to the case of China, Sandby-Thomas identifies chiefs as the political elite who are at the administrative rank of county/division or above, the staff as those cadres who are below the administrative rank of county/division, and the masses as the ordinary people (Sandby-Thomas, 2014). Sandby-Thomas (2014) claims that the rank in terms of their significance to regime legitimacy should be the relationship between the elites and cadres, the relationship between the elites and masses, and the relationship between the cadres and masses. Sandby-Thomas' model makes a valuable contribution in highlighting the importance of the political elites; however, the administrative ranks of the Chinese political system are much more complex than this model, and therefore Weber's three strategic groups are not particularly appropriate for applying to the case of China.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Schubert (2014) argues that the "elites and masses" and "cadres and masses" relationships are as important as the "elites and cadres" relationship, and the most important factor in partial legitimacy is "the lowest administrative level of the Chinese political system". Thus, Schubert's (2008) new research agenda emphasizes the micro-level of the political system, such as villages and counties. It is valid to a certain point that the local levels of the political system are important to regime legitimacy; however, in the highly centralized authoritarian system, party leaders have the overwhelming power to determine the legitimacy of the regime. In addition, as mentioned above, the central government has been compensating for a legitimacy deficit in the local states. This suggests that the partial legitimacy of the political system at the top is crucial to the overall legitimacy of the regime. As Walder (2004:197) argues:

"The political elite of 500,000 cannot rule the country unless it can retain the obedience of 40 million state cadres... and if the elite maintains the discipline of state

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<sup>18</sup> Administrative ranks cannot fully reflect the real power of political actors. In China, some administrative posts are symbolic (*xu zhi*). For example, the party head of a country shares the same administrative rank – at the county/division level (*xian chu ji*) – as a leading cadre at a Women's Federation (*fu lian*); however, in their real power, there is a huge difference. Indeed, the county/division level cadres in many non-real power sectors (*fei shi quan bumen*) in China, such as women's federations, hardly warrant being called "chiefs" in Weber's sense.

bureaucrats and the allegiance of the party members, it can withstand challenges from other groups in society, even in periods of economic hardship and social upheaval.”

As such, this chapter emphasizes the institutional development of the CCP hierarchy at the top level, in particular the party leaders whose administrative ranks are at vice-ministry level (*fu bu ji*) or above. Arguably, in the highly centralized authoritarian system in China, those party leaders are much more influential than any others in determining the legitimacy of the CCP.

### 6.2.2 Is power succession in China more institutionalized?

The third debate is about the institutionalization of power succession in the field of Chinese elite studies. On the one hand, many are sceptical of the institutional development of leadership transition in China (Fewsmith, 2013; Shirk, 2002; Zheng and Lye, 2003). For example, Susan Shirk (2001:139) contended that the then key leaders – Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, and Zhu Rongji – might not step down under the constraints of institutional rules, and thus Shirk concluded that the “trend toward institutionalization might not survive the transfer of power that, under the new rules, is scheduled to occur in 2002 at the 16<sup>th</sup> Party Congress”. This prediction, of course, proved to be wrong. On the other hand, many have recognized that power succession in China has been increasingly institutionalized (Guo, 2013; Huang, 2008; Lee, 2010; Miller, 2013; Teiwes, 2001).

Different views on institutionalization in this debate led to contrary understandings of Chinese succession politics. While the proponents of institutionalization argue that institutional rules have become a significant factor in selecting Chinese leaders nowadays, the opponents consider power succession to be a result of factional politics or a “black box operation” (Fewsmith, 2013; Li, 2012c:3; Zheng and Lye, 2003). By using qualitative comparative analysis, one of my recent studies analyses the selection criteria of Chinese leaders at the most powerful leading body – the PSC – in 2012 (Zeng, 2013). A key finding is that age combined with the institutional rules was one of the most important factors in selecting top Chinese leaders at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2012, which lends strong support to the proponents of institutionalization (Zeng, 2013). This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the institutional development of the succession system in the past three decades.

## 6.3 Before Institutionalization, Power Succession: a Source of Instability and Crisis

Power succession can not only legitimize but also delegitimize political regimes. Power transition before institutionalization was a main source of crisis and instability in China. In Mao Zedong’s era, the lack of an institutionalized succession system led to a cruel power struggle within the party. In order to consolidate his power, Mao launched waves of radical mass campaigns that led to national upheaval and economic stagnation. Similar to succession politics in contemporary North Korea with the fall of Jang Sung-taek, the power struggle was a life and death game in Mao’s China. Mao’s first heir apparent Liu Shaoqi was defeated during the Cultural Revolution and died soon after his fall. The institutional rule in Mao’s era was so weak that the interrogation on the then PRC President Liu Shaoqi and his wife was launched without any formal resolution or any formal written document.

After the fall of Liu, Lin Biao became the new heir apparent. In 1969, Lin’s status was confirmed by the CCP constitution, which stated that “Comrade Lin Biao is a close ally and

successor of Comrade Mao Zedong”. However, two years later in 1971, Lin mysteriously died with numerous waves of purges of Lin’s supporters. The CCP offered no explanation for nearly two years until 1973, when Lin’s fall was acknowledged at the 10<sup>th</sup> CCP congress. The fall of Lin disillusioned many Chinese people about Mao’s rule. Although Mao began to emphasize the unity of leaders – “stability and unity” – in 1975 (Mao, 1996), Mao still failed to prevent the crucial power struggle in the then un-institutionalized political system. One month after Mao’s death in 1976, Hua Guofeng cooperated with military leaders to arrest the Gang of Four, including Mao’s wife Jiang Qing. Afterwards, Hua used Mao’s note – that “with you in charge, I am at ease” – to justify his claim as Mao’s successor.

As discussed in Chapter 2, mass campaigns combined with endless waves of political purges during Mao’s rule had caused the long-term political upheaval in China. The Cultural Revolution in particular seriously disrupted normal lives of Chinese people and reduced normal economic activities because the CCP mobilized ordinary Chinese people to participate in mass campaigns. It also made the CCP less capable to deliver public goods to the society. The CCP’s popular support significantly decreased even before Mao died.

Recognizing the necessity to minimize the negative effects of the power struggle, Deng Xiaoping and his supporters launched ambitious projects to formalize the political system in the early 1980s. Various institutional rules of power succession were made at that time. The grand project of “four transformations” is particularly notable, as it marked the starting point of the thirty-year institutionalization in China. This project stipulated four criteria to select cadres: more revolutionary, younger, more knowledgeable and more professional. Specific guidelines to adhere to these criteria include age limit, tenure system, step-by-step promotion, work experience, and educational qualifications, which I will discuss below.

Compared with Mao’s period, power succession under the watch of Deng had been far less damaging to the party’s rule. After Deng forced Hua Guofeng to step down, Hua was still a respected cadre and enjoyed full personal freedom. The fall of Hua is also the first power transition in the PRC without bloodshed. In addition, there had been some relatively open discussions within the CCP about whether Hua was still suitable as the top leader, which was quite democratic when compared with Mao’s era. This helped to reduce the negative impact of power struggles on the legitimacy of the leadership. Although Deng laid a foundation for today’s stable power succession, he also expelled two of his heirs apparent – Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. The elite division more or less strangled the decision-making ability of the CCP when dealing with popular protests in 1989, which almost put the party on the brink of collapse. This suggests that the level of institutionalization in Deng’s era was still insufficient to preserve the internal stability of the CCP.

#### **6.4 After Institutionalization, Power Transition: Predicable, Smooth, Orderly, and Stable**

In the post-strongman era, power succession has turned a new page. Elite politics has been much more stable than ever before owing to two key factors: the changing power distribution and the institutionalization of power succession. The existing literature on the subject of Chinese elite politics focus on the former factor, but the role of institutionalization is widely recognized. Many emphasize the fact that no single political group is willing nor able to dominate succession politics is key to explaining the stable elite politics in contemporary China (Li, 2005; Nathan, 2003). However, the institutional development also

matters. Indeed, learning from the painful lessons about orderless succession that I mentioned above, the CCP has made impressive efforts to institutionalize its power succession in the past three decades. This reflects a key aspect of its authoritarian resilience – the CCP’s ability to learn, which allows the party to adapt to the rapidly changing socioeconomic environment (Tsai and Dean, 2013).

This is not just fawning praise over the CCP leadership’s brilliance, because institutionalization is a decision that the CCP leaders have to make. As the PRC founders, the legitimacy of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping came from their personal authority rather than their institutional posts; however, the power of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao – who were promoted from the bureaucratic system – was mainly granted by their official posts instead of personal authority. Thus, contemporary Chinese leaders have to strengthen the existing institutional arrangements for consolidating their power. The continual institutionalization of power succession has formalized the process of selecting and removing leaders, and thus developed a power succession system with Chinese characteristics. The following section will explore the institutional development and key features of the Chinese succession system.

#### 6.4.1 Routinized Turnover of Political Elites

The turnover of political elites reflects the effectiveness of the political system. If the level of political mobility is low, a bureaucratic system occupied by old leaders who refuse to retire will systematically push young elites out of the system and discourage new elites from joining the system. It will indirectly contribute to the rise of external forces that might overthrow the rigid political system. In this sense, a rapid cycle of political elites helps the political system to co-opt young political elites and thus prevents divisions amongst the elite.

Political mobility is also relevant to the high adaptability of the authoritarian system. Without a high turnover rate of political elites, the political system – occupied by a group of party elders who tend to resist change – is hardly adaptive to the changing environment. In addition, by incorporating younger leaders into the leading bodies, it portrays a positive image of the CCP leadership as opposed to the image which suggests that the party is governed by a group of party elders. In this sense, the high turnover rates matter to the vitality of the CCP leadership. Chinese leaders considered routinized turnover of political elites to be crucial to maintain the CCP’s rule. As Deng Xiaoping (1983:397) clearly warned:

“If we ... let the old and ailing stand in the way of young people who are energetic and able, not only will the four modernizations fail but the Party and state will face a mortal trail and perhaps perish”.

In order to ensure a rapid cycle of political elites, the CCP has developed and practised two specific rules: term limits and age limits.

##### 6.4.1.1 Term limits

Putting an end to the tenure of top leaders is one of the most challenging tasks for the CCP in institutionalizing its power succession, because there is no such tradition in Chinese culture – the abdication system is ideal, but rarely happened in practice, as discussed in Chapter 5. The post of Chairman belonged to Mao Zedong until his death. Before Deng Xiaoping took power, there were no effective institutional rules to regulate the terms of Chinese leaders. Recognizing the importance of term limits, the CCP began to implement a



tenure system and incorporated it into the PRC constitution in 1982. This amended constitution ruled that President and Vice-President of the PRC, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the People's Congress, and Premier, Vice-Premier, and State Councillors of the State Council shall not serve continuously for more than two terms. It officially announced the end of Chinese leaders' life long tenure. In order to put this rule into practise, Deng Xiaoping voluntarily set an example to hand over all his institutional posts. Nowadays, this term limit has become highly institutionalized – all Politburo members, except top leaders, have served for no longer than two terms since 1997.

#### 6.4.1.2 Age Limit: Retirement and Promotion

Unlike term limits that first regulated the top leaders, the early efforts towards establishing an age limit in the 1980s mainly focused on mid-level leaders. In 1982, the CCP announced the relevant rules to institutionalize the retirement system. It rules that the minister level or equivalent cadres should usually retire at 65 years old and those at the deputy minister level should usually retire at 60 years old (CCP, 1982). This age limit has since been gradually reinforced and developed to regulate the top leaders.

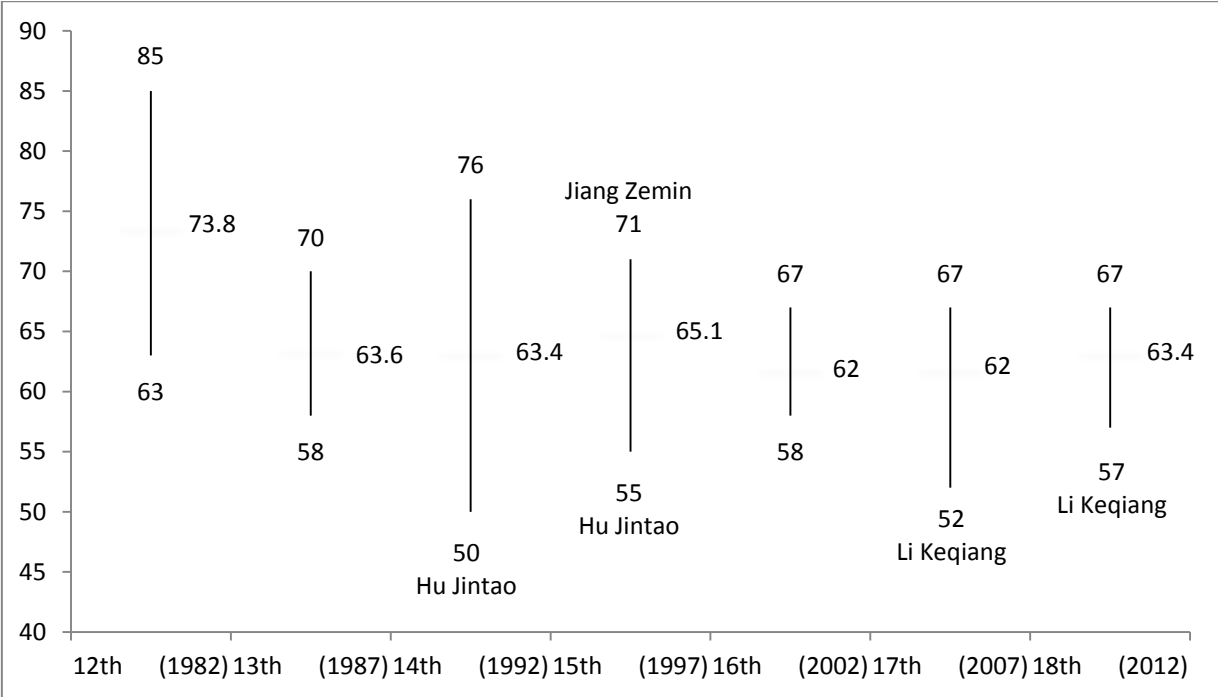
In Jiang Zemin's era, the specific retirement age of top leaders was established and strictly implemented. In 1997, the retirement age for the PSC members was set to be 70 years old. In 1998, Qiao Shi retired from the post of People's Congress Chairman because of this new policy – Jiang Zemin was 71 in 1997, but he stayed in power because he was the first leader. In 2002, the retirement age was lowered to 68. Li Ruihuan – who had just turned 68 – retired; however, Luo Gan – who was 67 – got promoted into the PSC in 2002. This new retirement age has been retained until now and has widely been called the custom of “67 stay and 68 retire”. Many argue that retirement age served as a tool to force Jiang's political rival to relinquish power (Fewsmith, 2003a; Fewsmith, 2008; Fewsmith, 2013; Ou, 2012; Shirk, 2012). This is valid to a certain point, because there was much room to manipulate this rule during the initial process of its institutionalization. Jiang and his supporters could take advantage of their younger age and the relevant rules; however, to set up a specific rule to regulate retirement is actually an important progress as long as the rule-makers follow this rule themselves.

As mentioned above, some skeptics of institutionalization predicted that Jiang Zemin and his supporters would not follow the age limit rule and step down in 2002. On the contrary, Jiang and his supporters strictly followed this rule, which further strengthened the rule's authority. In 2002, Zhu Rongji – who is considered a close supporter of Jiang (Li, 2001a; Miller, 1996) – retired from his post as PRC Premier, and Jiang Zemin handed over the top position of power to Hu Jintao – which marked the first smooth leadership transition of the PRC. Zeng Qinghong, who was considered Jiang's most powerful supporter (Li, 2001a; Li and White, 2003), also retired from his post as the PRC Vice-President when he was just 68 in 2007, – without violating the “67 stay and 68 retire” rule. My recent study suggests that this retirement age limit became one of the most important factors in selecting the 18<sup>th</sup> PSC members in 2012 (Zeng, 2013). In addition to the retirement age, a specific age limit for promotion was made at the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress that the age of new Politburo members should not exceed 63.

Figure 8 shows the age distribution of the PSC members in the past three decades. It shows that the retirement age of 68 and 70 has been strictly implemented since the relevant rules were made. The strict implementation of age limits changed the age trends of the PSC

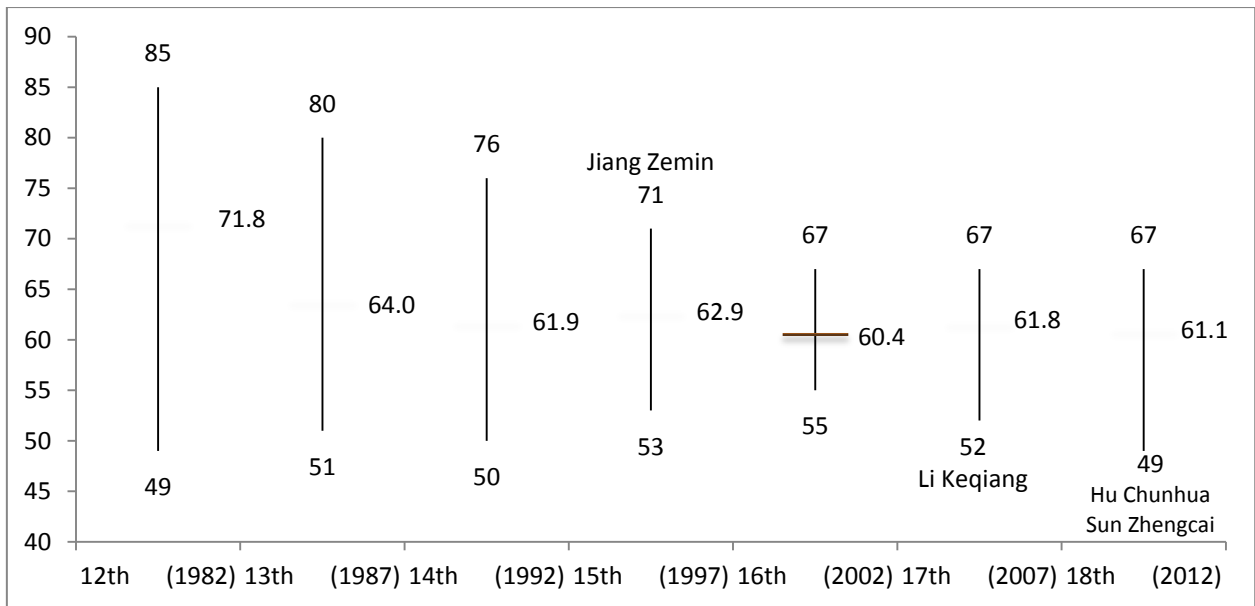
and Politburo members. As indicated in Figure 9, in 1982, the oldest member of the Politburo Ye Jianying was 85 years old, in contrast with the youngest member who was 49 years old. The age span among Politburo members reached 36 years in 1982, while it was only 18 years in 2012. After thirty years of institutionalization, the Chinese leaders are now much younger than before. Figure 10 shows the average age of Chinese leaders. The average age of the new PSC members in 2012 is 63.4 and that of the new Politburo members is 61.1, both of whom are ten years younger than those in 1982. Arguably, the growing institutionalization of term and age limits has achieved one of key goals of “four transformations” – younger leaders.

**Figure 8: Age distribution of the Politburo Standing Committee from 1982 to 2012**



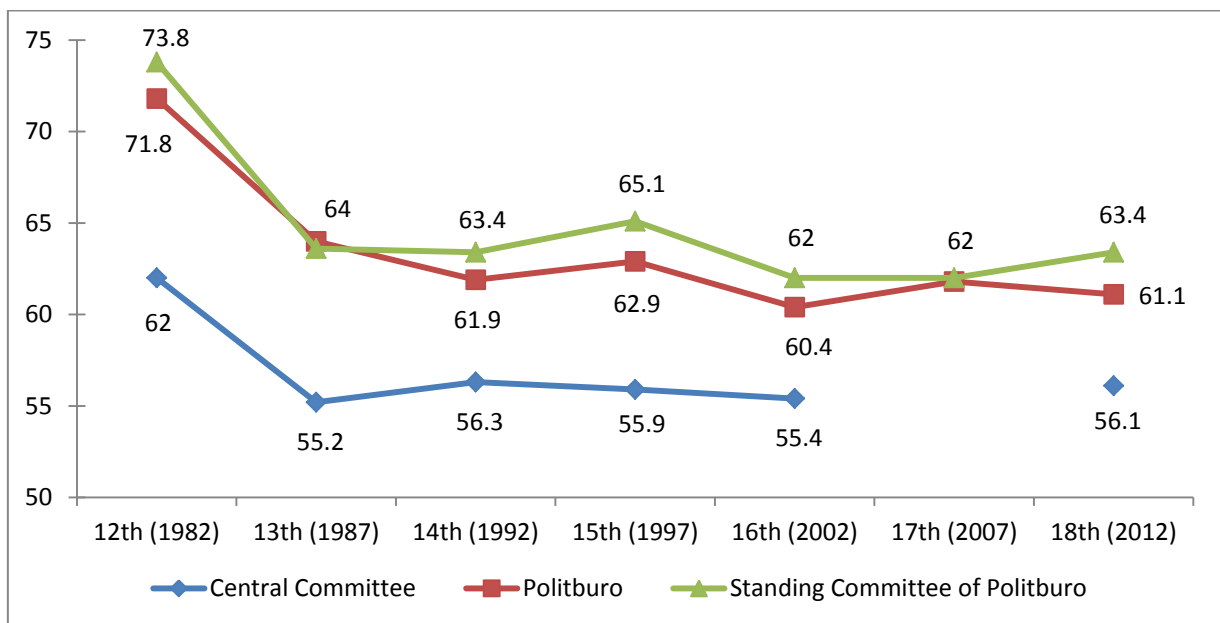
The author’s own tabular representation and data

**Figure 9: Age distribution of Politburo members in China from 1982 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation and data

**Figure 10: Average age of Chinese leaders when they were appointed from 1982 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: for 1982-2002 data, please see (Li and White, 2003: 566); for 2007-2012 data, please see <http://www.c3sindia.org/china-internal/3220>; and for 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress data, please see Xinhua [http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/14/c\\_113691117.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/14/c_113691117.htm), China Daily (English version) [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-11/17/content\\_15938052.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-11/17/content_15938052.htm)

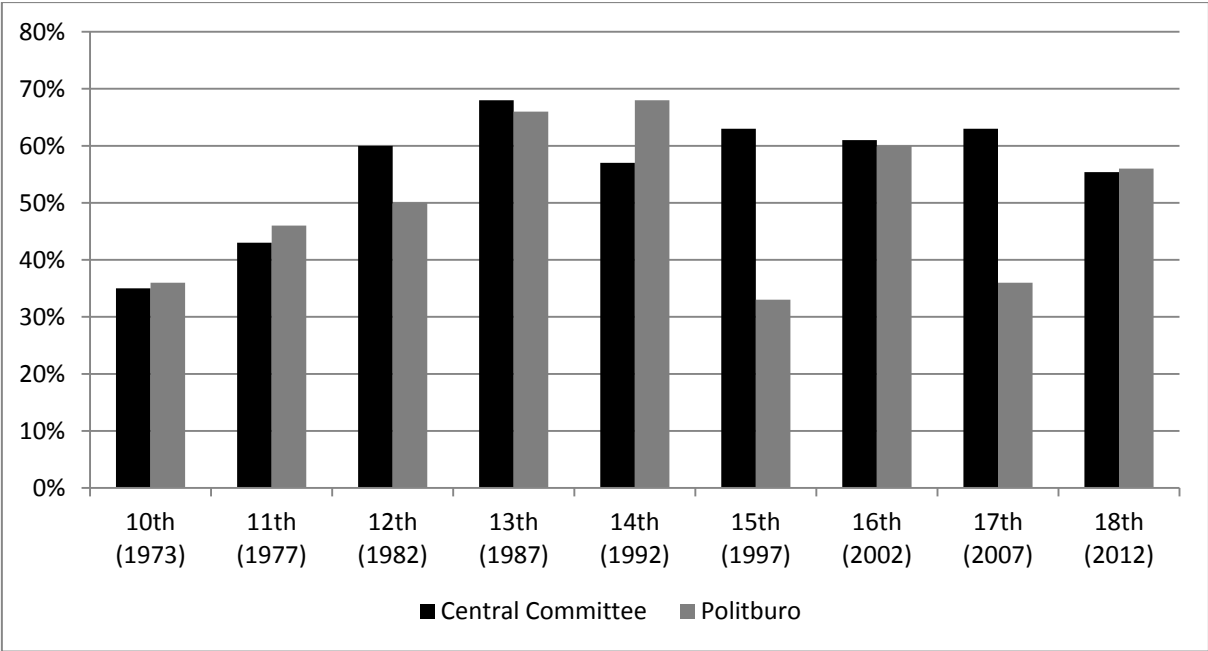
### 6.4.1.3 High Turnover Rate of Chinese Leaders

In addition to younger leaders, the growing institutionalization of age/term limits also led to a rapid turnover of Chinese leaders. Figure 11 shows that the turnover rate of Chinese leaders has been very high since the 1980s. The turnover rates of both the Central Committee and the Politburo reached over 60% in 2002 and 55% in 2012. In 2007, four out of the nine 16<sup>th</sup> PSC members retired; and in 2012, the turnover rate of the PSC exceeded 77% – seven out of the nine PSC members retired including President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. In 2012, 113 members of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee retired and 91 remained in office; and 15 out of the 25 members of the 18<sup>th</sup> Politburo are new.

Figure 12 compares the turnover rate of the Chinese Central Committee and the Politburo with that of the US Congress from 1973 to 2012. Although these institutions are very different, this comparison still reflects certain aspects of political mobility among powerful politicians in the two largest world economies. It indicates that the turnover rate of Chinese leading bodies has been at least 40% more than that of the US Congress. In 2012, the turnover rates of the US Senate and House are around 10% in contrast with 56% of the members of the Chinese Central Committee and the Politburo.

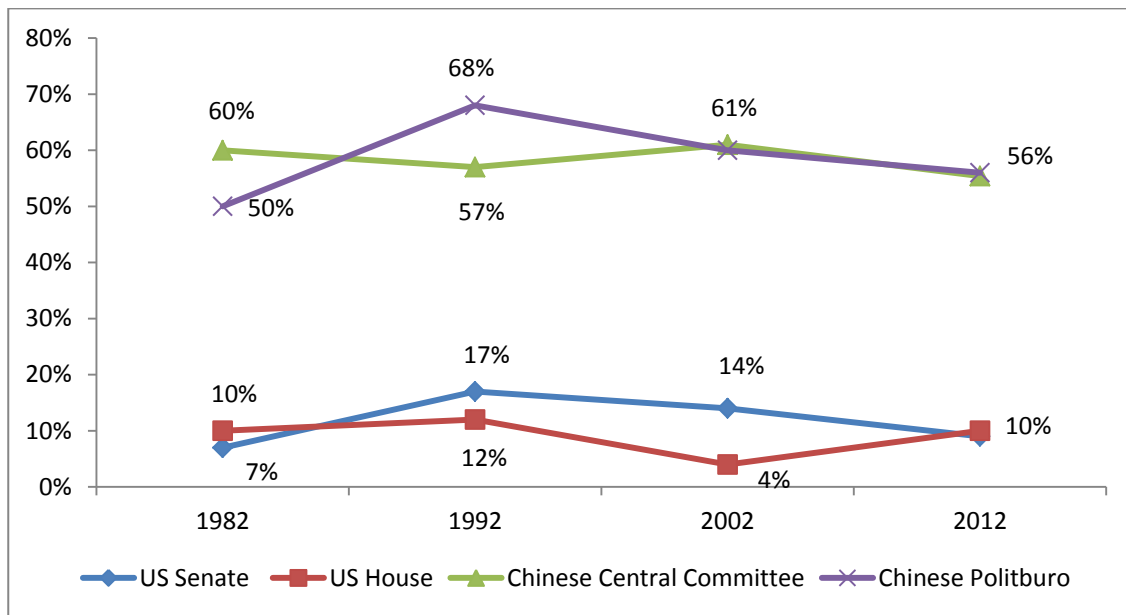
The high turnover rate of Chinese leaders indicates that the CCP has managed to select and remove its leaders by using its own rules – as opposed to liberal democratic elections. The succession system with Chinese characteristics has been effectively and efficiently recruiting new blood into its leadership, which helps to maintain regime stability and contributes to the CCP’s “adaptability”.

**Figure 11: Turnover rate of the CCP Central Committee and the Politburo from 1973 to 2012**



The author’s own tabular representation. Source: for 1973-2002 data, please see (Li, 2012b: 29; Li and White, 2003: 560). For 2007-2012 data, please see (Wu, 2012)

**Figure 12 Turnover rates of American political representatives and Chinese leaders from 1982 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: the Centre for Responsive Politics available at <http://www.opensecrets.org/bigpicture/reelect.php>; the data on the 2012 re-election rate of US congress members are reported by Bloomberg at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-12-13/voters-throw-bums-in-while-disdaining-congress-bgov-barometer.html>

#### 6.4.2 Meritocratic Bureaucracy

Political meritocracy is also closely relevant to legitimacy. Without democratic elections, the selection procedures cannot provide as much procedural legitimacy as democratic procedures do; thus the legitimacy of the succession system heavily relies on the outcome (i.e. a meritocratic bureaucracy) rather than the procedures (i.e. elections). The Chinese culture highly values the performance of the rulers rather than how they come to power. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Chinese understanding of democracy has been shaped by the Confucian doctrine – minben. A key difference between minben and liberal democracy is that the doctrine of minben assesses regime legitimacy from the government's performance rather than how the government ascends to power, whilst liberal democracy highly relies on the procedures of democratic elections to assess the regime's legitimacy. In this sense, the good performance of the cadres can compensate for the non-democratic procedures of their selections. In other words, high performance legitimacy can compensate for low procedural legitimacy.

Notably, before institutionalization, the selection and removal of leaders – such as Gao Gang and Rao Shushi – took place on a whim, depending on whether they were on the right side of the prevailing political climate or not. The number of provincial leaders who lost their jobs under Mao's rule was startling. It seemed that merit and ability were unimportant when it came to developing a political career, whilst personal contacts and factions were key. As discussed above, nowadays, institutional rules have become a key factor in selecting PSC members, while patron-client ties have become less important. Specific institutional rules to

train Chinese leaders include step-by-step promotion, the exchange of cadres, and the succession track of heirs apparent.

#### 6.4.2.1 Step-by-step promotion

Step-by-step promotion means that leaders are usually promoted level by level. For instance, a candidate should usually be a regular or alternate member of the Central Committee or a minister level official in order to be eligible for Politburo membership. This promotion mode helps the Chinese leaders to broaden their visions, increase their leadership experiences, and hone their skills. Since the 1990s, most regular members of the Politburo have followed the step-by-step promotion mode. Almost all Chinese leaders have followed this promotion mode except in establishing heirs apparent.

Many argue that Chinese top leaders are well-trained and experienced before they assume power owing to step-by-step promotion (Bell, 2012; Zhang, 2012). Theoretically, this institutional rule also provides a way of filtering out incapable leaders, because there are many opportunities to test their capability. Provincial administration is an important ground upon which to examine leaders' capability and skills. With China's rapid economic growth, many Chinese provinces are now much bigger than many countries, not only in terms of population but also in terms of total economic output (Li, 2010a; Zhang, 2012). Thus, Zhang (2012) argues that

“It takes extraordinary talent and skills to govern a typical Chinese province, which is on average the size of four to five European states. Indeed, with the Chinese system of meritocracy in place, it is inconceivable that people as weak and incompetent as George W. Bush or Yoshihiko Noda of Japan could ever get to the top leadership position”.

#### 6.4.2.2 The Exchange of Local Cadres

In order to curtail the localism and to broaden the vision and experience of cadres, the transfer of cadres in different departments and provinces except Shanghai was effectively implemented in Jiang's era. Most PSC members had abundant experience in governing provinces. Hu Jintao, in particular, used to work as the secretary of Communist Youth League and the head of Gansu and Tibet. All the 18<sup>th</sup> PSC members except Liu Yunshan used to be the head of at fewest two provinces or key cities. Xi Jinping used to work as the head of the Fujian Province, Zhejiang Province and City of Shanghai, and Li Keqiang worked as the head of Henan and Liaoning.

#### 6.4.2.3 The Institutionalized Procedures of Training Heirs Apparent

Built on step-by-step promotion and the exchange of local cadres, the succession track of heirs apparent has been increasingly institutionalized since Jiang's era. Many posts are reserved for heirs apparent of the General Secretary and Premier in order to broaden their visions, increase leadership experience, and hone their skills. As indicated in Table 6, Hu Jintao was appointed to the roles of Vice President of the PRC in order to be exposed to foreign affairs, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) to gain military knowledge, and Chancellor of the Central Party School in order to handle ideological affairs

before becoming the top leader. Xi Jinping followed the same succession track. Zhu Rongji, Wen Jiabao and Li Keqiang served as Vice Premier for more than four years before they became Premier. Now, the CCP seems deliberately to normalize the rule that heirs apparent of the General Secretary and Premier should serve in the PSC for at least one term before succession. It is designed to make the new General Secretary and Premier more familiar with national affairs before they inherit the top posts.

#### 6.4.2.4 Educational Qualifications

Knowledge is one of the four criteria for selecting leaders in the “four transformations” project. Partly because of this project, the educational qualifications of Chinese leaders have been largely increasing since the 1980s. Figure 13 shows the changing educational credentials of Politburo members in the past decades. In 1982, when “four transformations” had just been incorporated by the party constitution, only 4% of Politburo member received a college education. Twenty years later, only 4% of Politburo members had not attended higher education. In 2012, over 68% of the 18<sup>th</sup> Politburo member held masters’ degrees or PhDs. In particular, both the new President and Premier hold doctorates from the top two Chinese universities: Xi Jinping received a PhD in law from Qinghua University, and Li Keqiang was awarded a PhD in economics from Peking University.

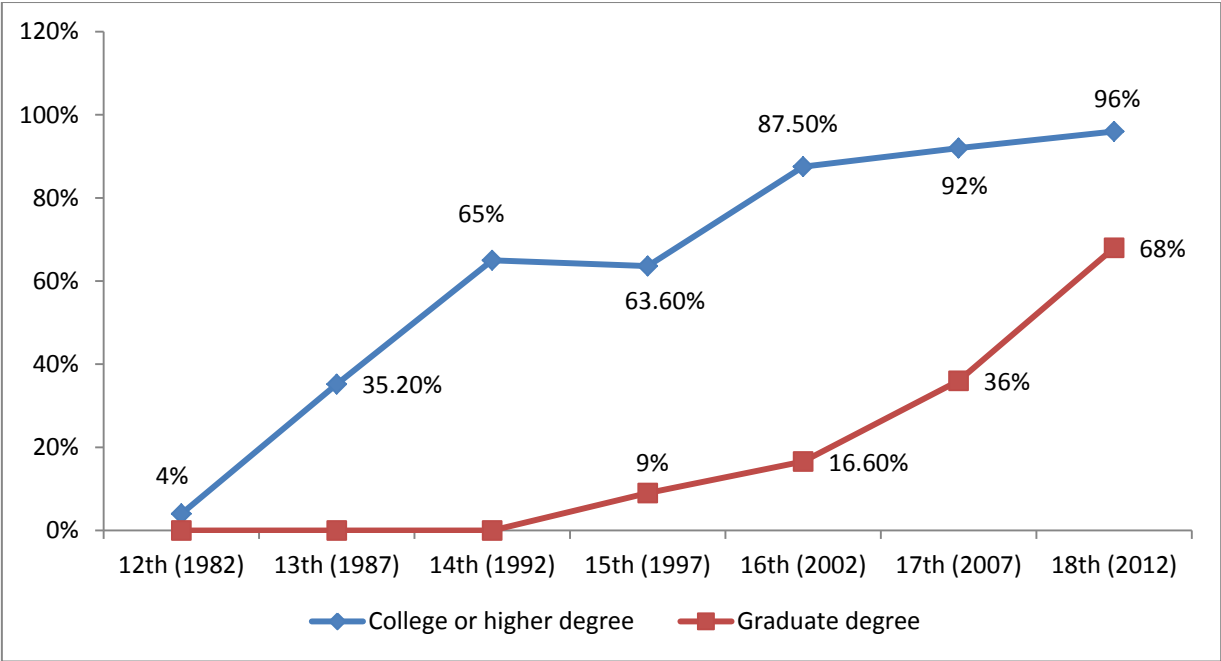
Another important change in leaders’ educational qualifications is their academic disciplines – the majors of the leaders’ highest academic degree. Most leaders of the third and fourth generations are technocrats who studied engineering or natural sciences in higher education, in contrast with the mainstream majors of social sciences and humanities in the fifth generation. Figure 14 shows the academic disciplines of PSC members from 1992 to 2012. Social sciences include management, law and economics; the humanities include literature and history. This figure indicates that most of the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> PSC members studied engineering or natural sciences. In the 18<sup>th</sup> PSC, only Yu Zhengsheng was an engineer, and the remaining six members studied social sciences and humanities. In the past two decades, the high growth rate of the Chinese economy benefited from the leaders’ technocratic backgrounds, leading them to encourage economic efficiency; however, it also created a huge gap between poor and rich. The changing expertise of leaders might help the state to increase its emphasis on economic equity. Some Chinese intellectuals argue that the new leaders who studied social sciences and humanities will emphasize social justice, rule of law and governance (Sun and Hu, 2012).

Notably, the value of Chinese officials’ qualifications has been widely questioned (Li, 2008a; Pei, 2012). Many Chinese cadres attended their graduate programmes when they still worked full time as busy officials; many of their qualifications were awarded from part-time programmes or party schools; and some even asked secretaries to write their dissertations. Thus, the real value of their education is questionable. Pei (2012) argues that, in terms of their education, Chinese officials have cheated in order to compete for power. Nonetheless, an undeniable fact is that the educational level of the Chinese leadership has been significantly improved in the past three decades. There is little doubt that Xi Jinping’s leadership cohort has been much more educated than the revolutionary generation.

Nowadays, educational qualification is an important criterion for selecting Chinese cadres. Empirical studies show that educational qualifications have boosted the chance of promotion in China (Lee, 1991; Shih, *et al.*, 2012; Sun and Hu, 2012). Improving one’s resume is a practical reason for Chinese cadres to pursue part-time educational qualification;

however, we should not ignore the fact that the CCP is a learning Party. The party has institutionalized a learning system to organize lectures and study groups for the Politburo members in order to train their leaders (Tsai and Dean, 2013). Many senior officials did not receive a full education when they were young, mainly because of the political unrest and limited educational resources at that time. In light of China's increased difficulty to govern, it is reasonable for them to attend training or degree programmes in order to meet work needs. The proportion of part-time or party school degrees will definitely decline with generational change in the future.

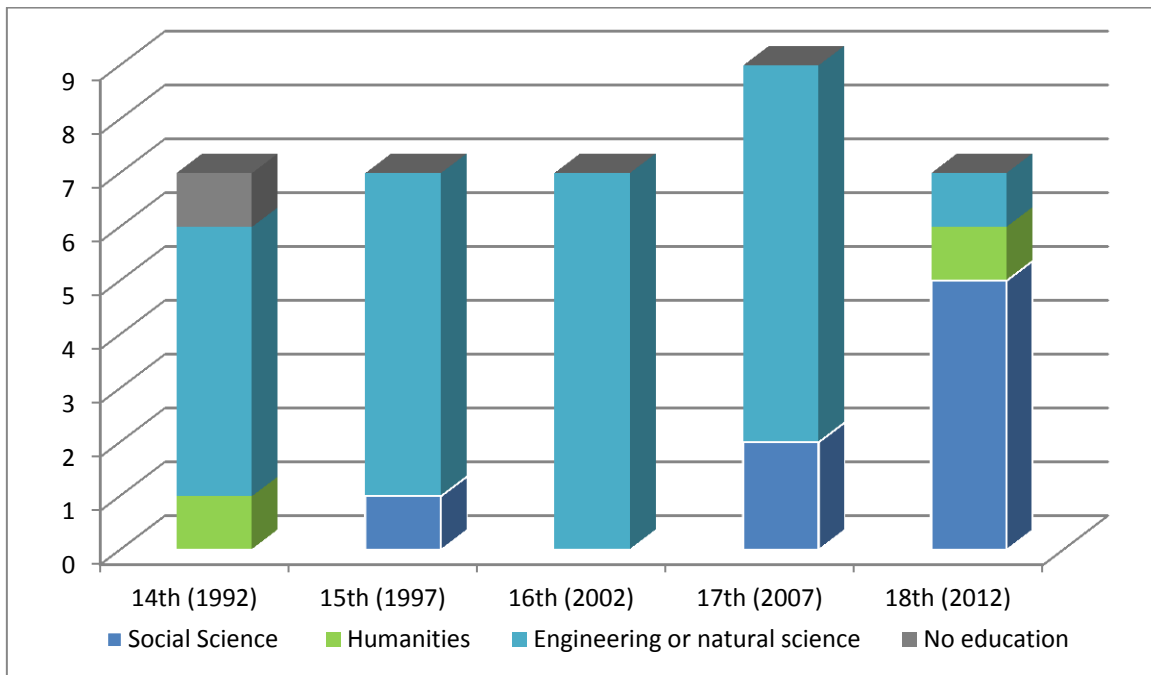
**Figure 13: Changing tendency of educational qualifications of Politburo members in the past decades**



Source: (Sun and Hu, 2012); the data of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress are updated by the author.



**Figure 14: Academic disciplines of PSC members from 1992 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation

### 6.4.3 Representation

In democratic countries, the composition of voters would translate to certain kinds of representation in the leadership. Although there are no such kinds of elections in China, the CCP has been keen to build a representative leadership for maintaining stability and legitimacy.

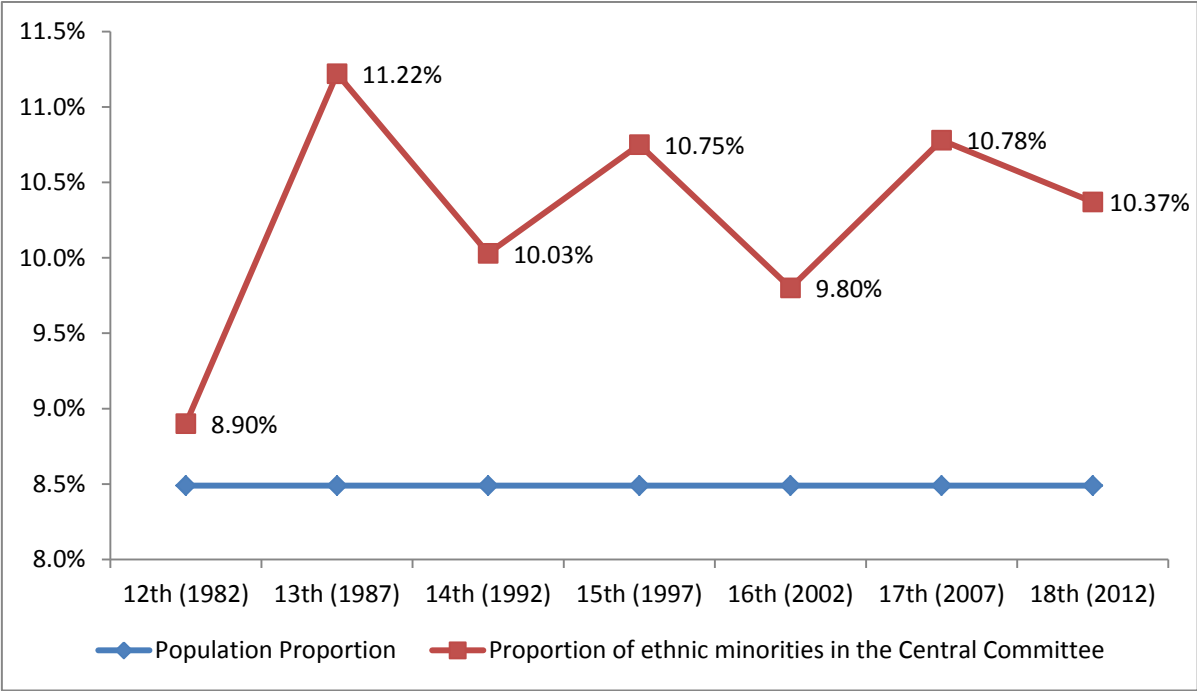
#### 6.4.3.1 Ethnic Minorities

The CCP clearly recognizes the importance of co-opting ethnic minorities. In order to legitimize its leadership, the CCP developed several institutional rules – certain proportion of ethnic minority at various levels of party and governmental organs – to promote systematically ethnic minorities elites into its leadership (Mackerras, 2003:21; Shih, *et al.*, 2012). As evidenced by an empirical study, ethnic minorities are more likely to be promoted in the CCP Central Committee (Shih, *et al.*, 2012). Figure 15 shows the proportion of ethnic minorities in the CCP Central Committee. It suggests that ethnic minorities have been slightly over-represented in Chinese leadership compared with the proportion of ethnic minorities in the entire Chinese population – 8.49% (China, 2011). Thus, in terms of quantity, ethnic minorities are well-represented in the CCP leadership; however, the distribution of ethnic minorities in the Central Committee is imbalanced.

Figure 16 shows the proportion of ethnic minorities in the Central Committee, the Politburo and the PSC. It indicates that the higher the party rank, the fewer the ethnic minorities. If we apply the population proportion as a standard, ethnic minorities have been over-represented in alternate members of the Central Committee, approximately well-represented in regular members of the Central Committee, and under-represented in the Politburo and the PSC from 1982 to 2012. A possible interpretation is that: at the lower level,

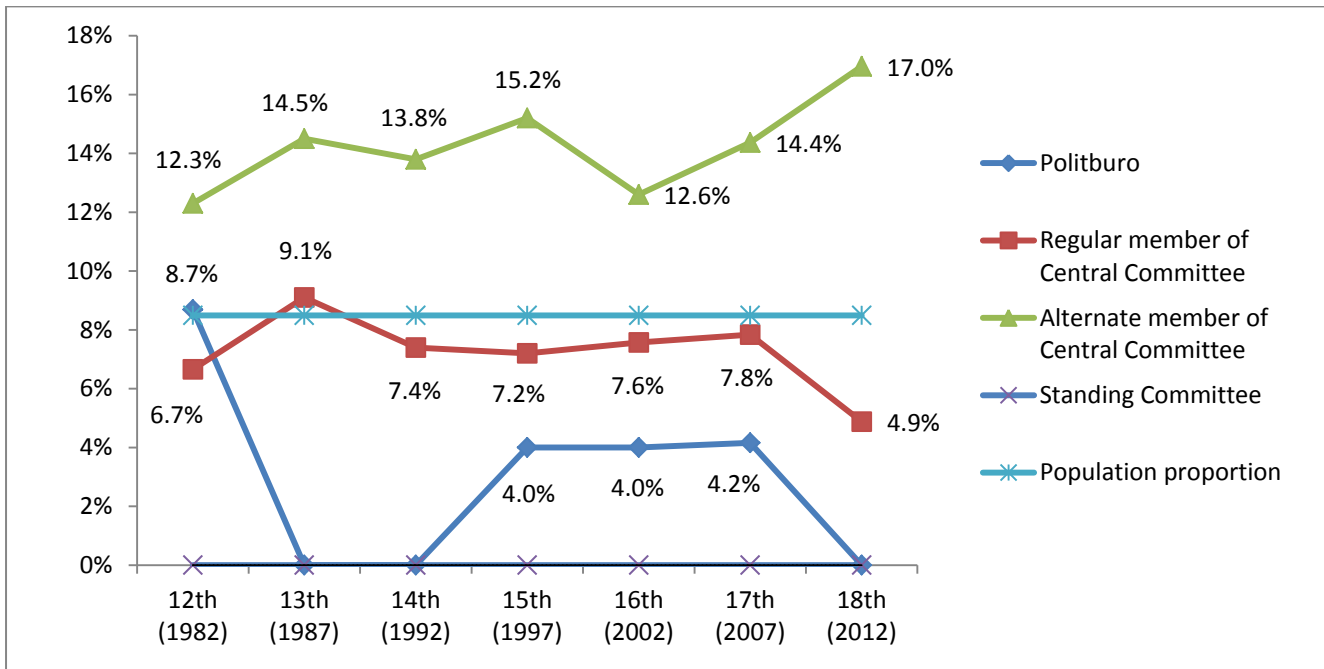
the CCP wants to ensure that a certain percentage of positions are reserved for ethnic minorities; however, at the higher level (e.g. the Politburo and the PSC), the CCP are less able to do that because of more intense competition.

**Figure 15: Proportion of Ethnic Minorities in the CCP Central Committee from 1982 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: Xinhua News, more information please see [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-10/25/content\\_2136727.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-10/25/content_2136727.htm) (China, 2011).

**Figure 16: The Representation of Ethnic Minorities in the CCP Central Committee and the Politburo from 1982 to 2012**



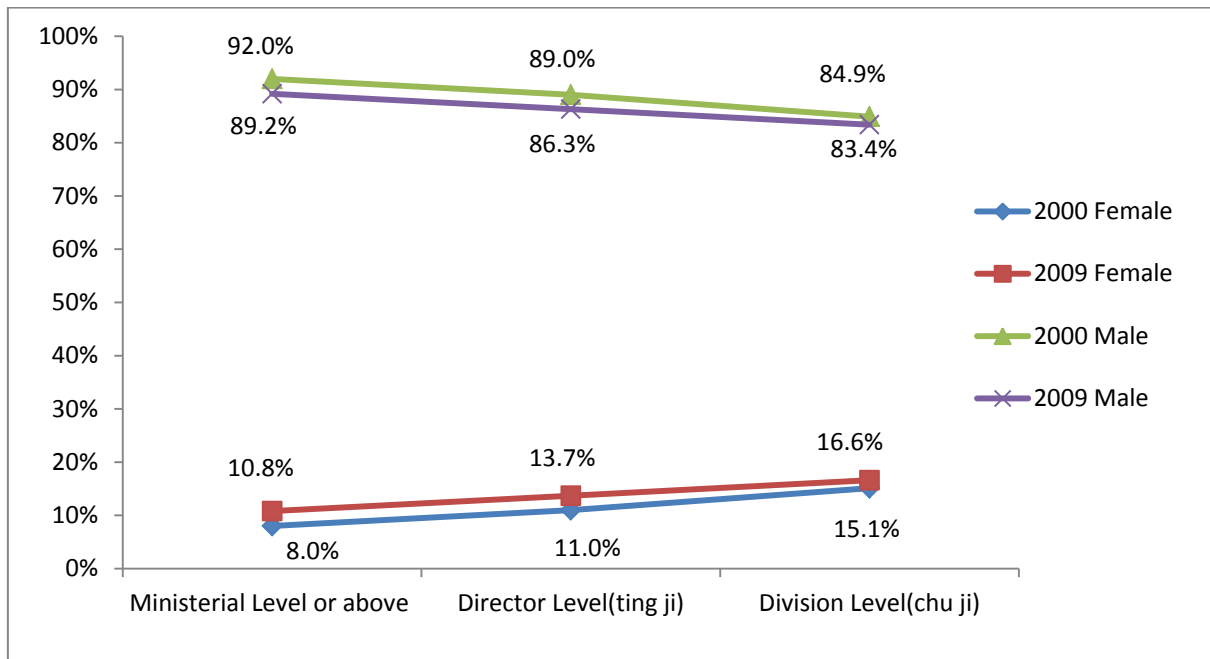
The author's own tabular representation. Source: Xinhua News. For more information, see [http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-10/25/content\\_2136727.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-10/25/content_2136727.htm)

#### 6.4.3.2 Females

Similar to the representation of ethnic minorities, the CCP has also been keen to build a symbolic image of female representation. In addition to the symbolic image of representation, many also argue that a higher representation of women in leadership positions would help to improve governance. Bell (2012), for example, argues that a higher representation of women in the Chinese leadership will help the government to “rule in a compassionate and humane way”. Indeed, Chinese women are under-represented at all levels of cadres. Figure 17 compares the proportion of the mid- and high-level female cadres in 2000 with those in 2009. It indicates that the proportions of female cadres slightly increased by 2009 but they are still under-represented in the Chinese government. Notably, the Organization Department of the CCP has made institutional rules to stipulate the proportion of women in various levels of government. In order to obey this rule, local governments have to select women into their leadership, but they are more likely to appoint women into the deputy position (*fu zhi*) or symbolic posts (*xu zhi*) (Wei, 2012).

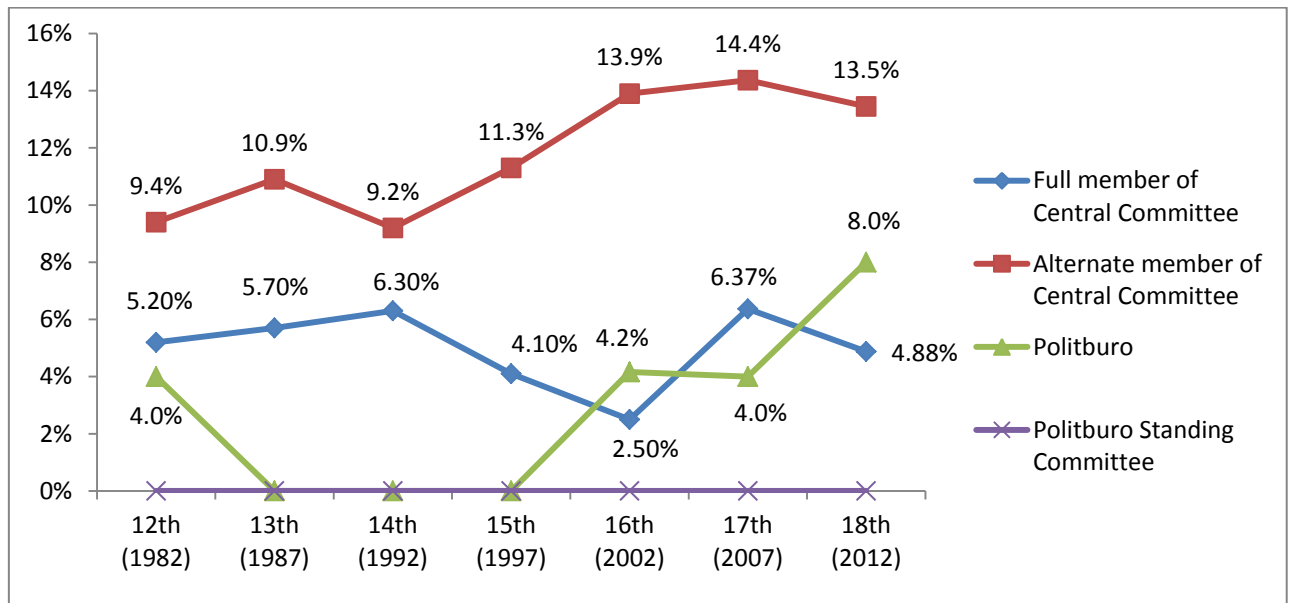
Figure 18 presents female representation in the Chinese leadership. It indicates that the distribution of female leaders is somehow similar to that of ethnic minorities – the higher the party rank, the lower the proportion. This is perhaps also because the competition becomes more intense the higher the party rank, and thus the party is less likely to concern itself with gender representation. This has slightly improved. As indicated in Figure 18, women won one seat on the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> Politburos, and two seats on the 18<sup>th</sup> Politburo. This has led to a significant increase in the proportion of women in the Politburo in the past decade.

**Figure 17: Proportion of mid- and high-level female cadres in 2000 and 2009**



The author's own tabular representation, source cited from (Wei, 2012)

**Figure 18: Female representation in Chinese leadership**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: (Li and White, 2003). The information of Politburo, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, is updated by the author.

#### 6.4.3.3 Organizational/ Regional Representation

Unlike the symbolic representation of ethnic minorities, the CCP has carefully constructed some checks and balances among organizations and regions. This organization/regional representation has been institutionalized for ensuring that all major

party organs and regions have voices at the highest level.<sup>19</sup> For example, a “one province administration, two full seats” quota has been strictly implemented in the CCP Central Committee since 1997 (Li and White, 2003: 576). Some Central Committee members might be transferred to other regions or promoted to work in Beijing; however, the equal distribution of membership has been strictly implemented when they are elected into the Committee (Li, 2012b).

Table 4 shows the provincial leaders holding full membership of the Central Committee from 1997 to 2012. It suggests that this membership is evenly distributed to representatives of each region – usually party chief and governor. The two most important ethnic minority regions sometimes get more seats. As indicated in Table 4, Tibet had three seats in 2002 and 2007; Xinjiang had four seats in 2002 and 2007, and three seats in 2012. Notably, all ethnic minority regions have at least one local ethnic minority leader who is also an 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee member. It again suggests the CCP’s deliberate efforts to enhance the stability of ethnic minority regions and increase the legitimacy of leadership by co-opting ethnic minority elites.

Needless to say, some key regions are more influential in the top decision-making bodies as their leaders are usually Politburo members. Figure 19 shows the Politburo members’ bureaucratic affiliations when they were elected. It indicates that the proportion of leaders from provincial administrations and central government organizations in the Politburo have been increasing at the expense of party organizations’ representation. Provincial leaders have been the largest component of Politburo members since 2002. 44% of the 18<sup>th</sup> Politburo members were provincial leaders when they were elected. Table 4 shows the regional representation in the Politburo in the past decade. The representation of three major groups of Chinese regions in the Politburo – municipalities directly under the central government, ethnic minorities’ autonomous regions such as Xinjiang, and coastal, developed province such as Guangdong – has shown certain signs of institutionalization. This institutionalized representation is perhaps an attempt to protect the interests of key regions in the top decision-making process.

The rule that – party chiefs of all four municipalities directly under the Central government are usually Politburo members, and their mayors are at least the Central Committee members – has been institutionalized. Beijing and Shanghai, in particular, are over-represented in the Politburo. As indicated in Table 4, Beijing had two seats in the 16<sup>th</sup> (Jia Qinglin and Liu Qi) and the 17<sup>th</sup> (Wang Qishan and Liu Qi) Politburos, and both Jia Qinglin and Wang Qishan were promoted into the PSC afterwards. Shanghai also had two Politburo seats in 2002 and 2012; and four out of five Politburo representatives of Shanghai have been promoted to the PSC in the past decade. It reflects the overwhelming political influence of Beijing and Shanghai in Chinese politics.

In addition to regional representation, organizational representation is another important factor in selecting leaders. New chiefs of some critical organizations usually select from internal candidates. For example, Liu Yunshan was appointed as the head of propaganda, largely because of his career experience in propaganda. This consideration is designed to ensure that the new selected leaders have abundant experience in their assigned specialized areas.

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<sup>19</sup> The term “region” here includes provinces, municipalities directly under the Central Government and autonomous regions.

The representation of key organizations in the Politburo has been institutionalized to a certain extent in order to maintain the influence of key organizations in the decision-making at the top. As indicated in Figure 19, the People’s Liberation Army has held two seats (8%) in the Politburo since 1992. Notably, the State Council, rather than the military, is the best-represented organization at the top-level authority, which reflects the CCP’s emphasis on economic development. Five of the 18<sup>th</sup> Politburo members<sup>20</sup> and three of the 17<sup>th</sup> Politburo members<sup>21</sup> served in the State Council when they were elected. Figure 20 shows the working units of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee members. 26% of the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee members worked in the State Council when they were elected compared with 21% of those who worked in the military. Figures 19 and 20 indicate that local governments are the largest component of the Politburo and the Central Committee, and the State Council are the second largest. It is notable that the People’s Congress and People’s Political Consultative Conference hold only 2% of the seats in the 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee. This low percentage reflects the real political influence of these two organizations in China, although the rule – that their heads are PSC members – has been institutionalized.

**Table 4: Provincial leaders holding full membership of the 15<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee between 1997 and 2012**

|                       | 15 <sup>th</sup> (1997) | 16 <sup>th</sup> (2002) | 17 <sup>th</sup> (2007) | 18 <sup>th</sup> (2012) |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Beijing               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Tianjin               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Hebei                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Shannxi               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Inner Mongolia        | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Liaoning              | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Jilin                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Heilongjiang          | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Shanghai              | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Jiangsu               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Shandong              | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Zhejiang              | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Anhui                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Fujian                | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Henan                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Hubei                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Hunan                 | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Jiangxi               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Guangdong             | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Guangxi               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Hainan                | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Sichuan               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Chongqing             | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| Guizhou               | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| <b>Yunnan</b>         | <b>1</b>                | 2                       | 2                       | 2                       |
| <b>Xizang (Tibet)</b> | 2                       | <b>3</b>                | <b>3</b>                | 2                       |

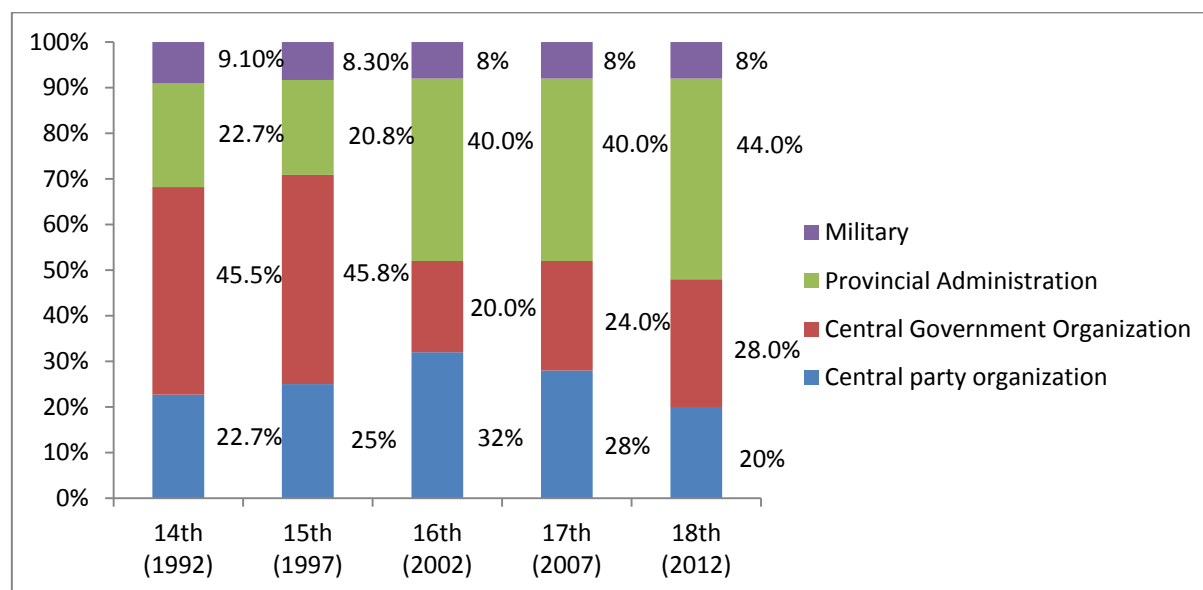
<sup>20</sup> Ma Kai, Liu Yandong, Li Keqiang, Wang Qishan and Zhang Dejiang

<sup>21</sup> Wen Jiabao, Hui Liangyu, and Bo Xilai

|                 |    |          |          |          |
|-----------------|----|----------|----------|----------|
| Shanxi          | 2  | 2        | 2        | 2        |
| Gansu           | 2  | 2        | 2        | 2        |
| Qinghai         | 2  | 2        | 2        | 2        |
| Ningxia         | 2  | 2        | 2        | 2        |
| <b>Xinjiang</b> | 2  | <b>4</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>3</b> |
| <b>TOTAL</b>    | 61 | 65       | 65       | 63       |

Source: (Li, 2012b:28; Li and White, 2003:576); the information of 18<sup>th</sup> Central Committee is updated by the author

**Figure 19: Organizational Representation of Politburo Members between 1992 and 2012**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: (Li and White, 2003:574)

**Table 5: Regional Representation in the Politburo between 2002 and 2012**

|  |                  | 16 <sup>th</sup> Politburo<br>(2002) | 17 <sup>th</sup> Politburo<br>(2007) | 18 <sup>th</sup> Politburo<br>(2012) |
|--|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Municipalities<br>directly under the<br>Central Government | <b>Beijing</b>   | Jia Qinglin,<br>Liu Qi               | Wang Qishan,<br>Liu Qi               | Guo Jinglong                         |
|  | <b>Shanghai</b>  | Huang Ju<br>Chen Liangyu             | Xi Jinping                           | Han Zheng,<br>Yu Zhengsheng          |
|  | <b>Chongqing</b> |                                      | Wang Yang                            | Zhang Dejiang <sup>22</sup>          |
|  | <b>Tianjin</b>   | Zhang Lichang                        | Zhang Gaoli                          | Zhang Gaoli                          |
| Ethnic Minorities<br>Autonomous<br>Regions                 | <b>Xinjiang</b>  | Wang Lequan                          | Wang Lequan                          | Zhang Chunxian                       |
|  | Inner Mongolia   |                                      |                                      | Hu Chunhua                           |
| Coastal Provinces <sup>23</sup>                            | <b>Guangdong</b> | Li Changchun                         | Zhang Dejiang                        | Wang Yang                            |
|  | Fujian           |                                      |                                      | Sun Chunlan                          |

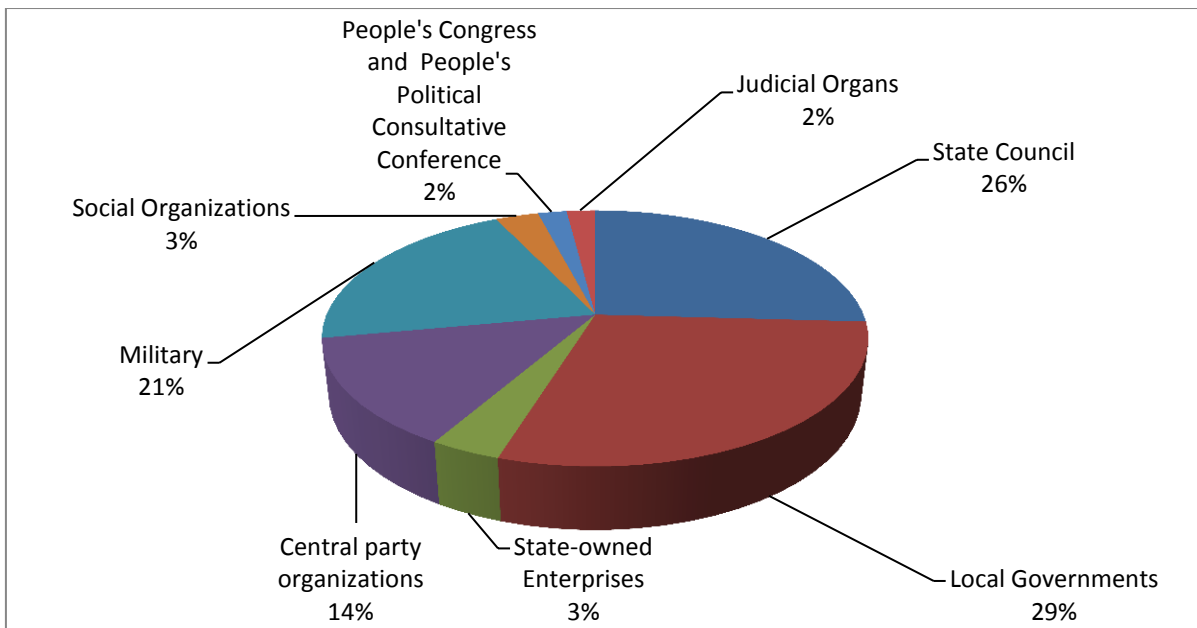
<sup>22</sup> Bo Xilai was a Politburo member before he was removed; and therefore this seat can be considered to be reserved for Chongqing Party Chief.

<sup>23</sup> It also includes Shanghai and Tianjin

|  |          |               |               |              |
|--|----------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
|  | Zhejiang | Zhang Dejiang |               |              |
|  | Jiangsu  | Hui Liangyu   | Li Yuanchao   |              |
|  | Liaoning |               | Li Keqiang    |              |
|  | Shandong | Wu Guanzheng  |               |              |
|  | Sichuan  | Zhou Yongkang |               | Liu Qibao    |
|  | Jilin    |               |               | Sun Zhengcai |
|  | Shannxi  |               |               | Zhao Leji    |
|  | Hubei    | Yu Zhengsheng | Yu Zhengsheng |              |

Source: The author's own collection

**Figure 20: Working Units of 18<sup>th</sup> CCP Central Committee Members**



The author's own tabular representation based on the data from <http://cn.nytimes.com/pages/interactive/central-committee.html>

## 6.5. What Remains to Be Done?

After exploring institutional development over the past three decades, this section analyses two crucial aspects of power succession that need to be institutionalized further. As mentioned, even institutionalization might be subject to factional manipulation. The current level of institutionalization might not be able to maintain the internal stability of the CCP in the long run, as evidenced by the challenge from Bo Xilai who had publicly campaigned for a PSC seat. The institutional development of the PSC and the contested elections are particularly noteworthy.

### 6.5.1 The Institutional Development of the PSC

Over the past decades, decision-making at the top has been gradually moving towards a collective leadership with the division of work in China. The institutional arrangement of the PSC was set to formalize a collective leadership. Some respond positively to the institutional development of the PSC. For example, Hu Angang (2012a), a prominent policy advisor for the Chinese government, argues that the current institutional setting of the PSC – “a collective



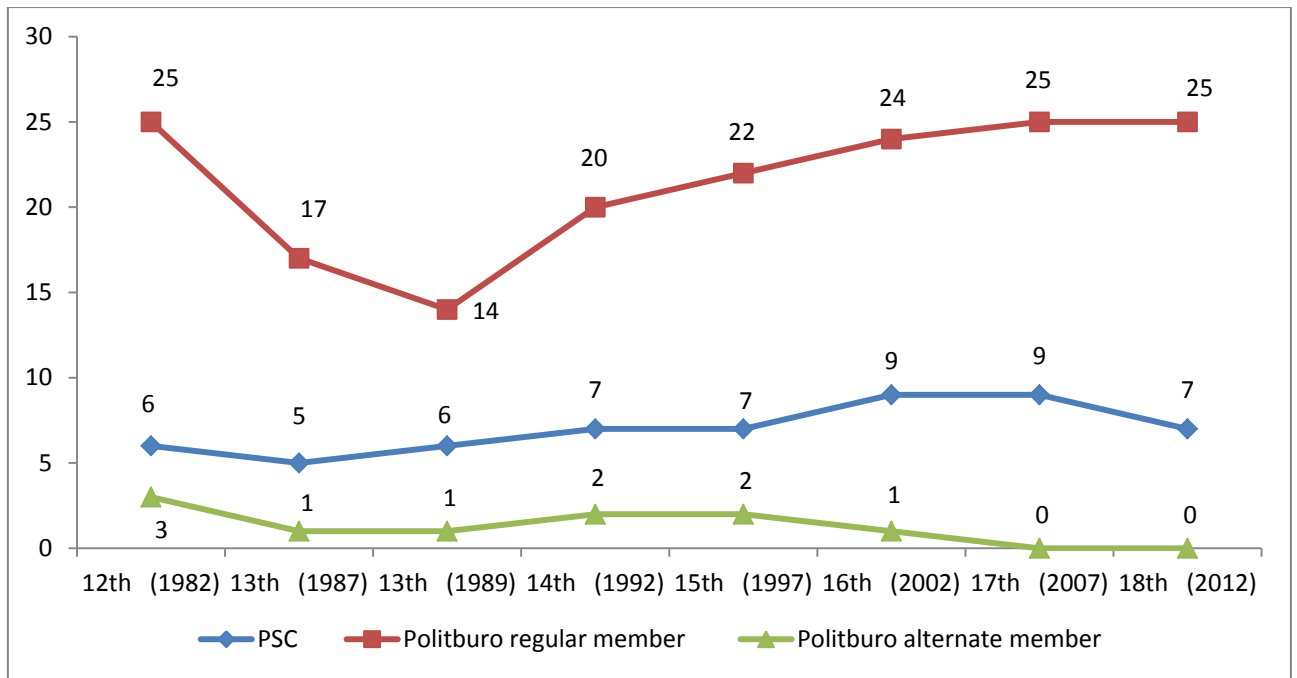
presidentialism with Chinese characteristics” – is key to China’s success in the past decade. It is valid to argue that the institutional settings of the PSC and Politburo have been much more institutionalized now than ever before; however, the extent of institutionalizations are not sufficient. Neither the size of the PSC nor its members’ specific division of work is fully institutionalized.

As indicated in Figure 21, the number of PSC members has hovered between five and nine over the past three decades. The recent downsizing of the PSC in 2012 led to many different interpretations. Some argue that it was because the leaders in charge of internal security especially Zhou Yongkang were too powerful (Mattis, 2012). Li Cheng argues that it is a “direct signal that political reform is under way”, because Zhou obstructed the progress of political reform (Report, 2012). It is also argued that the downsizing of the PSC might increase the efficiency of decision-making (Hart, 2012; Report, 2012) and give more authority to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang (Report, 2012).

Others argue that the changing size of the PSC is simply a result of factional struggles. For example, Fewsmith interprets the expanding membership of the PSC in 2002 as Jiang Zemin’s attempt to restrict Hu Jintao’s power (Fewsmith, 2008; Ou, 2012), and the downsizing of the PSC in 2012 as a way to prevent Hu’s supporters – Li Yuanchao and Wang Yang – from entering the PSC (Ou, 2012). In this regard, that the number of the PSC remain stable is important to leave less room for people to manipulate the result, because political manipulation would undermine the effects of institutional rules.

The division of the PSC members’ work responsibilities also needs to be institutionalized further. Table 3 lists the positions of leadership held by the PSC members. It shows that the PSC did not reserve seats regularly for the Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the PRC President, or the Chairman of the People’s Congress until 1992. The lack of representatives at the top leadership is one reason why the People’s Congress and the CPPCC are “rubber stamps”. Since 1992, it has become the norm that the PRC President, the Premier, the Chairmen of the Congress and the CPPCC are PSC members; however, the assigned areas of other PSC members – except the Secretary of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the Executive Vice-Premier – have been changing all the time.

**Figure 21: Size of the Politburo and its Standing Committee from 1982 to 2012**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: (Miller, 2011: table 1); the information about the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress is updated by the author

**Table 6: Politburo Standing Committee Members' Leadership Positions in Major Institutions from 1982 to 2012**

|   | 12 <sup>th</sup> (1982) | 13 <sup>th</sup> (1987) | 13 <sup>th</sup> (1989) | 14 <sup>th</sup> (1992)  | 15 <sup>th</sup> (1997) | 16 <sup>th</sup> (2002) | 17 <sup>th</sup> (2007) | 18 <sup>th</sup> (2012) |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>General Secretary of Central Committee</b>             | Hu Yaobang              | Hu Yaobang              | Jiang Zemin             | Jiang Zemin              | Jiang Zemin             | Hu Jintao               | Hu Jintao               | Xi Jinping              |
| <b>President of PRC</b>                                   | Li Xiannian (1983)      |                         |                         | Jiang Zemin (1993)       | Jiang Zemin             | Hu Jintao (2003)        | Hu Jintao               | Xi Jinping (2013)       |
| Vice President of PRC                                     |                         |                         |                         |                          | Hu Jintao (1998)        | Zeng Qinghong (2003)    | Xi Jinping (2008)       |                         |
| Chairman of CMC   | Deng Xiaoping           |                         | Jiang Zemin             | Jiang Zemin              | Jiang Zemin             | Hu Jintao (2004)        | Hu Jintao               | Xi Jinping              |
| <b>Chairman of People's Congress</b>                      | Ye Jianying             |                         |                         | Qiao Shi                 | Li Peng (1998)          | Wu Bangguo (2003)       | Wu Bangguo              | Zhang Dejiang           |
| <b>Premier</b>  | Zhao Ziyang             | Li Peng                 | Li Peng                 | Li Peng                  | Zhu Rongji (1998)       | Wen Jiabao (2003)       | Wen Jiabao              | Li Keqiang (2013)       |
| Executive Vice- Premier                                   |                         | Yao Yilin               | Yao Yilin               | Zhu Rongji <sup>24</sup> | Li Lanqing (1998)       | Huang Ju                | Li Keqiang (2008)       | Zhang Gaoli (2013)      |
| Chancellor of Central Party School                        |                         |                         |                         | Hu Jintao (1993)         | Hu Jintao               | Zeng Qinghong           | Xi Jinping              | Liu Yunshan             |
| Secretary of Central Commission for Discipline Inspection | Chen Yun                | Qiao Shi                | Qiao Shi                |                          | Wei Jianxing            | Wu Guanzheng            | He Guoqiang             | Wang Qishan             |
| Secretary of Central Commission for Politics and Law      |                         | Qiao Shi                | Qiao Shi                |                          |                         | Luo Gan                 | Zhou Yongkang           |                         |
| <b>Chairman of CPPCC</b>                                  |                         |                         |                         | Li Ruihuan (1993)        | Li Ruihuan (1998)       | Jia Qinglin (2003)      | Jia Qinglin             | Yu Zhengsheng           |
| Other posts   |                         | Hu Qili                 | Song Ping               | Liu Huaqing (VP of CMC)  |                         | Li Changchun            | Li Changchun            |                         |
|   |                         |                         | Li Ruihuan              |                          |                         |                         |                         |                         |
| <b>In total</b>   | 6                       | 5                       | 6                       | 7                        | 7                       | 9                       | 9                       | 7                       |

<sup>24</sup> Zhu was elected as the Vice-Premier in 1991 and he became the first Vice-Premier in 1993.

### 6.5.2 The Practice of Uncontested Election

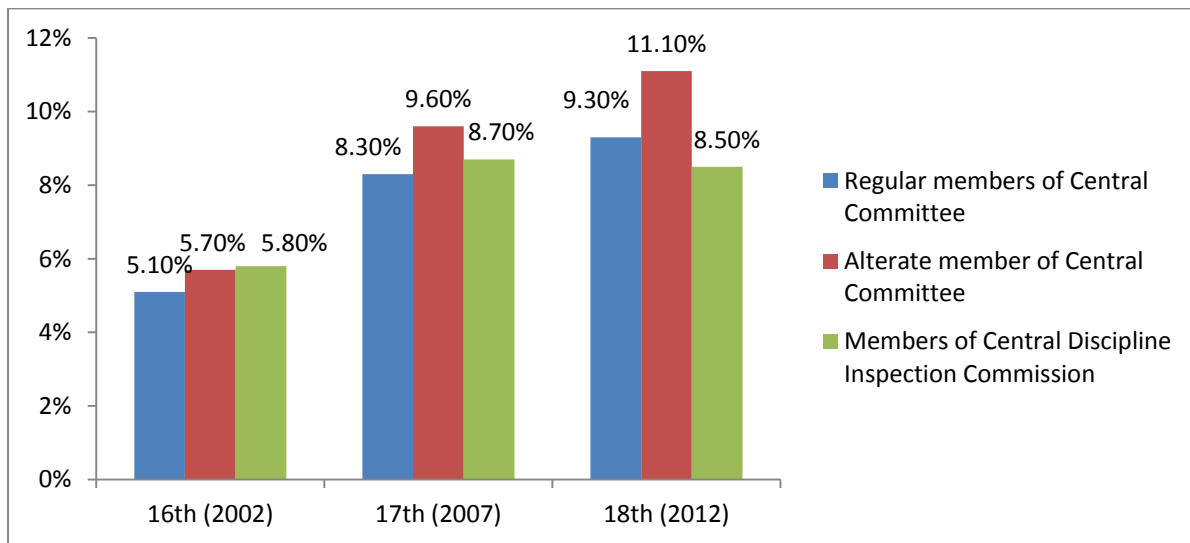
The CCP has been practising elections to select leaders since 1957. Chinese elections are very different from those in democratic countries – it is called “socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics” in China. The uncontested election (*deng e xuanju*) and the contested election (*chae xianju*) are the two principal types of elections in China. An uncontested election is a type of election that has the same number of nominees and elected candidates. A contested election or differential election refers to those elections that have more candidates than elected seats. Before 1987, the uncontested election was the only type of election in China. The contested election was officially added into the Party Constitution and experimented with in electing the 13<sup>th</sup> Central Committee members in 1987, and a few high-level leaders including two former ministers of the Propaganda Department, Zhu Houze and Deng Liqun, lost this election. Since then, the CCP has gradually institutionalized contested elections in selecting the Central Committee members (Yan, *et al.*, 2012).<sup>25</sup>

Figure 22 shows the difference in the proportion of nominated and elected seats in the elected seats of the Central Committee and the Central Discipline Inspection Commission in the past decade. It indicates that this proportion has gradually increased at each Party Congress. In this regard, Chinese elections have been improving – but at a very slow pace. Liberal democracy and competitive elections are still very sensitive in China, and those efforts to practise elections were designed to *strengthen* rather than *democratize* the party – although these two are not necessarily contradictory. Nonetheless, the contested elections of Chinese leaders provide a good starting point for practising intra-party democracy. It might be true for the CCP to claim that the immediate implementation of direct elections might cause tremendous social instability. Thus, the gradual process of increasing the proportion of nominees in the elected seats of leaders might find a balance between the practise of party democracy and the maintenance of political stability.

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<sup>25</sup> The former Premier Wen Jiabao also confirmed that the CCP has been practising the contested election for selecting Chinese leaders when he answered a journalist’s question in 2011 (Xinhua, 2011).

**Figure 22: Ratio showing the difference between the number of nominees and the number of elected seats (cha e bi li) in the Central Committee and the Central Discipline Inspection Commission**



The author's own tabular representation. Source: Data of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress are from the Xinhua News Agency [http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/13/c\\_113680755.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/18cpcnc/2012-11/13/c_113680755.htm) accessed on December 21, 2012; for data from the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, see (Shan, 2012)

## 6.6. Summary

This chapter studies the institutional development of power succession in China over the past three decades. It argues that this institutionalization has developed a power succession system with Chinese characteristics, which has guaranteed the seamless transfer of power that rarely proceeds smoothly in authoritarian regimes. As a result of this institutionalization, the leadership transition since 2002 has been distinct from the previously cruel “life and death” power struggles in Mao’s era. The stable power transition under the authoritarian rule in China provides a dramatic example of authoritarian resilience.

Yet, political reforms – including the institutional development of power succession, in China is under-researched in the English language literature as mentioned in the Introduction Chapter and Chapter 3. As this chapter shows, the institutional development of power succession plays an important role in legitimizing and stabilizing the authoritarian rule in China, which strongly supports Schubert’s (2008) argument that political reforms have been generating a “critical degree” of regime legitimacy in China.

It must be acknowledged that the current power succession system in China is still less transparent than those in developed democratic countries nowadays. However, the current succession politics in China have no doubt been more predictable, transparent, and stable now than ever before in the history of the PRC. The institutionalization of the Chinese succession system has managed to overcome the fatal weakness of the authoritarian system – how to transfer power successfully at the top without splitting the leadership. This does not mean that the current level of institutionalization is sufficient to guarantee authoritarian rule in the long run – the case of Bo Xilai clearly warned of the potential dangers of division among the elites. For the sake of its survival, the CCP is still under enormous pressure to

develop its succession system further. Whether this development will lead to democratic elections or not is in the hands of the CCP (i.e. party cohesion) and – more importantly – the Chinese people (i.e. popular legitimacy).

## Chapter Seven: Conclusions

### A Journey to Popular Legitimacy and Party Cohesion

#### 7.1. Introduction

While some scholars have been debating whether – or even when – China will rule the world (e.g. Beeson, 2013; Jacques, 2009), the CCP has been seriously concerned about the continuation of its rule. Not only the collapse of Eastern European communist regimes and the Soviet Union but also and the failure of republicanism and the KMT in China's modern history have constantly alerted the CCP to the consequence of losing popular support and consensus among the elite. As discussed in Chapter 2, after Mao Zedong died in 1976, the CCP realized that its legitimacy was at an all-time low because of the long-term national chaos and the almost collapsed economy. Since then, the CCP has taken a completely different performance-based approach from Mao's ideology-based one.

Moving away from communist ideologies did help the CCP to promote economic growth. However, as this thesis has frequently stressed, there is a fundamental contradiction between generating economic success by utilizing quasi-capitalist economic policies and the fact that this is a communist party that supposedly justifies its rule by being the vehicle to deliver a communist society. As Chapter 2 shows, this contradiction has generated endless ideological battles within the party. In the late 1980s, this power struggle within the CCP leadership combined with social challenges – led by complaints about negative consequences of economic growth – and almost overthrew the CCP.

In contemporary China, rapid economic growth has not undermined the CCP's concerns about its potential existential crisis. Indeed, various threats to the CCP's rule, such as corruption and socioeconomic inequality, are derived from this rapid growth. Nowadays, addressing the negative consequences of rapid economic growth has become a leading challenge to the CCP's rule. This challenge does not only involve economic aspects – such as pushing for more economic reforms to generate a more sustainable growth – but also ideological ones. A communist party is not supposed to tolerate problems such as socioeconomic inequality; in this context, the CCP has to produce ideological discourses to justify its rule.

As this thesis shows, driven by the CCP's own concerns about existential crisis, it has taken impressive efforts to modernize its ideologies and institutionalize its power succession system in order to search for popular legitimacy and party cohesion. Yet, the topics of ideology and power succession do not receive sufficient attention in the political science literature of Chinese studies in general.

#### 7.2. Popular Legitimacy: A Wide Gulf between Western and Chinese Scholarship

Based on a mixed qualitative/quantitative analysis and primary data, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to reveal a *remarkable division* between the Western and Chinese scholarship on the subject of legitimacy in China. When explaining the CCP's legitimacy, the conventional wisdom of Western scholarship focuses on performance legitimacy. Economic performance in particular has been highly valued. As mentioned, economic performance is important; however, it also creates many legitimacy threats, such as corruption and inequality. In addition, economic performance needs to be transformed into people's subjective perceptions in conducive ways so that it will enhance legitimacy, and ideological factors play

a significant role in this process. In other words, ideology will influence the impact of economic growth on regime legitimacy. More importantly, economic growth also created a fundamental dilemma for the CCP's rule – a party that is supposed to deliver a communist society in order to justify its rule.

Social stability is another important element of the CCP's performance legitimacy. Similarly, ideology also plays a role in maintaining social stability. The CCP's (in)stability discourse exploited people's concerns about an unstable and fracturing China by portraying a potential scenario of an unstable and divided China. In this way, ideology interacted with the CCP's capability to maintain social stability, as discussed in Chapter 5.

In addition to economic performance and social stability, nationalism is also crucial in legitimizing the CCP's rule. However, nationalism alone is not an ideology, as Chapter 3 discussed. It is better considered as informal ideology that consists of a set of incoherent and relatively fleeting values. As discussed in Chapter 5, the discourse of national rejuvenation is a part of the CCP's broad ideological construction, which interacts with the CCP's (in)stability discourse, national condition discourse, and China's "uniqueness".

While the topic of ideology in China is under-researched in the English language literature, it remains a crucial topic in the Chinese literature. This thesis finds that Chinese intellectuals consider ideology to be crucial to the CCP's legitimacy. It also finds that Chinese intellectuals are more pessimistic about performance legitimacy than Western scholars are. In China, it is clearly recognized that simply relying on economics is not sufficient – even if the economy continues to do well (and of course, there is a clear understanding that bad economic performance will harm legitimacy). In the relevant Chinese literature, the most perceived threats to legitimacy are all problems caused by economic growth –changing values, socioeconomic equality, and corruption. Ideology is considered by Chinese intellectuals to be helpful in justifying those problems under the CCP's leadership.

In addition to ideology, institutional change in China is another under-researched topic in the English language literature, although a few studies address this issue, as discussed in Chapter 6. Institutional change has both direct and indirect impacts on regime legitimacy, as discussed in Chapter 3.

### **7.3. Party Cohesion**

Legitimacy is certainly crucial, but it is not a sufficient condition of regime survival. As this thesis establishes, *the CCP's survival is decided not only by external stability reflected in popular legitimacy but also internal stability reflected in party cohesion*. As Figure 1 shows, party cohesion and popular legitimacy are inter-related. In the CCP's discourse, its ruling capacity is an inner cause of its legitimacy, and party cohesion is obviously a prerequisite for the CCP's ruling capability. A highly divided party leadership will restrict the CCP's capability to maintain its legitimacy by delivering economic growth, maintaining stability, and defending China's national interests. By studying both party cohesion and popular legitimacy, this thesis links the CCP's internal stability with its external stability for explaining its survival.

This thesis also shows that ideology and the institutionalization of power succession play crucial roles in maintaining party cohesion. In order to settle ideological battles within the party, the CCP has produced various formal ideological discourses to redefine socialism.



In addition to ideological reforms, the CCP has also taken great efforts to institutionalize its power succession system in order to minimize the negative effects of power struggles.

With rapid economic growth, the reality of the political economy in China may move away from the CCP's socialist commitment. *The quest for popular legitimacy may sometimes conflict with the search for party cohesion.* As Chapter 2 discussed, in the 1980s, reform-minded leaders intended to push for more market reforms in order to generate economic success and thus maintain legitimacy; however, less reform-minded leaders were concerned that excessive liberal reforms might make China a capitalist society, and thus lose the CCP's meaning of existence. The CCP's desires to generate legitimacy by economic success led to further ideological divisions within the CCP and thus harmed party cohesion. The protests of 1989 combined with the elite divisions at that time were a notable consequence of this struggle between legitimacy and party cohesion. Further research should look into how the CCP deals with the potential contradiction between popular legitimacy and party cohesion, and how it balances its needs for these two crucial notions.

Party cohesion and popular legitimacy are definitely interconnected; however, party cohesion may be a greater threat to the CCP's rule compared with popular legitimacy. As mentioned in this thesis, the majority of the authoritarian rule is overthrown by the ruling elites instead of the masses. In China, the communist party is most likely to be overthrown when it is divided.

If there is a waning of the power of informal ideology and/or inappropriate choices over how to refresh or renew the informal ideology, the loss of party cohesion may be more harmful to the CCP's rule. For example, as discussed in Chapter 5, the CCP's informal discourses argue that the CCP's legitimacy is based on its capacity to promote economic growth, maintain stability, and defend national interests. If the regime fails to achieve those goals, the forces within the regime may pose quicker and perhaps stronger challenges to overthrow the then leaders than the social forces do. This is especially dangerous to the CCP's rule in the post-Deng era because it lacks strongmen such as Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping who are willing and capable of pulling the party together by all necessary means – without Deng Xiaoping, the CCP perhaps could not survive the protest of 1989.

#### **7.4. Formal Ideology and Informal Ideology: A Dual Strategy**

By examining the CCP's formal and informal ideological discourses, the mechanism of ideological promotion, and their effectiveness, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to the limited studies of ideology in China. A core argument of this thesis is that *ideology is by no mean obsolete; it still plays a crucial role in maintaining the CCP's rule.* This thesis also proposes a new theoretical distinction between formal ideology and informal ideology. Formal and informal ideologies have inter-related but different functions in justifying its rule.

While the CCP has been using quasi-capitalist economic policies to promote economic growth, it needs to justify why China still needs a communist party to monopolise power. As mentioned, the contradiction between quasi-capitalist policies and the CCP's commitment to socialism has generated endless ideological battles within the CCP. Thus, the CCP has constantly put forward formal ideology to justify its communist rule to itself for settling intra-party disputes. However, as this thesis also shows, formal ideology can undermine the consensus within the party when it deeply involves in factional struggles.

In addition to the self-justification of communist rule, the CCP also needs to justify its authoritarian rule to the entire society. In other words, it needs to legitimize its one-party rule. The CCP learnt a painful lesson about the importance of popular beliefs from the popular protests in the late 1980s. Learning from the protest of 1989, the CCP has taken great efforts to construct various informal ideologies to maintain popular beliefs.

A major strategy of the CCP's informal ideology is to legitimize the one-party system by discrediting alternative political systems in particular liberal democracy – a kind of anti-westernism or negativism more generally. Although this strategy helped the CCP to maintain one-party system, this kind of anti-westernism informal ideology may delegitimize the CCP's rule in the long run.

Even if the CCP feeds other components into this informal ideology, it may still be inadequate to secure the CCP's position in the future. As this thesis explained, the CCP's ideological hegemony depends on not only informal ideology but also formal ideology. As I mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, unlike formal ideology that consists of a coherent value system, informal ideology is formed by a set of relatively fleeting and incoherent values. It alone cannot replace the value system to justify the party's rule – it neither provides an ideological basis for forming certain policies nor guides the establishment of a political system. Thus, to adapt informal ideology alone is not able to maintain the CCP's rule.

Moreover, most components of informal ideology are closely embedded into this anti-westernism approach. Other components or streams may be able to feed into the informal ideology; however, it is very difficult to shift this anti-westernism approach because informal ideology is significantly constrained by formal ideological discourse and thus has very limited room to do so. If there is no significant change on both formal and informal ideologies, the legitimising role of informal ideology may be very limited in the long run.

In short, formal ideology and informal ideology play roles in maintaining party cohesion and popular legitimacy respectively. Driven by the rapidly changing socioeconomic-political landscapes, the CCP will definitely continue to revise its formal and informal ideologies. As we have observed, there is a tendency to merge formal ideology and informal ideology. Formal ideology is, now more than previously, made up of more populist elements and less communist elements (e.g. language). Further research should look into the future development of the CCP's dual strategy driven by rapid economic growth and the development of technology.

## **7.5. The Institutionalization of Power Succession**

In addition to ideology, institutional change in China also plays a crucial role in maintaining the CCP's rule. This thesis links the institutional development of power succession with regime survival (popular legitimacy and party cohesion). A core argument of this thesis is that *the institutionalization of power succession plays a crucial role in maintaining party cohesion and the CCP's ruling capacity to maintain power*. By offering a large amount of primary and secondary data, this thesis analyses the institutional development of power succession in the past three decades and its impacts on the CCP's survival. Arguably, the institutionalization of power succession is crucial for the CCP to

minimize the negative consequences of power struggle among the ruling elites and to maintain stable elite politics. In this way, it helps to maintain party cohesion and the legitimacy of the CCP leadership.

Before institutionalization, power succession in China had always been associated with political crisis and chaos, which seriously delegitimized the CCP's rule, as Chapter 6 discussed. Since institutionalization, the CCP's leadership transition has become predictable and smooth. In explaining the stable elite politics in China, the relevant literature focuses on the changing power structure and non-strongman politics in the post-Deng era. However, the institutionalization of power succession is also crucial in maintaining the internal stability of the CCP, as this thesis shows.

## **7.6. Contribution to General Literature of Comparative Politics: Authoritarian Resilience**

Authoritarian systems are often considered rigid; however, the school of authoritarian resilience argues that authoritarian regimes can be resilient as well, as discussed in Chapter 3. By presenting a highly adaptive authoritarian regime with a strong learning capability, this thesis strongly supports the theory of authoritarian resilience. The success of the leadership transition in 2012 further supports the theory of authoritarian resilience. To transfer successfully the top power and prevent a split in the leadership during this process have always been extremely challenging to authoritarian regimes. Learning from the failure of other communist regimes and its past, the CCP has made great efforts to institutionalize power succession in the past three decades. This institutionalization has made the leadership transition more predictable, smooth, and stable than ever before.

Moreover, modernization theory suggests that socioeconomic modernization will trigger a series of value shifts towards liberal democracy and democratization. In order to maintain its rule, the regime has produced various informal ideological discourses to resist pro-liberal democratic values. By deploying this ideological strategy, the CCP has managed to promote China's socioeconomic modernization without damaging its one-party rule. These cases suggest that the CCP is not only highly adaptive but also has a strong ability to learn. As Tsai and Dean (2013:87) point out, the CCP has carefully constructed itself as a "learning party" in order to achieve "thought unification and regime adaptation".

## **7.7. Methodological Contribution to the Field of Chinese Studies**

In addition to the aforementioned theoretical and empirical contributions, this thesis also contributes to the field of Chinese studies methodologically. Building on Gilley's and Holbig's (2009) work, this thesis develops a notable mixed qualitative/quantitative approach to study Chinese literature systematically. This thesis also uses Pearson's chi-squared test to analyse how Chinese intellectuals' arguments are influenced by their research background. A principal component factor analysis is employed to study how different policies proposed by Chinese intellectuals are knitted together. After a quantitative data analysis frames the debate among Chinese elites, discourse analysis is used to study the specific content of the Chinese debate on legitimacy.

This above mixed method can be widely applied in other fields of Chinese studies. Although this method cannot capture the opinions of dissidents or confidential discussions about the state, it can systematically study the academic discussion among Chinese

intellectuals, and thus would likely serve a variety of academic and practical uses in policy and business relations. For example, it can delineate and measure Chinese views over China's role in the world and its foreign policies. Specifically, it can be used to study several key domestic debates in China's international relations among Chinese intellectuals, including but not limited to "Chinese core interests"; "the China Dream"; "Peaceful Rise/Development"; and "the China Threat". Chinese domestic debates over these issues will help to identify, measure, and assess China's assertive foreign policies. Further studies can use this method systematically to understand Chinese discourse on its foreign policies.

## **7.8. The Future of China**

As this thesis establishes, both popular legitimacy and party cohesion are important to the CCP's rule. It also shows that ideology and power succession are crucial for the CCP to stay in power. What are the implications of these conclusions for China's future? Is the authoritarian system in China sustainable? Will (or when will) China democratize with its rapid socioeconomic modernization? Or, to put it another way, can the CCP stay in power in the long run? It is notable that answers to those questions will necessarily be tentative and incomplete; however, this thesis does shed lights on China's future development.

### **7.8.1. Economic Crisis = Legitimacy Crisis?**

When predicting China's future development, many focus on economic aspects. Many argue that once the economic growth slows down, the CCP's rule will be in danger (Krugman, 2013; Zhao, 2009). It suggests that economic performance is a core factor in deciding the CCP's fate. Economic performance is certainly important; however, ideology plays a crucial role in affecting the impacts of economic performance on regime legitimacy, as discussed in Chapter 3. As suggested by the 2008 financial crisis and the Wenzhou debt crisis, economic crises may bring some challenges to the CCP's rule, but it will not overturn the CCP's rule as long as proper and effective political actions are taken in response. This thesis suggests that there is room for the CCP to manipulate people's perceptions of economic performance. In this sense, performance is not all about economic growth but also responses to economic crises including both policies and ideological discourses.

Future studies should pay more attention to the role of ideological factors in framing people's perceptions of economic performance. More importantly, ideological discourses are relevant to the CCP's future political marketing. Further studies should focus more on whether the CCP can establish itself as being the only force that can:

- (a) Identify future challenges
- (b) Find ways of dealing with those challenges
- (c) Deliver social stability and defend China's national interests

If the CCP can succeed in persuading the masses over those points, it may increase its popular prestige even during times of economic difficulties. In short, ideological factors are key to deciding whether economic crisis will trigger a legitimacy crisis.

### **7.8.2. Socioeconomic Modernization = Challenges to Authoritarian Rule?**

Many also argue that the CCP's authoritarian rule may not last in the long run even if economic growth continues to perform well. This argument is relevant to several notable

theories. According to modernization theory, socioeconomic modernization will lead to a series of pro-liberal democratic values, which will challenge the authoritarian rule in the long run. Performance dilemma and Davies' "J curve" theory of revolution also suggest that performance legitimacy is very fragile and unsustainable in the long term because of people's rising expectations, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In this aspect, the role of ideology is immediately obvious – ideology is a direct factor of regime change, while economic growth is an indirect factor. As this thesis suggests, so far, the CCP's informal ideology has been effective in undermining the impacts of pro-liberal democracy values brought about socioeconomic modernization. This is not to say that the CCP's anti-liberal democracy ideological strategy may work in the long run. As this thesis also suggests, those informal ideological discourses are short-term solutions that has a shelf life rather than more fundamental solutions. In the long run, they may be used against the CCP. Thus, the CCP needs constantly to revise its informal ideology to legitimize its rule. Further studies should look into the role of the CCP's ideological discourses in affecting the changing social values brought by modernization and people's rising expectations.

### 7.8.3. Why do Communism and Mao Zedong still Matter to China's Future?

As conventional wisdom considered ideology meaningless, communism and Mao Zedong are widely neglected when predicting China's future. Indeed, they still matter a lot to the continuation of the CCP's rule. How can the CCP justify communism and Mao Zedong in light of what they are doing now? As this thesis suggests, different views on communism and Mao Zedong have seriously undermined party cohesion. Bo Xilai's challenge provides a dramatic example to suggest the importance of ideological orthodoxy and Mao Zedong to the CCP's rule.

Intensified by Bo Xilai's challenge and the widening socioeconomic inequality in Hu Jintao's era, the ideological battle between the Leftist and the Liberal has become an unavoidable issue for Xi Jinping's new leadership. The CCP notices that it gradually loses its hegemonic discourse on social values. In this context, Xi Jinping attempted to reunite the spiritual civilization and the material civilization just as Deng Xiaoping tried to do in the 1980s. Similar to Deng's principle of anti-right in politics and anti-left in economics, Xi Jinping's approach is, in short, left-leaning in politics and right-leaning in economics.

On the one hand, Xi Jinping's leadership has showed its firm determination to push for market reforms in order to promote economic growth. Immediately after Xi Jinping took the top power of the PLA in December 2012, Xi visited the south of China following a very similar route to that of Deng Xiaoping's famous "southern tour" in 1992, setting up a strong stance in order to support market reforms. During Xi's southern tour, Xi (2012) promised to strengthen China's market reform and considered Deng Xiaoping's "reform and open up" as "a crucial strategy to decide China's fate". On the other hand, after Xi showed his liberal stance on market reforms, Xi launched a series of left-leaning campaigns in order to deal with political affairs, especially ideology and the party. Xi's leadership launched a series of Mao Zedong's mass-line campaigns – including the campaigns of "criticism and self-criticism", anti-corruption, and rectification. By launching these intra-party campaigns, Xi attempted to improve the working style of the party (i.e. against formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and wasteful custom) in order to strengthen the relationship between the party and the masses.

More importantly, Xi Jinping highly emphasizes ideology. At a national conference of propaganda and ideological work, Xi clearly pointed out that “ideological work is extremely important” (Ni, 2013). A month after Xi took power, Xi set the official tone to end the dispute about the party history between the Leftists and the Liberals (Fewsmith, 2014). As an editorial of *Guangming Daily* argues:

“Mao Zedong is the founder and the creator of our party, our country, and our socialist system. If we negate Mao, it is bound to negate the history of the CCP and the PRC and to negate the leadership of our party and our socialist system. This is a true intention of some people who negate Mao.” (Qi, 2013)

In dealing with the party’s history, Xi proposed a theory of “The two ‘cannot negates’”. Xi (2013) argues that the period of Mao Zedong and the period of “reform and open up” are “inter-related”, none of which should be negated. In other words, the period of Mao established a foundation of socialism in China, based on which Deng’s “reform and open up” can succeed; therefore, China should not negate the contribution of the first thirty years of Mao’s rule to today’s success.

After setting the tone for the party history, Xi’s leadership is taking a series of actions to strengthen ideological and political education. An obvious example is the CCP’s tightening control over freedom of speech on the Internet. As Chapter 5 discussed, the party has strengthened its political marketing on the Chinese version of Twitter, Weibo, by undermining pro-liberal opinions (e.g. the arrest of some pro-liberal opinion leaders) and reinforcing pro-government voices. In the meantime, Xi Jinping introduced his ideological formula, China Dream, involving a strong appeal towards nationalist sentiment.

With China’s rapidly changing socioeconomic-political landscape, the CCP will continue to revise its formal ideology to justify its communist rule. The rapid economic growth may make the justification of the CCP’s socialist commitment more difficult. In the context of declining communist beliefs in China, further studies should look into how the CCP will revise its link with communism and Mao Zedong. Will the CCP rename itself as a socialist party?

#### 7.8.4. Prospects of the CCP’s future ideological strategy

Since the CCP’s ideological discourses are path-dependent, it is unlikely to see any dramatic change in the short term. The CCP will continue to adapt the current dual ideological strategy to maintain party cohesion on the one hand and the popular legitimacy on the other. In the long term, what are the prospects for the CCP’s ideological strategy?

Scenarios 1: ideological popularization and the unification of ideology.

With the increasing educational levels of Chinese people and development of technology, there is enormous pressure for the CCP to reform its communist discourse system. It may result in ideological popularization. As this thesis shows, formal ideology involves more and more populist elements nowadays. In the future, it could contain greater populist vocabulary and less communist vocabulary. To what extent will formal ideology become popularized? Will the CCP’s dual ideological strategy – formal and informal ideology – merge into one? Those questions need further observation.

This ideological popularization may lead to two opposite scenarios: more westernisation (scenario 1a) or more nationalist and resistant (scenario 1b). In scenario 1a, the CCP's adapted value system may be heavily influenced by the Western liberal values. This may make the CCP's ideological discourses more convincing to the society; however, those pro-liberal values may present a potential challenge to the legitimacy of the one-party system. This may also lead to the resistance of the conservative forces and thus undermines party cohesion.

If the conservative forces lead this ideological popularization, it may lead to scenario 1b of a more nationalist and resistant discourse system. This ideological move may either intensify the conflicts between political system and economic growth or further constrain the CCP's quasi-capitalist economic policies – both of which may undermine performance legitimacy.

#### Scenarios 2: the continuation of dual ideological strategy in the long run

If the Chinese leaders continue to use this dual ideological strategy in the long run, its formal ideological discourses will become more marginalized. As discussed in Chapter 5, formal ideology has already become very ineffective in persuading the mass. In the end, the CCP's formal ideology may completely lose its discourse hegemony. This is to say, formal ideology may be out of touch with informal ideology and social values.

A possible consequence of this disconnection is that social values may fundamentally go against formal ideological discourses. This will not only make formal ideology become a purely political symbol but also further delegitimize the communist rule (although not necessarily the authoritarian rule). The rapid socioeconomic development in China will make the reality of China's political economy further move away from communist doctrine and thus the CCP will be less capable of justifying its "communist" rule to both the society and the party.

#### 7.8.5. Chinese Nationalism

As this thesis discussed, so far, Chinese nationalism alone is not an ideology. Considering its significance, further studies should focus on the future development of Chinese nationalism. Will the appeal of Chinese nationalism become more coherent? Will it become an independent force to influence Chinese politics? A related issue is the interaction between state nationalism and popular nationalism. In terms of state nationalism, future studies may look into how the CCP integrates nationalism into its value system for gaining legitimacy. This may be crucial for the CCP to stay in power when facing economic difficulties and democratic movements in the future.

Popular nationalism is also notable. Specifically, how will this popular nationalism influence state nationalism? What are the impacts of popular nationalism on Beijing's foreign policies? Will the rise of Chinese nationalism make China become more assertive? In addition, the rise of nationalism may discourage foreign investment and trade, and thus harm China's economic performance. It may also lead to popular protests if Beijing fails to meet the expectations of nationalists. In this situation, how will Beijing balance its needs for

nationalism and other legitimacy sources such as economic growth and social stability? All those questions are crucial to China's future and thus need further observation.

#### 7.8.6. How to Deal with China's Democratization?

The topic of Chinese nationalism is also relevant to how the West should deal with China's democratization. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are two contrary policy options for the West to deal with China's democratization. On the one hand, some suggest that Western governments should be tougher in supporting democracy in China. On the other hand, many argue that Western governments should not put too much pressure on China. This thesis supports the latter view. The CCP's informal ideology, including nationalism, takes a negative approach that legitimizes the authoritarian rule by discrediting liberal democracy. If the West takes a more explicit role in promoting democracy in China and supporting the separatist movement of Chinese dissents, it will only lead to the rise of anti-West sentiment and thus harm China's democratic development. This nationalism intensified by the West will also constrain Chinese leaders in the move towards liberalization. As Breslin (2010: 206) argues:

“Pressuring China's leaders to liberalise might actually end up restraining their ability to do so. Outside pressure – particularly when it comes in the shape of the US government – ‘nationalises’ technical issues and brings them to the forefront of popular attention. It also gives succour to those who oppose further liberalization and favour a more national-based Chinese economic future.”

Thus, any impatient Western attempt to promote dramatic changes in China – liberal democracy in particular – would likely harm China's democratization and to consolidate the authoritarian rule in China.

#### 7.8.7. Future Development of Power Succession

As this thesis establishes, owing to the institutionalization of power succession, Chinese elite politics have become quite stable in the past two decades. As mentioned in Chapter 6, my recent study finds that institutional rule combined with age has become a key factor in selecting Chinese leaders in 2012 (Zeng, 2013). However, the current level of institutionalization is not sufficient to maintain party cohesion and the legitimacy of the power succession system in the long run. As discussed in Chapter 2, Bo Xilai's challenge to the CCP's rule does not only lie in the field of ideology (i.e. ideological orthodox) but also in power succession. Bo's publicity campaign seriously challenged the legitimacy of the CCP's power succession system. Thus, the CCP is still under enormous pressure to institutionalize its leadership transition further.

Moreover, Bo's case also indicates that whether the CCP is capable of distinguishing anti-corruption campaigns and power struggles is also very important. Obviously, the CCP's attempt to hold up Bo as an example of anti-corruption does not seem to be convincing to the society. This relates to Xi Jinping's current anti-corruption campaign. In the short term, this kind of popular and legitimising anti-corruption campaign may help to generate popular



support for new leadership. However, if this campaign is not handled well or it involves factional factors, ordinary people and political elites may doubt whether this campaign is really launched for anti-corruption. Thus, in the long term, the anti-corruption campaign may even harm popular legitimacy and party cohesion.

Above all, institutionalization of power succession is crucial for the continuation of the CCP's rule. It is very difficult if not impossible to point out what and to what extent institutional reforms will be sufficient to prevent factional discord in the future because of the changing political dynamics. For example, whether the recently established Central National Security Commission will change the power structure within the party and the influence of the PSC still needs further observation, and it will take years to become clear. So far, it is too early to argue whether Xi Jinping's recent institutional reforms will strengthen or undermine institutionalization.

As such, this thesis can only point out two potentially significant issues for further observation: (a) the institutional development of the PSC and (b) the practice of uncontested elections. Future studies on these two aspects will help to understand the unity of the CCP's leadership and its decision-making capability. More importantly, it may point to the future development of the selection mechanism of Chinese leaders and thus China's democratic future – even if it is not a Western liberal democratic future.

Specifically, the development of the PSC will help us to understand to what extent the CCP would reinforce/or manipulate the institutional rules to constrain/or serve for factional struggles. As Chapter 6 discussed, institutionalization is crucial to prevent factional discord and thus maintain a stable elite politics. However, the effects of the institutionalization may be undermined by political manipulation. The changing size of the PSC has left many rooms for factional struggle and thus harmed the effects of the institutionalization. In this regard, as the highest leading body of the Chinese political system, the PSC's current level of institutionalization is certainly insufficient. If this problem is not properly solved, it may lead to the loss of party cohesion.

The second crucial development is the practice of the uncontested elections among central leaders. It provides an open, transparent, and democratic way to regulate internal competition. Of course, the practice of the uncontested elections is far from sufficient to maintain party cohesion and popular legitimacy; however, it indicates a positive sign of implementing electoral democracy.

This high-level democratic practice may play a more important role than the local democratic practice such as village democracy in the future. Although both are launched to strengthen rather than democratize the one-party system, village democracy is more about improving local governance and propaganda purpose than the high-level democratic practice is. As Chapter 4 discussed, the Chinese intellectuals highly value grassroots democracy; however, none of them suggests scaling up this local democratic practice to the national level. In addition to political sensitivity, we cannot deny the fact that the current quality and influence of village democracy in China is still very questionable. There is little chance that village democracy will establish a very positive image of democratic governance. This is not

to say that village democracy is not important, but that it is unlikely to be a decisive factor of the future development of China's political system.

#### 7.8.8. Scenarios of China's Future

Although China scholarship is reassessing the resilience of the authoritarian system, mainstream political science still holds that democracy is the only effective system to govern a pluralistic society in the long run and the authoritarian system is weak in nature. Most Western observers firmly believe that the current political system in China is unsustainable, and democracy will come to China in the future. So far, possible scenarios of China's future are offered: "apocalyptic", "optimistic", and "muddling through" variants (Baum, 1996; Dickson, 2006; Saich, 2005; Scalapino, 1993). The "apocalyptic" scenario predicts a downfall of the regime. The optimistic variant anticipates a gradual transition towards democracy, which might be similar to the democratic transitions of Taiwan and Korea. The last scenario expects careful problem-solving with limited adaption to preserve the one-party system.

In addition to the above three major scenarios, two proponents of China's political reform, Heberer and Schubert(2006), add a new scenario that the CCP could stay in power in the long run if it effectively takes action to solve emerging problems. This scenario is similar to but much more optimistic than "muddling through". Heberer and Schubert (2006) argue that political reforms contribute to cadre efficiency and accountability, and thus enhance political legitimacy in China.

All of the above scenarios are valid to a certain point: socioeconomic development, the government's capability to solve various problems caused by socioeconomic development, and limited political reforms on a macro level, are definitely important. In addition to those factors, this thesis also shows the importance of institutionalization and ideological adaptation in maintaining the CCP's rule.

Above all, with China's changing socioeconomic-political landscapes, the CCP is forced constantly to adapt itself. The continuation of the CCP's rule is decided by whether it can promote reforms to maintain a dynamic stability. As Li Keqiang (2013) elaborates, promoting economic growth in China is like riding a bike. If the bike keeps going forwards, it will maintain stability; once it stops, the bike will topple over. This is not only true of economic reforms, but also of ideological and political system reforms. Once the CCP's reforms and adaptation stop or slow down, the rapidly changing environment will put the CCP's rule in danger.

## Appendix A: Coding Manual

| FIELD LETTER                 | FIELD NAME               | CODING      | DESCRIPTION  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|--|
| <b>Basic Information</b>     | Author                   |             | Names of Authors   |
|                              | Authors' Institutions    | 1,2,3,4,5,6 | Institutions of authors: 1= university/ academic institutions, 2= party school, 3= government, 4= think tank, 5=military-relevant institutions, 6= others  |
|                              | Authors' Location        | 1/0         | GDP per person of author's location is higher than national average (first author has the priority) (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Funding Project          | 1/0         | This article is funded by a governmental institution or a large national foundation (Ministry of Education, the National Natural Science Scientific Foundation of China, an institution directly under the State Council) University funding does not account. (yes= 1, no =0) |
|                              | Journal                  |             | Names of Journal   |
|                              | Date                     | 2008-2012   | Date of publication  |
| <b>Legitimacy Evaluation</b> |                          |             |  |
|                              | High                     | 1/0         | View that political legitimacy in China is high (jiao gao, gao) (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Challenge                | 1/0         | View that the party-state is or will soon facing challenges to its legitimacy. E.g. 挑战 (including 巨大挑战, 严峻挑战), 弱点, 困境威胁, 匮乏 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Crisis                   | 1/0         | Use the term legitimacy crisis in reference to China. E.g. 合法性危机, 合法性面临的危机 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                              | Crisis: Local government | 1/0         | Use the term legitimacy crisis in reference to local governments of China. E.g. 合法性危机, 合法性面临的危机 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
| <b>Source</b>                |                          |             |  |
|                              | Economic performance     | 1/0         | View that economic performance is critical to political legitimacy in China (yes= 1, no =0)  |
| <b>Problems</b>              |                          |             |  |
|                              | Global Forces            | 1/0         | Mention that global or foreign forces (such as 敌对势力) are a challenge or threat to political legitimacy in China (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Globalization            | 1/0         | Mention that globalization has a negative effects on regime legitimacy in China (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Economy                  | 1/0         | Worry about slowdown of economic growth (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Performance Dilemma      | 1/0         | Mention that China is or will soon be facing performance dilemma. 政绩困境 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                              | Values                   | 1/0         | Mention that changing social value. E.g. 社会价值观, 意识形态变化, 信仰危机, 公民意识, 主流意识形态弱化 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                              | Inequity                 | 1/0         | View that socioeconomic inequality is a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 社会公平 社会公正, 分布不平衡, 城乡差距, 区域差距, 社会差距 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                              | Welfare(threat)          | 1/0         | View that inadequate provision of public welfare, including  |

|                  |                      |     |   |
|------------------|----------------------|-----|---|
|                  |                      |     | health, education, social security, housing or pensions, is a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 缺乏公共保障, 社会保障不足, 医疗教育保障缺乏 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                  | Corruption           | 1/0 | View that corruption is a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 腐败, 权钱交易 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                  | Technology           | 1/0 | Mention that development of technology, such as internet, brings negative effect on political legitimacy in China. E.g. 网络发展 社交网络 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                  | Interests            | 1/0 | Mention that new socio-economic classes and/or interests are a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 社会阶层, 社会阶级, 利益团体, 利益主体, 贫富阶层, 利益群体 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Participation        | 1/0 | Mention that inadequate citizen participation is a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 公众监督, 拓宽民众参与渠道, 公众监督, 参与机制, 利益表达渠道 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Bureaucracy (threat) | 1/0 | Mention that problems of bureaucracy or government are a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 官僚主义, 政府职能缺位, 政府职能错位, 行政不作为, 政绩考核体系缺陷, 政府自利性, 官本位思想 ineffectiveness, inefficiency (yes= 1, no =0) |
|                  | Rule of law          | 1/0 | Mention that inadequate implementation of law is a major threat or challenge to political legitimacy in China. E.g. 缺乏法制 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
| <b>SOLUTIONS</b> |                      |     |   |
|                  | Growth               | 1/0 | Emphasis on sustained, faster, or better economic growth to maintain legitimacy. E.g. 经济发展, 经济发展又快又好, 经济增长 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Welfare              | 1/0 | Emphasis on improvement of public provision of health, education, social security, housing or pensions to maintain legitimacy. 社会保险, 社会救助, 最低生活保障 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|                  | Equality             | 1/0 | Emphasis on narrowing of socio-economic inequities to maintain legitimacy. (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Jobs                 | 1/0 | Emphasis on reduction or control of unemployment to maintain legitimacy. E.g. 剩余劳动力, 再就业 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Public opinion       | 1/0 | Emphasis on better work to guide public opinions to maintain legitimacy. E.g. 舆论引导 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Propaganda           | 1/0 | Emphasis on better building or promotion of ideological work to maintain legitimacy. E.g. 意识形态建设 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Morality             | 1/0 | Emphasis on better building or promotion of morality to maintain legitimacy. E.g. 诚信, 道德标准, 道德教育 (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                  | Socialism            | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Socialism to maintain  |

|  |                                  |     |  |
|--|----------------------------------|-----|--|
|  |                                  |     | legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Marxism                          | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Marxism-Leninism to maintain legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Maoism                           | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Maoism or Mao's thoughts to maintain legitimacy. 毛泽东思想(yes= 1, no =0)   |
|  | Dengism                          | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Dengism or Deng's theories to maintain legitimacy 邓小平理论(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Three Represents                 | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Three Represents to maintain legitimacy 三个代表(yes= 1, no =0)   |
|  | Harmonious society               | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on Harmonious society to maintain legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Nationalism                      | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater attention on nationalism, culture or patriotism to maintain legitimacy 传统文化，爱国主义，中华文化，民族精神(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Party                            | 1/0 | Emphasis on improvement of internal party organization, cadre appointments or promotion system to maintain legitimacy (yes= 1, no =0) 党内监督                                   |
|  | Incorporation                    | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater social inclusiveness/incorporation or participation in the party, including wider membership, and political system to maintain legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0) |
|  | Congress                         | 1/0 | Emphasis on greater role for people's congress to maintain legitimacy (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Separate                         | 1/0 | Emphasis on separation of party from the government to maintain legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|  | Law                              | 1/0 | Emphasis on better rule of law, legislative quality, judiciary, and implementation of law to maintain legitimacy 依法建设，法制，依法行政，依法治国(yes= 1, no =0)                            |
|  | Anti- corruption                 | 1/0 | Emphasis on better control of corruption to maintain legitimacy  |
|  | Bureaucracy (solution)           | 1/0 | Emphasis on improvement of bureaucratic efficiency, quality, or effectiveness and public service to maintain legitimacy 有效政府 透明度，行政监督，执政科学化，合理性执政,行政体制改革, (yes= 1, no =0)    |
|  | Rights                           | 1/0 | Emphasis on provision and protection of improved rights to maintain legitimacy 合法权利，民主权利，公民权力，人权 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|  | Freedoms                         | 1/0 | Emphasis on provision of greater freedom to maintain legitimacy 自由 (yes= 1, no =0)   |
|  | Citizen Participation (solution) | 1/0 | Emphasis on encouragement and promotion of citizen participation to maintain legitimacy 公民参与, 公民监督, 政治参与, 参与机制, 利益表达机制, 公民有序参与(yes= 1, no =0)                                |
|  | Civil Society (solution)         | 1/0 | Emphasis on encouragement and promotion of civil society to maintain legitimacy 公民社会, 市民社会, 中间组织, 第三部门, 民间组织, 非政府组织, 社团组织, 舆论监督, 社会团体, 非盈利性组织, 社会公益服务组织(yes= 1, no =0)       |
|  | State Retreat                    | 1/0 | View that the government should withdrawal from social areas   |

|                 |                              |     |   |
|-----------------|------------------------------|-----|---|
|                 |                              |     | and give power to social organizations to maintain legitimacy<br>有限政府, 不属于政府的职能放归市场, 还政于民, 缩小政府活动范围, 政府推出社会管理领域(yes= 1, no =0)                          |
|                 | Repression                   | 1/0 | Emphasis that tighter controls on rights, freedom (including media, dissent, and civil society freedom) to maintain legitimacy<br>监控, 打压(yes= 1, no =0) |
|                 | Political reform             | 1/0 | Mentions that China should reform its political system to maintain legitimacy<br>政治体制改革(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                 | General Democracy            | 1/0 | Emphasis on making the political system more democratic to maintain legitimacy (yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                 | Constitutionalism            | 1/0 | Emphasis on promotion of constitutionalism to maintain legitimacy<br>宪政, 宪政民主(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                 | Party Democracy              | 1/0 | Emphasis on promotion of Party Democracy to maintain legitimacy(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                 | Electoral Democracy          | 1/0 | Emphasis on promotion of Electoral Democracy to maintain legitimacy<br>直接选举, 直接民主, 基层民主, 投票制度(yes= 1, no =0)  |
|                 | Consultative Democracy       | 1/0 | Emphasis on promotion of Consultative Democracy to maintain legitimacy<br>协商制度, 协商民主, 政协制度, 多党合作(yes= 1, no =0)   |
| <b>Scholars</b> |                              |     |   |
|                 | Chinese ancient philosophers | 1/0 | Mention the name of Chinese ancient philosophers or cite his work in legitimacy discourse<br>孔子, 孟子, 儒家, 法家, 道家   |
|                 | Coicaud                      | 1/0 | Mention the name of Jeen-Marc Coicaud or cite his work<br>让. 夸克   |
|                 | Lipset                       | 1/0 | Mention the name of Seymour Martin Lipset or cite his work<br>李普塞特, 西缪·马丁·利普赛特  |
|                 | Yu Keping                    | 1/0 | Mention the name of Yu Keping or cite his work<br>俞可平   |
|                 | Rousseau                     | 1/0 | Mention the name of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or cite his work<br>卢梭  |
|                 | Huntington                   | 1/0 | Mention the name of Samuel Phillips Huntington or cite his work<br>亨廷顿  |
|                 | Ni Xing                      | 1/0 | Mention the name of Ni Xing or cite his work<br>倪星  |
|                 | Marx Weber                   | 1/0 | Mention the name of Marx Weber or cite his work   |
|                 | Aristotle                    | 1/0 | Mention the name of Aristotle or cite his work<br>亚里士多德   |
|                 | Easton                       | 1/0 | Mention the name of David Easton or cite his work<br>伊斯顿  |
|                 | Almond                       | 1/0 | Mention the name of Gabriel Abraham Almond or cite his work<br>阿尔蒙德   |
|                 | Habermas                     | 1/0 | Mention the name of Jürgen Habermas or cite his work<br>哈贝马斯  |
|                 | Karl Marx                    | 1/0 | Mention the name of Karl Marx or cite his/her work  |
|                 | <b>NOTE</b>                  |     | Special note on article   |

## Appendix B: Chi-Square Tests and Crosstab

### Fund and Welfare (strategy)

| Fund and Welfare Crosstab |                  |                  |             |           |        |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|-----------|--------|
|                           |                  |                  | Welfare     |           | Total  |
|                           |                  |                  | Not mention | Mentioned |        |
| Fund                      | .0               | Count            | 92          | 13        | 105    |
|                           |                  | % within Fund    | 87.6%       | 12.4%     | 100.0% |
|                           |                  | % within Welfare | 87.6%       | 65.0%     | 84.0%  |
|                           |                  | % of Total       | 73.6%       | 10.4%     | 84.0%  |
|                           | 1.0              | Count            | 13          | 7         | 20     |
|                           |                  | % within Fund    | 65.0%       | 35.0%     | 100.0% |
|                           |                  | % within Welfare | 12.4%       | 35.0%     | 16.0%  |
|                           |                  | % of Total       | 10.4%       | 5.6%      | 16.0%  |
| Total                     | Count            | 105              | 20          | 125       |        |
|                           | % within Fund    | 84.0%            | 16.0%       | 100.0%    |        |
|                           | % within Welfare | 100.0%           | 100.0%      | 100.0%    |        |
|                           | % of Total       | 84.0%            | 16.0%       | 100.0%    |        |

| Chi-Square Tests  |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |
|---|--------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|   | Value              | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square  | 6.395 <sup>a</sup> | 1  | .011                  |                      |                      |
| Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>  | 4.823              | 1  | .028                  |                      |                      |
| Likelihood Ratio  | 5.386              | 1  | .020                  |                      |                      |
| Fisher's Exact Test   |                    |    |                       | .019                 | .019                 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association  | 6.344              | 1  | .012                  |                      |                      |
| N of Valid Cases  | 125                |    |                       |                      |                      |
| a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.20. |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table  |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |

### Author's institutions and party democracy

| Crosstab     |    |  |                 |      |        |
|--------------|----|--|-----------------|------|--------|
|              |    |  | Party Democracy |      | Total  |
|              |    |  | .0              | 1.0  |        |
| Institutions | .0 | Count  | 100             | 3    | 103    |
|              |    | % within AuthorsInstitutions0Universityacademic1party school | 97.1%           | 2.9% | 100.0% |

|       |   |   |        |        |        |
|-------|---|---|--------|--------|--------|
|       |   | % within Party Democracy                                    | 84.7%  | 42.9%  | 82.4%  |
|       |   | % of Total  | 80.0%  | 2.4%   | 82.4%  |
|       | 1.0   | Count   | 18     | 4      | 22     |
|       |   | % within AuthorsInstitutions0Universityacademic1partyschool | 81.8%  | 18.2%  | 100.0% |
|       |   | % within Party Democracy                                    | 15.3%  | 57.1%  | 17.6%  |
|       |   | % of Total  | 14.4%  | 3.2%   | 17.6%  |
| Total | Count   | 118   | 7      | 125    |        |
|       | % within AuthorsInstitutions0Universityacademic1partyschool | 94.4%   | 5.6%   | 100.0% |        |
|       | % within Party Democracy                                    | 100.0%  | 100.0% | 100.0% |        |
|       | % of Total  | 94.4%   | 5.6%   | 100.0% |        |

| Chi-Square Tests  |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |
|---|--------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|   | Value              | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square  | 7.995 <sup>a</sup> | 1  | .005                  |                      |                      |
| Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>  | 5.368              | 1  | .021                  |                      |                      |
| Likelihood Ratio  | 5.964              | 1  | .015                  |                      |                      |
| Fisher's Exact Test   |                    |    |                       | .018                 | .018                 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association  | 7.931              | 1  | .005                  |                      |                      |
| N of Valid Cases  | 125                |    |                       |                      |                      |
| a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.23. |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |
| b. Computed only for a 2x2 table  |                    |    |                       |                      |                      |



### Appendix C: Principal Component Factor Analysis

| Rotated Component Matrix <sup>a</sup>               |              |                    |                |
|---|--------------|--------------------|----------------|
|   | Component    |                    |                |
|   | 1 (Ideology) | 2 (Social Justice) | 3 (Governance) |
| Deng Xiaoping's Theories                            | .938         |                    |                |
| Three Represents                                    | .924         |                    |                |
| Jobs  |              | .794               |                |
| Welfare   |              | .744               |                |
| Equality  |              | .520               |                |
| Bureaucracy   |              |                    | .714           |
| Citizen participation                               |              |                    | .672           |
| Civil Society                                       |              |                    | .652           |
| Anti-Corruption                                     |              | .356               | .599           |
| Congress  |              |                    |                |
| Consultative Democracy                              |              |                    |                |
| Party   |              | .323               |                |
| Harmonious society                                  |              |                    |                |
| Growth  |              | .228               |                |
| Nationalism   |              |                    |                |
| Propaganda  | .262         |                    |                |
| Marxism   | .463         |                    |                |
| Constitutionalism                                   |              |                    |                |
| Law   |              |                    | .232           |
| State retreat                                       |              |                    | .379           |
| General Democracy                                   |              |                    |                |
| Incorporation                                       |              |                    |                |
| Electoral Democracy                                 |              | .515               |                |
| Party Democracy                                     |              |                    | .260           |
| Freedoms  |              |                    |                |
| Rights  |              |                    |                |
| Public Opinion                                      |              |                    |                |
| Repression  |              |                    |                |
| Morality  |              |                    |                |
| Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.    |              |                    |                |
| Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. |              |                    |                |
| a. Rotation converged in 14 iterations.             |              |                    |                |

Note: variable "political reform" is filtered out.

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